


SENSORY DECAY SYMPOSIUM



2-3 NOVEMBER 2023
ONLINE

 UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM
Amsterdam School of Heritage, Memory
and Material Culture

ROOTS
cluster of excellence

PROGRAM

DAY 1 (ONLINE)

INTRODUCTION

16:00

BY PAMELA JORDAN & SARA MURA

SENSING DECAY IN A CONSTRUCTED ENVIRONMENT IS A MULTISENSORY EXPERIENCE. THE STAGES OF DECAY CAN BE TRANSITORY AND EVER-CHANGING. THE SENSORY COMPLEXITY OF DECAY MAY BE ADDED TO OR CONFUSED BY CONCURRENT PROCESSES OF REMAKING, REBUILDING, AND RENEWAL. THE SYMPOSIUM AIMS TO CONSIDER HOW WE CAN ISOLATE AND RECORD THE SIGHTS, SOUNDS, TASTES, AND SMELLS OF DECAY WITHIN THE CONTINUUM OF DETERIORATION. IN TANDEM, WE SEEK TO RECOGNIZE HOW PARTICULAR SENSORY ASPECTS OF DECAY MAY PROMPT CULTURAL RESPONSES AND ACTIONS - THIS COULD INCLUDE THE AESTHETICIZATION OF ARCHITECTURAL RUINS, FOR INSTANCE. OUR SENSES ALSO PROVIDE TOOLS TO ANALYSE THE PRESENCE OF DECAY AND ITS TEMPORAL STAGES, FOR EXAMPLE, IN MATERIAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION. A PARTICULAR METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGE IS HOW WE, AS MULTI-DISCIPLINARY SENSORY ANALYSTS, CAN RECORD OUR OWN NUMEROUS BUT FAST DECAYING EXPERIENCES AS AVENUES TO QUESTIONING AND INTERPRETING THE PAST.

All times CET (Amsterdam, NL)



SESSION I

INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE AND SENSORY DECAY

SENSORY EXPERIENCE IS FLEETING AND DECAYS VERY RAPIDLY. AS IN MODERN LIFE, OUR ANCESTORS EXPERIENCED SENSATIONS IN ALL ASPECTS OF EVERYDAY LIVING. THESE INCLUDE WHILST MAKING ITEMS SUCH AS POTS OR TEXTILES, USING TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT, WALKING IN THE STREETS OR THE MORE OPEN SPACES OF THE LANDSCAPE AND IN MORE INTIMATE SETTINGS SUCH AS SANCTUARIES AND THE HOME. THIS SESSION BRINGS TOGETHER RESEARCHERS ENGAGING WITH THE EPHEMERAL AND INDIVIDUAL NATURE OF THESE SENSATIONS.

CHAIR: JANE LAWRENCE, DURHAM UNIVERSITY

NATHEN FAIR (GHENT UNIVERSITY)

16:20

SENSING AND BODIES: EPHEMERAL AND INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES OR NOT?

LOUISE STEEL (UNIVERSITY OF WALES: TRINITY ST. DAVID)

16:45

HOUSEHOLD PRAXIS AND SENSORIAL ENGAGEMENTS WITH POTTERY IN LATE BRONZE AGE CYPRUS

YONCA ATABAY (TILLBURG UNIVERSITY)

17:10

EXPLORING IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCEPTANCE OF HAPTIC GLOVES IN MIXED REALITY FOR ARTEFACTS IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS

GROUP DISCUSSION

17:35

All times CET (Amsterdam, NL)

SESSION II

ENGAGING THE SENSES IN EVOLVING CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

THIS SESSION GOES BEYOND THE HISTORIC FABRIC OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AND RECOGNIZES THE INEVITABLE CHANGE AND DECAY THAT OCCURS AS HISTORIC PROPERTIES AGE AND EVOLVE. AS WE MOVE TOWARDS A MORE HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF HISTORIC PLACES AS COMPLEX CULTURAL LANDSCAPES, PRACTITIONERS ARE INTRODUCING APPROACHES THAT PRIORITIZE MULTI-SENSORY EXPERIENCES AS VEHICLES FOR BUILDING DEEPER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND PLACE.

