Global South Ethnographies
Minding the Senses
elke emerald
Griffith University, Australia

Robert E. Rinehart
University of Waikato, New Zealand

and

Antonio Garcia (Eds.)
Universidad de Santiago de Chile, Chile

Both an introduction to sensory ethnography and a bold display of the sophisticated use of the sensory for contemporary ethnography, *Global South Ethnographies: Minding the Senses* reflects both indigenous and non-mainstream takes on the sensory and the sensual in ethnographic practice. The authors provide a collection of original and timely chapters from both the hegemonic northern and Global Southern hemispheres. As the chapters stem from across a variety of disciplines, the book gives us novel ways of determining and perceiving the sensory.
Global South Ethnographies
RER
For Kerry Earl

ee
For Daniel Jansse 1933–1991
You would love your name in a book—here it is.

AGQ
This book is dedicated to my wife Marisol and my son Angel.
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1. MINDING THE SENSES IN
GLOBAL SOUTH ETHNOGRAPHIES

Expanding Worldviews

… sensory cosmologies make us aware of the many different ways in which cultures shape perception, and the inability of standard Western models to comprehend such sensory and symbolic diversity.

(Constance Classen, 2005, p. 162)

When we first discussed this book, it was a humid, coastal day. It was the kind of day in Whaingaroa/Raglan, Aotearoa/New Zealand that was sure to go one of two ways: either pouring with rain, or bright, woozy and sunny. The wet heat pressed in on us, like a smelly woolen dog. In a book—a novel—openings like that (“it was a dark and stormy night”: “it was a humid, coastal day”) portend of realism or idealism, sorrow or happiness. Or—of course—both binaries, brought together in a continuum. They occasionally simply mean that the reader better watch out! The depiction of the weather is a time-honored trope, but, of course, its use is meant to fulfil multiple purposes, not the least of which is interpretive.

Nonetheless, the presence of deliberate, metaphorical, lyrical language explicitly signals a worldview—which undergirds a research paradigm—that accepts interpretation as “what ethnographers do.” We don’t necessarily describe realistically, for realism (some might call it Truth) is in the eye/ear/taste of the beholder. The stance itself is problematic in that one person’s reality certainly doesn’t describe another’s. As we accept interpretation as a given in producing texts, in co-creating realities, we accept both multiple interpretations of truths and the “fact” that my truth may not hold for you, and vice versa. As well, our senses may, for a variety of reasons, apprehend and construct the world in different ways—for a variety of reasons.

The ranges of possible reasons for sensory distinction between and among people may include physical anomalies (e.g., think of “phantom limb disease” where foot pain remains despite amputation), cultural pejoratives, and experiential sensitivities. But make no mistake: the exploration of—and tolerance for—difference in how we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell the world is only at its inceptive phase in contemporary academia (outstanding concerted discussions include David Howes’ Centre for Sensory Studies at Concordia University, and his Sensory Formations series with Berg Publishers and Sensory Studies series with Bloomsbury).
Despite Howes’—and Constance Classen’s, among others—fine efforts, we appear to have barely “scratched the surface” of sensory studies.

For Minding the Senses in Global South Ethnographies, we envisioned a book filled with chapters that served as exemplars of sensory ethnography, of ways of knowing and apprehending the world and others through both the traditional senses and through non-dominant forms of the senses. We sought chapters that explored the senses, the sensory, and/or the sensual, in a wide variety of manners. Having brought together these wonderful scholars into this volume, compiled and extended from many of the presentations given at Contemporary Ethnography Across the Disciplines hui,1 we now realize that we have just begun exploring what the words senses and sensory mean.

David Howes (2005a) states, “Science cannot provide a touchstone of truth or a higher authority for cultural analyses. This is not to say there is no ‘truth’ to science, but rather that it is a culturally bounded truth” (p. 5). For example, the sciences use sensory/sense/sensing in some very explicit ways: remote sensing in oceanography and archeology; sensing land surface dynamics; spectrometer sensing of a variety of chemicals, including electrolytes and catecholamines; sensing the ion channels that act upon cells; quorum sensing in bacteria (cf., Miller & Bassler, 2001). The list is seemingly endless for this assemblage of machine/human sensory interfacing. But these types of “sense” are located within the rhetorics of science—rhetorics that are, at core, ethnocentric and deeply grounded in the belief that measurement, devices, and tools will “sense” more accurately, beneficially, and effectively than human perception. And, in countering positivism, according to Nietzsche (1968), “… facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations” (p. 267). That is to say, all research filters through the lens of human interpretation, human intervention—admittedly, at very different, albeit structurally similar, levels.2

However much those kind of “sensings” align or collide with other kinds of sensing/senses (and there are profound and interesting ways in which they do), we have narrowed our meanings for these words by examining the root sens: from the Middle French, from Old French sens, sen, san (“sense, reason, direction”), partly from Latin “sensus” (“sense, sensation, feeling, meaning”), from sentiō (“feel, perceive”)… (Sens, 2015).

The gist of this, for our purposes, is that (to) sense is essentially an attempt by an organism—we narrow it to human organisms—to perceive that which is either internal or external to itself. For ethnographic purposes, we can further distil the meaning to include human knowledge, perception, and understanding of the other and of self through a variety of methods.3

We aim for this understanding/discussion of senses from a sociocultural standpoint; that is to say, “biology provides the clay, but culture is the potter” (Howes, 2005, p. 5). In other words, human beings—all human beings—are designed similarly, with similar sensory organs; noses, tongues, ears, fingers, eyes. That is a descriptive fact, and unless something untimely has occurred to alter that state of the individual
(which of course it can and does), all humans start life with relatively equivalent abilities of perception of that which is inside and that which is outside the self.

But interesting variations occur within, between, and among cultures and societies. And, as Becker (2014) helps us to ponder: “… we can investigate the sociology of normal physiological functioning … What is the folk wisdom with respect to ‘normal functioning’?” (p. 93, emphasis added). Cultural differences and similarities are points of departure for ways of knowing the world differently, yet within each particular culture, there is a feeling of “normality” and “normal functioning.” Comparing difference cases of similar, yet disparate, ways to sense the world helps us to see patterns that occur across and perhaps between cultures—as well as specific instantiations within cultures and societies.

Typically, though of course not always, fascinating variations occur after the biological fact of birth: for example, certain cultures (e.g., the Ongee of Little Andaman Island) privilege heightened olfactory recognition, which coincides with asking each other upon greeting, ‘Konyune? onorange-tanka?’, ‘how is your nose?’ (Classen, 2005, p. 153). This may be justified by asking about whom a guest has been visiting by means of their odor, or by simply smelling another for medical purposes. As an aside, in western cultures, parents often smell their child or feel their skin as a means to roughly estimate their health or bearing. Tetro (2015) discusses the history of foot infection, which provides an example of smelling for medical purposes:

Long before rapid analysis of bacterial cultures, the most common way to quickly determine the nature of a bacterial culture was to smell it … Pseudomonas aeruginosa has a distinct grape smell. Escherichia coli has a distinct fecal odor. Then there are the staphylococci. Staphylococcus aureus smells like decomposition while S. epidermis smells like old sweat. (p. 1)

