

Lang01 Semiosis as orchestration

Paper Review Sheet

The phono-aesthetics of qing in Chinese medicine

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Short Abstract

In Chinese lexicography sounds and meaning tend to be intricately related, as they appear to be in some Chinese materia medica texts. The sound of the word qing, 1st tone, can mean light, transparent, bluegreen, depending on the graph with which it is written.

Long Abstract

This paper will first present what Merleau-Ponty says about meaning-making with words (phenomenology of language), and how his understanding of the process of meaning making differs from meaning that is considered to be encoded in a word (semiotics). It will then present an example where the sound qing as the prefix for plant ingredients/names in certain recipes can be read as gesturing towards the efficaciousness of the recipe. Rather than considering this phenomenon as onomatopoeic, and hence an exceptional kind of meaning making in linguistics, it will open up discussion about how to make sense of such phenomena. The paper will explore to what extent such a sound might inform us about perceived materialities of the ingredients of Song dynasty recipes (ca 11th century).

Peyo: song, sense and sign in Araweté vocal art

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Short Abstract

This presentation will ethnographically pursue the description of different semiotic dimensions of the peyo ceremony amongst the Araweté, an amazonian society.

Long Abstract

Peyo is the central ceremony of the Araweté, a small amerindian society in Eastern Amazonia (Brazil). During this ceremony, ritual specialists bring deceased araweté kin and divinities called Maꞑ to eat and sing among the living. This celebration is, at the same time, a culinary feast, a reception for divinities, and a concert for the deceased. Here, I analyze this complex ritual through an ethnographical description of the ritual specialist's role in conducting different semiotic dimensions of a peyo. These dimensions are the linguistic and polyphonic aspects of songs, the smell of bodily decoration and the taste of ritual food, and the conductor's gestures on bodies and commodities. If the specialist and his rattle are anything like a conductor and his baton, could these semiotic dimensions be thought of as instruments with different timbres? Drawing on 14 months of fieldwork amongst the Araweté, this presentation will ethnographically pursue the description of the different semiotic dimensions outlined above through my interlocutors' descriptions of the peyo ceremony and its components, the form and content of the songs performed, and the role of audiences in listening to and interfering with this ritual.

The power of sonic 'things': The power of sonic 'things': multi-species communication in the Batek's forest

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Short Abstract

This paper considers the ethical and aesthetic discourses surrounding how sensory modalities are used among the Batek, a forest dwelling, hunting and gathering group of Peninsular Malaysia. How do these come to orchestrate human relationships with the non-humans of the forest?

Long Abstract

This paper considers the ethical and aesthetic discourses surrounding how sensory modalities are used among the Batek, a forest dwelling, hunting and gathering group of Peninsular Malaysia.

Batek people do not distinguish between 'types' of sound - such as between musical and speech sounds, verbal and non-verbal sounds, or human and non-human sounds. Rather, people make an important distinction between 'sound' and 'noise'. 'Bad' and 'ugly' noise is often taboo, and the contamination of 'good' sounds with 'bad' sounds has the power to cause cosmological and ecological disturbance - upsetting the non-human persons and super-beings of the forest.

Through discussion of how sounds are talked about as 'things' that are 'given' and 'taken away', and that can be 'found' in the forest, this paper compares the mixing of tabooed sonic 'things' to the mixing of tabooed physical things such as blood, and other tabooed sensory phenomena such as smells. In so doing I illustrate how webs of multi-species relationships are 'orchestrated' sensorially under the forest canopy through the ethical and aesthetic discourses surrounding their production and reception.

The paper will therefore argue that a contextualised understanding of 'sound', including how it interacts with the other sensory modalities, can be used to deepen understanding of Batek theories of ethics and aesthetics that resonate beyond the domain of the sonic - becoming used to define people's relationship with the non-human persons of the forest.

Unspeakable Taste: Communicating through the sensory modalities of tea in China.

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Short Abstract

Descriptions of tea taste often diverge. Chinese tea circles (chaye quan) address this elusiveness over time through sight, touch, smell and voice, with each sense alternately marking phases of the communication event. How much is this orchestrated by commerce, aesthetics or rivalry?

