

## **Sens(e)itizing Sociology**

### **Programme 2011-12**

Following the 'Envisioning Sociology' series of discussion groups, 'Sens(e)itizing Sociology' extends discussion from visual forms of exploring and investigating the social world to the role of the 'senses' more broadly in our research practice. Starting from the position that the researcher is always engaged in an embodied and sensorily active way both with their research environment and their research subjects, individual sessions in the series will explore the role of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell in the research process. The discussion explicitly addresses the role of the senses not only in the course of fieldwork but also in memory and evocation for analysis after the field and in relation to how we might share these sensory experiences in disseminating research findings.

The discussion groups will follow the same format as for Envisioning Sociology. Where possible participants will be able to experience a particular piece of work in advance and the producer of this work will lead the discussion. While the focus of discussion will be on research practice and process, we will also seek to share theoretical ideas and methodological literature that we have found useful in thinking about sensory sociology. The discussions will be informal and accompanied by refreshments.

The group is open to all members of the department (staff and students) and participants are particularly encouraged to invite individual students who might benefit from, and contribute to, discussion sessions.

#### ***Autumn Term***

**Session 1: Hilary Pilkington** (University of Warwick), **Over-exposure? Empathy, emotion and the politics of using film as a research medium**, Wed 26<sup>th</sup> October, 5.30-7pm, IAS Seminar Room, Milburn House, University of Warwick.

**To view in advance:** '**...from Vorkuta: A research film**', Directed by Elena Omel'chenko, edited by Dmitrii Omel'chenko, Vorkuta 2007. This film can be viewed by going to the Culture, Media and Representation Research Cluster webpage:  
[http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rsw/rpa/culture\\_media/esr/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rsw/rpa/culture_media/esr/)

#### ***You might also like to read:***

Omel'chenko, E. 'No right to remain silent? In search of equality in the field', Garifzianova, A. 'Research emotions: The view from the other side' and Pilkington, H. 'Does it have to end in tears? Reflexivity and team-based ethnography' in H.Pilkington, E. Omel'chenko and A.Garifzianova (2010) Russia's Skinheads: Exploring and Rethinking Subcultural Lives, Routledge, pp. 189-199, pp.200-210 and pp.211-224.

**Themes for discussion:**

This film was made as part of collaborative research involving the University of Warwick (Hilary Pilkington), 'Region', Ul'ianovsk State University, Russia (Elena Omel'chenko, Al'bina Garifzianova, Dmitrii Omel'chenko) and a group of young people in the Russian city of Vorkuta who identify/ied themselves as 'skinheads'. The film was intended to be a participatory enterprise to be shown to the young people during the second stage of fieldwork and to elicit their reflections on how we had presented and made sense of their lives. The ethical issues that emerged in the course making the film – the expression of 'inappropriate' emotion by one of the respondents - however, rendered this original goal unachievable and caused the researchers to reflect on the challenges of using film in this way. Moreover, the subsequent experience of showing the film to academic audiences has met with mixed response. Whilst for some it adds texture to the disembodied vision of respondents that emerge in academic texts, for others it has called into doubt the integrity and politics of the researchers.

In this session it might be useful to discuss what value is added to research through the use of media which capture and display the relationships between respondents and between respondents and researchers. While as a general principle, ethnographers seek to maximize trust and warmth in their field relations, are these best left as unspoken prerequisites of field research? We might consider the potential harm to both respondents and researchers from exposing these relationships and the practical measure (and techniques) that might be used to minimize such harm. It would be interesting also to discuss the relationship between research and politics. What are the challenges of making films with 'extreme' groups? Visual materials may re-embody respondents and prevent the distilling of complex life experiences into decontextualised discussions of ideological nuance. But what ethical issues arise from giving voice to xenophobic views? And whose feelings should the researchers be sensitive to: respondents or audience? The answers to these questions may help us determine how best to use such materials in the dissemination of research findings?

**Session 2:** Christina Hughes (University of Warwick) **Salivation: Critical Issues in 'agential cut' epistemologies**, Wed 9<sup>th</sup> November, 5.30-7pm, IAS Seminar Room, Milburn House, University of Warwick

**To view in advance:**

**You might also like to read:**

Hughes, C. (forthcoming) 'Salivary Identities: The Matter of Affect', Subjectivities (forthcoming)

**Themes for discussion:**

How we can rethink the very grounds from which we speak (Bauchspies and Puig de la Bellacasa, 2009)? In this paper I am interested in considering the epistemological issues that are central to developing intra-disciplinary frameworks for the analysis of subjectivity and which bring together the biology and neurology of the body with cultural and sociological analysis. In this respect, I explore Barad's (2003; 2007) concept of 'agential cut'. Barad's work has been heralded as providing a highly fertile analysis of ontology, epistemology and ethics that draws on feminist theory and developments in quantum theory (Dolling, 2007). Drawing on and developing Haraway's (1988) notion of partial objectivity, the concept of an agential cut

underlines the significance of ethical responsibility, positionality and agency in the development of knowledge. This raises questions of how knowledge is framed, through which kinds of instruments and, in consequence, what is the adequacy of the knowledge produced. Threading through this is a concern with how knowing is authorized. These issues are exceptionally significant as we enter a post-Cartesian era where it is argued that we need to consider the vitalism of the affective, discursive and material in relations of entanglement. Post-Cartesian thought seeks to create new interdisciplinary constellations that bridge the social and natural sciences and humanities. How well does the concept of 'agential cut' serve us in this regard?