It is said that in days of yore, a rough diagnostic for Diabetes Mellitus Type 1 was the peculiarly sweet smell of urine—and that it attracted ants, clustering around the undigested sugar. Clearly, western sense theorists have (re)explored new methods and approaches to the heretofore western-dominant models of the hierarchy of senses—and their applications. But it remains a paradoxical project: concomitant with celebrating the richness of variety within the apprehensions of the world by indigenous peoples, sense researchers bring “modern” and dominant sensory worldviews. Thus, effectively, this process leads to a production of homogeneity within how the world is perceived—perhaps akin to the patterns of language-decimation we see within indigenous cultures (e.g., McCarty, 2003; McCarty, Romero, & Zepeda, 2006; May, 1999). Similar to language loss, the loss of systems of sensory worldview is irrevocable: “When even a single language falls silent, the world loses an irredeemable repository of human knowledge” (McCarty, Romero, & Zepeda, 2006, p. 29). Knowing the world through the nose, similarly, is of irreplaceable value.
ARISTOTLE’S CLASSIC FIVE

These methods generally include the five common western senses as their starting point: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch. And, as Schmidt (2003) writes, there were, for Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas at least, “classical orderings of the senses” (p. 43). The hierarchy (of importance, of value) was thus: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, though Stewart (2005) makes the point that Aristotle writes “in De Anima, [that] taste and seeing are described as forms of touch” (p. 61). But, more recently, recognition of other senses has disrupted dominant cultural (read Euro/Anglocentric) biases, so that scholars of sense and the sensory are now rethinking basic assumptions about how we may perceive the world—and not just visually, as predominant post-Enlightenment and contemporary philosophers, cultural critics, and artists might suggest.

The fact of the Ongee cultural worldview privileging smell is interesting, but the antecedents for this societal privileging of olfactory sensing make us trace sensory dominance itself—and how and why dominance of the visual has proceeded in western societies. Another example of divergence from the dominance of sight/visual is the Songhay. “For the Songhay of Niger, taste plays an important role in social categorization” (Stoller & Olkes, 2005, p. 131). Thus, by interacting with and learning from others unlike ourselves (and everyone is unlike ourselves), we may broaden our own reflexivity about the commonplace—and avoid a reductionistic form of exoticism.

The recognition of how “the other” may differentially perceive the world follows myriad paths, including how humans may contextualize geographical sitedness, topography, climate, growing seasons, and transportation methods within their culturally-shaped perceptual networks. In some ways, the visualization of fundamental needs—such as food, water, shelter, clothing—have been the source of examination by scholars: for example, the Hungarian ethnographer Gábor Szinte, who sought to “explore the topics of ecclesiastical and folk architecture.” During his career,

… his core sources comprise[d] more than three hundred photographs, one hundred sketches, reports of his journey in the field, related visual notes … nitrocellulose films, glass negatives, positive images, pen and pencil sketches, and watercolour paintings. (ibid.)

Trained as an artist, Szinte, from roughly 1879–1914, used visual techniques to convey the folk traditions of the Hungarian people. His use of visual depictions—of “Székely gates and homes” and of other folk architecture from his birthplace—was part of a larger project driven by the Hungarian Museum of Ethnography’s director János Jankó to capture “folk material culture, architecture, lifestyles, customs” (ibid.).

How humans adapt to their particular context, including technological advances, like nitrocellulose films and glass negatives, does, in fact, affect which of their
senses are more or less salient at given times, in specific locales, with/in varying communities. Szinte is quoted to have said:

I did not travel as most tourists do, by train, but on foot, by the wagons that carried the local mineral water, or by Székely cart—so that I could see how they lived, hear their lush, pleasurable speech, and experience their nimbleness of mind. (ibid.)

When an ethnographer—whether “classic,” “traditional,” or “contemporary”—immerses herself in a community, she utilizes her senses to make sense of the participants’ worlds. She also relies on the dominant senses that she has nurtured both professionally and in her everyday life.

We must remember, however, that approaching the other—or knowledge and understanding of the other—is not the same as being the other. The other is other—or even alien—to each of us for a reason: they are not the self. Their experience(s) (and this includes in many cases their intimate lived experiences) are singular, located specifically in time and space, and shaped by myriad influences. As Patrick Lewis reminds us: “A child, a youth, an adult, we all experience the self as multidimensional, augmented through the situated awareness of human being” (2009, p. 16). As ethnographers, we must be aware of our own learned behaviors—whether these are learned in western graduate schooling, drawn into our selves by immersion within new experiences, or exist simply as dominant artifacts of our home worldview. We must, as the fish must, learn to notice and critique the very water we swim in; not just its fact, but its temperature, its viscosity, its clarity, salinity, brackishness, and so on. We must not just observe its existence descriptively, but absorb as much of its substance as we are able.

Thus, “perceiving” the world, learning about it, takes many forms. Lewis (2009, 2011) suggests that story is yet another way of perceiving the self in relation to the world:

Quite possibly, [story and storytelling] is the principal way of understanding the lived world. Story is central to human understanding—it makes life livable [sic], because without a story, there is no identity, no self, no other. (2011, p. 505)

And Classen (2005) points out the “importance of expanding our perceptual field to appreciate other systems of sensory and symbolic organization” (p. 148), particularly focusing on a discussion of “the Tzotzil of Mexico, the Ongee of Little Andaman Island, and the Desana of Colombia” (ibid.).

Classen’s point extends Marshall McLuhan’s observation about literate cultures’ over-reliance, indeed, dependence, upon visual perception as their dominant form of sensing the world and non-literate cultures’ reliance upon the aural/oral. Classen’s work in the Andes with indigenous Inca lead to her musing about McLuhan’s untested views, lumping together all “non-literate” societies into a group that he thought solely relied upon hearing within their communicative orality and aurality.
Touch, seen in Aristotle’s western hierarchy as one of the lowest forms of sensing the world, can serve as a metaphor for contact between cultures. In a dream, Bob was introduced to some Māori women. He recalls,

One was stretching, with her forehead on the floor in front of her, her back facing upward. She wore a thin singlet, and, it turned out, had had both breasts removed. I reached out to touch her back, to warn her of my presence, while, at the same time, my friend was introducing me to her. The woman recoiled as if my touch was a burning flame. I then apologized profusely—a male initiating touch with a female, or a “stranger” touching someone unbidden, without a clear marker for permission, was taboo for many reasons, in a myriad of cultures. In my dream, I felt incredible shame and guilt—both at my privilege and at my crass ethnocentric assumptions—in certain Polynesian cultures and in Thailand, touching the head of another has historically been taboo. The fact that I’d spent the first forty years of my life as a swim coach—teaching children and adults by moving their limbs, in other words, touching them—was a situated excuse, a learned behavior, but not a reason.

Many factors can ameliorate or exacerbate the social dynamics of touch, who can touch, when touch is appropriate, pressure of touch, reciprocal touch, and commercialized forms of touch. Among them are power imbalances (e.g., a teacher/student relationship, senior to junior employees), gender roles, age and age cohort differences, religious sanctions or taboos (hugging or kissing upon greeting), social mores (air kissing), cultural or sub-cultural mores. Further, negotiations of and for touch can range from very subtle and nuanced to explicit, crass, and obvious. But in each, “touching” may serve as a decisive metaphor for the third space that Linda Smith (2014) mentions at the powhiri between those embedded in the land and those visiting. In most cases, there is a reciprocity of respect involved that takes into account individual and cultural needs for touch (cf., Rinehart, 2015; Lang, 2008).