Long Abstract

A 'communication event' has multiply intended facets: information; prestige or ritual display; reconciling or creating conflict; etc. The different facets may be communicated through one sensory modality or through a selected combination, changing as circumstances require. Does an ongoing communication event presuppose identifiable boundaries or does it morph unintentionally into something no longer seen as belonging to an earlier form? Some communication events strive not to stray over time from core intentions, for example the formalised and relatively unchanging Japanese tea ceremony. By contrast, there are a number of relatively recent, regionally different, and changing Chinese customs around tea drinking. Some observers see them not as ceremonial but as practical procedures for securing the best taste in tea. Others regard them as tea ceremonies. The particular case presented of stylised tea preparation and tasting in China, is only about three decades old but feeds into a modern China-wide perception of tea ceremonies as continuing the country's ancient heritage. Depending on participants' interaction in seeking to determine the elusive nature of tea taste, tea-tasting alternates between a) visually focused 'ceremonial' silence and body language in tea preparation, b) the invention of vocabulary to describe the taste, smell and touch of particular teas, and c) open discussion and commercially driven, competitive tea-tasting. Throughout these interlinked, spatio-temporally separate occasions, however, the agreed identification of taste remains elusive. It is the unspeakable sense that knows neither fixed name nor boundary.

SILENT PLAYGROUNDS Non-Verbal Communication Among Children Moving and Playing in a Multicultural Setting

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Short Abstract

How do children mediate aspects of social life in a multicultural context where verbal language cannot become ultimate source of explanation? How are communicative resources at their disposal (such as gestures, eye gaze) to create, sustain, and shape the settings in which the children move and play?

Long Abstract

When speech becomes a negligible element, humans rely largely on body language to construct their models of communication: embodied action is central to the multidimensional lives of global encounters. I investigate how a "range of semiotic modalities" (Goodwin 2006: 25) is made relevant in the midst of the ordinary events that constitute the lifeworlds of children in a multicultural setting. My argument is based on distinct speech events collected in a summer camp held in Liguria (Italy) where a group of twenty boys and girls from Fukushima (aged seven to twelve) were hosted in July-August 2017. I focus on how the Japanese and Italian children coordinate interactive communication to organise play activities such as dodgeball and dance, while making sense of the impossibility of talking to each other and while facing cultural differences. For instance, Italian children are said that direct eye contact is considered an important indicator of confidence, effectiveness and openness; whereas, Japanese children are taught to avoid direct gaze because considered disrespectful. When language fails to mediate communication and conflicts take place (e.g. bullying, or litigation), how do children sense a drive towards harmonious collaboration? How are different semiotic modalities coordinated, and conflicts in face-to-face or dispersed interactions resolved? Focusing on semiosis as multimodal communication allows to shed light on the ways children, in particular, facilitate a "smooth interaction" (Duranti 2015: 210) by anticipating the actions of others and coordinating with them on a regular basis to avoid conflicts or resolve disputes.

Reflexivity, experiment and ambiguity in the semiotic orchestra of ritualized everyday life

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Short Abstract

Enawenê-nawê everyday life is analysed as a series of intercalated patterns of directional movement, tempo, touch, vision, voice and sound. The play of visibility and invisibility, silence and speech, noise and melody, touching and distanced bodies, achieves a social and cosmic orchestration.

Long Abstract

Enawenê-nawê everyday life is carried out in and around a panoptic arena that serves as theatre and auditorium. Working, living and relating are musicalized, aestheticized and choreographed to take on poetic qualities. I consider the twofold efficacy of the orchestration of intercalated patterns of directional movement, tempo, touch, vision, voice and sound through the ethnography of routinized ritual activity and carnivalesque festivals.

Firstly I argue that Enawenê-nawê mastery of multi-modal communication creates *communitas* and participation, by drawing people's senses centripetally inward and synchronising and collectivizing their embodied, sensory experience. This occurs, for example, when a woman grating manioc in her house is absorbed in a bodily nexus of breath, movement and sound, and receives auditory feedback to evidence the synchronicity of her work with that of others hidden in separate houses. Over the course of each day, and over an annual cycle, the changing village soundscape provides a tangible realisation of the synchronicity and shared temporality of people's lives.

