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# 2

## EMBODIED ADVENTURES

### An experiment on doing and writing multisensory ethnography

*Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto and Tytti Lehtovaara*

#### Introduction

I walk up the red-brick stairs through a dim stairway, take a turn to the left and come to a medium-sized auditorium with similar red-brick walls. The room is full of warm light. I can hear the air-conditioning and sense the cool dry air. There are already some people in the room when I enter. I look around and greet them, recognizing a few familiar faces. I walk to the stage where my co-chair is waiting for me. I feel excited that our workshop will finally take place. I sense the excitement as alertness in my body, but I do not have time to reflect on it further since we need to set our presentation and start the workshop. (Field diary, Eerika)

When reading through scattered notes about a situation that took place months ago, like the one described above, it is often difficult to remember what happened and how it felt. Most often, notes entail fragmented details of the environment and atmosphere, descriptions of the space and people there. In the beginning, the researcher often notes her own sentiments, but as soon as participation and social activities begin, there is no time for taking notes nor reflection. General textbooks and guides about ethnographic methods encourage the researchers to pay attention to details and to include “as much of the sensory experience of participant observation as possible” (Murchison 2010, 72). The textbooks seldom give any further advice on how to make sensory observations. This strategy of turning our attention to sensory perceptions and embodied being in the world has developed into the more specific and increasingly popular approach of sensory ethnography. Sensory ethnography is a different mode of *doing* ethnography. It is not a single method, but rather a critical methodology, a reflexive and experiential process in which the role of the researcher as embodied subject is crucial (Pink 2009, 8). It is based on the idea that all human beings are connected to materiality and the physical environment through their sensing bodies (Pink 2009, 8–9). At the core of sensory

ethnography are sensory experiences (sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch), and their role in social practices and relations (Pink 2009, 12–15, 25–26). By studying sensory experiences, one can find nonverbal and seemingly meaningless and self-evident information that affects our everyday life and daily practices (Bendix 2000, 41; Ingold 2000, 285; Pink 2009, 8, 12).

It is crucial to note that sensory and embodied knowledge is not a language-centered experience, and often not spoken (Bendix 2000, 41). Therefore, in order to interpret the embodied experiences and analyze the co-produced data, sensory knowledge must, like any other ethnographically produced data, be verbally processed by the ethnographer and collaborative participants. Thus, the methodological challenge of sensory ethnography lies not only in identifying sensory knowledge, but also in rendering our interpretations into words and communicating them in a way that other people can understand and imagine the situations and circumstances we experience (Pink 2009, 132). In this chapter, we turn our attention to this process of gaining and sharing sensory knowledge. We approach this knowledge as embodied, intersubjective and dialogic (Csordas 1999; Coffey 1999, 59; Pink 2009, 25). Anthropologist Thomas Csordas, for instance, argues for the integration of an embodied perspective in ethnography because representation (language) and being in the world are dialogic partners in knowing about the world (Csordas 1999, 147). We scrutinize a collaborative process of learning sensory ethnography and sharing the experience in written and verbal form. This process took place in an experimental workshop in the conference “Ethnography with a Twist” in Jyväskylä in 2019. We invited participants to work as ethnographers with us to explore and to reflect on how we could use our senses to study the entire conference setting “by moving in different spaces indoors and outdoors, turning our attention to our sensory perceptions and documenting them with the help of audio, video, GPS, and other technologies on our mobile phones” (Workshop proposal). Our aim was not only to make sense of the surrounding physical environment and people’s activities therein, but also to analyze the encounters between the people and matter.

The participants of the workshop were all scholars with varied multidisciplinary backgrounds. We have decided to call them participants instead of using their names or pseudonyms, since we wish to represent them as equal participants in a shared experiment. Some of them had more experience in ethnographic fieldwork than others and are also more advanced in the academic hierarchy. All participants gave us permission to study their participation and outcomes of the workshop and signed consent forms allowing us to use the raw data we produced together in the workshop, including their co-produced writings, photos and videos. In addition to this, we used our own notes about the contents of the workshop and the discussions we had in the classroom. This text features excerpts from both authors’ notes.