By questioning these forms of ethnocentrism and also the logics of assumptions of cultures and peoples using either sight or hearing as their primary, dominant ways of perceiving the world, Howes, Classen and others have opened up a range of discoveries (“discoveries” by western observers, “common-sense” by members) regarding what makes sense locally rather than globally. The

… Tzotzil, the Ongee and the Desana each conceptualize the vital force of the cosmos in terms of a different sensory energy. These sensory energies order space and time, determine health and illness, life and death, and govern social and personal identity. (Classen, 2005, p. 160)

It is the range of variance in how humans perceive the world that makes study of the “senses” at once provocative and stimulating.

The Tzotzil, according to Howes (drawing from Classen (2005)), “create a thermal geography. East is called ‘Rising Heat’ by the Tzotzil, and West is called ‘Waning Heat’ … This thermal classification extends to the Tzotzil social order …” (p. 28). Hot
and cold, related to “vital energy,” also serve as ways of organizing “the cosmos—which is divided by the Tzotzil into hot worlds and cold worlds, hot deities and cold deities—and to the organization of human society” (Classen, 1999, p. 273). The Ongee … believe that a person’s spirit resides in her or his bones. During the night, while a person sleeps, this spirit goes out and visits the places the person has been during the course of the day in order to collect the smell which has been left behind and bring it back to the body … The continual restoration of odour-life to the body during sleep replenishes a person’s depleted vitality and enables her or him to continue taking in and emitting smells. (Classen, Howes, & Synnot, 1994, p. 155)

The Desana use hearing, vision, smell, taste to determine “message[s] about the social and cosmic order” (Classen, 1999, pp. 274–275). Classen (1999) discusses the wide range of values the Ongee place on subtle ranges of senses: even their name for themselves, wira, “means ‘people of the wind’ or ‘people who smell’” (p. 275).

SETTING SOME TERMS

We see commonalities between the so-called “hard science” usage of sense and sensory and sensing and our interdisciplinary and ethnographic use of the terms. The first is the attempt to perceive that which is outside our “normal” range of perception: known as the field of remote sensing, it has its analogue in inferences borne of our senses. What can we know of something that is beyond our sight, beyond our hearing, our smell? Can we infer from often-unconscious, tacit knowledges and understandings to sense our worlds—that is, shape through perceptual re-framing—differently than we have ever previously done?

There is a long tradition of non-western understandings of the senses or the sensory as paths to both knowledge acquisition and understanding. Many of these traditional ways have been buried, cast aside, assimilated, deliberately “absented”—in short, they have been, for all intents and purposes, lost. When recovery was possible, it has been slow, but implacable. Sometimes it is simply re-discovery. Other times it is an individual or group mimicking the original ways—and finding similar “solutions” to age-old concerns that their elders once utilized.

And western-types of research have begun to “re-discover” such indigenous ways of apprehending the world, to celebrate them, to learn from them. The caution, of course, is that (sometimes) well-meaning western academics, in such a powerful position, must avoid their own forms of imperialism, of “manifest colonialism,” in which their zeal to “discover” old wisdom colonizes and even kills the very thing they so cherish.

This recovery of indigenous knowledge echoes one of the main points of Barclay-Kerr’s From myth and legend to reality: Voyages of rediscovery and knowledge, where indigenous knowledges preceded western imperialist replacement of knowledges. For example, current 21st Century climate scientists are using elders’ knowledge and ways of knowing to reinforce their own insights: “Inuit Elders hold
personal knowledge of sea ice trends and extreme events back to the early 1900s” (Fox, 2015, 2). This “match [of] indigenous and scientific knowledge” comes from the National Snow and Ice Data Center, out of the University of Colorado, Boulder (USA). Informed, data-driven, quantitative scientists have supplemented their research with ethnographic observational research that enhances the ecological validity of their findings. As Fox states (2015, 2), “Indigenous people use complex terminology and explanations for ice structures and processes; these can confirm, challenge, and augment scientific understanding.”

Thus, the first lesson regarding the senses: the very naming of them, the apprehension and salience of them, is culturally driven. As David Howes and Constance Classen (2013) put it: “The ways we use our senses, and the ways we create and understand the sensory world, are shaped by culture” (p. 1).

And, as they point out, our comprehension and appreciation of the senses and the sensory are mediated by context. Jonathan Reinarz (2014) notes, regarding the attention given to the significance of scent, that it is culturally and contextually relative: “… studies of smell in various Global South societies commence by noting a devaluation of olfactory experience as peculiar to the Global North and its intellectual traditions” (p. 2). What does this mean? Ultimately, it means that, though we are a universal humankind, we have localized and selected singular values that we place on the parts of our worlds that we inhabit. This sense of universal singular coexists within most of us as members of large nation-states simultaneous with being family-unit members, community members, and so on.

Having lived in the Global South for the past seven years, Bob can categorically state that his sense of smell pleasantly embraces the olfactory aura of various native floral displays—both natural and designed—throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. It is a very different apprehension to the tamping down of natural and organic smell and odor and fragrance found in much of North America. Yet, this simple (and stereotypical) binary—that of the pleasurable and the rank—does not work equally for all individuals in all time periods or all situations:

… these different odor locales created, in effect, an olfactory map, enabling city inhabitants to conceptualize their environment by way of smell, with notable concentrations of aromas around markets, food vendors, religious buildings, gardens, and other green spaces. Usually, as diverse as these sites may appear, such scent catalogs have further encouraged scholars to think of smells in terms of binaries, most famously the foul and the fragrant. (Reinharz, 2014, p. 179)

Indeed, Howes and Classen (2014) make a compelling case for “synaesthesia, the ‘union of the senses’” (p. 153). They argue that:

… synaesthesia is too multifaceted and too culturally important to be left solely to neuroscientists to define. We also hope, on the one hand, to encourage neuroscientists interested in sensory integration to take more account of
cultural factors, and, on the other, to stimulate historians, anthropologists and other scholars to look beyond, beside, and behind neurological models to explore the ways in which the senses—and sensory models—are shaped by culture. (p. 153)

Howes and Classen point out that neuroscience continues to theorize the “individual body or brain …” (p. 156), whereas their focus on the social body allows for a more integrative approach.

In synesthesia, smells may have color; sounds could be perceived visually (as an audio graphic equalizer may do); and so on: in essence, “traditional” (read: Western) dichotomies of the senses may be comprehended as much more integrated. This is a more holistic—neither deficit nor abundance—model of the capacity of human beings to apprehend the world in complex fashion.

The question of the boundaries of ‘sense’ and ‘the senses’ is an interesting one for ethnographers, in terms of the sensing itself, and also the documentation of that sensing. To consider first, documentation: with how much facility do we generally language even the western sensorium (taste, sight, smell, touch, sound)? As lisahunter and elke emerald explore in their explorations of sensory narrative (2015, 2016), our worlds are embodied and emplaced, yet, in the main, we are reduced to a limited language to express and communicate that world; as a small example, consider the language of odor: musky, putrid, pungent, camphoraceous, ethereal, floral and pepperminty; the language of the tactile (texture and temperature for example) and the haptic (kinesthetic information or a sense of position, motion and force) elements of touch.

As evident in CEAD and gathered in this book, there are ethnographers working on the boundaries of written/spoken language, using arts based and movement forms to research and represent sensory experience. Returning to the question of the senses themselves, lisahunter and elke emerald (2015, 2016) press us beyond the purely physical to consider the experience of senses, the qualities of experience; pleasure, pain, nostalgia, melancholy, joy and so on. How might we access these qualities, as an experience (for ourselves and participants) and how might we language these in effective and evocative ways, how might we consider them ‘data’ or ‘evidence’?

