

### Sensory Experience as Method

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### Abstract and Keywords

The researcher's body and sensory faculties are both experientially involved in interactional field settings. Drawing on their research, the authors sketch out three sensory encounters informed by theoretical and methodological debates pertaining to subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Dealing with issues of race, gender, and heritage, the authors demonstrate how their bodies as researchers go through processes of sensory learning and calibration. Data are collectively generated along with respondents during fieldwork. In the discussion, the authors provide a lens through which corporeal and sensory experiences can be deployed as an important methodological tool in the generation and theorization of data in ethnographic research.

Keywords: sensory knowledge, corporeality, qualitative methods, experience, researcher positionality

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Fieldwork encounters are both sensorial and corporeal. The researcher's body and sensory faculties are actively and experientially involved in such interactional contexts. In this chapter, the authors reflect upon their earlier research vis-à-vis extant debates on the centrality of the body and senses in qualitative research. By focusing on three sensory encounters—"sensing race," "sensing gender," and "sensing heritage"—the authors foreground the ways through which bodily and sensory experiences work as method in the generation and theorization of data. This analysis is anchored upon embodied reflexivity, thereby recognizing and engaging with the authors' own subjectivities as researchers and intersubjectivities with others (Pink 2009; Turner and Norwood 2013). This endeavor is key toward underlining a range of sensory methodologies that have gained traction over the last two decades (Ellingson 2006; Low 2013a; Sandelowski 2002; Vannini, Waskul, and Gottschalk 2012; Waitt 2014). Building on extant debates, three main lines of contention frame the discussion: (1) the importance of the senses and the body in qualitative and ethnographic research; (2) shifting relations between researcher and respondents in fieldwork encounters; and (3) the issue of researcher positionality and shifting stances when the body and senses are involved in the research process. The body of the researcher—far from being passive or neutral—undergoes processes of sensory learning and calibration, responding to social interactions in collectively generating data along

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with respondents. The authors pay careful attention to “the embodied experience of research—the feel, sight, [smell] and sound of it” (Turner and Norwood 2013, 696). Given that the authors are “corporeally present” as researchers, the body is a site of knowledge production as they research *through* the body (Vannini, Waskul, and Gottschalk 2012; Wacquant 2004; Wainwright, Marandet, and Rizvi 2018).

Wacquant (2015, 5) makes a clear distinction between “carnal sociology” and “sensual ethnography,” with a lineage traced to phenomenology. Where the former refers to a sociology *from* the body, the latter has to do with the “field study *of* the senses.” For present purposes, this chapter concurs with Pink’s (2009) argument concerning bodily emplacement and senses in combining these two strands. The body as an agent of knowledge and experience—a position shared by both Pink and Wacquant—occupies an integral role in the production of a sensory ethnography via corporeal intentionality (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2012). Researching through the body and its sensory faculties would also mean confronting one’s respective ontological awareness with regard to ethnicity and gender, as well as emotional subjectivities. This chapter serves as an empirical and conceptual exploration of carnal sociology (Wacquant 2015) that concomitantly reveals how corporeal and sensory experiences interweave with social structure and social order. Experience in this respect is an ongoing temporal flow of reality received by consciousness, which involves not only cognition, but feelings, expectations, and bodily states (Bruner 1986; Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2012). These experiences are thereby rendered meaningful.

Studies on the body, sensory experiences, and data collection in qualitative research span such fields as work and organization (Plourde 2017; Strati 2007), sports and other physical cultures (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2011; Allen-Collinson et al. 2016; Vannini 2017), and migration and urbanity (Feliciano and Gadelha 2017; Low 2013b; Stevenson 2017). These works collectively highlight the pertinence of sensory research that fieldworkers deploy, usually alongside their respondents. This chapter shares Pink’s (2009) position in that it takes sensory approaches to ethnography as a methodology rooted in the anthropology of the senses. Sense perception is both physical and cultural, governed by culture which varies across different parts of the world; members of a particular culture assign meaning to the senses (Classen 1997; Howes 1991). The senses of smell and sight, for example, are invested with different approaches to social reality and sociocultural values. Developing from these arguments, the key principles of sensory ethnography as methodology require reflections on “multisensorial embodied engagements with others” and with their sociocultural and sensory milieu (Pink 2009, 25). Connecting embodiment with ethnographic approaches implies that the researcher’s body forms part of the process of knowledge acquisition and production. The researcher’s corporeal presence influences both the research relationship with respondents and the data collection process (cf. Wainwright, Marandet, and Rizvi 2018).