In this text, we scrutinize the process of doing sensory ethnography from sensory observations and interventions to writing. Our interest in sensory ethnography arose from our individual research projects in which we have studied everyday materiality and sensory memory. We have struggled with both documenting and writing about

sensory experiences and embodied knowledge. Often the sensations that we gain through being outdoors and indoors, visiting different places and people are intense situations in which many things happen and there are many details to observe. Smelling the air or touching a piece of cloth are *fleeting moments* (Murchison 2010, 70) that direct our attention unconsciously and disappear within seconds. In this text, we ask how can we become aware of them, document them and verbalize them in a way that would allow us to analyze this information? We scrutinize the holistic process of sensory ethnography, and the different phases it includes: How to begin the sensory observations? Which are the challenges of identifying sensory knowledge and possible solutions to these? These questions inspired us to plan the experimental workshop on doing sensory ethnography and to engage in these questions collaboratively. We approach the experiences of sensory ethnography as “twist” moments of ethnographic research which transformed our previous understanding of doing ethnography and engaging in reflexive ethnographic knowledge production.

### The sensory ethnography workshop

Our workshop encompassed two collaborative and reflexive exercises, and was divided into three sections: 1) Introduction to sensory ethnography and instructions of how to do the experiment, 2) Exercise of doing sensory ethnography (observation within the conference site), 3) Writing Exercise and reflection: joint writing in a shared online platform (GoogleDocs) and discussion about the experiment. At the end of the workshop, we discussed our experiences and thoughts together.

When the participants began to arrive in the classroom, they chose their sitting places quite close to us. We were happy about that because we wanted to build an intimate and reliable atmosphere. The participants sat relatively close to each other and formed a semi-circle. Later on, this proved to be an important thing because it was easier for the participants to talk together when they not only heard but also saw each other. (Field diary, Tytti)

Participants were from the following fields: geography, oral history, music studies, political sciences, social work, anthropology and sociology. Their specializations included soundscape and landscape studies, urban and consumption studies, study of youth cultures and anthropology of money. Many of them had used ethnography in scrutinizing various groups of people, for example, practitioners of martial arts, homeless people, and transnational families. The varied cultural and geographical backgrounds (e.g. urban/rural) led to discussions about the different perspectives on interpreting sensory experiences in the workshop. The participants' backgrounds provided a good picture of how sensory ethnography is a necessary method for many different science fields. Many of them had done research that focused on one sensory aspect (e.g. soundscapes) but needed a broader view of multisensory approach. Others wanted to learn new methodological tools that could be used in teaching.

Step one of the experiment was a practical exercise in doing sensory observations in the conference setting. We asked the participants to move around in the conference hall, taking notes for an estimated period of 30 minutes. We suggested that the participants document their observations by using different tools such as pictures, drawings, maps, videos and GPS technology. The experiment was done in pairs so that they could plan the experiment together and engage in a dialogue while observing. Social contacts and encounters were encouraged.

After the observation exercise, the experiment continued with a joint writing session of approximately 20 minutes. The idea was to write down experiences and perceptions. After writing, we had a brief discussion of each pair's thoughts about the experiment. Our analysis in this text focuses on the challenges that the participants met during the experiment and the ways in which they think sensory ethnography differs from regular ethnographic fieldwork. We also wish to evaluate the knowledge we gained and to make suggestions about how an experimental workshop on sensory ethnography could be developed.