Further, elke emerald and Lorelei Carpenter (2015) ask us whether we can consider ‘emotion’ a documentable sense—both our ‘participants’ and our own. And can we use our own emotional senses as ‘data’ or ‘evidence,’ and how are we to document them? Can we as ethnographers, for example, understand intuition as a sense? The 3rd Contemporary Ethnography Across the Disciplines hui, was a site for researchers to examine ways of knowing through dance, photography, art, and aural, visual, gustatory, tactile, baresthesive, thermoreceptive, intuitive, proprioceptive (and many other) senses. As such, many presentations at the hui pushed at the boundaries of expression in the written and spoken word and also moved beyond the written or spoken word to engage senses through experiences such as performance, movement, sound, light and interactive painting. And here
now in the book, we have gathered some of these but confront again the challenges of linear written language as our primary means of representation. Even images are limited by aesthetic appreciation, publications costs, and dominant representations. So, for example, lisahunter’s experiential installation is rendered in to words and images, trying to retain some of the flavor of the anxiety and disquiet it stimulated (deliberately!) in hui delegates. And John Dahlsen’s art works are here conveyed mainly in words. Karen Barbour’s dance and Hoturoa Barclay-Kerr’s stories and pictures of navigating the Pacific Ocean were both deeply sensed and sensual experiences for the delegates. We can hope these rich sensory landscapes are revealed to some degree in these pages—but we retain the earmarks of a fascinating question: what is lost?

ABOUT THE BOOK

In seeking out authors from the 3rd biennial ‘Contemporary Ethnography across the Disciplines hui’ for this book we kept our scope broad to include ethnographic studies that took the sensory to more complex levels of interactivity. Cultural performances, re-enactments of historical emplacements, open-sea navigation, Colombian youth, women’s voice, the creative act: all these kinds of complex ways of knowing and perceiving, and enacting, the located world are logical expressions and embodiments of how humans sense the world.

Soyini Madison introduces Section 1: Emerging methods with her beautiful essay that explores the archetypal trickster that is performance ethnography. She delves into the felt-sensing experiences of fieldwork research enacted and translated both within the intimate, ethnographic spaces of everyday moments in the field, all at once filled with pleasure, politics, and beauty. The essay is a composite of selected stories from her work in Ghana. She shows us the courage, wisdom, and agency of local Ghanaians in their fight for personal, national, and transnational human rights. At the keynote from which this essay is drawn, the audience were transfixed by the performances—testament to the power and efficacy of storytelling as a mode of communication for social justice and for the voices, hearts, and minds of local people whose acts of courage and resistance too often go unnoticed by dominant western (and Northern Hemisphere) culture. Soyini juxtaposes stark, often painful political and social realities (e.g., ‘Water-borne diseases kill one child every eight seconds’) in stark contrast to tender and close moments of real lives and courageous small and large acts of resistance and defiance to power and authority.

Wendy Talbot turned to performance theory to bring her research findings to life, finding a way to bring un-humorous humor theory to an audience. She puts a personified Humor on the stage as five couples engage in a reflexive process of audiencing their own conversations. Wendy calls this process reflexive audiencing practice. Employing performance and presenting her chapter as a script we see some of the effects for couples who reflexively audience their own lives, and in particular the contribution(s) of Humor to this evolving process.
The research supervisory relationship can be an interesting one, especially given that it can intersect with collegial relationships, friendships and, in Katie Fitzpatrick and Esther Fitzpatrick’s case, even the discovery of a shared great-great-great grandfather! Katie and Esther found a way to communicate through poetry and art in their collegial and supervisory relationship. Katie and Esther explore this interesting and complex space of research supervision—and interconnectedness—through poetry in their chapter *Since feeling is first: Poetry and research supervision*. They wrote poems to each other ‘answering, conversing, building the work, the words, together.’ In this chapter, they invite us in to their world, asking us to extend our reading senses and understand their world through poetry, art, snippets of song and theory. These forms invite us to engage beyond intellectual rationalization in the crises, joys and ongoing journeying of Katie’s supervision of Esther’s thesis—and bring to bare some further insights into community building within the increasingly-instrumentalist academic world.

John Dahlsen is an environmental artist. His art protests reckless human destruction of this planet. He makes tactile art forms with ‘rubbish’ to convey statements about key environmental problems and the part played by global tycoons and policymakers in creating those problems. John himself suffered at the hands of these global tycoons when the economy plummeted as a result of the ‘global financial crisis.’ John’s livelihood was simply erased and he had to, in a sense, ‘re-invent’ himself. At the 2014 CEAD hui he spoke to his huge and magnificent digital prints of arts works created from human-created debris washed up on beaches. In *Environmental art: A creative response to economic catastrophe*, John takes us on his journey after the financial crash, using his beautiful sculpture to usher us in to his protest. He demonstrates the importance of ensuring the powerful voices of artists are not silenced during times of economic disaster, and in a rather amusing and ironic twist, reminds us that he now, again, makes a living critiquing the very society that he relies on for sales of his art work.

Hoturoa Barclay-Kerr (Aotearoa/NZ), sails into Section 2: Praxis—The sensory in lived worlds with his stories of the recovery of traditional knowledges of navigation by stars, wind and ocean. In his chapter “From myth and legend to reality: Voyages of rediscovery and knowledge” he provides some histories of Maori heroes ‘renowned for their courage and adventurous spirit.’ Epic tales of voyage and discovery were slowly relegated to the realm of myth and legend by western scholars and academics. However, these were no myths for the owners of these stories and Hoturoa has reclaimed these stories, reliving great voyages, navigating across the Pacific, by the stars, wind and currents in beautiful new waka.

Harmony Siganporia invites us into the ancient and fascinating world of Tibet. She chronicles the modern rendition of the traditional Tibetan Dekar—something like a medieval jester or bard (or modern-day standup comedian)—whose role is to provide ruthless commentary on society. The Dekar’s world was visceral, sensual and sensory. One description, from refugee camps—after the Dalai Lama’s 1959
exile—mitted the Dekar as a rowdy character, drunk and unkempt, living with and among the stray dogs: “he was revolting and teased and mocked by children. Yet on special occasions people would gather around when he, praying, singing, and jesting in ‘choicest turns of phrase’ would provide a merciless critique of both society and individuals.” In *From drunken-sage to artiste; The many lives of the Tibetan ‘Dekar,* we meet the Dekar, and Harmony recounts the life, and after life, of this Tibetan cultural institution and repository of folk memory and knowledges. This example of an embodied sensualist performing out on the streets, as a counter-hegemonic move to disrupt taken-for-granted hierarchies within culture, provides a holistic sensory experience for spectators and participants alike.

Rachel Lamdin Hunter and Kahurangi Dey then conjure for us, in scenes from another tumultuous, blackly comedic performance—the family dinner table. In evocative vignettes that will surely touch a nerve for many readers, we visit the supermarket with Rachel as she trails three hot and disgruntled children through the slow, painful and argumentative family grocery shopping. She must then endure cooking, the dinner debacle and cleaning—all at the end of her long work day. In *Mothers and food: Performing the family mealtime,* we engage affectively with the frustration, exhaustion and guilt of mothering, as expressed through the relentless expectation for mothers to provide and nurture in very particular, and nigh impossible, ways.

