THREE

Preparing for sensory research

Practical and orientation issues

In this chapter I suggest how researchers might set about preparing themselves to be open and attentive to the sensory ways of knowing, categories, meanings, moralities and practices of others. This raises a series of questions originating in the approaches and perspectives discussed in previous chapters, concerning what kinds of self-awareness, technologies and epistemologies might equip us well for this task. It involves asking: What is the sensory ethnographer seeking to find out? What are the implications of 'researcher subjectivity'? How does one choose a method? How might media figure in sensory ethnography? And is there a particular sensory approach to ethics? Moreover, preparation to do ethnography in a way that attends to the senses includes considering how one might use one's own body and senses alongside and in combination with both more classic and contemporary innovative digital research methods and technologies.

INTRODUCTION: PREPARING IN AN UNPREDICTABLE WORLD

It is impossible to ever be completely prepared for or know precisely how an ethnographic project will be conducted before starting. Many researchers who have undertaken ethnographies that attend to the senses have done so without any special preparation: the multisensoriality of the research context is often something that emerges though one's encounter with both people and the physical environment one is participating in. It involves unanticipated smells, tastes, sounds and textures, and unexpected ways of comprehending them. These lead to similarly unanticipated moments of realisation. This point is demonstrated in

one of the earliest ethnographies to bring to the fore the importance of the non-visual senses. Steven Feld has described how during his long-term anthropological research in Papua New Guinea the Kaluli man working with him had 'blurted back' to one of Feld's questions regarding 'bird taxonomy and identification' to point out to him: '"Listen – to you they are birds, to me they are voices of the forest"'. Feld realised he had been imposing 'a method of knowledge construction ... onto a domain of experience that Kaluli do not isolate or reduce'. He explains that 'Birds are "voices" because Kaluli *recognise and acknowledge their existence primarily through sound*, and because they are spirit reflections ... of deceased men and women' (1982: 45, italics added). For Feld the methodological implication of this realisation led him to rebalance 'the empirical questioning and hypothesis-making activities ... with a less direct approach' (1982: 46). Such unforeseen realisations are quite characteristic of the way ethnographers learn during fieldwork. In some cases they might occur in ways that are quite subtle and over time. For instance, David Sutton describes how when he was doing research in Kalymnos (Greece) local people repeatedly told him to 'Eat, in order to remember Kalymnos' (Sutton, 2001: 2). Over time he realised that, as he puts it: '*telling me to use the transitory and repetitive act of eating as a medium for the more enduring act of remembering, they were, in fact, telling me to act like a Kalymnian*' (2001: 2, original italics) since in this particular cultural context foods formed a fundamental part of local people's memories.

In other circumstances researchers learn in more abrupt ways. The performer and scholar Hahn writes of what she calls the 'sensually extreme' in ethnography, suggesting that 'disorienting experiences' (2006: 94) in fieldwork create a type of liminality through which researchers might come to reflexive realisations. Hahn describes her own experiences of doing fieldwork at monster truck rallies as 'sensually more intense than I could have conjured: enormous trucks, deafening sounds, thick clouds of exhaust, and visions of extreme physical force as these 10,000-pound trucks flew into the air and crushed piles of cars or performed freestyle' (2006: 87–8). She proposes that 'The extreme pushes one to reorient sensibilities and consider the thresholds of what is sensually extreme from where we stand at the moment' (2006: 95). As Hahn points out such 'disorienting' moments are unexpected (2006: 92) – and they somehow 'jolt' (Young and Goulet, 1994: 20–1, cited by Hahn 2006: 94) us into a new level of understanding. This 'jolt' may be gradual, enjoyable, perhaps disturbing if the disorientation experienced leaves the ethnographer grasping out for points of familiarly, or it might be sudden. Whatever the nature of the experience we cannot be prepared for the specificity of such jolting, disorientating or revelatory moments. However, we can do our best to be open to them, and be prepared to engage reflexively and analytically with such experiences. We should be aware that even with extensive preparation, researchers' own sensory experiences will most likely still surprise them, sometimes giving them access to a new form of knowing.

THE RESEARCH QUESTION: WHAT IS THE SENSORY ETHNOGRAPHER TRYING TO FIND OUT?

The suggestions made in this chapter are based on the assumption that the study of the senses would not normally be the sole and primary objective of research itself, but that it forms part of a methodology for understanding other people's experiences, values, identities and ways of life. A methodology based in and a commitment to understanding the senses provides a route to forms of knowledge and knowing not accounted for in conventional forms of ethnography. It often leads us to the normally not spoken, the invisible and the unexpected – those things that people do not perhaps necessarily think it would be worth mentioning, or those things that tend to be felt or sensed rather than spoken about. For example, in my own experience, in studying how self-identity is constituted in the home (Pink, 2004) I found the concept of the 'sensory home' to be an important route to understanding people's everyday practices and decision making about domestic work; this led me to understand tacit sensory and normally never spoken-about ways that people knew their houses were clean or dirty. The concept of the sensory home was also used again in my later work as a way in which to think about how laundry was implicated as part of everyday sensory environments (Pink, 2012). For example, we found that laundry was part of the texture of home in ways that would go beyond a focus simply on what participants would have said it looked, smelled and felt like (Pink et al., 2013). I took a similar approach in my research about the Cittàslow (Slow City) movement in Britain. There I used an analysis of the sensoriality of urban experience to develop the idea of the 'sensory city' (Pink, 2007b) and to explore the role of sensorial experience in sustainable development in England (Pink, 2008a) and in Spain (Pink and Servon, 2013. In later research in Australia I was careful to attend to how slow city activists spoke about their relationship to their local environments in terms of sensory experience (Pink and Lewis, 2014) as a way to comprehend how their embodied and affective relationships to locality were part of their activism. Again I did not study the senses for the sake of defining the city or locality as a sensory context, but treated the sensoriality of the city and the local environment as a context for understanding people's actions in and concerning the areas they lived in. Likewise, my ethnographic work on organisations seeks not to study how the senses are used in those organisations, but the ways in which sensory experience and sensory ways of knowing are part of the ways in which people stay safe in organisations (Pink et al., 2015).