As a corollary, issues of shifting power relations and positionality in research contexts warrant a brief discussion. To grasp the significance of the embodied researcher’s role, one has to move beyond simply placing the researcher in a position of power and at the same time position the researcher as a “neutral, cognitive instrument that is somewhat

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removed from the situation” (Turner and Norwood 2013, 697). Bodily and sensory co-presence in research contexts needs to be acknowledged and reflected upon. This is especially the case because researchers “do not readily admit discomfort and concern ... [and particularly] when it is deeply personal and related to our own embodied presence” (Wainwright, Marandet, and Rizvi 2018, 284). Such embodied and sensorial presence requires a calibration of positionality in relation to gender, race, and age, and it also demands attention to various other bodily experiences. Wainwright, Marandet, and Rizvi (2018) engaged in their respective research on aromatherapy massage, hairdressing, and full body massage. In analyzing training and embodied learning processes in these various corporeal contexts, the authors undertook research through their bodies. They shifted from being “detached observer-researchers” to “participant-researchers” (2017, 3). Adopting “guinea-pig positions,” they each came into close bodily contact with their respondents and presented themselves as “un-groomed bodies.” Such embodied presentation was accompanied by a sense of “visceral shame/embarrassment” (2017, 4). The trio thereafter reflected upon their experiences:

This closeness and familiarity with research participants in an immediate and embodied sense has a bearing on power dynamics. Having our research participants either run their hands through our hair or over our semi-naked bodies, or see this being done to us, did make us reflect on the dynamism of power relations in the research process as we were no longer detached observer-researchers... . The usual distance and hierarchy between the researcher and the researched, which often persists despite our best efforts, was changed and narrowed in the later interviews, enabling easier research connections to form and discussions on the intimacies/uncertainties of touch in body-training. (2017, 6)

Ostensibly, negotiating one’s own positionalities goes beyond the routine of being reflexive of one’s demographic and social positions. These positions include such given attributes as nationality, race, and gender, as well as biographical experiences (Turner and Norwood 2013). Such reflexivity must also engage with unseen or not readily upfront characteristics that importantly feature sensory behavior and emotional states of mind. Additionally, how respondents relate to these attributes is addressed in the current chapter through analyses of qualitative data after the fieldwork phase. Through the course of their research, the authors of this chapter had to moderate their own sense of gender and emotional subjectivities. Such moderation transpired in ways that were more similar than different from respondents. In other words, the researchers’ bodies and sensorial faculties were clearly part of the research and analytical processes.

The position on subjectivity as relayed in this chapter is congruent with Pink’s (2009) delineation of two concepts related to sensory knowing and strategies. The first, “sensory subjectivity,” relates to how researchers reflect upon their own role or positioning in the course of producing ethnographic work. How fieldworkers employ the senses in terms of both knowledge and practice is conceived as a “form of subjectivity.” This form consists of comprehending the world through a culturally specific lens, which is shaped in relation to other identity markers, including ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and age (Pink 2009, 53).

One's self-identity therefore becomes continuously reconstituted vis-à-vis embodied ways of knowing. The second, which Pink calls "sensory intersubjectivity," has to do with how one's researcher identity undergoes constant negotiation based on intersubjective ties with social actors. Such negotiation importantly includes the sensory and material environment. Deploying these two concepts of subjectivity, this chapter is thus consonant with the theoretical and methodological concerns of recent scholarship on the body, the senses, and qualitative studies. In reflecting upon their own bodily and sensory experiences in ethnographic research, the authors draw attention to ontological episodes where how their bodies behave, are presented, and respond to different research contexts that overlay the sociocultural phenomena that the authors examine.

### Sensory Encounter I—"Sensing Race"

The first sensory encounter engages with Abdullah's (2011) work. He scrutinized how Malay practitioners in Singapore and Malaysia perceived misfortune as an outcome of supernatural agency. He interrogated how they meaningfully managed and negotiated their ethnic and religious identities during episodes of spirit affliction and their pursuit for relief from such distress. The phenomenon of spirit affliction is connected intimately with the emotions, perceptions, sensorial feedback, and feelings of individuals and their extended kin. Throughout the research process, he relied upon different methods to gather data. His study was primarily based on ethnographic fieldwork, informal conversations, and in-depth narrative interviews.