Emalani Case then invites us into another world of movement, song, poetry, and dance. Pehea ka ‘aha a kāua? How is our rope? *Ethnographic practices from behind, in front of, and in the ‘aha* lets us into the ways, as a child in Hawai‘i, she sang, chanted and danced stories of her people and her history through hula. Emalani asks us to engage with her truly embodied experience of dance. Some of those stories intertwine with the stories of the sacred art of canoe making—which, as a child, she was excluded from because of age and gender. She was separated from the men shaping the canoe by the ‘aha, a prickly coconut husk rope that encircled the thatched canoe house. The ‘aha kept her on the sidelines, bearing witness and even giving voice to story—but unable to take a step inside. Many years later, Emalani once again approached the ‘aha, but this time metaphorically. She contacted the men who had carved that beautiful twenty-six foot outrigger canoe and sat with them to hear their stories, and to laugh and cry, as they allowed her to peer into that space beyond the ‘aha once again. In some instances, they even let her move in front of the rope, into their circle. Emalani explores the complex researcher/participant dynamic through the metaphor of the ‘aha—negotiating ‘in’ and ‘out’ spaces, ‘in’ and ‘out’ knowledges, who has the right to speak and know and who has the honor of witnessing, recording and singing.

Karen Barbour opens *Section 3: Transformations in social justice* with her *Place responsive choreography and activism* in which she invites us in to sensory encounter with place, site and landscape to explore local issues of social justice and environmental activism and feminist choreography. Karen is a dance artist and researcher; as such, ethnographic and autoethnographic research has led her
to performance as a specific means to articulate her encounters with place through embodied expression and textual representation. In this chapter she shows how her site-specific dance ‘Whenua’ performed at the CEAD hui expanded beyond sensory encounter with the research process, spiraling inwards to encompass a sense of belonging and responsibility for local place, and also outwards to political, feminist communitarian engagement with issues of land contestation and spiritual, cultural, economic and environmental concerns.

Confusion, anxiety and distress swirled through lisahunter’s installation at the CEAD hui—as delegates entered the claustrophobic space, assailed by lights and sounds, the ‘spinning wheel of death’ hypnotized and a haunting voice sang us into the madness of the visceral frustrations of the digital world: the embodied tight helpless, hopeless anguish of yet another computer crash, yet another loss of data, in the midst of tight-to-breaking timelines and bleating demands from all quarters. In Spinning wheel very pretty: Cybridity and the cyborg academic, lisahunter recalls some of that for us through images and words.

In The heartlines in your hand: Writing autoethnography with Helene Cixous and Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth McKinlay, in poetic prose, poetry and cartoons, takes us with her on her bicycle to a café. She needs her coffee to ‘think well, love well, sleep well’ (Woolf, 1929, 18), and then, when her personified friend ‘Writing’ refuses to co-operate, we pedal again: ‘forever in motion, flying, writing, moaning, singing, gesturing, and daring.’ Elizabeth’s reverie as she rides takes her—and us—deep into her ethnography as she, “Pen flying, fervent, fighting against the futility,” wrestles through poetry, searching for the just the right words to situate herself, her people and their realities. She ponders and probes her roles across worlds as she resists

Using white power and privilege
To cross over under the guise of research
A woman about to make herself radically vulnerable
As the heartlines in her hand become her
Ethnography and education that doesn’t break your heart
Just isn’t worth doing anymore. (after Behar, 1996)

Finally we arrive in her academic playground and converse with Elizabeth’s mentors and motivators Helene Cixous and Virginia Woolf as Writing skips and plays and giggles. The world Elizabeth invites us into is playfully wrought, but challenges us to engage thoughtfully, and even mindfully, with our own relationships to ethnography, Writing, and the people in our ethnographic worlds and beyond.

We credit Antonio Garcia for editing and introducing Section 4: The sensual in Latin America: Writing in the Boundary between Spanish and English. In Foreign and yours: Writing in the boundary between Spanish and English, Antonio chronicles the work CEAD has done to respond to the overwhelming predominance of presenters coming from, in his terms, the “British sphere” by launching Days in Te Reo and in Spanish and Portuguese at the 2012 and 2014 hui, respectively.
Participating scholars came for the Day in Spanish and Portuguese from France, Australia, Brazil, Chile and Colombia. Antonio points out that, in having these pre-conference days and publishing in non-English languages, CEAD quite deliberately problematizes the supremacy of ‘English’ as the academic *lingua franca*, noting that the predominance of English is one paradigmatic expression of colonization in the academy/ies.

Similarly, Antonio reminds us that CEAD is characterized by deliberately mixing fields—fields that are traditionally and formally separated. As a founding member of the Association for CEAD, he points out that the conference seeks to overcome the notion of ethnography as a technique historically rooted in anthropology, challenging the traditional boundaries between different disciplines. And these are keys to the richness of the CEAD Association, the hui and the publications. As well, though, Antonio challenges us to problematize the ‘Day in …’ formulae and find ways to allocate spaces and times for the British sphere to also “consider their own ethnographic production as part of a broader world, thinking about their own ethnographic practices and what distinguish and connect them to other cultural spheres.” This would, in his opinion, strengthen CEAD as a space of confluence of different voices and would bolster the “main” conference as a space of encounter for diverse cultural perspectives. The papers in this section, accordingly, situate us in the problem/opportunity of translation. The authors use new approaches to ethnographic writing to describe the unique perceptions and emotions that the cultural “immersion” they try to undertake carries.

Pamela Zapata-Sepúlveda is a Chilean ethnographer who moved from her city in Chile to the academic sphere in the US. In *My “Third World” in three words: Performative writing from the perspective of a Latin-American woman*, she describes the challenges she confronts as she herself uses Academic English as a second language. She delineates and interprets her work encountering Colombian refugee women, who arrive, often on foot, with only what they can carry. They often bear the physical scars of a suffering witnesses can only imagine—of trauma and persecution, of fear and dislocation—for those who hope to find safety and opportunity in Chile.

For Pamela, this chapter is itself an act of resistance and transgression as she laments the pressures of ‘publish or perish,’ and the dangers of such resistance. She also uses her writing to engage with undergraduate students and give them a space to hear themselves in their explorations of political life in Chile. At the heart of Pamela’s chapter is an autoethnographic poem, written in the 3-word style that Lauren Richardson shared at the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (2014). This poem, “So that nobody knows that I’m running away; so that nobody knows that I want to stay,” came from Pamela’s work in a support program for Colombian refugee women and its poignancy invites us into their world.

In *Passing’ and ‘failing’ in Latin America: Methodological reflections on lingualcultural identity*, Phiona Stanley bases her ethnography on a series of random encounters in different Latin-American countries: Mexico, Cuba, Colombia,
Phiona questions what she sees as the assumptions underlying many contemporary language programs: that intercultural contact necessarily results in intercultural competence. We travel with her as she “passes” and “fails to pass”—sitting in cafes, riding on busses, going to the market and sitting a Spanish test. We feel with her as she yearns for her ‘Spanishness’ to prevail and experiences delight when she is mistaken for a Mexican.

Autoethnography has become a proving ground for drawing us to embodied and emplaced experience. In Section 5, *Autoethnographic voices in the global south*, Fetaui Iosefo and Melissa Carey help us understand some of the idiosyncratic ethnographic experiences within their worlds. As well, we see and can imagine their work between various worlds.

In dual texts of narrative and analysis and in poetry, Fetaui speaks to us with three voices: Fetaui the narrator; Jerodeen the academic analyzer; and, JOFI the poet. These incarnations are represented through writing in three paired texts of narrative and analysis; and in three poems. In her chapter, *Who is eye? An autoethnographic view on higher educational spaces from a Pasifika girl*, Fetaui, Jerodeen, and JOFI take us on Fetaui’s journey as a ‘Pasifika girl,’ navigating her way through the institutional spaces of higher education. With her, we live the horror of helplessly watching a tsunami ravage her home and people in Samoa, confined as she was in another country. Together, Fetaui, Jerodeen, and JOFI create a Pasifika conception of third space (Bhabha, 1994) as a means to analyze culture alongside physical and social spaces within higher education as well as the Pasifika girl’s life beyond higher education.