What the sensory ethnographer wants to find out is always inflected both by the disciplines through which she or he is working, or with which she or he collaborates, as well as with an assumption that the sensory ethnographer is seeking to understand the environments, activities and experiences that our lives come into contact with. These environments might have material, digital, invisible, intangible, social and other elements. Our respective interest in these will depend on a range of questions.

This is a departure both from the more traditional forms of ethnographic practice (e.g. Atkinson et al., 2007) that I outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. It also differs from the objectives of Howes and Classen (1991) whose idea of studying the sensory categories of any given culture resonates with conventional methods of investigating and documenting other cultures in twentieth-century anthropological practice. For example, for much of the twentieth century one of the first steps in doing anthropological research about another culture was to investigate and map out, diagrammatically, its kinship system (although towards the end of the twentieth century anthropologists became faced with questions about the validity of this approach – see for example Schweitzer, 2000). Howes and Classen suggested that another fundamental aspect of human culture should be given centrality – setting out an agenda for doing research that aims to elicit 'a given culture's "sensory profile" or way of "sensing the world"' (1991: 257). To do so they recommended attending to 'language', 'artefacts and aesthetics', 'body decoration', 'child-rearing practices', 'alternative sensory modes' (i.e. when people of different categories use different 'sensory orders'), 'media of communication', 'natural and built environment', 'rituals', 'mythology' and 'cosmology' (1991: 262–85). Their list is very inclusive and the areas they cover have been represented in several subsequent ethnographies that attend to the senses. For example, Geurts (2003) undertakes detailed analyses of both the linguistic aspects of Anlo Ewe sensory categories, practices surrounding birth and the care of children and ritual, and Grasseni has focused on how children learn to see (2007b); in my own work I have focused on the built environment (Pink, 2004, 2007b), rituals (2007b, 2008b) and what Howes and Classen call 'alternative sensory modes' (1991) (Pink, 2004, 2005b); and Desjarlais has examined how a man and woman interviewees used gender-specific sensory categories and metaphors to discuss their autobiographical experiences (2003). Yet, my argument here is that a sensory ethnography goes beyond this, and as it is presented here is aligned with a more processual and phenomenological approach.

Therefore, to return to the question of what the sensory ethnographer is trying to find out, we need to account for this context in which most ethnographic studies of the senses actually form part of research into other substantive questions. Thus, one response would be that the knowledge sought is always project-specific. However, more generally it is fair to say that the sensory ethnographer is trying to access areas of embodied, emplaced knowing and to use these as a basis from which to understand human environments, activities, perception, experience, action and meaning, and to situate this culturally and biographically.

REVIEWING THE EXISTING LITERATURE AND AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THE SENSES

Most good ethnographic research is concerned not only with the knowing produced through encounters with people and things and engagements with practices

in fieldwork contexts. It is also dependent on existing related published ethnographic knowledge, local literatures (fictional and documentary), images and other texts (including online texts), and art forms that form part of the cultural knowledge that is inextricable from everyday practice and local ideologies. A review of such existing materials and materialities will help the researcher both reformulate their research question(s) and decide which methods are most appropriate for the task.

Howes and Classen suggest a systematic four-stage process for library-based research about the senses. This might involve working with an ethnographic text, a novel, a life history or a film. They suggest the researcher should: first, 'extract all the references to the sense of sensory phenomena from the source in question'; second, 'analyse the data pertaining to each modality individually'; third, 'analyse the relations between the modalities with regard to how each sense contributes to the meaning of experience in the culture'; and finally, 'conclude with a statement of the hierarchy or order of the sense for the culture'. As they point out, this method only allows the researcher to analyse the *representation* of the senses that is offered by the producer of the text, which will also represent the sensory subjectivity of that author (1991: 261).

Other forms of writing and representation can also become key sources in a sensory approach to ethnography. In my experience ethnographers always benefit from engaging analytically with fiction writing, film, other media representations, reportage and other literary statements connected with their topic. In fact existing discussions of the senses developed in architecture and design studies have often used both literary sources – fiction and poetry – and existing ethnographic description as sources to demonstrate the sensoriality of our experience of physical environments (e.g. Malnar and Vodvarka, 2004). Although literary writings on the senses will, like ethnographies, be based in the sensory subjectivity of their own authors, as well as possibly designed to portray particular experiences in ways that are morally inflected, they can offer insights into how sensory experiences are represented as part of specific cultural narratives, historical contexts and situated personal experiences. Fiction can also offer interesting sources that enable understanding of the ways that sensory experiences are expected to be or how they are framed in certain cultural and practical contexts. For example, 20 years after first starting my research about the bullfight in Southern Spain I was invited to write about the bullfight again. With no new ethnographic materials, but a growing interest in the sensory, embodied and effective elements of the performance, and its emplacement in the bullring, I returned to the historical bullfight literature in order to explore cultural narratives about the experience and sensoriality of the performance from the bullfighter's perspective. Using passages from the work of the well-known writer Blasco Ibáñez in his book *Sangre y Arena* (*Blood and Sand*) (1908), I reflected on representations of the sensory, affective embodied experience of the bullfighter. For example, in one particular passage, both Blasco Ibáñez's moral distaste for the bullfight and the sensation of being a bullfighter walking out into the ring are brought to the fore:

> They felt themselves different men as they advanced over the sand. They were risking their lives for something more than money. Their doubts and terrors of the unknown had been left outside the barricades. Now they trod the arena. They were face to face with their public. Reality had come. The longing for glory in their barbarous, ignorant minds, the desire to excel their comrades, the pride in their own strength and dexterity, all blinded them, making them forget all fears, and inspiring them with the daring of brute force.
>
> Gallardo was quite transfigured ...
>
> (Blasco Ibáñez and Gillespie, 2005: 41)

I argued that this scene might be understood through a theory of emplacement, as outlined in Chapter 2, and suggested that 'the wider implication is that a theory of emplacement might also be used to understand other performative contexts' (Pink, 2011a). Therefore, fictional texts, including historical fiction, can bring to the fore aspects of sensory experience in ways that are culturally, historically, politically and morally inflected. They therefore offer excellent ways in which to learn about the sensory ways of knowing that might be part of a specific context being researched, but as this example also shows they need to be situated so that we may comprehend how the experiences they are describing might be usefully meaningful in any one research project.

Another example of how a non-academic text has played an interesting role in enabling understanding of a research context emerges from my research about the Slow Food and Cittàslow movement. Here existing written materials about the aims and work of these movements have proved indispensable to my understanding of the role of the senses in the actual activities of their members. For instance, the Slow Food movement advocates and undertakes programmes of 'sensory education' (see Petrini, 2000), by which it hopes to convince people of the benefits of its ideology by teaching them about the meaning and importance of consuming and knowing about local produce, through the medium of food. Carlo Petrini, the leader of Slow Food, proposes that 'Reappropriating the senses is the first step towards imagining a different system capable of respecting man as a worker of the land, as a producer, as a consumer of food and resources, and as a political and moral entity' and 'To reappropriate one's senses is to reappropriate one's own life' (2007: 99). The analysis of such texts cannot provide researchers with first-hand knowledge of how people actually experience and give meanings to food. Rather, it allows us to gain an understanding of the sensory categories the movement's literature constructs, the moralities and values that it gives to particular types of sensory experience, and the wider activist agendas in which they are embedded. As such it provides a reference point from which to analyse the actual practices and meanings generated amongst research participants. For example, an appreciation of the Slow Food approach to the senses has helped me to analyse the ideological and activist strands of the sensory experiences that are structured into

the composition of a Slow City carnival (Pink, 2007b) and in approaches to sustainable development in Slow Cities (Pink, 2008a). Not all texts that discuss the senses have similarly explicit political or activist agendas to that I have outlined above. For instance, other examples might be texts discussing clinical practice in bio-medicine or alternative therapies, or cookery books. Such texts will nevertheless be identifiable as attached to specific world views and ideologies and provide invaluable cultural resources for a sensory ethnographic study.

It is moreover not only written cultural *texts* that can offer researchers access to local discourses and representations of sensory experience. Sensory ethnographers should be open to other media and practices of representation. This includes viewing films and other audiovisual works in ways that are attentive to the senses but might also include performance as it is embedded in everyday life. For example, Marina Roseman discusses the significance of song amongst the Temiar people of Kelantan, Malaysia. The Temiar are an indigenous forest-dwelling people whose world, Roseman writes, is impacted on by 'rainforest deforestation, land alienation and Islamic evangelism' (2005: 213). Roseman shows how, as she puts it, 'In musical genres ... Temiars map out their experiential universe, locating that which is Other within reach of the self' (2005: 218). Thus to understand how discourses and sensory experiences are expressed and remembered in culturally meaningful ways, ethnographers can also benefit from looking beyond written and visual texts.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT METHODS

The discussions above have implied that the question of how close the ethnographer might get to 'sharing' the sensory embodied or emplaced experiences and the sensory subjectivity of their research participants might depend partly on the methods of investigation used. This does not mean that the method employed will determine the level of analytical *understanding* the researcher will arrive at, but rather that different methods take us into other people's worlds and ask them to reveal their experiences to us through different routes. In the following chapters I approach the question of what sorts of engagements are facilitated and what types of knowledge are produced through a series of different methods: interviewing, participating and digital methods. The choice of method should be matched to two key factors: the method should serve the research question – it should be the method that will best enable the researcher to explore the themes and issues and acquire the understandings that she or he is seeking; yet this first factor requires that the method must simultaneously be suitable for and amenable to the research participants in question. In some projects the methods used will be predetermined and the participants in the research to a certain extent self-select in that they will only ever be those people who are happy to collaborate in knowledge production using the predetermined methods. However, in projects with a more flexible

design, it might be that different participants in the same project collaborate more or less enthusiastically with different methods. Or even that the methods used are often determined not by the researcher's own prior decisions about practical approaches but by the research events and scenarios created by research participants (see, for example, Pink, 2008b).

Above all, it is useful to recognise that in sensory ethnography practice, methods themselves are ongoingly changing – they are not static tools that we can take off a shelf after having been used by someone else. Rather, methods are malleable and flexible: they can change over time and between projects. In short, methods have biographies (Pink and Leder Mackley, 2013).