CHAIR: GRETCHEN HILYARD BOYCE,
GROUNDWORK PLANNING AND PRESERVATION

SESSION RESPONDENT: CAITLIN DESILVEY,
UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

HEE SOOK LEE-NIINIOJA
(INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR)

18:15

PERCEPTUAL-TEMPORAL SENSORY DECAY-
LIVING EXPERIENCES IN REALITY AND
VIRTUALITY AT THE KOREAN
DEMILITARISED ZONE (DMZ)

**JOEL SANTOS (UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER), JOÃO SEQUEIRA (UNIVERSITY
OF MINHO – IHC – CSIS NOVA), TÂNIA
MANUEL CASIMIRO (HTC-CFE NOVA |
UNIVERSITY OF LISBON)**

18:40

FROM COD TO DECAY: FEELING THE
FACTORY

**COMMENTS BY CAITLIN DESILVEY
(UNIVERSITY OF EXETER)
AND GROUP DISCUSSION**

19:05

All times CET (Amsterdam, NL)

DAY 2 (ONLINE)

INTRODUCTION

BY PAMELA JORDAN & SARA MURA

15:00

SESSION III

SNIFFING OUT DECAY

THE ODOURS OF DECAY ARE UNDER-EXPLORED IN ARCHAEOLOGY AND HERITAGE. THIS SESSION PRESENTS PAPERS ON THE SMELLS ASSOCIATED WITH DECOMPOSITION; VARIOUSLY REGARDED AS MALODOROUS, DISTINCTIVE, OR ACCEPTABLE/POSITIVE.

CHAIR: SUE HAMILTON, UCL INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY, UK

ROSE MALIK (DURHAM UNIVERSITY)

15:20

SCENTING THE PAST: FINDING ANCIENT SMELL IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL REMAINS

CECILIA BEBIBRE & GEORGIOS ALEXOPOULOS (UCL INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE HERITAGE)

15:45

EXPLORING MALODOURS: THE SMELL OF DECAY AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR HERITAGE INTERPRETATION

ROBERT KIRKBRIDE (PARSONS SCHOOL OF DESIGN + PRESERVATIONWORKS)

16:10

THE SCENT OF KIRKBRIDE PLAN ASYLUMS AND THE DECAY OF AMERICAN MENTAL HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURES

ROBYN PRICE (BROWN UNIVERSITY)

16:35

LIFE SCENTS AND MUMMIFICATION IN ANCIENT EGYPT

GROUP DISCUSSION

17:00

All times CET (Amsterdam, NL)



SESSION IV
OPEN SESSION

PRESENTATIONS ON THE THEME OF SENSORY DECAY THAT DO NOT OTHERWISE FIT INTO ONE OF THE STRUCTURED SESSIONS.

CHAIRS: PAMELA JORDAN, UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM & SARA MURA, KIEL UNIVERSITY

NEHA KHETRAPAL, JINDAL INSTITUTE OF BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE, O.P. JINDAL GLOBAL UNIVERSITY **17:40**

THE VISIBLE OUTER AND RESURRECTED SENSATIONS WITHIN ANCIENT HINDU TEMPLES

MARIA LORD (UNIVERSITY OF WALES TRINITY ST. DAVID) **18:05**

THE PROBLEM OF SHIFTING BASELINE SYNDROME IN CAPTURING THE SENSORY EXPERIENCES OF PAST ENVIRONMENTS

MELISSA GREY & DAVID MORNEAU (THE NEW SCHOOL) **18:30**

SOUNDING THE ASYLUM

GROUP DISCUSSION **18:55**

FINAL DISCUSSION **19:15**

All times CET (Amsterdam, NL)

ABSTRACTS

SESSION I INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE AND SENSORY DECAY

NATHEN FAIR, GHENT UNIVERSITY

SENSING AND BODIES: EPHEMERAL AND INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES OR NOT?