Melissa Carey too, negotiates different (and sometimes contested) worlds, moving between a colonized world, *te ao Māori* (the Māori world) and the spirit world, *te pō*. In *The transformative experiences of cultural healing: An autoethnography of Kaupapa Māori*, Melissa takes us with her as she heals a rupture she didn’t know existed. Raised in Australia and now in her mid-thirties, family secrets start to unravel and Melissa discovers “a brown secret hidden beneath [her] white skin.” Her forgotten ancestors call her to action, and so begins her journey of healing. This chapter locates the inexplicable and the haunting within cultures that seemingly rely upon certainty and surety.

The book closes, with a panel discussion. Holly Thorpe chaired a discussion between keynote presenters D. Soyini Madison, Karen Barbour and Hoturoa Barclay-Kerr. You might do well to read this chapter first. The discussion draws on the themes that arose for delegates and captures the spirit of the gathering. Soyini, Karen and Hoturoa describe how the sensual plays throughout their work, as research that is embodied, performed, and tangible. In this chapter Soyini, Karen and Hoturoa converse about the sensual in their own work, navigating their approach to and dissemination of ethnographic research and the fruitful collaborations of the sensual and embodied and the technological.

We have kept the chapter in transcript-style, tidying up the differences between spoken and written text just a little, as that captures the immediacy and texture of...
the conversations. Karen describes how, as a dancer with a particular commitment to somatic inquiry, she holds the felt sense of her cellular breathing simultaneously with her sense of empathetic relationship as she creates dance works that are both research process and research text. Soyini shares her inspiration in the work of the sensual ethnographers at the hui and puts in to words for us how the embodied and sensual was so elegantly expressed in the work of the dancers at the hui. Hoturoa describes how the young sailors he takes to sea to learn the ways of navigation by stars and ocean come to sense that world through their bodies and see themselves as researchers, creating texts of song and dance as forms that enable them to learn and store indigenous knowledge practices for the future.

The panel closes with Soyini’s prompt for us to move into the future with careful consideration of the ways that technology cuts both ways. New technologies both enhance our lived experience and our research and yet may minimize, discard, and disrespect our senses. She asks us to engage in this conversation and squarely face the inherent contradictions of new technologies.

The 3rd biennial Contemporary Ethnography Across the Disciplines hui was a varied, rich and deep encounter with sensual landscapes. Delegates came away refreshed and recommitted to exploring the methodological and theoretical edges of research. But this volume, where expanded versions of their delivered papers are put forth as exemplars of the work being done in contemporary ethnography, demonstrates deeper reflection and reflexivity on the part of the authors. Though not exhaustive, these chapters offer something of the spirit of sensual ethnography in many forms and nuances.

NOTES
1 For more information regarding the bi-annual CEAD conferences, please go to www.cead.org.nz
2 For positivists and some post-positivists, relating to the senses as discrete “variables” that can be studied separate from the totality of the human sensory experience remains a possibility. For others, it is wise to look at sensory apprehension, capturing, engagement in a more holistic manner. The former tends toward descriptive discussion of senses; the latter tends toward examination of contexts, patterns, logics.
3 There are, of course, studies looking at how non-human species interact with the world. These works are largely steeped in the earth sciences, including biology, botany, zoology. Such examinations, while useful both philosophically and pragmatically, are beyond the scope of this volume.

REFERENCES


SECTION 1
EMERGING METHODS
This essay will discuss the embodied praxis of ethnography and how the felt-sensing experiences of fieldwork research are enacted and translated both within the intimate, ethnographic spaces of those everyday moments in the field that are all at once filled with pleasure, politics, and beauty. Those qualitative researchers who dare to transform data into symbol, metaphor, and embodied knowledge traverse territories and spaces to attempt the impossible: they show us how narration still matters by making utopian imaginaries into a politics of the real, a materiality of the flesh, a consequential action of effects. Like the archetypal trickster the performance ethnographer turns things upside down for pleasure, beauty, and purpose to create something new and different across publics, large and small, hidden and spectacular, to communicate the complexities and the theatrical gravitas of fieldwork praxis. The essay will examine the acts and intentions of interpretation as a project of storytelling and the senses at the service of illuminating histories, of critically engaging structures of feeling, and of digging up the hidden abodes underneath political economies that would deny the fact of imagining and performing the (im)possible.

Performance ethnography across narration and the senses requires what the jazz artist Dianne Reeves calls forth in her brilliant composition, entitled, Bridges. It requires us to: “Be Still, Stand in Love, and Pay Attention.” It shows us our relationship to objects in the lived experience of inhabiting a body. The body is an organism that encounters other organisms, e.g., monuments, borders, rivers, or other humans. It shows us how space and place are not simply containers where we must reside in our social relation but how space directs our destiny, our Truth, our possibilities. It shows us the human sensorium and how our senses register and are registered by nearness and distance (what we hold dear and what we cast out) how we inhabit and enter realms of desire and disgust, peace and violence, freedom and un-freedom.

SENSORY ETHNOGRAPHY IN FOUR STORIES

Understanding that Performance is embossed—it brings to light—it magnifies and manifest symbolic importance, I would like to share Four ethnographic moments from my field work in Ghana excerpted from my book Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance.
Mother and Child: A Ritual of Caring

I remember one day I had just left the market. I was standing at the trotro stop trying to get back home. It was so hot that day. I could hardly breathe and nothing could quench the thirst. Every trotro that passed by was filled with people packed together, crushed inside, trying to get where they needed to go—a stream of dilapidated, old vans full of exhaust fumes, sweaty bodies, overbearing heat, and smells of every sort. Everything felt so crowded and so dirty that day. I was hot and tired and missing my home in the US and feeling very much like the Ugly American.

Dirt is a fact of material and political conditions, but too often it is cast as a moral flaw. The World Health Organization’s daily requirement for water is 20–40 liters a day per person. In Ghana for those without a piped water system, purchasing three buckets or eighteen liters of water a day costs between 10 and 20 percent of their average daily income.

As I waited, hoping a trotro would stop where I could squeeze into one empty seat and get back to the quiet and solitude of my home, I looked down the road a bit, and saw a woman sitting over a bucket of soapy water. There was a child at her feet, she undressed the child and then placed him in the bucket of water. She bathed the child in the public market place … “quiet and solitude” for her is a different reality than it is for me. I was transfixed by what was more than just a woman bathing a child outside on a hot day, but how the ordinary—how the day to day—is so strong and healthy and impeccably resistant against the facts of its own reality.

Water-borne diseases kill one child every eight seconds.

As I watched the woman and child, suddenly, an old man, appearing to be mad—his hair matted, with very dirty clothes and half dressed—walked up to the woman. Without the least concern, she simply brushed him away with a wave of her hand and continued to bathe the child. He then, undeterred, stumbled toward the bucket and began to take off his clothes while attempting to step into the soapy water. Immediately, two young men standing next to me at the trotro stop quickly walked over to the old man and with such sincere gentleness and gracious respect, helped the old man put his clothes on and guided him back down the road.

In south-Saharan Africa, 70 percent of deaths and diseases are due to the lack of clean and accessible water. The majority of women and children in rural areas travel miles in the morning and evening for water that remains infected with-water-borne diseases.