REFLEXIVITY IN SENSORY ETHNOGRAPHY

That reflexivity is fundamental to a sensory ethnography has already been recognised by some key contributors to the field. The anthropologist Geurts puts this particularly poignantly; in setting an agenda for a reflexive and sensory ethnography, she writes:

> We [ethnographers] often find ourselves drenched – not just in discourse and words, but in sensations, imaginations and emotions … And yet, if we have become drenched, those we work with may also be soaked through and through. Such moments open up space, or sound a call, to body forth fine-tuned accounts replete with an ethical aesthetics of relationships in the field. (2003: 386)

A sensory ethnography calls for a form of reflexivity through which the ethnographer engages with how his or her own sensory experiences are produced through research encounters and how these might assist her or him in understanding those of others. The following chapters of this book reveal that there exists a growing body of academic and arts practice that suggests how this reflexivity has been engaged in practice. As Regina Bendix pointed out in 2006: 'how ethnographers are to acquire sensory reflexivity and, concomitantly sensory effectiveness in participant observation has thus far hardly been discussed, nor has there been much experimentation or explication as to how sensory ethnography might find its way back on the printed page' (2006: 8; see also Bendix, 2000). Contributors to Bendix and Donald Brenneis' (2006) co-edited volume and other scholars (e.g. Geurts, 2003; Lee and Ingold, 2006; O'Dell and Willim, 2013) have begun this task. In the following section I pursue this question through a discussion of the sensory subjectivity and intersubjectivity of the ethnographic encounter.

Such reflexivity is essential to ethnographic research, as conceptualised here. It is a collaborative process through which shared understandings (to the extent that they can be shared) are produced. It involves sets of encounters that when presented appropriately can serve to represent in powerful ways, the experiences

of one group of people to another. The self-conscious and reflexive use of the senses in this process is an important and strategic act. By attempting to become similarly situated to one's research participants and by attending to the bodily sensations and culturally specific sensory categories (e.g. in some, but not all cultures, smell, touch, sound, vision, taste) through which these feelings are communicated about and given value, ethnographers can come to know about other people's lives in ways that are particularly intense. By making similarly reflexive and body-conscious uses of this sensory knowing in the representation of their work, ethnographers can hope to produce texts that will have powerful impact on their readers or audiences. This might involve using the written word, yet recent discussions suggest the potential of sensorial media to invoke empathetic and possibly (if properly contextualised) intercultural understandings. Such processes can be engaged in both academic and applied research. The implication is that empathetic understandings might be produced through the engagement of decision makers (whether policy makers or in industry) with evocative multimedia and multisensory representations that seek to represent the embodied nature of other people's experiences and concerns. This implies the possibility that they might become reflexive audiences, self-conscious about their own subjectivities. Such empathetic and reflexive texts might convince in ways that cannot be achieved through the 'dry' (even if passionately conceived) arguments made in the bullet points of written reports based on questionnaire data.

FROM SENSORY BIAS TO SENSORY SUBJECTIVITY

An important step towards understanding other people's sensory categories and the way they use these to describe their environments, activities, experiences and knowledge, lies in developing a reflexive appreciation of one's own sensorium. In much existing research methods literature produced originally in the English language, the 'we' who do research are assumed to be modern western subjects, who divide the senses into vision, hearing, touch, taste and smell (along with the oft added mysterious sixth sense). Howes and Classen stress that *'Other cultures do not necessarily divide the sensorium as we do'*. They note how, for example, the Hausa have two senses and the Javanese five, and that these senses do not necessarily coincide with modern western ones (1991: 257–8, original italics). As Howes has later commented (for the modern western ethnographer), 'it is not easy to cultivate ... cross-sensory awareness because one of the defining characteristics of modernity is the cultural separation of the senses into self-contained fields' (2003: 47). Nevertheless, it is important for ethnographers to be aware of sensoria that differ from their own. As Geurts argues, the 'Western model of five senses is a folk model' (2003: 227) and as such it is one amongst others. For the modern western ethnographer an awareness of the five-sense model provides a useful comparative

apparatus that might be employed as a way of reflecting on cultural difference; it offers a ready-made reference point. However, it is also more deeply embedded in the practice of modern western scholarship since there the ethnographer, as a scholar or an applied researcher, is usually obliged to communicate her or his findings to audiences of modern western subjects who also understand the world through a five-sense sensorium. At the same time, not all ethnographers necessarily originate from cultures in which the five-sense model is used, which means there is no real justification for putting it at the centre of academic enterprise: it is a tool employed by ethnographers who use it as a way of life and a way of research, but it is not the only possible model.

To understand what they call the 'sensory biases' of another culture Howes and Classen recommend that a researcher must both develop an awareness of and 'overcome' her or his own 'sensory biases' (or as I discuss below 'sensory subjectivity') and then train 'oneself to be sensitive to a multiplicity of sensory expressions'. They suggest undertaking exercises in self-training that might involve 'taking some object from one's environment and disengaging one's attention from the object itself so as to focus on how each of its sensory properties would impinge on one's consciousness were they not filtered in any way'. From this they recommend that researchers develop what they call 'the capacity to be "of two sensoria" about things'. This entails 'being able to operate with complete awareness in two perceptual systems of sensory orders simultaneously (the sensory order of one's own culture and that of the culture studied), and constantly comparing notes' (1991: 260). The process of seeking to apprehend one's own sensory situatedness might be begun before starting ethnographic fieldwork. Exercises such as those suggested by Howes and Classen can encourage us to break down an experience into sensory categories; the result of doing so would allow one to be aware both of the categories one uses and of how one defines and gives meanings to different types of sensation.

The suggestion that the sensory ethnographer starts with a kind of auto-ethnography of her or his own sensory culture and of how she or he is situated in it proposes a stage of preparation for ethnographic fieldwork. This should equip the researcher with an awareness of how he or she uses (culturally and biographically specific) sensory categories to classify and represent multisensory embodied knowing. In addition, this involves accounting for her or his own sensory subjectivity, an ability to be reflexive about how this subjectivity might be implicated in the production of ethnographic knowledge, and an openness to learning how to participate in other sensory ways of knowing. It is also essential to recognise that there is significant variation within cultures – although people of the same culture might share certain sensory categories and classifications, they may use these in different ways or give different meanings to them. The sensory ethnographer needs to keep in mind that in any given culture any number of different ways of living out – for instance, gendered, ethnic, generational, professional or other – identities might be associated with different ways of practising, understanding,

recalling and representing one's experiences sensorially. These insights need to be applied not only to the way we understand other people's culturally specific sensory worlds, but also to how we regard ourselves as being situated in and moving between different sensory cultures.