### **Putting on new lenses and *doing* in the field**

Anthropologists David Howes and Constance Classen who have studied cultural orders and hierarchy of senses (sensorium) suggest that researchers who engage in sensory ethnography, should first take exercises to overcome their own culture-oriented sensory biases (Howes and Classen 1991; Pink 2009, 51–52). Even if these biases are difficult to detect, it is important to note that senses are valued differently, and in different social and cultural contexts, some senses gain more emphasis than others (e.g. Classen 2012). In the workshop, we asked the participants to reflect on the sensory hierarchies and intentionally engage with sensory dimensions that are often ignored. In order to prepare and orient the workshop participants to sensory observation, we prepared a brief list of possible sensory dimensions that they could pay attention to:

#### **SOME HELP FOR THE EXPERIMENT**

Different sensory/bodily information:

AUDITIVE: voices/noise/silence/echoes

VISUAL: lights/shadows/colours/shapes/aesthetics

TOUCH and SPATIAL issues: temperature/air/materials/furniture/architecture/layout/texture

KINESTHETIC: rhythm/movements/practices/gestures

OLFACTORY/TASTE: smells, scents and tastes

In addition to this list, we also suggested some behaviours or motions that would help in order to make perceptions of senses that we might not usually pay attention to: close one's eyes, sit in unusual places, and touch and smell things. In some situations and places, these actions might have seemed out-of-place, odd or inconvenient, but in our view, these small interventions were crucial in conducting

multisensory ethnography, as they made us perceive the world differently and reorient our ways of being in the world. The participants of our workshop seemed to embrace the idea of engaging with the environment and doing unusual things:

Most of the pairs went outside the classroom and the conference venue (the main building of University of Jyväskylä). They went to the lobby, to the bathroom area or to other classrooms. One pair stayed in the lecture room and one navigated out of the main building to the nearby area of the campus elementary school. Participants in the lobby walked, looked around, sat down in different places and listened, smelled and touched the materials of the environment with their different body parts, for example with their hands, feet, bottoms and backs. Most of them took notes, photos and videos, but most of all, they seemed to fully engage in sensory knowledge through their bodies and minds. (Field diary, Tytti)

When starting the observation experiment, the participants did not directly leave the room in haste and head somewhere, but moved more slowly, looking around as if seeing the room for the first time, alert and open, and paused at the doorway touching the door and the walls surrounding it, more aware of the space and its functions. I also noticed that the pairs who stayed in the classroom moved more slowly than usual to the back of the room, approached the back wall and last seats, sitting down and standing up, and touching the surfaces of seats and walls. They seemed to notice things that they would usually ignore and, above all, to approach the space and movement in the space differently. (Field diary, Eerika)

When observing the environment, the workshop participants sometimes decided to use a particular sense and other times engaged multiple senses. A few participants decided to conduct exercises of *touching* things. Touching is deeply affective; it is the first sense through which we develop the sense of care and connection (Classen 2012; Kinnunen and Kolehmainen 2019, 30). Furthermore, touch is crucial for many everyday life activities such as cooking and building, and for the acquisition of knowledge and creativity in science and art. The workshop participants described the experience of touching things as *emotional* and mostly positive:

It's a *funny feeling* to touch across the brick-walk, it feels so *rough*, particularly where brick and mortar meet. I sit on the wooden bench – and like usually I can't help touching the wooden bench – I love touching wood. It is so *soothing*, *calm*, *nice*, I don't know why. Gives me an idea, I move back towards the reception, touch the walls, the different materials – some are cold, some are warm – some sensations are *nice*. (Participant 2, 2019)

Most participants seemed to enjoy touching materials such as wooden details and the red brick walls. Often, the act of touching was combined with moving in space. Motion is multisensory, an interplay of tactile, sonic, and visual senses that fuel the



**FIGURE 2.1** Conference venue. Photo by Tytti Lehtovaara.

perceptual engagement of emplacement (Feld 2005, 181; Österlund-Pötzsch 2008, 117). It also forms kinesthetic (sensation of movement) and proprioceptive (awareness of the position of one's body) knowledge that constitute many everyday-life routines and tasks (see e.g. Tiili 2016, 34; O'Dell 2004). One means of doing sensory ethnography is to walk specific routes and perceiving the environment (e.g. Österlund-Pötzsch 2008), or to practice accompanied *walk-along-ethnography* in the form of a *sensory memory walks*, during which the participants share *sensory memories* attached to place (e.g. Järviluoma and Vikman 2013; Aula 2018). We encouraged the workshop participants to reflect on their memories, and a few of them mentioned that sensory perceptions triggered memories of similar places:

For [my workshop partner], the first thing that these bricks remind her of is primary school, standing outside of the entrance door where she used to (strangely) smooth out a bitten section of her apple, which she used to eat at break time. (Participants 6 and 7)

By moving in the space and testing different routes, the conference participants explored *the cultural kinesthesia*, culturally specific set of movements that are formed through everyday life practices of using and navigating particular spaces (O'Dell 2004). It is interesting how the workshop participants, most of whom were not

familiar with the conference building and campus before, analyzed the constraints of moving in its space:

To our left there was a door leading to a video conference section. You could not see through the door – we wondered if it was off limits as it looked like you needed a key card to get into it. We tried the door, which led to a hallway of other doors. The ability to not see through gave a certain impression of “off limits”. Materials have a very significant power in the impressions of space and our mobility choices. [...]

We went through a door leading to a short corridor and the floor changed. As we passed through the door, we walked over a plastic black scratchy mat, intended for wiping your feet. The mat made a *scratchy noise* as we walked over it, which made my partner *feel really uncomfortable*. The floor then changed to tiles, which looked like the bricks on the wall. The space suddenly went from feeling very light and open to *dark and claustrophobic*. It felt prison-like. (Participants 6 and 7, 2019)

In the excerpt above, different embodied sentiments are interlinked, forming an interpretation of a prison-like environment and atmosphere. The situation was a good example of multisensory experiences occurring in specific material environments into which different sensory and bodily dimensions are immersed (Aula 2018, 80–81; Sumartojo and Pink 2019).

Most often, sensory experiences, like smell, and taste, touch and feel are intertwined. The participants noted that distinguishing smell from other senses was challenging.

The smell of coffee, or is its taste? (Participant 5, 2019)

We go out – the air smells cold, it is cold but definitely smells cold. (Participant 2, 2019)

In addition to identifying odors, they also struggled to describe them:

In the open spaces, we didn’t detect a significant smell. It felt clear, almost like an invisible sense. As we enter into the side doors and rooms, however, musky smells were evident. It smelt damp, with stale air. (Participant 6 and 7, 2019)

Hearing and sight, by contrast, are sensory dimensions that are well represented in ethnographic inquiry. Sound, combined with an awareness of sonic presence, is a powerful force that shapes our social experience, relation to community and to other people, and the spaces and places we inhabit (Feld 1996). Two participants of the workshop were specialized in the study of sound and *soundscapes* in particular environments (Järviluoma and Vikman 2013). One of them taught her partner, who had no prior experience of soundscape studies, to pay attention to the ways in which sounds and echoes move in the space and to the absence of certain expected sounds:



I immediately check and start to listen to the ventilation system I have not paid attention to yet. No hum of the ventilation system could be heard. Usually this hum is very dominating in the building and lecture halls where I work. I've realized how people pay attention to the changing sounds of the ventilation system when it pauses and starts again during the lectures and seminar just by following their gestures and facial expressions. [...] Going out the hall, I pay attention to the tile wall. A feeling like I was outside. Smelling the street.... The atmosphere changes, acoustics of the space. Nice labyrinth structure makes one need to guess the direction of the sounds. [...] Wide hall, [it's] good to be able to pay attention to its details. In the middle of the hall you can hear [sounds from] three different directions because they have their own sound bubbles: [an] info desk [-], [a] cafe and the brightest corner with a group talking. (Participant 1, 2019)

[My workshop partner] remarks how funny this labyrinth is – how it reflects and changes the noises and what kind of sensations it gives, kind of fortifying the sensations. The noise actually grows stronger – yeah, you hear cups clinking, people talking, laughing, it grows louder. What a difference in the hearing experience – it has grown from silent to louder. (Participant 2, 2019)

These remarks are detailed, and feature special language and vivid expressions describing the acoustics of the place with expressions like “labyrinth” and “sound bubble”.