Abdullah's own biographical history and professional location in Singapore influenced his eventual choice of studying spirit possession among Malays and selecting Singapore as a field site. Despite the familiarity and knowledge a researcher has in relation to the social context and the field languages spoken, many scholars have reported problems studying their own societies (Dragadze 1987; Greenhouse 1985; Kang 2000; Kondo 1990). They describe such experiences as having "to learn another language in the words of [their] mother tongue" (Okely 1984, 5). The ethnographer in her "own" society must therefore first rediscover the "strangeness" of "[t]he adventure [that] begins just around the corner" (Honer 2004, 114). This is to avoid the problems associated with total immersion or "going native." In Abdullah's case, this included learning and reappraising different bodily and sensory scripts and knowledge.

Abdullah was born into a multireligious and multiethnic household with a migrant historical background. He later converted from Roman Catholicism into his Malay mother's religion, Islam, at a relatively young age in Singapore after his Chinese father and Malay mother divorced. His kinship relations included Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Taoist, and Jewish aunts, uncles, and cousins. However, merely speaking the same language, sharing similar histories, and believing the same religious faith did not translate into "sameness." There were numerous social encounters during fieldwork that positioned Abdullah both as a "stranger" and "insider," thereby highlighting the complexity of ways of belonging and distance in the field. This ambivalent experience of being situated both "inside" and

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“outside” partly reflects the tensions of simultaneously belonging and not belonging. On several occasions, Abdullah was regarded as not “fully” Malay, particularly in regard to his perceived incompetence of “doing Malay” or demonstrating competent “Malay knowledge.” These included how others read his body, gestures, and sensory knowhow. In this respect, he was often positioned by others in the field as “campuran” (mixed), “kacukan” (hybrid), “setengah Melayu” (half-Malay), or “halfie,” to borrow Abu-Lughod’s (1991) term. Therefore, he needed to make sense of the boundaries that marked him off as being both “Malay” and yet also a particular sort of “Malay.” This was because he had initially assumed that a somewhat “similar” ethnic and religious background would help enhance his relations with research participants intersubjectively.

In many of these social encounters in the field, Abdullah’s respondents—whether they were those afflicted with spirit incursions, spirit mediums, or religious scholars—often invoked and foregrounded various threads of his entangled, multiplex identities. These strands could both draw him closer to his respondents or thrust him further apart from them. The extent of rapport depended on the context of interaction and the different bodily and sensory knowledge he was familiar with. Correspondingly, certain facets of his racial identity have also been de-emphasized in the field. During these episodes, he clearly felt uncomfortable and at times even apologetic. These aspects had been underscored by his respondents, particularly in situations of bodily, gestural, and sensory gaffes, which included his visual, aural, and olfactive know-how within the Malay community. His experience of discomfort and awkwardness is illustrated through the following sample from his field notes:

We were all seated on the floor in the living room. Two elderly men were at the corner of one end of the room, discussing very intently the case of Nurul’s affliction. I wanted to hear what they were discussing about more clearly, so I stood up and crossed over the outstretched legs of the person next to me and proceeded to sit next to the two elderly men. Later, I was pulled aside by one of the older men who reminded me gently: “Have you not learnt your manners? You just can’t cross over a person’s legs like that, what more an elderly man like him? It’s not polite. At the very least, you should have also slightly arched your back while walking past people already seated... . I thought you would have known this as a Malay, as a mark of respect ...” I then suddenly recalled the incident, and knew my gaffe immediately. At that moment, because I was so excited to hear what the two men had to say, I forgot this and felt really embarrassed after that. I apologized profusely and never have I forgotten to slightly arch my back while walking past elders after this incident.

The episode described earlier shows how Abdullah was expected to know how to behave appropriately through the use of his body. During his interaction with the two elderly respondents, they delineated to him the expectations for social behavior according to Malay conventional norms. In other encounters during his fieldwork, several respondents have

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similarly expressed appropriate sensory behavior that he was expected to know and adopt.

While attending a funeral, I was suddenly so overwhelmed that I cried loudly, but was nevertheless admonished by the rest: “Don’t cry! You can’t cry or the body can’t leave in peace. And you cried so loud! This is inappropriate. God has taken her away. We can’t do anything about it but accept that fate, and she’s gone to a better place.” At the very most, you should do it quietly.

It was around the time of *Maghrib* (sunset) and I distinctly noticed a strong fragrant odor. I remarked on this scent to Rosmah and Sumiati if they had smelled this as well. Both of them immediately rebuked me for mentioning this and told me to remain quiet. I was confused and asked them why, but they refused to let me know there and then. It was only the very next morning when Rosmah chided me that I should have known that I should not have commented about such scents at night since this was indicative of the presence of malevolent spirits and that such spirits would feel threatened by the acknowledgment of their presence when one remarks on these scents. She expressed how surprised she was that I did not know such knowledge as a Malay.