This paper explores how new understandings from multidisciplinary fields can inform a new framework, and application of that framework, which positions sense experiences as not as individuated nor as being consistently ephemeral and decaying.

The late twentieth century saw increasing interest in the senses across the humanities and social sciences, including archaeology and cultural heritage. Initially, sensory approaches accepted somewhat uncritically the Aristotelian five senses model, deeply embedded in Western tradition. However, over time sensory archaeologists began to break with this frame and adopt broader, more critical, and diverse understandings of the senses, founded in neurobiology, anthropology, and phenomenology.

Nevertheless, despite a 'sensory turn', adoption of sensory archaeological techniques remains limited, due in large part to concerns regarding the ability of sensory methods to produce 'objective', persistently valuable knowledge. Among the challenges to the value and objectivity of sensorily-focused research methods is the assumed decay of individual sense experience over time. This decay leads researchers to question the legitimacy of recalled experience as a source of 'objective' knowledge. As a result, the impact of sensory experiences has been somewhat constrained to communicating research to wider audiences rather than embedding them as key tools in the archaeological research process.

This paper suggests that these concerns can be responded to by adopting a new theoretical frame which reconceptualises both the nature of sense experience and knowledge production to meaningfully respond to questions regarding 'objectivity' and to deflect criticism related to sensory decay.

At the heart of these criticisms is the largely unsupported assumption that the individual human observer (even when enmeshed in a cultural context) is above or outside the experience itself. This implies sense experiences that are ephemeral and individuated, limiting our ability to effectively employ methodologies which are sensorially informed. Building on the work of Bohr, Barad, and Hamilakis the new frame proposed by this paper rejects this assumption.

This new frame understands the human body as 'being-from-the-world' – sensorially enmeshed in the "dynamic topological reconfigurings/entanglements/relationalities/(re)articulations of the world." What we research then becomes part of the way we research, and so our ontological unit shifts to the phenomenon instead of an individual aspect, object, or subject. We create through our research the specific boundaries which we are then measuring or observing, not subject to individualised sensory decay.

This paper then presents a practical application intended to explore the utility of Extended Reality (XR) technology for research within the new frame, through the establishment of a XR laboratory and experience assessment method, building on existing research as well as integrating this proposed framework.

LOUISE STEEL, UNIVERSITY OF WALES TRINITY ST. DAVID

HOUSEHOLD PRAXIS AND SENSORIAL ENGAGEMENTS WITH POTTERY IN LATE BRONZE AGE CYPRUS

This paper explores the transient and ephemeral traces and "fast decaying experiences" of people's daily sensorial engagement with pottery in Late Bronze Age Cyprus as means of interpreting long since vanished lifeways. It looks at embodied encounters with kitchen equipment – namely Plainware pots, pans, basins and pithoi – that were used on a daily basis in the production and consumption of food and drink. Although Plain ware typically comprises the greater part of a Late Cypriot ceramic assemblage, this class of pottery tends to be overshadowed by the more visually appealing tableware – White Slip and Base Ring – even though these have a more restricted distribution within settlement contexts. Nonetheless, I would argue that for most Cypriots in the Late Bronze Age, daily material engagements with pottery were primarily mediated through Plain ware.

The focus on this paper is a discrete group of vessels excavated in storerooms in Building 1 at Aredhiou, which has been identified as a House according to Lévi-Strauss' *Société à Maison* (1982). This group of pottery provides us with a unique opportunity to explore how such objects were used together and perhaps to reconstruct ancient activities. More intriguing perhaps is the tactile lived experiences of the people who made and used the pots and pans. This paper considers the capacities (agency and vitality) of the clays used to make these vessels and how these enabled or constrained the actions of the potters who created them. Similarly, it examines the interaction and the experiences of people working with pottery on a daily basis within the settlement and how this shaped their daily household praxis. Focusing on material engagements and the myriad intersections between people and things allows us to think about the materiality of the Late Cypriot social world and specifically the tactile experiences involved in working with pottery.