Researchers tend to begin their fieldwork from a wide range of different relationships to the subjects of their research. In some cases a researcher might already be a specialist practitioner of the activity they are studying. Good examples include John Hockey's auto-ethnography analysis of the sensory experiences of long distance running (2006) and Hahn's work on knowledge transmission in Japanese dance, having been a dancer before beginning the research (2007). Other ethnographers who seek to learn about other people's experiences and meanings through the senses may not have such an established basis of specialist embodied knowledge. However, there are different degrees to which existing bodily knowing will be involved. This can depend on whether the researcher is doing fieldwork in her or his own culture. Ethnographers might research practices that are already part of their lives, but that might be experienced and understood differently by others. For example, in 2000 I worked on a study of everyday domestic laundry practices in the UK (Pink, 2005b, 2007c, 2012) and in 2010–14 I led a UK sensory ethnography of the home which also covered laundry (Pink and Leder Mackley, 2013, 2014). I have been doing laundry myself for many years, yet I found that my own knowledge and embodied ways of knowing about laundry, and ways of interpreting the domestic environment in relation to laundry processes, differed – sometimes enormously – from those of the people who participated in my research. When I was working on the first study in 2000, their (varied) beliefs and values concerning how one should use one's senses to judge when and in what ways laundry was clean or dirty led me to different consciousness about how I made my own subjective decisions about laundry. However, this self-reflexivity also allowed me to understand that how one treats laundry is bound up with how one uses sensory categories and practices to create statements about one's self-identity. In this reflexive process however, I did not attempt to deconstruct my own sensory knowledge about laundry *before* starting the research. Rather, the self-awareness it entailed was generated *during* the research process as I began to use my own sensory values and practices as a means of comparison and a reference point through which to situate the different approaches of my various research participants. However, the reflexive process can, over a series of studies, go further than this. For example, by the time I began to work on the later studies, what I had learned from the first study and my own personal experiences of doing laundry through different spatial layouts in Spain and Malaysia, brought a new set of ways of knowing and experiences through which to understand participants' sensory engagements with laundry.

Likewise, in my study of the sensory home this process of self-awareness was not an exercise that took place prior to the fieldwork, but developed relationally as I explored other people's sensory homes with them. In this instance I was doing

research in two cultures, English and Spanish, in which I had lived my everyday life through fairly conventional and culturally specific routines. Before doing the research I had often noted how, for example, washing up was done differently in England and Spain, but I never reflected on how in either cultural context and material environment I had used my own sensory experiences and knowledge to make decisions about how and when to clean something in my home, or to pass judgements about other people. I had not realised how I also used sensory strategies as ways of defining my own self-identity. Now, years since I undertook my first project in the home my own practices invoke a particular awareness of how I use embodied sensory knowing and categories – when determining if clothing can be worn or needs to be washed, when rooms need to be tidied, when the kitchen floor needs to be cleaned. These strategies are also identity practices through which I create a particular self and engage with culturally specific moralities through my decisions about the condition of my clothes and domestic surfaces.

To understand the complex ways in which we use sensory knowing and categories and develop sensory strategies in social interaction and self-representation I suggest two concepts are needed. The first is the idea of *sensory subjectivity*, mentioned above. The idea that ethnographic research is by nature subjective and requires the researcher to reflect on her or his own role in the production of ethnographic knowledge is by now a widely accepted paradigm. The ways individuals use sensory knowledge and practice can be understood as a form of subjectivity – a way of understanding the world that is at once culturally specific and might also be influenced by experiences and ideologies originating beyond the local, from how an individual is positioned in relation to social institutions and other individuals, and that should be understood in connection with any number of other identity markers (such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age and generation) and more. However, rather than essentialising the individual as having just one subjectivity we should recognise that people may shift between different subject positions, depending on the contexts in which they find themselves. Thus, building on the literatures and ideas discussed in Chapter 2, as our emplacement shifts and changes, we continuously move and learn (see Harris, 2007: 1) and our self-identities are continuously reconstituted. As our identities are continually completed in relation to place and our ways of embodied knowing and learning, this idea of sensory subjectivity is thus sensitive to the contingency of identity and it is also inextricable from our relationship with our total environment.

The second concept implied by the idea of sensory subjectivity is that of *sensory intersubjectivity*. Indeed, if identity is continually being negotiated through our intersubjective relations with others and our material/sensory environments, we need a way of conceptualising how this works in practice during our research encounters. Our social interactions are certainly not based simply on verbal communications and visual impressions. Rather, they are fully embodied and multisensory events – even if actual physical contact does not take place. The sensory ethnographer needs to account for how the senses are bound up with

her or his relationships both with research participants and between the people participating in the research themselves, and indeed how these shift and change.

OTHER PEOPLE'S SENSORY CATEGORIES AND SENSORY INTERSUBJECTIVITY

The way we live, understand and communicate through our senses involves *social* relationships. This means that through our participation in social and material environments our sensory practices and indeed identities are lived out. The type of sensory intersubjectivity that these social and material encounters involves invites three strands of discussion: the role of sensory perception in how we interpret and interact with others; the implications of sensory intersubjectivity for understanding the research encounter; and the ethnographer's quest to share sensory experiences with research participants, attempting to apprehend their experiences and seeking to communicate about them with them through this sharing.