In these short bodily and sensory encounters reflected in his field notes, Abdullah could not fully comprehend and appreciate these Malay practices, and bodily and sensory subjectivities, such as aural and olfactive sensibilities. He had forgotten important sensory cues: that it was impolite to cry loudly or to express emotions openly in public, as well as to comment on scents that were construed as “dangerous.” At the same time, his ethnic “Chinese” background was often accentuated. This was sometimes read favorably, but at other times disapprovingly. A brief portion of Abdullah’s field notes detailing a conversation between two middle-aged women respondents illustrates this point:

I was sitting in the living room on the floor with a group of Mirna’s relatives, some of whom I did not know, while waiting for the spirit medium to arrive to check on Mirna’s deteriorating condition. The air in the room was still and the discomfort in the room was palpably stifling, though there were murmurs around speculating the possible outcomes of the upcoming healing session. One of these was a conversation in Malay between Haziaton, whom I was sitting beside, and her elder sister, Jumilah:

Jumilah: (whispers) Eh, who is that *budak Cina* (Chinese boy) next to you? He can speak Malay ah?

Haziaton: Chinese boy? Ohhh ... don’t you know him? He’s Noorman *lah*. The one I told you about before you came here. Not Chinese boy, *our boy lah*.

Jumilah: Oh ... that’s why I thought who this Chinese boy is. He looks and also sounds Chinese. That was why I was confused.

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Abdullah: Yes, my parents are from different ethnic groups. My father is Chinese and my mum is Malay, but I am Muslim and even though my racial group as reflected on my identity card is Chinese, this is because, as you know, the government only recognizes my father's race which determines my racial group.

In the preceding interaction, Jumilah drew attention to his visual physical and aural features. In his encounters with other respondents, they also made reference to his purportedly small "Chinese" eyes (*mata Cina*) and "flat" nose (*hidung pesek*), as well as his accented voice when he spoke to them in Malay. At the same time, his oral Malay was admittedly not excellent, according to his respondents. He could easily converse with them, but this was often perceived by his respondents as heavily accented. These aural inflections could easily be captured as "nonnative." In many of Abdullah's initial conversations that he had with his respondents in Malay, they often positioned him as a Chinese from neighboring Malaysia or Indonesia, given their ability to converse in the Malay language. Abdullah therefore had to explain his background to those who did not know him well, or even among those to whom he was introduced by distant relations such as in the case of Haziaton and Jumilah earlier.

These brief fieldwork vignettes are not intended to suggest that ethnographers in other settings and studying other social phenomenon do not experience similar encounters in the field. These encounters also include sensory knowledge within the community they are ostensibly "part of" and "native to." Given the heterogeneity of any society and the multiplicity of social boundaries and group memberships erected, individuals can belong and not belong to different social categories and groups.

In both professional and personal contexts, there is often a misplaced notion that an ostensibly "native" researcher will command a priori "insider" bodily and sensory knowledge such as sight, olfaction, and aurality. As such, she may be more easily accepted in the field, given that she has a more nuanced perspective regarding the context, as compared to other ethnographers. Scholars also suggest that this concept of "native" and the data she collects are typically charged with notions of "authenticity" (Appadurai 1988, 37) or "authority" (Kang 2000, 45). This, we contend, also includes different corporeal and sensory experiences and knowledge that we bring to the field and how these reconfigure social relations. A "native" social researcher is thus assumed to be an "insider" who will forward an "authentic" point of view of her respondents intersubjectively. There is likewise an assumption that the "native" researcher's familiarity with her "insider" context would affect her objectivity in observing and perceiving the settings in which she is located. This could inadvertently affect her research findings and observations.

However, as demonstrated through Abdullah's brief fieldwork encounters, the positions of "insider" and "outsider" are not as clear-cut as they are made out to be. This also includes the everyday, banal sensory sensibilities taken for granted by the community such as sight, sound, and olfaction. Moreover, the contention that respondents may position "native" researchers as "one of them" at certain times, and not at other times, generally means that higher expectations and obligations may be placed on their social perfor-

mances and knowledge. They may correspondingly not profit from the allowances made to other “outsider” researchers. Given the diversity within cultural domains and across groups, even the most experienced of social researchers cannot know everything about her own society, or any society for that matter. In this regard, using the case of differential sensory and bodily knowledge in the field, the act of researching one’s “own” society thus imposes various impediments and problems. However, these are often negotiated in the field and are more complex than a straightforward dichotomy of “insider” and “outsider.”