The woman paying no mind to the old man … no mind to anyone or anything else—kept her willful attention on her child and their ritual. This small moment, in a small, crowded space of heat, sweat; -and- smell was claimed—taken back—by a Water Rite between mother and child. Pristine, Real and Resistant. Kweku will come. I will
eventually find water today. And this search over time will come again, and again, and it will eventually become another, a different kind, of Water Rite. But, I wonder sometimes about the old man.

Story Two

_The Plantain Seller and the Greedy Man_

I went for my usual morning walk down the road in East Legon for roasted plantain and groundnuts. There was no sidewalk, so during the morning traffic I navigated between the street and the kiosks lining the road. As women carried large baskets on their heads with various items for sale, their babies wrapped in cloth around their backs, they balanced between the edge of the road, the open sewers, and the heavy traffic. These women rushed alongside moving cars as drivers hurriedly paid for their goods in the moving traffic: plantain chips, water, fruit, bread, nuts, linens, cookware, assortments of snacks and candies, and more. As I approached the woman’s kiosk where I usually purchased my morning plantain and ground nuts, a speeding car suddenly stopped in front of her plantain stand and startled me. The car was big, shiny, and black with flashy wheels, tinted windows, and a sticker on the back window that read “Buy American Rice.” The force of the car, inches away, also startled a young woman passing along the road and almost knocked her and her child into the gutter, but a boy quickly caught the woman and child and saved them from falling. A Ghanaian man got out of the big shiny black car and, without apology or concern for anyone, walked boldly up to the plantain stand, pulled out a bunch of money, and pointed to the plantain of his choice. The woman selling the plantain ignored him as though he were air. The man, annoyed by being ignored, raised his voice and demanded the plantain. The woman calmly ignored him. With a heavy, angry voice, the man began casting insults upon her. The woman, unaffected, continued to turn over each plantain against the burning coals. By this time all eyes were on the shouting man, who looked as though he was about to implode, and the small woman attending to her plantain, who refused to acknowledge his presence. The man was embarrassed. He began to shout louder, he moved closer to the woman, but, still undeterred, she kept turning her plantain and then began to softly hum a tune. The man pointed his finger to threaten her and came in closer as though he were about to strike her, and in that volatile moment the other women at their kiosk along the road—the paw paw, pineapple, and tomato sellers—with knives in hand surrounded the angry man. The man stepped back with a mixture of surprise and fear and in a grand huff quickly returned to his shiny car making threats about “stupid women” and how he was “going to come back and teach them a lesson.” Everyone laughed as the man sped off cursing, fist shaking out of the car window, and the

“Buy American Rice”

faded away down the road.

I asked the woman selling pineapple: “Do you think he will come back?”
In clear English she said, “Let him come back. Foolish man! We are not afraid of stupid men. Let him come!”

The woman selling the plantain laughed and said: “Ehh! These women in Ghana here! It is a new day!”

I bought my plantain and asked her name.
She smiled and said her name was Cecilia.
Her teenage daughter, dressed in a school uniform, walked up to the kiosk and greeted her mother. The girl just missed the angry man and his big shiny car. She sat down behind the kiosk and took out a red notebook from her bag and began writing.
“You look like you are concentrating very hard,” I said to the girl.
She looked up with a pleasant smile and in a shy voice said: “I am writing a story about my mother.”

Among the papers in her school bag was a small white book:
“The Women’s Manifesto for Ghana.”
“Is that your school book in your bag?” I asked.
Before the girl spoke, her mother said: “I gave it to her—she reads very well and works very hard in school. She reads to us.”
“Do you like the book?”
“Yes, Madame,” said the girl.
The mother looked over at her daughter and turned to me. “I go to the meetings for women in Ghana here. I go. I teach my daughter.”

Story Three

World Water Forum

One of the first people I went to see when I got to Accra was Al-Hassan Adam, a long-time friend and a water and environmental activist. I met him in his office at Civic Response. Al-Hassan sat at his desk during our conversation and began by describing what first inspired his commitment to social justice.

“It was music. The music. Listening to Bob Marley shaped my ideas on society. It’s all about the totality of the music,” he said.
“It begins with Bob Marley…”
“If you listen to Bob Marley’s Talkin’ Blues, it’s all about complete struggle: He talks about freedom fighters and, when they come, who is going to stand up. I mean Talkin’ Blues is a whole picture. It’s a complete picture of living a life of resistance. It’s inspiring.” Al-Hassan then expanded on the idea of drama relative to social justice by recounting a different place and time: the international stage at the 2003 World Water Council in Kyoto, Japan. Al-Hassan attended the forum to represent Ghana and its coalition against water privatization. There was scheduled to be a very important keynote presentation given by the former IMF Managing Director. The representative was scheduled to launch a report that basically explained, according to Al-Hassan, “how to finance water.” The report was intended to focus on “how the private sector can now go to public funds and then use public funds to finance
water.” There were anti-privatization activists from all over the world—Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the United States—who, when they found out in advance about the report, decided they must do something about it. Al-Hassan said, “We were really a rainbow.” On the eve of the keynote address, the activists held their own meeting and decided to protest the World Bank report.

“How were all of you going to protest against the report?” I asked.

“In the big meeting where the report was to be given, there were going to be high officials and important people. It was organized by the World Water Council. One of the Japanese ministers for water was there, the South African minister for water and forest, ministers and development ministers, and everybody was there who is supposed to matter—the water chief executives, water activists, water technocrats—everybody was going to be there. So we, activists had to dress well so we could get into the hall and not look suspicious. We did not want them to be aware of our plan.”

“So you dressed up like them, and it was a disguise so they wouldn’t recognize all of you as activists?” I asked.

“Exactly! We made ‘lie meters’ to stage our protest. We hid them under our coats so, as we entered the hall, no one could see them.”

I was amused. “Lie meters?”

“Yes,” said Al-Hassan. “The lie meters were made out of cardboard … we painted a red, orange, and brown arc. Attached to the bottom of the Meter were small bells. There were about five of us who went into the hall with the lie meters under our coats. We stood in five different sections so that we would be at strategic points in the room. When the World Bank fellow read his report and each time he told a lie, all of us would shake the meter and point the arrow in the direction of one of the colors. For the small lies, the meter would shake and go to brown; for the bigger lies, the meter would shake and go to yellow; for the biggest lies, the meter would shake and go to red. We had a fellow who signaled the color and the time to point in order to be sure we were all shaking at the same time and on the same point. One of the protestors would shine a light on him; he would then signal us to shake and move the meter on a color. All five of us would move the meter at the same time and on the same color.”

“Did anyone try to stop you? Did the speaker try to stop you?” Al-Hassan shook his head, “No, he couldn’t. He was shocked. They all were absolutely shocked.”

“Did he finish his speech?” I asked.

“He started to fumble. The Japanese minister tried to persuade us to stop. We said we must speak to the issues. We spoke into the microphones and began asking questions and speaking to the issues of privatization. We had six people stationed and there were two mikes: three people at one side of the mike and three people on the other side of the mike. We really prepared and did our homework for this. We knew what we were doing. We had met and we had planned and rehearsed our presentation very carefully. We let them know that all of us there … we represent so many people and you people are not representing anybody anymore on this count of lies. We want to have a dialogue—we did not come here to just listen to a report
being read to us. After all, this report took one year to prepare, and this is the first time we are hearing it, so we want a dialogue. They said they would give us fifteen minutes! ‘We are giving you fifteen minutes.’ We said, ‘You can’t use one year to write a report and give us fifteen minutes to respond to it; so this is not fair and this is not democratic! We denounce this meeting and we denounce your report! We don’t recognize your report!’”