We, the organizers, were familiar with the venue but had never paid attention to its soundscapes. However, we became more aware of them when some participants explained that they had noted how different the audible sensations were inside and outside the building:

We walked downstairs and straight to the foyer where we had previously been for tea and coffee and food. The sound of dishes being moved in the kitchen was immediately apparent. Clattering of dishes and cutlery against each other. (Participants 6 and 7, 2019)

[We] heard fan noises from the exhaust of the building and smelled the first smell of our journey: heat, smell of burning oil (?). We came upon children laughing and playing with a ball, *sounds of children laughing and playing*, and running through the sun. Then we heard a siren of the police in the distance. [...] *Crunch crunch crunch* on the snow. Birds in the distance singing, every so often [...] Different shades of light in the trees and contrast with the shady areas. [...] Sound of a car slowly slowly moving behind us signalled danger! (Participant 3 and 4, 2019)

In the latter excerpt, the participants try to describe the different kinds of sounds they heard both near and at a distance, including the onomatopoeic “crunch crunch crunch”. They documented places they had visited in short videos they displayed in the classroom. Audiovisual materials expand media of documentation

and communication in ethnographic practice and can be extremely useful in sensory ethnography because they contain more information than can be described through language (see MacDougal 2005). In addition to capturing voices, movements, physical environments and gestures, video-ethnography enables both researchers and the research audience to revisit scenes and see them from multiple perspectives (Sumartojo and Pink 2019, 11–12). The making of video ethnography can also enable new kinds of encounters between people and research audience, when films introduce intimate spaces such as people's homes (Pink et al. 2015).

Analyzing and becoming aware of how we see, view and represent things, is central in visual anthropology/ethnography (MacDougal 2005; Pink 2007). Although this field of inquiry connects to sensory ethnography, we, the organizers took sight for granted at first and did not reflect on the ways in which we, as ethnographers, look at things. The participants, however, pondered on the ways in which sensory observation made them aware of how things and space can be viewed differently. Some participants used sight in an interesting way:

Looking up we saw all the colours painted on the portico (?) when you look up (the pieces that overhang the building) [...] brilliant blues, ochre, green, maybe some yellow. [...] We re-entered the building talking about scale and how scale matters. We noticed the columns looked like the tree trunks and had the same scalar thing going on [...] grooves in the columns like crevices in the trees. (Participant 3 and 4, 2019)

In our discussions after the workshop, we noted that sight dominates the act of observing. It is often argued that at least in Western cultures, sight is the dominant mode of understanding the world (e.g. Howes 1991; Sparkes 2009; Pink 2009, 12). In the workshop, the participants noted that the vocabulary we use in describing sensory experience is also highly metaphorical: when writing about their experiences, participants used expressions such as “the mind's eye”. When we write about our sensory experience, we should be aware of this bias and seek ways to overcome it and expand our sensory vocabulary.

## **Sensory ethnography as adventure and exposure**

As many scholars studying senses have pointed out, in our everyday life the senses work “unconsciously”. They are culturally encoded and intertwined with each other (Sparkes 2009; Bendix 2000). Our workshop was multicultural and multidisciplinary, which proved to be a good way to learn how to observe sensory experiences. Even though ethnography can and is often conducted in teams (see e.g. Clerke and Hopwood; Turunen et al. in this volume), ethnographies, especially monographs, are still most often written alone (for an exception, see Stavrianakis, Rabinow and Korsby 2017). In our workshop, we worked in pairs and practiced collaborative writing. When two people from different cultures, or

different living and working environments, engaged together in observing and writing, they adjusted to different modes of observing the environment, thus learning from each other. Our participants experienced the pair work and the joint writing session as fruitful.