**Session 3:** Patrick Laviolette (Tallinn University) **My own private vertigo: The forbidden fear of returning from fall-out**, Wed 23 November, 5.30-7pm, IAS Seminar Room, Milburn House, University of Warwick

**To view in advance:**

Andrei Tarkovski's *Stalker* (RUS. 163 mins. 1979) parts 1-7 available at:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0YIzY8Ews8&feature=related>

**You might also like to read:**

[on *Stalker*] Davidov, V. (March 7, 2008). Urban exploration: A subculture at a glance.  
<http://www.materialworldblog.com/>

Laviolette, P. et al. 2007. Special issue - hazardous sport? *Anthropology Today*. 23(6), 1-16.  
(available from) <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/anth.2007.23.issue-6/issuetoc>

Laviolette, P. & K. Baird 2011. Lost innocence and land matters: Community regeneration and memory mining. *European Journal of English Studies*. 15(1): 57-71.  
also see: <http://www.heartlandscornwall.com/heartlands/blog.php>

Stranger, M. 2011. This study of surfing (chap. 1). *Surfing Life: Surface, Substructure and the Commodification of the Sublime*. Farnham: Ashgate.  
(available from)

[http://www.ashgate.com/default.aspx?page=637&calcTitle=1&title\\_id=8265&edition\\_id=11447](http://www.ashgate.com/default.aspx?page=637&calcTitle=1&title_id=8265&edition_id=11447)

**Themes for discussion:**

Social infection - instigating the desire for fear in others - this is certainly part of the moral dilemma addressed in my title. Yet perhaps the catalyst question for this discussion would be to consider how 'play' activities might not only remove but could also add value to highly undesired spaces, places or restricted areas. That is, this session is intended as a platform to consider growing concerns over 'danger zones' – our sensorial perceptions of them (from up close or at a distance) along with our movements within or skirting around their edges. Starting with a few anecdotes (mostly visual & textual) of an ethno-historical and auto-biographical nature (which draw on, for instance, nuclear power protest and contemporary post-Soviet Baltic memories), the idea is to explore the ways in which individual as well as social anxieties connect with certain culturally embodied taboos over pollution, threat and desire. Such questioning follows thematic developments regarding adventure sport, dark tourism, landscapes of fright and the risks of urban exploration.

Running parallel to this, it might be interesting to think about theoretical approaches which are driven by considerations of social immediacy, the cultural construction of speed and rapidity as well as reflections upon the conditions of late modernity, especially in relation to understanding the flamboyance and foolishness of characters which one can perhaps label as 'accelerated *flâneurs*'. Or is such a term an oxymoron? Moving from risk spaces to sanitised, safeguarded places and in-between urban/rural landscapes, what happens to our sensorial experiences as well as to the concepts of *flânage*, risk, time, etc, if we accept or refuse to push for answers? And is it even worthwhile to link the notion of the *flâneur* with the countryside? These are a few provocations for discussion.

**Session 4:** Cath Lambert (University of Warwick), **The Idea of a University and Jacques Rancière's 'redistribution of the sensory'** Wed 7<sup>th</sup> December, 5.30-7pm, IAS Seminar Room, Milburn House, University of Warwick

***To view in advance:***

The Idea of a University website

[www.warwick.ac.uk/go/reinvention/filmspublications/ideaofauniversity/](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/go/reinvention/filmspublications/ideaofauniversity/)

***You might also like to read:***

Lambert, C. (2011) 'Psycho classrooms: teaching as a work of art', *Social and Cultural Geography*, 12 (1): 27-45.

Lambert, C (forthcoming) 'Redistributing the Sensory: the critical pedagogy of Jacques Rancière'. This article can be accessed on the CMR cluster website:

***Themes for discussion:***

*The Idea of a University* art installation was produced and curated as part of a collaborative (staff and student) research project exploring the architectural development of the University of Warwick. The focus was on the mutually constitutive relationship between the (design and construction of the) material environment, and the social, political and pedagogic experiences and identities of those working with/in it. The installation was temporary but some indication of its aims and methods are presented on the web site above. I have subsequently used this exhibition and other academic/aesthetic products in order to examine the role of the aesthetic and the sensory in knowledge generation and communication. I have been using the work of Jacques Rancière, whose emphasis on politics as aesthetic provides a critical and provocative framework for thinking about how sense perception operates to organise the social world according to what and who is visible, who sees and does not see, who can make noise and which noise is rendered intelligible, and so on. He talks about these processes of division and exclusion as 'the distribution of the sensory'. Politics occurs when the aesthetic order is redistributed so as to enable the emergence of marginalised voices or knowledges. Does, can, and should our sociological work aspire to the re/distribution of aesthetic regimes? What issues arise from utilising art as method and product in sociological work? How can we research sensory engagement when it isn't in a form our traditional methodological tools are familiar with (i.e. it's not in spoken or written language, or using recognisable visual forms)?

