
Introduction

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Biographical notes: Gavin Jack is Professor of Management in the School of Business at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia. His research interests include postcolonial theory and its application to the critical study of management and marketing, international and cross-cultural management, and more recently the intersection of social class and sexuality in work and leisure settings. He has published in journals including *Organization*, *Sociology*, *Management International Review*, and the *Academy of Management Review*. He is the co-Chair of the Critical Management Studies Division of the Academy of Management.

Samantha Warren is Professor of Management at Essex Business School, UK. She has been an advocate of visual methods in management research for over a decade and is co-Founder of inVisio – the international network for visual studies in organisations. Her research interests centre on the interplay between aesthetics, working life and the senses, especially with regard to research methodology, but she has published on topics as diverse as drugs, pregnancy, iPods, workplace bullying, accountants and Christmas.

Kathleen Riach is Associate Professor in the Department of Management at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. Her research explores the negotiation of bodies, identities and selfhood in the everyday experiences of working life, with a particular focus on ageing and the role of unspoken embodied dynamics in organising processes. Recent and forthcoming work has been published in a range of internationally renowned journals such as

Sociology, Urban Studies and Organization, and presented on international stages including the BBC and the United Nations. Her current research project seeks to provide new conceptual insights into ageing at work through an in-depth analysis of the financial sector.

The aim of this special issue is to provoke renewed thinking and stimulate ideas about the relationship between culture and the senses in the affective domain of organisational settings. Despite increasing interest in organisational aesthetics, a full appreciation of the sensory and sensuous dimensions of organisation is yet to be developed. By paying attention to the full gamut of sensory life in organisations, scholars can enliven and contribute new thinking to the well-worn literature on organisational culture, whilst also advancing conceptual thinking and empirical insights into the sensory nature and experience of work organisation(s).

This special issue emanates from a stream¹ entitled ‘The senses: embodying culture’ at The Seventh International Critical Management Studies Conference held in Naples in July 2011. The impetus for this stream began with the provocation that yet another conference stream on culture – organisational, subcultural, national, popular – and its relation to management might provoke yawns of familiarity, or a jaded sense that there is little new to be said about it. It was back in 1997 that Calás and Smircich (1997) provocatively asked whether the organisational culture concept was dominant but dead. In the broader domain of social theory, Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton (2003) called for culture and cultural theory to be consigned to a stint in the attic. Yet the concern with culture continues in academic debates within management studies (e.g., Ybema et al., 2010; *Organization Science*, 2011). We wondered whether and how the culture concept in management and organisation studies could be re-animated before being consigned to storage.

With regard to the culture concept, it seemed pertinent to ask how scholars might re-invigorate, or breathe life into it by considering culture’s relationship to the senses. How can we better, and in creative and distinctive ways, see, hear, touch, smell, taste and feel culture, and its relationship to work organisation(s)? Conversely with regard to the senses, how are these organised in relation to culture and work, and embodied in employee subjectivities? In setting forth with these, and other, questions, this issue aims to promote an engagement between research on culture and research on the senses, and how these two concepts might be articulated.

The suggestion that culture cannot be grasped through logocentric accounts alone can be traced to 1980s corporate culturism. Shared values became the new corporate asset, purportedly readily identifiable and capable of manipulation towards organisational ends. Schein’s (1985) model of organisational culture took it to arise from certain ‘basic assumptions’ – taken-for-granted and subconscious ways of understanding the world – that could only be apprehended through artefacts, or visible signs such as organisational traditions, rituals, heroes and stories. The emergent practice of culture management focused on the manipulation of these symbols (Gagliardi, 1990) and sought to educate employees in dominant and desired meanings in and of the organisation.

Yet sight – in line with the wider ocular bias of Western societies – was the privileged sense for the leveraging of social control implicit in such culture management initiatives (Kavanagh, 2004). Similarly, the recent genre of ‘cultural studies of organisation’ (Hancock, 2008; Rhodes, 2001) prioritises sight as the primary source and medium for

organisational analysis through its deployment of popular cultural and televisual ‘data’. As such, both literatures occlude an appreciation of other sensory dimensions in critical explorations of organisational life.

Notwithstanding some notable exceptions that explore how knowing and competence are achieved through the senses (e.g., Candau, 2000; Hindmarsh and Pilnick, 2007; Strati, 2007) little is known about the ways in which actors in organisations feel, smell, touch, taste, hear or otherwise sensually negotiate culture and the social relations that it constitutes. While the senses have formed part of methodological traditions within anthropological disciplines (Classen, 1994), the textual impulses of much organisational culture research continue. In particular, cultural studies of organisation have a “tendency to downplay the sensory and the material in accounts of society and culture while conceptualizing cultural phenomena as discourses, texts or systems to be interpreted” [Liljestrom and Paasonen, (2010), p.1]. However, the ways that we share, experience, feel and embody the presence of culture in organisational life implies that its tentacles go far beyond normative forms of logic and communication and implicate the sensory dimension of lived experience.

Despite an academic hesitancy to engage fully in sensual organisational life, tales of our senses being managed, manipulated and controlled are often discussed in media and practitioner circles (Lindstrom, 2010; Tischler, 2005). Sensory marketing is now estimated to be worth more than \$5 billion worldwide, and with computer technologies such as ismell and SENX on the market in the next three years, the traditional boundaries between virtual and ‘authentic’ sensuality continue to blur in our daily experience. Within the workplace, UK travel call centres broadcast ‘natural noises’ and infuse the air with the smell of suntan lotion to motivate agents on the workforce. Elsewhere, buildings are architecturally designed to be silent but pump in air-conditioning noises to allow confidential discussion in an open plan office, whilst music may be a ‘gift’ to workers that can be bequeathed or sanctioned (Korczynski and Jones, 2006). All this suggests that, like cultural products and objects, sensory experiences can become a “lubricant for the system” [Adorno, (2001), p.117].

