



CALL FOR PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS

Stop Making Sense: A conversation between sensory and social science about food and drink

Sensory experience as a subject of study has long been a focus of multiple disciplines; yet only recently has the sensory experience of *food* – how it tastes and why that matters – become fodder for serious discussion. We are seeking submissions of work for a one-day symposium on the study of the senses from an interdisciplinary perspective hosted at The Chemical Heritage Foundation in Philadelphia, on March 10, 2017.

Within food science – a natural home for inquiry into food’s sensory properties – sensory scientists have designed tools and methods to measure and interpret sensory perception. Meanwhile, within the social sciences, a growing body of researchers, including anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and philosophers have turned their attention to determining the social, cultural, and other context that shape the operation of the senses and the meanings individuals take from sensory knowledge. However, there have been few opportunities, and few incentives, for productive dialogue among sensory researchers across these fields and disciplines, especially across the perceived chasm separating food-sensory science and the humanities and social sciences. This gathering aims to combat the status quo by encouraging productive conversation and collaboration through bringing together scholars in multiple fields concerned with the study of human sensory experience of in food and drink. We seek to provoke a discussion that unsettles the presumptions of investigators in both the sciences and the humanities, to expand the methodological approaches of researchers in both fields to better attend to the previously unconsidered or overlooked, and ultimately to enrich practices of documenting, learning about, and accessing sensory experience.

On the one hand, sensory evaluation as a field of study within food science has designed tools for the measurement of sensory perception. Through experimental protocols aimed at quantitation, sensory scientists seek to access objective sensory experiences intrinsic to food itself. In fact, much of the disciplinary expertise within sensory evaluation is dedicated to the exclusion or control of biasing factors that are thought to contaminate this true experience. This approach has become extremely powerful in sensory knowledge-making; its influence can be seen from the designed environment of the “aesthetic-industrial complex” (Shapin 2012) to the everyday proliferation of taste tests claiming to show, for example, that Pepsi is “better” than Coke or that a particular brand of olive oil is the best. Despite this success, however, sensory

scientists are increasingly aware of limitations in their disciplinary foundations – physiology, psychology, and other behavioral sciences (Köster 2009) – and are looking to understand and theorize information that until now has been dismissed as biasing or contextual.

On the other hand, anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and other social scientists have begun to approach the same issues being tackled by sensory scientists. These scholars seek to understand the operation of the senses and the influence of political, social, and cultural practices on sensory knowledge. Recently, social scientists interested in the “sciences of subjectivity” (Howes 2015, Shapin 2012) have expanded their examination to the practices of sensory scientists themselves. Despite this growing area of shared interest, social scientists have largely hesitated to directly engage with sensory scientists or employ the methodologies and theories sensory scientists have developed. This has led to the production of separate bodies of knowledge and theory, with too little cross-pollination.

Despite theoretical and disciplinary divides, researchers investigating the senses face similar questions and challenges. How can the content of individual, subjective sensory experience be articulated and comprehended by others? How do cultural, social, and environmental factors impinge on sensory experience, and vice versa? In studying sensory perception, what – the material, the environment, the context, the culture – “counts”? What is the role of human interpretation – subjectivity – in the measurement of sensory experiences and attributes? Fundamentally, what is the relationship between sensory experience and context?

Confirmed Keynote Speakers:

Hildegarde Heymann, Distinguished Professor of Viticulture and Enology, University of California–Davis

Steven Shapin, Franklin L. Ford Research Professor of the History of Science, Harvard University

We are seeking papers, presentations, and other works that examine the study of the senses, on topics including but not limited to:

- **Methodologies and Practices of Studying Sensory Experiences** – what are discipline-specific methods of engaging with and rigorously studying sensory experience?
 - Sites of Investigation — the laboratory, the field, the archive. How do different disciplines define appropriate sources of sensory information?
 - Instruments and Technologies — how do particular technologies of data collection influence how the senses are understood and known, and how have historical conceptions of sensory knowledge shaped the design of instruments to study and measure sensation?
 - Limits — are there limits to what we can know or say about the senses? how are these limits constituted?

- **Defining and Communicating about Sensory Experience**

- Epistemology – how are the senses and sensory experience defined, accessed, and understood within and across disciplines? What epistemological techniques impede inter-disciplinary communication?
 - Assumptions – What implicit and explicit assumptions are present in field-specific practices of defining, researching, and talking about sensory experience? What are the effects of those assumptions?
 - Objectivity – sensory science claims to capture and make visible the universal aspects of sensory experience; how does it accomplish its goals, and what challenges or barriers might be apparent to different disciplines?
- **Designing and Making Sensory Experience**
 - Labor — What labor happens in making sensory authority or expertise? Is there a viable category of “sensory labor”?
 - Language and Food Design – sensory science is already intimately engaged in the design of everyday products; how can (or should) other disciplines become involved?
 - Applied Science — how does the commercial application of sensory research shape the questions that are asked, the conclusions that are drawn? Who (or what) is “the consumer” imagined by various disciplines of sensory research?

Deadline:

Abstracts are due October 31, 2016. Please submit all abstracts to foodsensory@drexel.edu.

Outcomes: Conference papers will be compiled and published into an edited volume

Contact:

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Where:

Philadelphia PA

When:

March 10, 2017 at the Chemical Heritage Foundation

Registration Fee:

\$30, due upon paper acceptance

Organized by:

Jacob Lahne (Drexel University), Christy Spackman (Harvey Mudd College), Nicholas Shapiro (Chemical Heritage Foundation), Nadia Berenstein (University of Pennsylvania), Ana Maria Ulloa (New School), Ella Butler (University of Chicago), and Camille Bégin (University of Toronto Scarborough)

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