YONCA ATABAY, TILLBURG UNIVERSITY

EXPLORING IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCEPTANCE OF HAPTIC GLOVES IN MIXED REALITY FOR ARTEFACTS IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS

The sensory experience with artefacts in the present is starkly different from the past. Especially tactile experience is limited because of the presentation of artefacts in glass cases. Museums exhibiting archaeological artefacts are increasingly using novel technologies to overcome the glass case problem and reenact past sensory experiences with artefacts. This study investigates the implementation and acceptance of a highly novel technology called Haptic Mixed Reality (HMR), combining haptic gloves with a mixed reality system, to provide a tactile experience with artefacts. Through a mixed-method approach combining qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, this study provides insight into the perspective of museum professionals, academics and technology specialists on the challenges of implementing HMR in archaeological museum exhibitions. In particular, museum professionals' perspective was investigated in more detail through the UTAUT framework for technology acceptance to assess the factors influencing the intention to use HMR in their practice. Results indicated that the professionals group differed in terms of identifying the key challenge for implementing HMR. Additionally, museum professionals in particular identified 10 challenges: training and staffing needs, technical and practical issues, exhibition flow, distraction, lack of social interaction, accessibility, technology acceptance, lack of in-house knowledge, future orientation of the technology and institutionalization of artefact interaction. Lastly, the results of the UTAUT analysis indicated that museum professionals' intention to use HMR is influenced by their exhibition goals and professional network. Overall, the novelty of HMR and the lack of knowledge about the technology currently stands in the way of implementation. Future research on HMR could consider how effective knowledge transfer can be provided to encourage museums to pursue HMR.

SESSION II ENGAGING THE SENSES IN EVOLVING CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

HEE SOOK LEE-NIINIOJA, INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR

PERCEPTUAL-TEMPORAL SENSORY DECAY-LIVING EXPERIENCES IN REALITY AND VIRTUALITY AT THE KOREAN DEMILITARISED ZONE (DMZ)

My paper addresses the perpetual-temporal sensory decay-living experienced in reality and virtuality through a cultural programme based on collective emotions, memories, and semiotic interpretations.

The website of "Korea Visit" expresses the Korean Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) as a symbol of peace and culture." The DMZ has been a buffer zone between North Korea and South Korea since 1953. Two decades later, the two Koreas agreed on utilising the DMZ as a symbol of peace, allowing human contact and protecting its pristine nature, but it remains untouched. Several endangered animal and plant species survive among the fortified barriers and landmines. Ecologists recognised ca. 2900 plant species, 70 kinds of mammals, and 320 types of birds.

Through a cultural programme, Imjingak Resort (2005) celebrates the Peace Festival, whose park transforms the site of coldness and war horror into a place of peace and unity. As the pain of separation grows, Odusan Unification Observatory overlooks the meeting point of the two rivers. For reunification tourism, its binoculars make visitors feel like they are in North Korea. The Korean Workers' Party Headquarters, part of North Korea after ending the Japanese occupation, reveals an open ruin with the scars of the war and its remnants. To this end, the aromatic scents of the herb field allure visitors with the ambience for relaxation, moving the dark past into a bright future.

"A Symbol of Peace and Culture" questions sensory experiences. Does it endow a feeling of decay from the past or living emotions for the future? As the texts and images of the programme contain a polysemic nature due to the varieties in sign-symbol interpretations saturated by culture, tradition, and the individual, semiotics can provide a theoretical foundation to unlock the complexities of translation.

Sensory means "connected with the physical senses of touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight." Decay is defined as gradually becoming damaged, worse, or less; to cause something to do this (Cambridge English Dictionary). Of sensory decay, or sensory living between the past and the present, what are the multiple concepts of sensory decay-living in this untouched area? What is particular about nature and culture? What sensory stimuli decay, if any? Who experiences this?