## Sensory Encounter II—“Sensing Gender”

The second sensory encounter involves Low’s work (2009), theoretically informed through the sociology of everyday life. It focused on the sociocultural significance of smell in historical and contemporary Singapore that included unpacking gendered meanings associated with olfaction. Low attempted to explain how respondents deployed smells as an intermediary through which social actors are delineated using social categories as “masculine” and “feminine.” These categories were occasionally coupled with other associated categories of sexuality—heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality. In other words, respondents constructed their own varied olfactive configurations of sex, gender, and sexuality “with smell as a medium of sensorial recognition and placement” (Low 2009, 85). Breaching experiments were carried out to problematize and unpack how everyday practices (Garfinkel 1967) of gender were accomplished, in addition to the conduct of narrative interviews. Low’s sensory body was therefore employed both as a research tool and elicitor of responses. The approach was based on breaching experiments employed under the framework of ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967). Breaching dichotomous gender norms meant transgressing socially “acceptable” gender behavior. This was not without a good measure of embodied reflexivity on the part of both himself and his respondents. Low wore fragrances that were marketed for female consumers as a target group. He wanted to test whether these smells would engender reactions from his respondents. He then asked respondents what they thought of the fragrance. A combination of both physical and conversational breaches were undertaken, beginning first with Low’s body that had been presented as emitting “feminine” scents. This was followed by Low probing respondents further if, where, and how they ascribe gendered qualities to olfaction.

Most respondents held polarized views on gender and scents: “Masculine scent should be strong ... it should give the user a feeling of confidence and charm ... in contrast, a feminine scent should be gentle in nature... . It probably fits in with society’s image of what an ideal man and woman should be ... ”; “I’m strongly against male applying female fragrance or vice versa” and “I would definitely *not* wear a fragrance marketed for men... . As a woman, I wear things intended for women... . Would you wear scents marketed for women? If so, good luck to you” (Low 2009, 115–116, emphasis in original). There were others, however, who were equally critical of the dichotomy: “If a [female] friend can get away with wearing a male perfume and smell nice, I don’t see what’s wrong” and “I



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would say a nonsensical need to differentiate men and women based on smell because you have scents that define femininity and particular smells that represent masculinity ... I think these smells are in the first place learnt... . You just need marketing agencies to do that ..." (Low 2009, 118).

Where some of these interlocutors were categorically associating gendered values with scent, others criticized such forms of gender essentialism as well. How Low's respondents sensorially experienced and rationalized gender subjectivities, related to, or resisted gendered norms of behavior were also issues that he confronted as a researcher. How Low olfactorily experienced his own gender identity as a male researcher, depending on the scents that he deliberately put on before meeting respondents, conjointly become embroiled in the ways through which respondents sensed him. Low failed in his first attempt to elicit responses, as he was hesitant to smell "feminine" himself and thus applied a modicum amount. In subsequent attempts, he put on greater doses of perfumes. In effect, Low was repositioning himself in embodied terms with gendered norms in mind, and how to transgress them more explicitly. He was recalibrating his body and its sensory properties in order to prepare it in later attempts as a methodological instrument of data collection. By deliberately applying copious amounts of fragrances marketed for female consumers in round two, Low wanted to find out if such bodily transgression might elicit reactions from respondents with regard to olfactory evaluations of gender norms and behavior.

When one of his female respondents queried if he had been wearing a new perfume, Low asked what she thought of it. She responded by saying: "How come it smells so sweet and fruity? Erm ... (she falters for a while) ... I don't think it really suits you... . Maybe you shouldn't wear it." He then prodded her by querying what in her view would suit him as a male person, to which she replied:

Well, what you are wearing now is perhaps more ... erm ... suitable for females, since so sweet and fruity. Guys should wear something musky, like tobacco? Kinda funny to smell that off of you, because it seems out of place. Just like how men can't wear skirts ... must be strong not weak. Or ... like ... pork roast smells nice by itself but not on a person ... not appropriate.