Step 2 of the experiment, a joint writing session, began in scheduled time. After a few technical problems, the participants wrote efficiently, and a lot of text, about 9 pages, accumulated quickly. There was few time left for discussion but the debate was expeditious and multidisciplinary, and it was interesting how the observations and topics varied and how different each pairs' and each participant's experience was. (Field diary, Tytti)

During our discussion, the participants reflected on the outcomes of the experiment, and the challenges they faced in doing sensory observation. One of the pairs who participated in our workshops named their notes as follows: "What follows is James' and Harry's sensory adventure" (James and Harry are pseudonyms used by the participants themselves in their text. Participant 3 and 4, 2019). According to them, this title reflects the experimental nature of the workshop, which felt like stepping into an unknown world and sensing its details as an explorer. Many workshop participants felt that doing the sensory observations meant crossing the boundaries of usual conference behaviour. This behaviour did not always feel comfortable, and participants were candid about this:

Putting our ear towards the door, we could hear a male voice (the programme would have suggested a woman presenting – this is what happens in conferences, things do not happen according to the programme). *Felt like peeping, fear of getting "caught"* or that somebody would open the door and we would be hit by the door. (Participant 8 and 9, 2019)

I don't usually do this kind of stuff. There is no need to say this but I feel a bit strange walking around and touching things. (Participant 2, 2019)

Questions of social courtesy, courage and fears of interrupting the intensity and intimacy of the situation often come up when conducting participant observation. Some ethnographers fear "becoming a spectacle", attracting an onlookers and questions, and generally being in the centre of attention (Murchison 2010, 71). Taking notes and photos, and especially filming, does hinder participation and evokes direct questions. Although cameras, especially mobile phone cameras, have become everyday objects that are used almost anywhere, it is necessary for ethnographers to consider when and where it is appropriate to film and take photos. In many cases, it is necessary to obtain consent.

Another challenge that workshop participants faced in observation was focusing and maintaining continuous attention in the flow of events and thoughts. They often felt that they were drifting away from the moment of perception and had to "return back to the present":

Actually, I get interested in the posters and start reading them – isn't that what you are doing at conferences? You take lots of stuff in. I see [my workshop partner] taking some picture of the ceiling (ceiling? I haven't paid attention to this part. Why – well, it's high, it's there, should I care? I decided I should maybe focus on the work again. (Participant 2, 2019)

By the end of the sensory ethnography workshop, the participants felt that their perception of the senses and the world around them had changed. They had gained new perspectives into their areas of interest and new ideas on how they could expand their own research into the world of senses. The participants discussed how the senses blend with each other and later mix with other perceptions and memories, forming accumulated and situated knowledge. This is why writing about sensory ethnography and sensory experiences can be challenging: even after a few hours, researchers see things differently and begin “losing” bodily experiences. In writing ethnography, researchers can “go back” to the observed situations and spaces, and bring them alive with the help of notes and *sensory memory and imagination* (Pink 2009, 38, 40). In sensory memory and imagination, perceptions, reflections and images intermingle, merging with words, expressions, images, narrative structures, metaphors, theories and concepts. In sensory ethnography, writing needs to express bodily sensations, describe the circumstances and environment vividly in order to enable others to imagine the spaces, narrating subjects, and the situations and emotions the researchers encounter.

The buildings were breathing; the trees were alive with warmth. And [my workshop partner] was freezing. (Participant 3 and 4, 2019)

All of this brings sensory ethnography close to creative writing and fiction. In fact, the line between them is thin (e.g. Clifford 1986). Ethnographic writing is an attempt at narrativizing the process by which the ethnographer gains new perspectives and knowledge. Descriptions of sensory experiences, environments and atmospheres, are the first step in ethnographic writing that was covered by workshop. The next steps include reflexive analysis and comparison of the ethnographer's experiences with notions and interpretations made by other researchers. Ethnographic writing thus includes both descriptive/creative writing and analytical/theoretical discussion. Further, in order to resonate with its readers, ethnographic writing needs to be vulnerable in the ways that challenge the conventions of factuality and neutrality in scientific writing (Gullion 2016, xiii). This means it needs to be evocative, empathetic and reflexive (Pink 2009, 136).