Sensory intersubjectivity

The self might be seen to be constituted through processes involving the transmission of sensory knowledge – as we enter into new ways of knowing in and about and engaging with our environments both our self-identities and understandings shift. Desjarlais proposes that 'Distinct types of sensory perception take effect at different times in people's lives'. Thus it is useful to look out for people's 'shifting orientations, and changes in time' (2003: 342). These shifts take place as a result of changes that occur throughout the life course, be they gradual, abrupt and occurring through a sudden realisation (e.g. Hahn, 2006) or developed through a training or apprenticeship process (e.g. Grasseni, 2004a, b; Downey, 2005; Hahn, 2007). In part such changes are related to our changing social environments and encounters – as such to the intersubjectivity between persons and to the way that our notions of self are continuously negotiated and reconstituted through our intersubjective encounters with others. As Desjarlais notes:

> Sensory engagements are as much intersubjective processes as they are personal ones. They regularly emerge in the course of interactions among people. Any considerations of a person's sensory engagements in the world must therefore be considered within the frame of a person in reflective action among other persons and other consciousnesses. (2003: 342)

Desjarlais' points of course are equally applicable to the intersubjectivity that occurs between research participants as to that between researcher and participants. He argues that 'The very substance of anthropological knowledge is founded on a sensory semiosis' (2003: 243). By this point, which can also

be applied to ethnography as practised in other disciplines, Desjarlais is referring to a process of intersubjectivity. The researchers' actions are informed by their own sensory subjectivities while, simultaneously, their actions and the meanings of these are also 'shaped by local perspectives on sensory perception' (2003: 243).

Another perspective through which to consider how the senses figure in the relationships between people entails a sociological focus on social interaction as outlined in Chapter 1 (Low, 2005; Largey and Watson, 2006 [1972]; Vannini et al., 2012). This approach suggests we should attend to how cultural norms are invested in sensory categories and invites us to consider how the ways people judge others is informed by a sensuous morality. This is particularly relevant as one considers the importance of the senses to the research encounter in general and to the interpersonal relationships that researchers develop during ethnographic research in particular. However, the moralities and values associated with the sensoriality of human interaction should also be situated in relation to specific bodies and materialities. Christina Lammer's discussion of 'bodywork', through the case study of her research about 'how radiological personnel perceive and define "contact" as it relates to their interactions with patients' (2007: 91) brings these issues to the fore. Drawing from the phenomenological writings of Merleau-Ponty as developed by MacDougall (1998), Lammer suggests that (as MacDougall proposes for anthropological filmmaking) in 'the biomedical practice of (interventional) radiology ... Bodies are mutually interpenetrated, leaving deep though invisible somatic traces; filling perception with multisensual flesh' (2007: 103). In the particular case of interventional radiology touch is central (2007: 104), thus making the corporeality of human interaction all the more obvious. Nevertheless, although sensorial intersubjectivity need not involve actual physical touching it should always be understood in terms of its corporeality and as occurring in relation to a material environment.

The sensory intersubjectivity of the research encounter

Above I have outlined three strands of thinking about how interpersonal relationships are lived out in everyday social encounters that might range from the seriousness and intentionality of a surgical intervention to the serendipity of a fleeting encounter in a supermarket while shopping. The first stresses that our self-identities are constantly renegotiated through these encounters as our own subjectivities become engaged with those of others. As (to take a modern western model) we see, touch, smell and hear others, and perhaps seek to modify their sensory experiences of our own bodies, we are continually resituating ourselves and re-making ourselves in relation to others. I have suggested that to acknowledge that sensory experience and perception form a part of these encounters allows us to understand the sociality that our emplacement involves. The second strand of

thinking, emerging from sociological approaches to social interaction, reminds us of the way normative and/or deviant behaviours and values are instigated and interpreted through culturally specific sensory expectations and memories. Finally, Lammer's (2007) work invites us to reflect further on the corporeality and multisensoriality of human interaction. These points are no less relevant to our understanding of the relationships and encounters that take place between ethnographers and research participants.

Martin F. Manalansan IV's (2006) discussion of the notion of the 'smelly immigrant', through the case study of his research with Asian Americans in New York City, is a good example. Manalansan describes how one of the concerns of the Asian Americans who participated in his research was with the (lingering) smells of Asian foods in their homes and on their clothing and bodies. He demonstrates how the culturally specific ways immigrants negotiate their identities through sensory strategies are set within political contexts and specific power configurations. Yet, Manalansan points out that his findings are not solely relevant for comprehending the sensoriality of immigrant lives. Rather, they are more generally applicable to the ethnographer. Reflecting on an excerpt from his field journal, which describes his visit to a Korean family home in the United States, he asks:

> In what ways were my own presuppositions about odors influencing my own actions, feelings and reactions in that domestic space? Was I – the anthropologist – authority figure, causing specific anxieties and emotions among members of the Park family? (2006: 51)

Manalansan's questions reinforce the importance of the ethnographer taking a reflexive approach to the relationships and encounters that she or he has with others, using this to situate and interpret both her or his own actions and reactions as well as those of research participants. Working with people from different cultures to one's own offers a useful way in which to encounter ways in which we feel the world differently to others, and on the basis of this to begin to consider how the world feels to them.

Such a reflexive analysis should be part of any good ethnography – it helps us to be aware of the ways in which we learn and know. Incorporated into a sensory ethnographic methodology it involves referring to: first, one's developing understanding of local sensory categories and meanings, how these are constituted, how they operate in everyday life, and the wider political and power configurations that they are entangled with; second, one's own sensory subjectivity to understand how this is informed by particular values and thus leads us to categorise others in particular ways; and finally, to how one's own sensory subjectivity shifts in the contexts of social and embodied encounters and negotiations with others, and how this in itself enables one to arrive at new levels of personal and ethnographic awareness and knowing.