(Low 2009, 116)

Her response reflects a tacit understanding of gendered norms that translates into how male and female scents are regarded. Low's sensory demeanor brought forth responses from those whom he studied. These responses thereby made it pertinent first to be aware of how his own sensory experiences were also harnessed as a method in exploring scents through the lens of gender. As much as he was interested in unraveling the sociocultural meanings of smell in everyday life, he was also a part of the sensory landscape in this research context. Being aware of discourses surrounding gendered mores and norms meant that Low was subjected to these accompanying notions of "masculine" and "feminine" scents and traits. In addition, and given his election of employing sensory breaching experiments as a method, Low had to first prepare his body before a research setting. This

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is similar to his respondents, who shared their daily olfactory routines before stepping out of the house. What would be appropriate smells that ought to emanate from him as a male person? How could he then elicit responses using breaching experiments if he had at first not breached gender norms and olfaction? These were the questions—related to Low’s own sensory subjectivity (Pink 2009)—that weighed on his mind. He had to first address these concerns before presenting his own body in front of respondents. Such awareness elucidates a reminder that sociocultural discourses construct the body and are “worked through the materiality of the body” (Wainwright, Marandet, and Rizvi 2018, 286).

Preparing his body in olfactory ways before conducting fieldwork, as well as calibrating his embodied behavior during research, was therefore crucial in employing sensory experiences as a method and in acknowledging bodily co-presence. Reflecting upon one’s own sensory experiences produced before and during research encounters illustrates sensory intersubjectivity, which is crucial work required in producing a sensory ethnography. Pink elaborates (2009, 50):

It is a collaborative process through which shared understandings (to the extent that they can be shared) are produced... . 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 ... through which these feelings are communicated and given value, ethnographers can come to know other people’s lives in ways that are particularly intense.

In so doing, researchers as gendered, ethnicized, and moral beings are also deeply involved in presentations of self, and they, in turn, study respondents’ presentations from the onset. Researchers’ presentation of self, as in Low’s case here, corresponds broadly to Wacquant’s (2015) notion of *enactive ethnography* where fieldwork comprises researchers who also perform the phenomenon under study. The difference, however, is that Low performed in the opposite direction on the basis of deploying breaching experiments as an ethnomethodological undertaking. His approach and results of breaching are consonant with the work of Wainwright, Marandet, and Rizvi (2018), in which their bodies became guinea pigs in the course of research. The researcher’s body in both studies adopted simultaneously the roles of subject and object in embodied fieldwork that clearly evidences corporeal intersubjectivity and the body as knowing.

## Sensory Encounter III—“Sensing Heritage”

The third and final sensory encounter pertains to Low’s recent work on heritage. If the researcher’s body is affected in fieldwork settings in all its physicality and sensorial materiality, the present sensory encounter extends such embodied presence alongside discursive textuality. Low (2017) examined how the senses operate in producing everyday heritage in Singapore, framed through actor network theory. By studying heritage trails vis-à-vis content analysis of trail brochures, media reports, and trail walkabouts, Low made a

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case for how such trails provided an avenue for users to engage with the past in embodied and sensory ways. He participated in heritage trail walkabouts with both locals and tourists, and also interviewed them to comprehend their experiences as heritage consumers. This approach is commensurate with the idea that walking as method offers possibilities to examine “spatialized, lived, sensually experienced deviations” from distant and abstract historical narration (Aoki and Yoshimizu 2015, 274).

Heritage trails in Singapore are marked out both by the National Heritage Board (NHB) as well as members of the public. These trails present a combination of sensory encounters and personal biographies, and global events and collective histories. Buildings, shop houses, and various other historically important locales are denoted as important heritage outfits of such trails, accompanied by narratives and accounts of the past recorded in trail brochures. Collectively, they are sites that reflect upon how heritage production is an amalgamation of both “grand narratives and localized experiences that together lend more nuanced meanings and draw further on embodied experiences of heritage and history” (Low 2017, 286). As an example, the NHB officially launched its Queenstown heritage trail in 2007. The significance of Queenstown lies in it being the very first satellite estate where the Housing Development Board built the first government flats in the 1950s. Responses to the trail, however, were not favorable, as many landmarks and memories which were of significance to residents were not included. A civic group called “My Community” later came up with five heritage trails in the estate that comprised the personal recollections of numerous Queenstown residents. This is an example of how residents’ mobilization of memories remedies the displacement of aspects of the past by official heritage choreography that mattered more intimately and meaningfully to them.