## **Spring Term**

**Session 5:** Karen Throsby (University of Warwick), Wed 18<sup>th</sup> January, 5.30-7pm, IAS Seminar Room, Milburn House, University of Warwick?

### ***To view/read in advance:***

Blogs from Catalina Channel swim summer 2011

<http://thelongswim.blogspot.com/2011/07/catalina-channel-part-i.html>

<http://thelongswim.blogspot.com/2011/07/catalina-channel-part-ii.html>

Video from Catalina Channel swim summer 2011:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWSE-IZE\\_Is](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWSE-IZE_Is)

Project website (with large collection of blogs and videos):

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/academicstaff/throsby/homepage/channelswimmer/resources/>

### ***You might also like to read:***

Throsby, K (in progress) “ ‘If I go in like a cranky sealion, I come out like a smiling dolphin’: marathon swimming and the unexpected pleasures of being a body in water”.

Hockey, J (2005) “Sensing the run: the senses and distance running” Senses and Society 1(2): 183-202 (I can circulate copies of this – unavailable in the library)

Spinney, J (2006) “A place of sense: a kinaesthetic ethnography of cyclists on Mont Ventoux” Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 24: 709-732

### ***Themes for discussion:***

Marathon swimming is conventionally, and historically, represented in terms of a mind-body separation whereby the rational, disciplined mind forces the reluctant body to endure in order to ‘conquer’, leaving no space for pleasure beyond the satisfactions of triumphant swim completion. Drawing on interviews with marathon swimmers and (auto-) ethnographic observational data from open water swimming communities in the UK and US, this paper argues that for many swimmers, the rhetoric of overcoming is an impoverished representation of the experience of being a body in water. Instead, taking a sensory ethnographic approach (Pink 2009), I argue that marathon swimming is an ‘emplaced’ practice that is best understood in terms of the interrelationships between bodies, minds and environments, in all their materiality and sensoriality. The data shows that while marathon swimming undoubtedly involves periods of struggle and suffering, it also (and sometimes simultaneously) offers novel, and often unexpected, modes of pleasure and connectedness (sensorially, socially, environmentally). This paper argues that these pleasures and novel inter-connections open up spaces for the critical reframing of the emplaced body both in and out of the water, especially for those who are habitually rendered terrestrially abject – for example, on the grounds of gender, fatness or older age.

In this session, it might be useful to discuss: what can a focus on the sensorial bring to sociological inquiry? What are the challenges of articulating sensation in text? How can autoethnographic data be most effectively used in this context? And what epistemological

challenges are raised by the incorporation of autoethnographic data with other observational and interview data?

**Session 6:** Ivan Gololobov, **Emptiness, emotions and possibility of sociological knowledge in the marginal space**, Wed 1st February, 5.30-7pm, IAS Seminar Room, Milburn House, University of Warwick

***To view in advance:***

Extract from Penny Rimbaud (ex-Crass)'s speech at the RottenBeat: Academic and Musical Dialogue with New Russian Punk event. Pushkin House. London. 4 May 2011

***Themes for discussion:***

Our research on Post-Socialist Punk demonstrate that people who formally belong to punk and who are believed to be punks by others find it very difficult to define what *is* punk. Penny Rimbaud, ex member of a seminal punk band Crass discussing the notion of punk said that to him the answer to what punk is would be simple, it isn't. This problem, in fact, is implicitly present in many studies of marginal communities and radical movements. The situation when something which exists does not find positive connotations is not limited with punk. Recent riots in England can be considered as a striking demonstration enacted 'emptiness'. In my presentation I will try to place 'emptiness' and 'absence' in the set of theoretical context and outline main questions and possible strategies sociologists can use to capture and work with this elusive object.

**Session 7:** Nana Zhang (University of Warwick) 'Using participatory methods in researching with rural migrant children in China', .Wed 15<sup>th</sup> Feb, 5.30-7pm, IAS Seminar Room, Milburn House, University of Warwick

***To view in advance:***

*tbc*

***You might also like to read:***

Tbc

***Themes for discussion:***

*tbc*

**Session 8:** Wed 7 March Anton Popov (University of Warwick) Details tbc

***To view in advance:***

***You might also like to read:***

***Themes for discussion:***