To explore how relations between bodies, objects and ideas are being constituted and organised within these social processes, we propose greater engagement with the cross-disciplinary ‘affective turn’ (Clough and Halley, 2007; Thrift, 2007). The affective turn cajols researchers into re-considering and paying attention to the non-representational and embodied experiences of social and organisational life in the development of theoretical and empirical work. If we are to explore what culture ‘feels’ like for organisational members in contemporary workplaces, and their “intensities of feeling, emotional attachments and gut reactions” [Liljestrom and Paasonen, (2010), p.1], we must recognise that cultural encounters are created and constituted through perceptual, cognitive, material and embodied interaction. Such interactions necessarily embrace the sensorial domain and indeed can be located in a broader social science trend towards exploring the interplay between working bodies and space (c.f. Cutcher and Dale, 2012).

Focusing on the inter-relationship between culture and the senses can enable scholars to articulate these co-constitutive interactions, and their social and organisational nature and consequences. It provokes the following questions:

- How might we better understand the cultural circuits that stimulate affective work through a sensory lens?

- What is the sensory experience of living in/through/by culture at work?
- In what ways is culture constructed, understood or reproduced through sensual processes?
- To what extent does organisational engagement with the senses privilege or silence particular groups, bodies, or types of work?
- How, and with what kinds of success, might a consideration of the senses aid the theoretical and conceptual development of culture at work?

In addressing these questions, the five articles that comprise this issue cover different organisational and workplace settings. These settings include bakeries, hair salons and food festivals and explore affect at different levels of conceptual and empirical abstraction. However, affect-at-work provides the common thread through which the co-constitutive relationships of embodied action and cultural representations coalesce.

Our issue opens with a call from Wendelin Küpers to return to the sensory, embodied roots of ‘sense-making’ in organisational life, where he suggests phenomenology as a conceptual apparatus through which to do this. Following the ideas of Merleau-Ponty, he sets the scene for the papers that follow by reminding us that being-in-the-world is simultaneously cultural *and* bodily, and thus organisation is a sensual and cultural accomplishment that should be studied as such. However, he cautions against a romanticisation of the senses as a nostalgic elevation of sentiment in organisational life. Instead, he calls for a ‘mindful’ investigation of how organisational culture influences and impacts how affective senses and sensations occur, as well as how the senses co-constitute and shape feelings, thinking, meaning and action.

Harriet Shortt’s article focuses on sonic affect in the everyday working lives of hairdressers employed in the UK. Based on semi-structured interview data, Shortt develops the concept of ‘soundwalls’ to explore how hairdressers escape the travails of the sometimes draining emotional labour that accompanies their service work. Resituating themselves affectively through the sonority of their working environment highlights the active spatialising practices that constitute the quotidian experience of work. In so doing, Shortt argues, the hairdressers are creating soundwalls, not to disengage from their work, as much as to provide a temporary respite for the self in alternative and private spaces and places (real and imaginary) in the public milieu of their workplace.

Ann Rippin’s article explores the inevitable dysphoria that occurs in agnostic organisations (particularly for women) through drawing on the fairy tale of the Handless Maiden. In focusing on the affective relations that operate within circuits of power, she suggests that touch can disrupt gender binaries and therefore must be suppressed through a lack of touch or even talk of touch in organisations. However, through reintroducing the haptic, or other material forms of recognition, the algorhythmic bureaucratic organisation may be challenged. As such her article serves as a beautiful cautionary tale of the dangers of not ‘keeping in touch’ with ourselves in organisations through the violence of gendered disembodiment, and the potential to return to an authenticity of human contact through the haptic.

Lynne F. Baxter and James M. Ritchie focus on the potential of smell to remind us of the affective relations in the research process, manifesting in the “intensities of feeling” [Liljestrom and Paasonen, (2010), p.1] experienced by the authors when researching a bakery. Through a reflexive account of the research process, smell is conceptualised as

both digested and ingested into the way researchers make sense of the social. In particular, the authors question the relationship between the transformation of the same smell going from 'pleasant' to 'unpleasant', and the increasingly strained relationships within the research context. It is at this nexus that embodied reflexivity provides a means of returning to the recognition of data as sensorially created, experienced and interpreted.

By contrast, Maria Laura Toraldo challenges the temporal play of affect through exploring the creation of an anticipated moment by marketers. Drawing on the online presence of two festivals, she argues that marketers actively engage in the construction of imagined future emotions as a way of creating a potential communion between festival-goers before the actual event. In this sense, it is the anticipation of a future embodied moment that is in itself an embodied experience in the present.

While this collection of papers contributes to understanding the sensuous organisation, they represent more than a corrective methodological treatise to the disembodied images and approaches that have dominated in many areas of management and organisation studies. Instead, they disrupt the sense of our experience of being in the worlds of organisations and organising. And in turn, this special issue re-animates debates in organisational culture, advancing theoretical and empirical knowledge of how cultures and senses are co-constituted.

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Notes

- 1 We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Antonio Strati to the CMS conference stream. All contributors to the stream were invited to submit their papers for review, and an open call for papers was also circulated to encourage other researchers working on the topic to consider submission. We would like to thank all those who submitted papers, the successful authors and the reviewers for their hard work and constructive feedback.