Human perceptions of the environment, emotions, and memories related to nature and culture enhance their sensory experiences. Although the DMZ was a battlefield with weapons and blood, it has been a haven for all creatures, paving the way for humans.

JOEL SANTOS, UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER; JOÃO SEQUEIRA, UNIVERSITY OF MINHO – IHC – CSIS NOV; & TÂNIA MANUEL CASIMIRO, HTC-CFE NOVA | UNIVERSITY OF LISBON

FROM COD TO DECAY: FEELING THE FACTORY

Raven's End is a peninsula located in Portugal, close to the Tagus River. This area has been used since the Roman times, in the 16th century for the location of tide mills and in the 20th century for the dry cod industry. All these activities left scars in the landscape and are still possible to visit today, materialized in the form of buildings, navigable canals, and small dams. One of those buildings belonged to the former factory Atlântida, where cod fished in the Atlantic Ocean was processed, dried, and salted. The industrial activities of this large industrial unit closed down in the mid-20th century, and the concrete building has never been occupied ever since, a giant colossus in the middle of a green, natural, protected area. When we visited this place for the first time, we saw a dying building, surrounded by a decadent landscape. Later, we understood and learned it was so much more. The Atlântida factory still dominates the landscape, but it does not exist on its own. Instead, it maintains a relationship with the mills, the military base, the beach, the river, the swamp, and the community. We realized that there is a community engagement with this building as part of a path that has a direct relationship with becoming an adult; that artists use the factory to express feelings not welcome anywhere else; that lovers use it to express emotions and much more; that animals use it as a shelter; and that dealers use it to hide their evidence. We also understood that although not being an active industrial unit anymore, the actions taking place inside transformed it into a hub of emotions and sensorial experiences. All these agents feel and engage with this decaying heritage differently and have different sensorial experiences in or with it, creating new layers of meaning. And we, archaeologists, highlight it to understand how different communities engage with the past and experience it.

SESSION III SNIFFING OUT DECAY

ROSE MALIK, DURHAM UNIVERSITY

SCENTING THE PAST: FINDING ANCIENT SMELL IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL REMAINS

Archaeology is the study of decay. Finding olfactory data from degraded organic materials presents access to the past in the present. The ephemeral nature of odour has meant that there has been a paucity of empirically based research undertaken. My research presents an approach using an innovative technique that involves the extraction and analysis of olfactory volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in ancient material remains to understand the experiential nature of past cultural practices.

As initial groundwork, a critical examination concentrated on soil sample data which revealed the complexities involved in interpreting states of decay in soil matrices. This included the potential deterioration or obversion of compounds during analysis; states of metabolisation; the effects on creating derivative variants from geological, animal, and artificial (human) activity and the impact of degradation in soil on the disintegration of olfactory VOCs in the soil matrices and buried material remains.

Analysis of soil samples from excavated sites and samples from archived material remains using the SPME headspace sampling method has provided insight into developing a methodology for identifying olfactory molecules, the olfactory compound structures encountered, and the stages of degradations exposed within those contexts.

The analysis identified commonality in the olfactory data from samples and revealed compound variations or as the technique identified analytes in their own form and as derivative-emitted degradation of an 'original' olfactory compound. Identifying derivative variants can help archaeological access to odour notes that form to create an ancient smell profile. Recording smell profiles has the potential to present an archaeological guide to olfactory molecules in organic material remains that are no longer present in their original form.

Degraded olfactory molecules tell a story of what was present from what is present and raises the possibilities for creating a methodology to allow archaeological investigations of ancient odour found within material remains. The SPME HS-GC-MS technique offers an approach into the methodology required for odour analysis of the type and state of compounds found in excavated feature contexts and from archived material remains.

Furthermore, the study and the analysis of degraded olfactory molecules can bring a more robust 360° multi-dimensional approach to archaeological interpretations and allows smell to be recognised, no longer as an inaccessible ephemeral sense, but rather as tangible archaeological material. Olfactory data, therefore, has the potential to provide archaeological insight into the experiential (essential and existential) nature of ancient smells, bringing deeper more robust interpretations to ancient cultural practices and landscapes.