By the end of the workshop, after our joint discussion, we, the organizers, felt that the experiment should have been longer to include more than one writing session. For those who are planning a workshop or a course on mediating sensory ethnography, we thus recommend organizing at least two separate sessions. During the first session, the group could go through the introduction and do the sensory experiment followed by a writing session. During the second session, which could

occur a day or week later, the participants could process and analyze the texts, reflect on and interpret their experiences, relate them to research literature, and conceptualize them theoretically.

## Conclusions

In the final discussion that took place at the end of the workshop, all the participants agreed that sensory ethnography is not only a simple tool for producing research data, but also a comprehensive reflexive process that begins with sensory adventures that break the boundaries of social behaviour and extends a process of creative writing which entails analysis and interpretation. The participants reported that even during the short workshop, they had become aware of the way in which senses play a part in interactions with space and time-space relations. One of the major outcomes of the workshop was that we all realized that paying attention to sensory experiences increases the researcher's awareness of his/her embodied being and self-reflection.

During our experimental workshop, our participants learned that engaging in sensory perception and reflexivity presents the challenge of being present and alert in one's mind and body as the moment-to-moment sensory perceptions mix with sensory memories of other situations and places. In fact, continuous observations of subtle nuances without interruption is quite impossible in many social situations. In our experimental setting, our participants were able to test different strategies and carry out small interventions changing their regular social behaviour and movement in space. They noted that paying attention to specific and multiple senses requires unusual behaviour, motions and activities that interrupt and even break social conventions. When these doings feel natural, good, funny, comfortable, soothing, or inconvenient, strange, scary, and disgusting – or mixture of any negative and positive affects – they inform the researcher of sensory and embodied, affective knowledge that informs us.

According to our participants, one of the major challenges in conducting sensory ethnography lies in the intertwining of sensory experiences and embodied knowledge into feelings and sentiments that are difficult to verbalize (see Bendix 2000, 41; MacDougal 2005). We all perceive and experience the environment differently and make different interpretations based on our personal preferences and cultural backgrounds. It is natural that in certain contexts, some sensory dimensions receive more attention than others, and are easier to grasp and document. The context of a scientific conference allowed the participants to pay attention to spatial dimensions such as movements in space, the details of architecture, and sounds within a building. However, writing about sensory experiences – even in those sensory realms that we can document by photographing and videotaping – requires a specialized and creative vocabulary. For example, writing about soundscapes calls for an understanding of the language of acoustics and music. In addition to specific vocabulary, we need to find ways of communicating how we feel, how senses and emotions mix and connect with sensory memories of the past, and how certain situations feel easy and convenient while

others feel awkward, confusing and inconvenient. Smell, for example, in the modern West has been ignored as something non-present or neutral (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 1994). To sum up, in order to write about sensory experiences, we need to be able to describe the embodied relationship with the world with an evocative, expressive and creative sensory vocabulary.

In our workshop, we focused on the subjective sensory experiences of the researcher, and the ways in which we can communicate those experiences through writing. Our experiment was just a brief example in which participants could engage in their own sensory and bodily experiences and share them with a partner in a joint writing session. The writing process did not proceed to analysis and theoretical conceptualization, a necessary phase of research that could also be done collectively as a joint process of shared conceptual work (see e.g. Stavrianakis, Rabinow, and Korsby 2017). Furthermore, in our workshop we did not have time to explore other representations of sensory experiences than those rendered into words in the form of notes and immediate free flow writing. Senses and sensory knowledge could be articulated as images and different forms of art, film and performance (see more e.g. Pink 2009, 132–153).

Acquiring and communicating sensory knowledge calls for creative means and new tools. Although senses and sensory experiences are part of everyday life, paying attention to them requires a different mode of being and doing that adds an extra twist to ethnographic research practices. This embodied twist makes the ethnographer an active corporeal explorer rather than passive observer. The sensory and embodied twist thus enables new perspectives on everyday embodied practices, spatiality, and materiality. Sensory ethnography is a constant process of learning by doing which involves various stages: becoming aware of sensory experiences, analyzing and acknowledging the holistic nature of sensory experiences, and seeking new ways of communicating them in words, and other creative modes.

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