1 From the Senses to Sensing in Interaction

1.1 Introduction to the Book

Sensorial engagements in the world are omnipresent in our everyday lives and our professional activities. We touch and taste the penne to check if they are cooked enough, we taste the wine proposed by the sommelier before accepting it, and we smell and touch the melons at the market to be sure they are ripe. A cocktail maker tastes the drink before handing it to the customer, a geologist looks at and touches the rock found on the bottom of the valley prior to categorizing it, and a 'nose' (*nez*) sniffs all sorts of aromas to provide advice to a perfume company. Sensorial engagements are pervasive, diversified and omnipresent.

These practices of sensing – looking, touching, tasting, smelling and hearing among others – have often been treated as private, individual and internal; as concerning physiological and mental processes characterizing our perception, sense organs and sense receptors, and the mind. This has generated debates about the possibility of expressing sensorial experiences in so many words, and to share them with others, as well as debates about the relation between perception and the use of language, between private sensations, subjective judgments and culture, about the specificity of sensorial experiences characterizing social classes, ethnic groups, or communities of practice. The question I address in this book is: How to think about bodies engaged in sensorial experiences in an intersubjective, collective, and social way?

Various responses to these debates have been formulated within different disciplinary and theoretical perspectives, emphasizing the cultural, historical, sociological and linguistic aspects that shape sensoriality – often treating each sense in a specific way, for example, discussing the primacy of vision over other senses, or reevaluating what had been considered as

'lower' senses. This book takes a distinct perspective, offering a comprehensive approach of the interactional, intersubjective, sociable dimensions of multisensoriality, integrating all the senses. It does so by paying special attention to how people engage with their bodies in sensorial experiences with the materiality of the world in the course of social interaction. This approach is meant to contribute to the general discussions about sensoriality in the human and social sciences, by considering how language, the body, and materiality are mobilized by social actors – participants in specific activities, members of specific social or ethnic groups as well as communities of practice – within their ordinary situated courses of action in social interaction. In this context, sensoriality is not just constituted of private experiences, but social practices produced in an accountable, witnessable way, with and for others, who might join the practice, monitor it, and make sense of it.

This book pursues two objectives. The first is conceptual, and addresses the ways in which we can think about sensoriality as a sociointeractional phenomenon. The second is analytical, and – on the basis of an exemplary empirical field – tackles the way in which we can study sensorial practices in the detail of their situated accomplishment and in the generality of their systematic organization.

The first objective is to propose an interactional approach to multisensoriality in situated actions. Within the framework of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, and video-based multimodal analyses, the aim is to account for the intersubjective, interactional and social dimensions of sensorial experiences. How to consider the carnality of the body without reducing it to its neurophysiology, and the intelligibility of the body without reducing it to an abstract symbolic language? The issue is to address the missing link between the body considered in its flesh, and its interactional engagements, between taste buds and the sociality of the senses. The proposal consists in a conceptualization integrating situated action, social interaction, embodiment, and language, as well as materiality and the physical-spatial environment in which sensoriality is deployed. By focusing on how movements of bodies in interaction engaging in sensorial practices like looking at, touching, smelling, and tasting objects, are systematically organized within social activities among collectivities of participants, this book aims at reflecting on how an ethnomethodological and conversation analytic perspective can tackle the issue of sensoriality.

The second objective is to develop a systematic empirical analysis of sensorial practices in social interaction, by focusing on an exemplary

context, in which all senses are mobilized, different categories of participants are involved and sensoriality plays a crucial role in the organization of the activity. The exemplary field on which the book elaborates an analytical, methodological and conceptual reflection on sensoriality is constituted by encounters between customers and sellers in gourmet shops specializing in selling cheese. Cheese has been chosen because it is a material object that involves sensorial practices of looking, touching, smelling, tasting and even hearing along all its life as an organic dynamic product, evolving in time and through a variety of activities and professions. Cheese shops are a setting in which asymmetric categories of participants, sellers and customers, experts and regulars, connoisseurs and novices meet and engage in social exchanges around cheese, involving different forms of knowledge, skills, judgments and sensorial access. On the basis of video-recorded shop encounters in a dozen European countries, the empirical analyses address both a variety of languages and a remarkable commonality of practices.

With an interest in sensoriality in social interaction in general, and in how sellers and buyers engage sensorially with cheese in particular, this book develops a conceptualization of sensoriality in interaction, a methodology for studying it, and a detailed analysis of some sensorial practices, showing how it is possible to demonstrate their methodic organization, their embodied character, and their intersubjectivity. The particular field considered makes it possible to systematically develop key issues relating to sensoriality, such as the details of the embodied engagements in sensing materiality, the embeddedness of sensoriality in practical situated activities and its consequences for the local emergence and definition of relevant sensorial features, as well as the relation between sensoriality, knowledge and language.