**CECILIA BEMBIBRE & GEORGIOS ALEXOPOULOS,
UCL INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE HERITAGE**

EXPLORING MALODOURS: THE SMELL OF DECAY AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR HERITAGE INTERPRETATION

It can be argued that there is a certain context in which smells of decay can be deemed positive without necessarily scoring highly in terms of their hedonic tone. Indeed, the smell of decay and its role in enriching the heritage experience has been considerably overlooked. For heritage professionals and practitioners in GLAMs (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) mould is associated with the deterioration and decay of buildings and objects and is seen as a constant threat for the future preservation of valuable heritage assets and collections. What's more, the smell of mould, not least because of its negative associations with decay, can be considered as a malodour and evoke unpleasant feelings and reactions. However, in the context of recent developments in multisensory research and particularly the growing emphasis on olfactory heritage the contribution of heritage malodours can become very important when considering their role in heritage interpretation, the development of storylines at exhibitions and heritage tours and the potential of offering impactful visitor experiences. This paper/presentation draws on research conducted for the Odeuropa project –funded by EU's Horizon 2020 programme– that aims to critically engage with the sense of smell and Europe's olfactory heritage. We will review some traditional associations with the smell of mould in the heritage sector and discuss these in relation to recent studies about sensory evaluation in specific heritage contexts. Furthermore, based on research conducted on the impact of olfactory activities and the value of the use of smells in the context of GLAMs we will reflect on the opportunities that malodours, such as the smell of mould, can create for enhancing the visitor experience. It is argued that the interpretation of such smells not only is context-dependent but goes also beyond their perception as pleasant or unpleasant. The sensory aspect of decay, in this case the smell, may contribute to an educational experience for visitors and also provide opportunities to enhance a sense of place and time.

ROBERT KIRKBRIDE, PARSONS SCHOOL OF DESIGN + PRESERVATIONWORKS

THE SCENT OF KIRKBRIDE PLAN ASYLUMS AND THE DECAY OF AMERICAN MENTAL HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURES

For the Sensory Decay Symposium, I propose to gather and present short video recollections – some from memory and some in situ – of various Kirkbride Plan asylum explorers' accounts of scent and decay in these extraordinary structures. In addition to being distantly related to Thomas Story Kirkbride, I am a Founding Trustee and Spokesperson for PreservationWorks, a non-profit organization committed to the preservation, restoration and adaptive reuse of the remaining Kirkbride Plan hospitals. Many of our members explore and document abandoned and endangered buildings and can describe in detail the nuances of scent among the Kirkbride Plan hospitals, including those that no longer exist. During the second half of the nineteenth century, approximately seventy-five "Kirkbride Plan" hospitals were constructed to treat the mentally ill across the United States, Canada and Australia according to the formal arrangements proposed by Dr. Thomas Story Kirkbride (1809-83) and the patient-centered principles of the Moral Treatment that he and social reformer Dorothea Dix (1802-87) tirelessly advocated. Embodying Enlightenment Quaker beliefs in the therapeutic powers of architecture, beauty, and respectful care, the Kirkbride Plan generated elegant and massive echelon-wing structures that embraced local climate and site conditions to provide patients with prevailing breezes, plentiful sunlight, and expansive vistas of bucolic, landscaped grounds that often included a self-sustaining farm for food and occupational therapy. Supplied with greenhouses, workshops, and other innovative amenities, "Kirkbrides" provided a dignified place for the placeless.