We contend that language and text are important resources through which sensory encounters and experiences can be articulated and/or analyzed (Low 2015; cf. Waitt 2014). Where such texts include a whole spectrum ranging from memoirs, newspaper articles (Montanari 2017), and poetry (Waskul and Van der Riet 2002) to letters, religious texts, and travel diaries, Low added brochures as another text form to this inventory. He explicated how heritage is recorded through sensory reflections and nostalgic recollections for heritage trail participants. These trails, he noted, were “invested with sensory cues that conjure the past, textured with individual stories and experiences that have transpired on site” (Low 2017, 276). While walking on such trails, participants concurrently referred to these brochures wherein narratives of the past have been documented. Low’s sensory co-participation with trail participants is one of the now more commonly employed sensory methods in urban qualitative research. These methods include smell walks (Low 2009), sound walks (Butler 2006), or participant walkthroughs (Imai 2010), among others. Such sensory walkabouts reflect upon sensory intersubjectivity (Pink 2009) in that experiences of place, and in the present encounter, embodied heritage, are co-produced between the researcher and participants. Researchers “get into the experience of the participants and see it as they see it” (Grosz 1998, 47).

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Furthermore, we return to the issue of power in the researcher-researched relationship in that sensory methodologies of walking come in multiple forms. The researcher may do the walk on her own, together with her research participants, or along with family or friends (Low 2015). Differentiating these forms is imperative as researchers and their respondents may, through direct participation, constitute “copresent interlocutor[s]” (Crang 2003, 499) and thereby reconfigure positionalities in the field. Such co-presence or co-research process translates the researcher and her body as active participants beyond detached observation. In their walking tours conducted in Japan and Canada on sex work, Aoki and Yoshimuzu (2015, 274) note that their multiple subjectivities as “mother, lover, friend, student, researcher, writer, are with [them] in the field and intervene in [their] research.” Walking as methodology avails a more critical engagement with urban space vis-à-vis embodied and sensory experiences. It offers embodied ways of comprehending how social actors relate to place and history, including how their bodily movements and recollections conjunctionally imagine and materialize space (Aoki and Yoshimuzu 2015).

An example of how heritage trails form depositories of both official and grassroots commemoration is drawn from the Jalan Besar Community Trail. The trail provides a depiction of the history of Jalan Besar, which literally means “big or wide road” in Malay. This is one of the first roads built in Singapore, which cut through a fruit orchard and a betel nut plantation. Owners of the land bought it from the British East India Company in the 1830s (Jalan Besar Community Trail Brochure, NHB and URA 2006). The trail brochure also focused attention on sports—a stadium in the area that has become an important landmark is noted:

To most Singaporeans, Jalan Besar is synonymous with the Jalan Besar Stadium, a landmark in the area for almost a century. It was here that many an exciting soccer match was played and a place that also bonded Singaporeans through sports.

Trail participants shared with Low their vivid memories of the stadium. They found it to be “such a nostalgic place where [they] all used to go watch matches and cheer together.” Another participant articulated the following sensory recollection: “I can recall the excited atmosphere ... cheering, shouting and booing at those soccer matches... . I think it was one of the Malaysia Cup of ... where we were all supporting our favorite team that was playing, taking in all the noise, heat and excitement ... ” (Low 2017, 287–288). Here the shared sensory experiences of soccer fans reflect how the sport serves as a social glue to bond people together. This response illustrates how the senses serve as an intermediary toward reliving the past through embodied socialities. Built in 1932, the stadium was where the Malaya Cup (1932–1966) and later the Malaysia Cup (1967–1973) were held before soccer matches were moved over to the National Stadium. Apart from personal narratives provided by trail participants, the brochure also raised similar embodied experiences:

If you were to take a closer look at the older trees along King George’s Avenue, you will find wooden structures and planks on top of the trees used by children of

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the area as spectator benches to watch the football matches going on in the stadium.

(Jalan Besar Community Trail Brochure 2006)

Drawing attention to both visual and material evidence of the past—comprising wooden structures and planks—promotes visceral familiarity highlighted in such heritage trails. Trail walkabouts, furnished by an array of embodied and sensory information provided in trail brochures, prompt both the researcher and researched (trail participants) to actively engage in intersubjective walking. Embodied and sensorial experiences of the past are either corroborated through personal narratives or visually “checked” while venturing on such trails—some participants were keeping a lookout for spectator fixtures on those trees.