“This was a historic moment,” I said. “What happened next?”

“We had two big banners that said, “People Before Profit!” and “Water Cannot Be Sold!” We went to the stage and covered the front of the stage with the banners and we started chanting ‘Water for life, not for profits.’ And then we just covered the whole platform. Nobody sees them again.”

The performance at the World Water Forum was powerful because it was tactical at several levels. First, it relied heavily on surprise for its effectiveness. Surprise held a twofold purpose: it was both maneuver to assure the activists would get into the space of the hall, and it was also a means to shock and therefore to bring greater attention to themselves. Surprise also served as an important device because it added to the quality of spectacle by startling and jolting the audience. To enact surprise is to harness attention. You can hardly look away at a surprise. When you are jolted, your attention is focused and captured by the jolt. They needed to shock the audience into an entirely unexpected register and mode of attention, quite different from what was happening before they entered the hall. Without this initial shock, it would have been more difficult to punctuate the moment. As Al-Hassan stated, the activists wanted the “big shots” attending the meeting to be caught “unawares” to ironically provoke them into the greatest possible awareness of their presence.

Second, in succeeding to surprise the audience, the element of shock was complemented by a theatrics of inversion. The group of activists literally created a reversal of positions relative to controlling the discourse of water privatization and how that discourse was now framed. The gentleman from the World Bank who represents the most powerful economic institution in the world was now usurped by people who most likely will never possess, control, or manage an iota of the amount of capital he dealt with at the Bank. The tenacity and will of the activists displaced the speaker in an act where subaltern voices silenced—in a particular moment in time—a voice from the high ground of world finance. This inversion that contributed to “globalization from below” was no small inversion maneuver. The tactic also inverted the form and content of the discourse from speaker—audience to agitprop performance happening, full of the theatrics of costume, props, cues, dramatic effect, and the passion to reverse and reinvent power arrangements.

Third, inversion was enabled by design—a well-conceived plan for a specific function and purpose. The performance was methodically arranged: from the coordination of what would be worn, the graphics of the “lie meter,” the synchronization of the ringing bells, the timing of the flashlight cues, to the climactic moment of mounting the stage and dropping the banner to literally and figuratively mask the panel as they “disappeared” from sight and hearing under the excessive
appearance and boldness of the banner as both prop and signification of “water cannot be sold.”

The event and its components of surprise, inversion, and design transformed a diverse group of internationalist activists into a momentary community of mutually empowering comrades. The privatization ideology, by the sheer force of the performance, was suspended, relinquishing the last word to the activists. The event unleashed the possibility of more performance from below to be remembered and revived.

Story Four

He Has NO Fear

Kwesi Pratt is a controversial media commentator, a grassroots organizer, a renowned social justice activist, and former president of the Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana. He is a member of the Ghana Socialist Forum and founding editor of the independent newspaper, *The Insight*, which is noted as a bold voice against local corruption and corporate greed. Kwesi was imprisoned as a result of his political activism and for, in his words, “striving every day to be a socialist.” When I asked him what that meant, he said: “It is the unwavering belief and practice that no one on this planet should be starving for food and in want of shelter and that every human being is worthy of respect and dignity.” I asked Kwesi if there was one incident in his long career as an activist that he could never forget. Kwesi recounted a public protest (while under a military regime and before multiple political parties were established in Ghana) that he led in 1986 at the Old Ghana House in Accra against the system of military rule.

“We called him Choirmaster. He was inspiring. He was a performer. He composed songs but many of the songs were spontaneous. Choirmaster had been with us for a long, long time. He was an activist and he liked to express himself through songs. He would break into a song in a meeting and people would sing. He was with us singing and inspiring the crowd on this particular day. There must have been about 100 to 150 of us. When we arrived at the Old Ghana House in Accra the policemen far outnumbered us. We were surprised. We didn’t expect so many. They were lined up waiting for us. When there became the possibility of violence, we asked our comrades to sit in the street and block the traffic. So everybody sat down. One of the police officers spoke through a megaphone and said they were giving us a count of three to leave. If we did not leave on the count of three, we would all be under fire. And then the policeman started counting. We were all face-to-face with the guns as he started counting. But something happened. I don’t know how it happened. He counted one, and by the time he counted two, I started walking toward the police. I don’t know what made me stand up and start walking. I didn’t think about it. It just happened. I just walked towards the police. I spoke to the
policeman who was in charge of the rest. I don’t really remember what I said. I think I told him the people there could be their brothers, their fathers, their mothers, their sisters. I think I told him they have nothing in common with the people in power. I think I told him that if he gave the orders to shoot, he would bear full responsibility for their deaths. I walked back to the crowd and sat down with my comrades. Then, the police officer gave the order … and I heard him shout ‘Charge.’ But, not one policeman moved. Not one moved. Not one policeman fired a gun. I cannot explain it to this day. I have no words for it. I will never forget it. It was incredible.”

Could it be that “it was incredible” because the police yielded to the theatricality of their countrymen sitting down, quiet and still, in the middle of one of the busiest, most crowded streets in Accra and this act of peaceful defiance moved them to pity or empathy or fear? Could it be that the police yielded to the theatricality of Kwesi Pratt, the man known in Ghana for “having no fear,” walking alone toward them—their guns pointing—because too great an affective energy, too poignant a bodily presence stopped them and their own musculature from advancing upon this man and his comrades to pull the triggers of their guns? Kwesi said he heard the head policeman shout “Charge.” To “charge” is very significant here because to “charge” operates through the disciplinary command of the head policeman as well as the inspired performance led by the choirmaster. To “charge” is to “go forth,” “authorize,” “enable,” and “empower.” Kwesi places the “Choirmaster” at the beginning of the narrative and characterizes his songs as being a source of inspiration. Protest songs and protest performances—as throughout the history of civil disobedience they both generate and are generated by acts of activism all over the world—function as a “charge” of inspiration, of motivation, and of energy. Could it be that the choirmaster’s inspired performances, and the affective energy they helped to generate, were a factor in why the police did not shoot? The choirmaster and the head policeman both enacted “charge.” By examining the notion of “charge,” the force of the choirmaster’s inspirational action against the “incredible” non-action of the police comes into focus, especially as it relates to the significance of performance. The choirmaster inspired and therefore contributed to the determination of the dissenters to sit in the middle of the street and of Kwesi Pratt to walk alone toward rows of armed officers. The charge resulting in the inspiring performances directed by the choirmaster for his comrades became a greater force than the charge commanded by the head policeman to his armed officers. When the head policeman shouted “Charge” to the armed men, the dissenters were already charged by a force of determination and purpose that seemed to usurp the charge of a punishing authority and a disciplinary power. Kwesi’s narrative illustrates another form of performance, punctuating and circling, through the manners and modes of social protests that raise the question of humankind being naturally wired to perform. Could it be that the choirmaster tapped into both inspiration and biology? Whether it was from his standard repertoire and/or created within that improvisational moment,
whether it was neurological and/or philosophical, the Choirmaster became a source of energy and motivation by keeping bodies and souls in step and on the move until it was time to sit still in the street. The Choirmaster and inspired performance charged justice and justice charged inspired performance, evolving into an act that was “incredible” and leaving us under its ineffable wonder: “I cannot explain it to this day,” “I have no words for it.”