Yet, remarkable though they were, these structures are permeated with disturbing histories and poignantly exemplify how one generation's earnest aspirations - embodied in their buildings and constructed environments - may unintentionally lay the foundations for future generations' dystopias. Despite their promising origins, the demise of Kirkbride Plan hospitals came to symbolize the decay of the American mental health care system. As such, those that remain offer three-dimensional documents of the complex challenges to providing physical and social infrastructures for mental healthcare, and it is for this very reason that it is essential to repurpose the hospitals rather than tear them down. Their erasure – whether deliberately or by neglect – is tantamount to the repression of a very real, very difficult cultural past that continues to haunt our present and, foreseeably, our future. Close, multisensorial readings of the buildings, their grounds and the traces of their occupation render legible not only the vestiges of actual pasts, they also lend voice to what might have been, or might yet be.

ROBYN PRICE, BROWN UNIVERSITY

LIFE SCENTS AND MUMMIFICATION IN ANCIENT EGYPT

In this talk, I will comment on how the ancient Egyptians used fragrance not only to combat the undesirable stench of bodily decay in death, but as a means for transforming the deceased into a living being. It has been suggested that the application of aromatic materials like incense, perfumes, and flowers to the deceased's body was meant to mask the odors of decay. Since the earliest periods of ancient Egyptian history, however, a ritual preoccupation with denying death in funerary rites suggests a more profound significance to this practice. Rather than simply disguising unpleasant aromas of death, the overlaying of malodors with pleasing scents emerged as a pivotal element in the ritual process of reinvigorating the deceased's being.

According to ancient Egyptian beliefs, the body's decomposition signaled not only its death but also its disintegration. Through the meticulous process of mummification and the application of pleasantly fragrant aromas, the deceased's body was transformed, both symbolically and physically. Namely, the body was re-integrated through the infusion of life, which was embodied by the aromatic substances. In this way, scent was a tangible yet invisible marker of life itself. As a result of this cultural belief, scent could be manipulated to ensure the successful rebirth of the deceased. For example, restricting access to certain scents could limit who was accorded this funerary privilege.

Thus, scent, a truly integral aspect of ancient Egyptian funerary practices, played a pivotal role in guiding the deceased on their journey to the afterlife. This presentation delves into the interplay between scent and funerary ritual, emphasizing its profound significance in denying death.

SESSION IV OPEN SESSION

NEHA KHETRAPAL, JINDAL INSTITUTE OF BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE,
O.P. JINDAL GLOBAL UNIVERSITY

THE VISIBLE OUTER AND RESURRECTED SENSATIONS WITHIN ANCIENT HINDU TEMPLES

What do we observe when we visit ancient monuments like temples? Our sense of vision frequently dominates these ancient encounters and the perception of sacred (material) decay. Here, the author moves beyond this 'pervasive' visual privilege by placing emphasis on - hitherto - 'hidden' or 'unacknowledged' aspects of ancient Indian architecture and other sacred objects. The - thus far - dominant visual privilege accrues from the investigative efforts of historians who have long examined sacred architecture in terms of styles of construction (e.g., Nagara, Dravida, Vesara and Kalinga styles), emanating from different time periods of Indian history. And - thereby - linking the architectural forms to particular dynasties or royal patronage (e.g., Kulshreshtha, 2023). While extensive efforts along these lines have catered to a 'universal' way of interpreting architectural remains, these efforts quite often underplay local understanding and - thereby - the role of lesser or other senses. Herein, an attempt is made to resurrect the role of smells and sounds based on the visual iconography and temple space paired with local folklore stories and ritualistic practices as opposed to only focusing on outer visible features of temples - that are readily available. Enroute to constructing the ancient smell-scape and sound-scape, visual iconography of incense burners - noted in temples devoted to the Mother Goddesses - and the reverberant acoustic features of the temple architecture are highlighted. Furthermore, the author also discusses the significance of lesser-discussed 'Sri Yantra' - deployed within Hindu ritualistic practices and resembling the Buddhist Mandala - for representing visually-available deities in audible forms. In pairing the sacred objects, carved and built architectural elements with local rituals and practices, the thrust - herein - is on an 'amalgamated perspective' for resurrecting lost smells and sounds in the (ancient) Hindu sacred space. An interesting question remains: is the 'amalgamated perspective' an alternate means for perceiving sacred (material) decay?