Another example of sensory and embodied corroboration of trail walks and brochure presentation is seen through the following account of gastronomical heritage. Food history has been documented in the Jalan Besar trail brochure, promoted as must-tries for trail participants. One such example is “Swee Choon Dim Sum,” located at 191 Jalan Besar, which is well known for its “fresh and handmade *bao* (bun) as well as the back lane dining experience” (Trail brochure, 2006). Visitors are prompted to try the restaurant’s “big meat *bao* which is a Chinese bun filled with minced pork, a piece of chicken, egg and half a shitake mushroom” (Trail brochure, 2006). Low quote at length some participants’ responses to such culinary promotion, after having eaten at this establishment:

Some local trail participants followed the trail brochure and ate at this restaurant, remarking that “the taste hasn’t changed,” egging me to try one so that I could also relive the past through eating. As one of them said to me afterwards: “I have eaten at this restaurant for a long time ... the tastes and smells of their food hasn’t changed a bit ... my family used to dine here a lot when we were younger and I will always remember how delicious and moist the bun is ... my father also used to buy those home from time to time.

(Low 2017, 289–290)

This quote illustrates how the participant still remembers the unchanging tastes and smells of the particular restaurant’s food, connecting such sensory fondness to familial experiences. Food heritage, family life, and embodied experiences intersect through sensory recollections of the past. At this point, one ought to note also that experiences such as the ones reflected here would differ, depending on the trail participants’ background, be they locals or foreign visitors. For each group, their ways of experiencing gastronomic heritage comprised either a reliving of the past or a taste testing of the present as invited by the brochure. For the former, food histories that encompassed family relations, identity, and commensality were vivified through such sensory encounters of eating so that gastronomic memories resonated more poignantly with this group of trail participants. Verifying the authenticity of such foods arose from both textual (brochure) and lived (familial) experiences. For the latter group who were foreigners visiting the country, some re-

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marked that the brochure has piqued their curiosity when they followed the food recommendations. Others were keen to check if the smells and tastes of local food lived up to its promise as invoked in the brochure. In these respects, heritage wielded contrasting purposes for its different consumers. More pertinently, different bodies and sensory biographies extemporized heritage in multivalent ways.

A collocation of sensorial and embodied experiences here reflects upon how the body and senses are conduits in the production and consumption of heritage. Social actors agentically harnessed their bodily and sensory knowledge toward receiving and producing heritage in their own terms. Sensing heritage conjoined both official and bottom-up levels of recollecting the past in relevant and meaningful ways. Such recollections are facilitated by varied embodied and contextual viscerality through brochure texts and trail walks. Some measure of agency may therefore be exercised by social actors toward responding to both historiographical inclusions and exclusions.

## Conclusion—Sensing Research

Sensory experience as method produces “sensible knowledge” in that it encompasses “what is perceived through the senses, judged through the senses, and produced and reproduced through the senses.” Furthermore, sensory experience also “generates dialectical relations with action and close relations with the emotions” of social actors (Strati 2007, 62). In other words, the senses serve as crucial intermediaries in the course of research and data generation. In the process, researchers and interlocutors are intersubjectively connected through different configurations of sociality. The approach to sensible knowledge is anchored upon Simmel’s (1908; cited in Strati 2007) contention that we perceive our fellow interlocutors through sensory lens comprising both appreciation and comprehension. Engaging with our own bodies and senses over the course of fieldwork means opening up further possibilities toward providing embodied insights of social phenomena that we study. By exercising sensory intelligence—where all of our senses are mobilized in reflexive and skillful ways to develop sensuous scholarship in appreciation of one’s own and others’ senses (Vannini, Waskul, and Gottschalk 2012)—the initially unfamiliar social life that researchers, at first as sideline observers (Contreras 2015), study may potentially become more familiar as a result of doing what respondents do. Such familiarity, in turn, ought to inform and further meliorate the research questions, theoretical framing, and analytical directions that are subsequently undertaken (Contreras 2015).

If the goal of ethnographic research, among others, is to uncover how social structure and individual and collective identities are influenced and shaped by embodied and sensory knowledge and practices, researchers who begin from the body “do not assume the uniformity of either the body or epistemic experience” (Pitts-Taylor 2015, 23). More pertinently, embodied insights, when appropriately yoked to reflexivity, unveil heterogeneous ways of knowing through the body and the senses. Such heterogeneity can clearly cut across not only the three domains of social inquiry that have been presented herein. It potentially encompasses a broad range of issues, themes, and social categories that form

the nuts and bolts of everyday life and lived experiences of embodiment. Learning to know, perceive, and orientate one's lifeworld through the lens of the body and the senses would mean privileging sensory-bodily analysis. Such approaches aim at improving social scientific inquiry engaged through the body of both the researcher and respondents.

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## Sensory Experience as Method

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