While multiple semiotic modalities may be orchestrated to enlance people in a stable, controlled and predictable lifeworld and temporality, reflexive code switching also provides the technology for risky but powerful experiments with the social and ontological order, for example when an activity that is usually audible but hidden (although it occurs in the hours of daylight) is made into a night-time spectacle. When many code switches occur at once, transfiguring the patterns of intercalated sensory stimuli, social and ontological boundaries are crossed and blurred.

Thoughts as space: visual representations of deaf-centric thought-maps

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Short Abstract

'VV' is a performance praxis in which deaf people externally map thoughts in space, constructing specific instants, people, landscapes, emotions & musings-made-flesh in order to consider or help others understand their thinking. This praxis reframes listening as seeing, in art & in welfare support.

Long Abstract

Visual Vernacular ('VV'), a sign language-principled deaf performance praxis, may also be understood as a form of bodily-mapped thought-processing. Born from the visual-tactile dominance of deaf condition, these performances enact specific instants, people, landscapes, emotions & musings via each individual

deaf person's body. Such performance is explicitly informed by each person's own sensorium, perspectives, and embodied memories of living a deaf life-way. They therefore externally re-make unique 'DEAF' interior worlds via witnessable fleshy instantiation. (*DEAF capitalised here connotes authority generated entirely apart from non-deaf normatively-driven definitions/praxis)

This paper examines the visible external shapes of deaf people's individually-generated interior worlds. It considers the inimitable social and physical elements that inform each unique performer-teller, and what can be lost when these body-maps are subjected to entextualisation, transduction, or interpretation. Because visual-tactility is essential to DEAF authorship regardless of sign language fluency, the analysis includes not only sign language users, but any deaf person who shares in common such deaf-centred, externalised thought-mapping practices.

Drawing from ethnographic examples of forms of 'witnessable thinking', I explore how deaf people offer lenses onto the 'poesis' (Agamben 1999) of DEAF world-production through these representations, thereby reframing such performers not as interlocutors, but as auto-ethnographers. I also unpack the ways that practitioners frequently highlight communicative fault-lines through their thought-performances, problematising rigid hegemonic listening practices and frontline applications of equalities policies. Ultimately, this paper confronts the lack of DEAF-centred communication practices within British institutions, and the resulting potential for epistemic injustice.

Disambiguating Channel Parasites in Plant Communicative Modalities: A Moroccan Mediation

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Short Abstract

I explore the phytocommunicable sensorium of plant parts and modalities designed to block communication of ill-intentioned others (human and nonhuman).

Long Abstract

How do we assess plant participation in plant-human interactions? What kinds of communicative sensorium ideologies shape plant-based treatments to block evil communication by ill-intentioned spirits and humans in Morocco? In Fez, "traditional" herbalists have long prescribed the smoke from harmala seed incense (Syrian rue, *Peganum harmala*) in medical treatments for communicative disorders associated with the ill-intentions of others (human and nonhuman). Many Salafi prophetic medicine practitioners reject incense as religious syncretism, and advocate ingesting sidra leaf tea (wild jujube, *Ziziphus lotus*) paired with Quranic recitation to block the harmful effects of invisible communicative channels such as the evil eye. In this presentation, I explore the phytocommunicable sensorium of plant parts (leaves, resins, seeds) and modalities designed to block communication. While anthropologists have explored the social lives of many plants that open communication between human and nonhuman interlocutors (coca, ayahuasca, tobacco, sage, cedar, sweetgrass, mushrooms), less attention has been paid to channel modality (plant smoke, breath across plants, ingested forms) as sensorium mediator across species (jinn and humans). Modality becomes an issue in communicability when interlocutors orient to other elements attached to the channel, potential parasites with problematic messaging effects. Salafi medical practitioners promote a specific plant medium sensorium bundle and modalities to disambiguate their approach from the troublesome parasites in "traditional" channels.

