

## **Sensorial collections**

### **Research-Museum-Art**

#### Call for contributions

The idea of this book is to consider the ways in which sensory experiences can be captured and reproduced by ethnographers, curators, artists and collectors, or, more broadly, all those involved in modes of transcribing the world. It is a matter of illustrating how these diverse practitioners collect senses.

The senses have occupied a growing place within the social sciences and humanities since the 2000s. In France, this trajectory was opened up with the history of smells proposed by Alain Corbin from 1982 onwards. Yet, a consideration of the senses as a means to connect with the material environment has long been limited, relegated to the backstage in works exploring taste, as inspired by the sociology of social distinction of Pierre Bourdieu (1979), or masked by the perceptible which assumes their transformation by different imaginaries (Sansot 1985). Anthropological contributions to the study of the sensory, be it taste, sound, light, shape or touch, took a considerable step forward at around about this time, notably in Anglophone literature, helping to make the sensory a subject of research in its own right (Howes 1987; 1991) and a methodological imperative (Pink 2009).

In this way, a study of the senses enables us not only to have access to contextual atmospheres and human representations but also to the motivations of action. The range of perspectives in this field are multiple, be it phenomenologically-inspired approaches, interrogating perception itself (Ingold 2000); those that take a pragmatic stance, attempting to get as close as possible to the lived experience (Hennion 2004); those that follow a more Spinozian line, with human action is understood as emotional reaction (Laplantine 2005); or more cognitive approaches (Candau 2000). Thus, sensory experiences, and equally, emotions, perceptions and sensitivities - of both the observed and the observer - have secured a firm place within the analyses of social sciences and humanities (Gélard 2016; 2017).

However, in this context of the renewal of research fields, there has been little questioning of the ways in which sensorial experiences and phenomena are collected. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has underlined the difficulty of "showing invisible sensorial experiences" (1999) that seem to end up unavoidably with the use of visual forms to translate taste, smell and feeling. But how do we collect the senses? Which forms are used to archive sensory data? What is the impact of the uses and values of the sensorial on the collections? Does the domination of the visual over touch (Krueger 1982) call for the collection of other senses in order to maintain an intangible sensorial experience?

If a society and a culture can be understood through their way of making sense of sensorial experiences and the place that these give to the manifestations of feelings, capturing these is by no means self-evident. Involving the perceptions of the researcher and their emotions, it is an approach that seems to contradict the requirement of objectivity on which the sciences are based. Their eventual analysis is confronted by their intangibility and the passage through the filter of subjectivity. It is an approach which therefore raises major epistemological and methodological questions for the social sciences.

Transcending the social sciences, the collection of the senses also questions the arts. Of course, we are thinking here of olfactory theatre (Jaquet 2015), of eat-art, or indeed of sound art, all of which require an upfront selection of sensorial artefacts.

Yet, more generally, whether they be interactive, immersive and/or scenic, all experiential devices raise questions about the heritagisation of the sensorial to the extent to which they are not aiming the singular confrontation of a spectator with the sensitive material, but rather their coproduction and collaboration (Borillon and Sauvageot 1996). In such a way, these practices interrogate not only how the senses are captured and recorded in order to be exhibited, but also how sensory creations can themselves be inventoried and archived.

Finally, the very places that serve to conserve sensorial artefacts provoke questions about collection practices, be these collections or archives, private or public. In relation to other institutions, museums find themselves particularly sharply challenged when it comes to the sensorial. While the visual and the material have long had their place within the museum sector, other perceptive registers seem less compatible with heritage (Miguet 1998). Objects, handwritten notes and photographs from the field are often accompanied by interviews, music and background sound, yet other sensorial data could be included.

This call is for classic book chapters but, given the subject matter, proposals for sound documents or annotated photographs will also be considered, subject to these documents being free from copyright.

Three main axes structure this book in order to circumscribe the challenges of sensorial collections. The first is concerned with the processes associated with sensorial collections undertaken as part of a critical reading of the world and of the society. The second focuses on the tools and materials of these collections and the way in which these inflect scientific and artistic practices. The third interrogates the conditions and premises of their conservation, or indeed, their heritagisation.

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### Submission criteria and timeline

Abstracts in French or English of approximately 2,500 characters, accompanied by an indicative bibliography and a brief CV should be sent as a ".doc" file by the **6 November 2018** to the following addresses:

[mlgelard@yahoo.fr](mailto:mlgelard@yahoo.fr) and [marie-luce.gelard@parisdescartes.fr](mailto:marie-luce.gelard@parisdescartes.fr)

This should outline the questions raised in the chapter, the materials used and the collection methods for these materials.

Any artistic or museum experience related to the theme of sensorial collection could also be highlighted.

Authors will be informed in **December 2018** whether their proposal has been accepted.

Authors whose projects have been chosen should then send the completed article (in French or English), or the work of art or sound or image file before the **1 April 2019**.

The articles and files will undergo a process of peer review and, following any demands for corrections, final versions of the selected chapters should be submitted by the **1 July 2019**.

### Editorial committee:

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