MEDIA, METHODS AND SENSORY KNOWLEDGE

There has been surprisingly little discussion of the relationship between media and the senses in the existing literature. In this section I outline some of the most historical work in this field, before suggesting an alternative approach which will inform the way that media are treated in the methods discussed in later chapters and also provide the theoretical foundations for understanding the use of digital media methods for sensory ethnography, as developed in Chapter 6.

In this context whereby until very recently (Pink, 2014) the question of media and the senses seems to have been largely evaded by both sensory and media scholars, one of the texts that has retained influence in this field is the early work of Marshall McLuhan (2005 [1964]). McLuhan's suggestion was that 'our technical media, since writing and printing, are extensions of our senses' (2005 [1964]: 46). He argued that what he called the 'sense-ratio' shifts when different media are involved (2005 [1964: 47). 'Sense-ratio' referred to 'the proportional elaboration of the senses within a particular cultural logic' (Howes, 2005b: 23) and McLuhan proposed that 'any new medium alters the existing sense ratios and proportions, just as over-all colors are modified by any local shift of pigment or component' (2005 [1964]: 47). Thus the 'latest' media of the time of his writing – television – he proposed was 'an extension, not just of sight and sound but ... tangibility in its visual, contoured, sculptural mode' and thus a 'sudden extension of our sight-touch powers' that must have social effects (2005 [1964]: 46–7). Although as Howes notes, there are problems with 'the technological determinism and implicit evolutionism of McLuhan's theoretical position' (Howes, 2005b: 23), his work invites the important question of the relationship of different media to sensory evocation and communication.

There have been other older theoretical explorations of media, the senses and society, one of which is Rodaway's attempt to explain the sensory context of post-modernity by drawing from Jean Baudrillard's notions of 'the orders of simulacra and the concept of hyper-reality'. Rodaway sought to explain the 'socio-historical development of styles of sensuous experience and the consequent changes in concepts of reality through the introduction of new social practices and the employment of new technologies' (1994: 9). While Rodaway's discussion is dated through its association with late twentieth century conceptualisations of post-modernity, the questions he raises remain pertinent. Much social, sensory and material experience is mediated in multiple and diverse ways by (constantly changing and developing) media technologies. Thus, as Nick Couldry (2000) has suggested, we might understand much human practice as 'media orientated'. This invites a consideration of how our emplaced contact with media technologies and the mediation of experience might be conceptualised within a sensory ethnography.

Indeed, there are several ways that culturalist and non-representational approaches to the senses impact on how we might understand media as 'sensory' (Pink, 2014). As I have emphasised in the earlier chapters of this book there is a clear distinction between the culturalist approach to the senses developed by Howes (e.g. 2003) and the non-representational approach developed by Ingold (e.g. 2000, 2010). If we likewise apply these two approaches to understanding media, then similar trajectories develop. Yet as I have pointed out elsewhere, the shifts towards phenomenological and non-representational approaches across academic disciplines that I have discussed in Chapter 1,

> have led to only a very limited amount of discussion of the experiential and sensorial dimensions of how we perceive and engage with media in everyday life. In contrast, through the representational approach of Visual Culture Studies W.J.T. Mitchell (2005) engages the sensory to develop a semiotic approach to media. (Pink, 2015)

Above I have noted McLuhan's culturalist and representational argument, which is aligned both with the theoretical commitments of David Howes and those of the visual cultures scholar W.J.T Mitchell, mentioned above. These authors take approaches that are rooted in semiotic analysis, and that are undertaken at the level of culture, rather than at the level of seeking to understand human experience and perception. In contrast, the approaches of Ingold (see Ingold, 2010) and of Barbara Stafford (2006), who has brought together insights from research in the neurosciences and art history in her own work, offer us a very different way to understand representations and their experiential and sensory qualities (Pink, 2015). My point is that the analytical consequences of taking a representational or non-representational approach to media are rather different (Pink, 2015), as are the consequences of doing so in relation to the senses (Howes, 2011a, 2011b; Ingold, 2011a, 2011b). In this book where I engage with media and technologies, both as part of the world we research and as part of the toolkit we use to research in the world, I treat them in a way that goes beyond their status as technologies to disseminate representations or be used for communications, but as sensory technologies with other forms of presence, affordances and qualities (Pink and Leder Mackley, 2013).

In Chapters 4, 5 and 6 I identify how different media have been used in sensory ethnography research through examinations of how specific methods have been developed in different research projects and contexts.

ETHICS IN SENSORY ETHNOGRAPHY

Any research project needs to attend to the ethical codes of the academic discipline(s) it is located in (these are normally developed by the professional associations of the discipline) and of the institutions with whom they are involved. As I have discussed

elsewhere (Pink, 2007a), researchers doing ethnography need to account for the ethical issues that are raised by specific cultural contexts and the culturally and personally specific moralities of their research participants. In this general sense ethical issues raised by a sensory ethnography need not vary from those of a visual ethnography (Pink, 2007a) or applied ethnography (Pink, 2005a, 2007b). Indeed, it is difficult to propose an ethics framework for an area of research practice that is already evidently cutting across academic disciplines and applied research agendas. Researchers working with different types of research question, participant and context will need to ensure that their ethical practices conform to those of their own professional associations and academic institutions. One of the keys to ensuring that research practice is ethical is to ensure that it is as far as possible collaborative. This means engaging the subjects of the research as participants in the project, rather than as the objects of an experiment. This is part of the collaborative and reflexive approach that is fundamental to sensory ethnography as it is conceived in this book. The idea behind this sensory ethnography is not so much to study other people's sensory values and behaviours, but to collaborate with them to explore and identify these. This is not to say that in some instances more experimental approaches are not interesting. However, generally before considering intruding on the sensory consciousness of research participants the ethical implications of doing this should be thoroughly considered. Indeed, Devon E. Hinton, Vuth Pich, Dava Chhean and Mark H. Pollard propose that 'Traumatic events are encoded into memory by auditory, olfactory and visual cues', all of which might be triggers or lead to flashbacks (2006: 68). Their report on psychiatric research into 'the phenomenology of olfactory panic attacks' amongst Cambodian refugees (2006: 69) is a powerful reminder that sensory memories do not always invoke the nostalgia of good times past.