Interruption and enumeration: Rhythm, gesture and tone in Northern Kurdish.

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Short Abstract

This paper questions the orchestration of verbal style across speech genres in Northern Kurdish: from challenges to a turn-taking system in conversation, to narrative flight and enumeration in rhetorical speech.

Long Abstract

The orchestration of turns in conversation may usurp the autonomy of interlocutors. Notable examples in the ethnographic literature are John Haviland's work on Tzotzil argumentation and Judith Scheele's observation of Tubu conversation in Northern Chad. In this paper, I depict an image of conversational freedom and interruptions in Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji). Against this backdrop, I sketch an image of Kurdish rhetoric, notable elements of authoritative speech and leadership. Recent work by Nick

Harkness is a source of inspiration for this analysis of the gestural and rhythmic aspects of enumeration in Kurdish. Building upon Brian Silverstein's research on Islam and modernity in Turkey, I study the historic legacy of verbal festivity in Arabic, and Persian rhetorical figures, to explore their role in the orchestration of Kurdish figures of speech.

Language and the body in Datooga children's concepts of kinship

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Short Abstract

This paper explores how Datooga-speaking children of Tanzania articulate kinship concepts through verbal and embodied action. To what extent is the body a resource for communicating kinship concepts, and what might this tell us about how children conceptualise kinship relations?

Long Abstract

This paper explores how Datooga-speaking children of Tanzania articulate kinship concepts through verbal and embodied action. To what extent is the body a resource for communicating kinship concepts, and what might this tell us about how children conceptualise kinship relations?

Much anthropological study of kinship has abstracted kin terms from their interactional contexts, while practice-based approaches to kinship have typically concentrated on nonlinguistic behaviour (e.g. Carsten 2004). Here we bring the language of kinship back into focus but consider its use in terms of the contextual configurations in which it occurs (Goodwin 2000). We look in particular at the Datooga concepts of gee- and qee- 'house', which can refer both to physical spaces and kinship units, and which form part of compound phrases meaning 'sibling'. How do children's bodily practices, including gesture, gaze, and spatial orientation, build on or modify the linguistic meanings of these terms?

Based on twenty hours of transcribed video recordings of Datooga children's interactions, we show that while children often rely solely on the verbal modality for expressing kinship concepts, the body can serve to highlight aspects of those concepts. For example, on one occasion, a four-year-old boy appeals to another child to take responsibility for his younger brother's behaviour. As he says 'brother', he gazes at the elder boy while pointing at the younger brother, thus constructing with his body a visual index of the kinship relation between the two. This action also reveals an acute awareness of the social obligations that kinship entails.

"Natural Sign" in Gestural Language and in Tibetan Sign Language in Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region

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Short Abstract

This paper explores and analyses the use of gestures in the context of so-called "natural sign" and Tibetan Sign Language in Lhasa.

Long Abstract

During ethnographic research with deaf Tibetans in Lhasa I was often told deaf and hearing Tibetans share a repertoire of gestures and signs. This repertoire was referred to as "rang-jung lag-da" or "natural" or "spontaneous sign" and in several interviews was estimated to make up approximately 30% of the sign lexicon of the Tibetan Sign Language (TSL), a sign language emergent since the early 2000s. The phenomenon of "natural sign" has also been reported from Nepal and analysed by Green (2014). But what is "natural sign" in Lhasa? I will pursue this large question through an investigation of communicative practices, and within these focusing on gestures, in a distinct set of interactions between deaf and hearing, and between deaf Tibetan communicators in a market, a café, an educational setting and in a home. Studying gestures within and beyond an emergent sign language, as is Tibetan Sign language, allows us to revisit established linguistic and anthropological work on gesture (e.g. Haviland 2007, Kendon 2014, McNeill 2005). How are gestures related to other modalities and sensual modalities in Lhasa? I will explore this question in relation to the topic of "orchestration" proposed by the panel organisers, and the recently suggested theoretical framework of "semiotic repertoires" (Kusters, Spotti, Swanswick and Rapio 2017).