MARIA LORD, UNIVERSITY OF WALES TRINITY ST. DAVID

THE PROBLEM OF SHIFTING BASELINE SYNDROME IN CAPTURING THE SENSORY EXPERIENCES OF PAST ENVIRONMENTS

The sensory experience of natural environments is as much subject to decay as any other aspect of the human experience and understanding the role of shifting baseline syndrome within this is essential to our understanding of the sensory and embodied past.

While the investigation of 'sensescapes', whether physical or cultural, has been an important component of the sensory and embodied turn in archaeology, the sensory impact of what might be termed 'nature' or the 'natural environment' has been less prominent. Hoaen (2019) even goes so far as to claim that archaeologists are 'not comfortable with the concept of nature'. Here I argue that the division that is often made between the built, i.e. humanly constructed, and natural, or 'wild' following Hoaen, environments is misleading. The importance of the biological in sensory perception of place been acknowledged by Hoaen (2020: 167), but contrary to his claim that wild landscape systems operated 'alongside and separate from those of human culture' (2019), I claim that in the past human sensory experience was a much permeated by, and embedded inseparably within, the geological and biological as that created by people, whether material or cultural. This is more in line with the claim made by Ingold (2022 [2000]: 2) that humans are perhaps primarily biological entities which also possess social and cultural agency.

Therefore, when trying to excavate the sensory experiences of the past an awareness and recording of the embedded biology and geology within past environments is important. However, there is a hitherto-ignored problem in relating the sensory recording of the contemporary world to that of the past: shifting baseline syndrome. This concept was first outlined by Pauly to describe how fisheries scientists use the levels of species they observe at the beginning of their careers as the baseline from which to judge decline in numbers, and '[w]hen the next generation starts its career, the stocks have further declined, but it is the stocks at that time that serve as a new baseline' (1995: 430). The result over time is that we lose sight of what past populations were truly like, and by extension our contemporary sensory experience of the 'natural world' does not relate to that of the past. The idea has been widely discussed by researchers in biology and ecology, but with rare exception (e.g. Spennemann 2022) has not been picked up by scholars outside these fields. If, however, we are to incorporate how the natural world is embedded within past human experience, then it is important we find mechanisms which help to overcome this form of sensory decay.

SOUND THE ASYLUM

Sound the Asylum, by composer-producers Melissa Grey & David Morneau, is a growing catalog of immersive audio documentation, recording the aural identity of decaying asylum interiors in 19th-century Kirkbride Plan hospitals. We use an ambisonic recording technique to capture the activation of resonant frequencies in full 360° spatial surround. A series of recordings—each a recording of the previous iteration amplified by a loudspeaker—gradually reveal the humming resonance of a room’s dimensions and character.

These frequencies become part of the color of every sound activated in the space. It is an aural phenomenon that provides the ear spatial information. Our process captures the sounds in and around the asylum—summer insects, tolling church bells, and bits of decaying plaster falling to the floor. These sounds give a sense of place, immersing the listener in the sonic landscape of the resonating frequencies that would have softly imbued every sound of daily life for the patients, staff, and visitors in these buildings.

The innovative Kirkbride Plan, developed by psychiatrist Thomas Story Kirkbride, created therapeutic environments for the treatment of mental illness, providing unprecedented access to space, natural light and fresh air. Described as “America’s castles,” 73 Kirkbride Plan hospitals were constructed throughout the United States and Australia, and only 30 or so of these massive hospitals remain standing today. To date, we have documented the Richardson Olmsted Complex (44,594 sq m) in Buffalo, New York, and The Ridges (65,032 sq m) in Athens, Ohio.

Our talk will include recorded excerpts that demonstrate the buildup of resonant frequencies in different interior locations, including patient rooms, corridors, and stairwells. We will conclude with the full presentation of a 5-minute recording captured in one room. All recordings will be presented binaurally. Attendees are encouraged to wear their favorite headphones for immersive listening.