Conventional approaches to research ethics, quite rightly, take a pragmatic approach to setting out how we might best prevent our research causing any harm or disrespect to others. However, the existing literature also implies a further role for a sensory ethnography, seeing a sensory approach itself as a moral perspective. Several writers have suggested that taking a sensory approach to understanding and intervening in the world might help to make it a better place. In Chapter 1 I argued that a sensory ethnography should be based in a collaborative and participatory approach to research that respects research participants and recognises that ethnography might have a role in the real world as well as in academia. The idea of a sensory approach as a moral perspective also links in interesting ways to the conceptualisation of a collaborative and participatory sensory ethnography.

The idea of a sensory approach as a moral perspective was first noted in humanist geography where the practical and ethical elements are interlinked. Porteous insists on there being practical implications of his notions of 'smell-scape' and 'sound-scape' for urban planning (e.g. 1990: 43–5, 62–5). He suggests that to 'live well', 'we need to improve the current imbalance of our sensory modalities, to moderate our current overemphasis on vision that distances us, and ultimately

alienates us from our surroundings' (1990: 200). His moral message is that 'The non-visual senses encourage us to be involved, and being involved, we may come to care' (1990: 200). Tuan's notion of aesthetics also has a moral message. He compares what he calls the 'Shadows' of 'Human Frailty and Evil' (1993: 238–40) with the 'Light' of 'Moral beauty' (1993: 240–3). He sees the 'human story [as] one of progressive sensory and mental awareness', thus seeing culture as a 'moral-aesthetic venture to be judged ultimately by its moral beauty' (1993: 240). In a similar vein the anthropologist Paul Stoller has suggested that 'humility' should be at the foundation of a sensory ethnography. He closes his book *Sensuous Scholarship* by proposing that 'If we allow humility to work its wonders it can bring sensuousness to our practices and expression. It can enable us to live well in the world' (1997: 137).

These approaches suggest that a heightened sensory awareness and a sensitivity to sensoriality in the way we both design and appreciate our physical environment and other people's ways of knowing also resonate with recent literature in architecture and design studies and outside academia. For example, the Slow Food movement takes a similar view – suggesting that it is through the education of the senses that we might better appreciate our environments and create a better world (see Petrini, 2001); the Finish architect Juhani Pallasmaa suggests that 'the city of the gaze passivates the body and the other senses' (2005 [1999]: 142–3); and the design theorists Joy Malnar and Frank Vodvarka (2004) argue that a multisensory approach should inform design (see Pink, 2007b).

Thus a sensory ethnography has certain congruences with the ethics of those who hope to make the world a better place, seeing greater sensorial awareness as a route to achieving this. This does not mean that the sensory ethnographer is necessarily one who cares more. It does nevertheless imply that in applied research attention to the senses can lead to an appreciation of what is important in how people feel – the affective and sensory elements of – their social and material worlds.

This ethic of working towards a better world, and the existing connections between a sensory approach and design, open up the possibilities of us also thinking about the role of sensory ethnography as part of ethical and collaborative co-design processes. This ethic connects with the future-oriented focus of a sensory ethnography that engages with the imagination and the ways that the future is part of the present, outlined in Chapter 2. It also enables us to consider the ethics of the ethnographic place as discussed in Chapter 2 – suggesting that by bringing together the ethics of a sensory ethnography approach with the ethics of change making for a 'better' world, a sensory ethnography approach is well placed to further novel approaches to design research and practice, precisely by inviting us to address the future and its uncertainties in ways that go beyond verbal expression and the domain of representations that are the subject of the approaches to media critiqued in the previous section.

Summing up

In this chapter I have examined practical and ethical aspects of a sensory ethnography. I have stressed that doing sensory ethnography is an approach that leads researchers to understandings of a wide range of aspects of other people's lives and experiences – rather than simply involving a substantive focus on the senses. To develop this approach ethnographers might incorporate into their preparation for research, attention to the following: examining their own sensory subjectivity (from both cultural and personal perspectives); an awareness of how sensory experience might be associated with media use and communication; reviews of existing writings, films and other representations of sensory experience and practice relating to the people with whom they plan to research; and (in addition to existing discipline-specific ethical codes) the specific ethical and moral concerns that have been associated with sensorial understandings in existing literature. This, I have suggested, offers us a route to considering the role of the future orientation of sensory ethnography in designing for change.

Recommended further reading

- Desjarlais, R. (2003) *Sensory Biographies: lives and death among Nepal's Yolmo Buddhists*. London: University of California Press.
- Geurts, K.L. (2003) *Culture and the Senses: bodily ways of knowing in an African community*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Hahn, T. (2006) '"It's the RUSH ... that's what drives you to do it": sites of the sensually extreme', *The Drama Review: the Journal of Performance Studies*, 50(2): 87–97.
- Howes, D. (ed.) (1991) *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: a sourcebook in the anthropology of the senses*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press.
- Pink, S. (2015) 'Approaching media through the senses: between experience and representation', *Media International Australia*, 254.