Sensing moments are embedded in actual situated activities, in which the sensorial engagement is adequately positioned within the ongoing unfolding of a course of action. This embeddedness is fundamental for the methodic organization of sensing practice, their accountability, that is, intelligibility and legitimacy, both for the person engaging in sensing and for others publicly witnessing it. Moreover, this embeddedness is crucial for understanding how and which sensory qualities are made relevant and oriented to at specific moments: the context of action shapes the relevance of sensing a particular object and particular qualities of this object; it also shapes the relevant ways of producing, expressing and formulating the outcome of this sensorial engagement. In the cheese shop, participants engage in looking at, touching, smelling and tasting the cheese at different

moments of the encounter. For instance, we shall see that touching might be mobilized, made necessary and justified, for checking the maturity of a Reblochon – but not for merely touching a product while pointing at it or asking a question about it, and not even for checking the quality of a hard cheese like a Gruyère. Likewise, tasting might be made relevant and justified when the customer hesitates between a younger versus older Beaufort, in order to decide which one to buy. The embeddedness in the ongoing course of action makes sensorial engagements not only possible but also necessary and justified (vs. forbidden, or inadequate); it also shapes the actions in service of which sensing is engaged, for example, for choosing, deciding and discovering personal food preferences.

This has a series of consequences for the way in which sensoriality is conceptually, analytically and methodologically related to the body, to knowledge, and to socioeconomic issues.

Sensoriality relies on the body, and more precisely on situated embodied actions of participants engaging in sensorial experiences. While bodily engagements have been abundantly evoked in the literature about the senses, as well as the importance of their movements, mobility, and kinesthetics, the precise ways in which the body is emergently deployed in sensing moments step by step within the temporality of social actions remains to be fully explored. The cheese shop offers an exemplary field of observation to detail how the body engages with material objects. When gaze inspects the color, texture and rind of cheeses, hands grasp a sample of cheese, bring it to the nose, put it to the mouth, rub it between the fingers, it is not only the eye, the hands, the nose or the mouth that are put in movement but larger parts of the body. Video recordings of sensorial engagements as they happen, make it possible to analyze these movements in detail, in the way they precisely unfold in time, and coordinate with other bodies, sensing together or accompanying, watching and guiding sensing bodies – as do sellers monitoring customers while they taste. In this way, sensing moments acquire their intersubjective shared intelligibility for the participants to social interaction.

Sensoriality has been traditionally associated with subjective aesthetic judgments, as opposed to objective scientific knowledge. Issues of knowledge, expertise, connoisseurship and taste are pervasive also in shop encounters. As soon as the customer asks for a product, they manifest their knowledge and culture – displaying whether they know the product versus do not know it, have some versus any idea about it, are novices or connoisseurs, and so on. These epistemic displays shape the interactional trajectories that lead to various ways of producing and manifesting

symbolic and embodied knowledge: from the general informative description of products by the seller, performed within an authorized discourse, to the sensual engagement of both sellers and customers directly accessing the sensory qualities of the cheese, the shop encounter is a context in which different forms of propositional, tacit, embodied knowledge and know-how are manifested and negotiated. This constitutes an opportunity to reflect on how knowledge – but also connoisseurship, curiosity, and passion – are locally treated as relevant and eventually differentiated in the course of the encounter, positioning sensoriality as a source of embodied knowledge playing a crucial role in decisive moments in the encounter – for instance, in the understanding of alternatives and options, reasoning and choosing, assessing and making decisions. The embeddedness of sensoriality within a situated activity, shapes sensorial practices and their contribution in a local and emic way. In the cheese shop, the participants locally negotiate the identification, recognition, description and evaluation of sensory qualities relevant to considering the objects to buy.

These practices locally define an economy of taste, which is not only proper to cheese shops but crucial in other loci – as different as restaurants, tasting workshops, food festivals or consumer testing – which produce the economic value and socioeconomic distinction of food. Offering not only the crude materiality of the produce, not only an elaborated discourse about it, but also a sensorial access to it, the shop encounter situates sensoriality at the core of the production of the value of products (of its *valuation*). In this sense, the analysis contributes to a reflection on how the value of objects is shaped through social interaction and within specific activities and contexts – rather than being an intrinsic characteristic of the object itself. Moreover, gourmet shops providing products to touch, smell and taste, offer at the same time the occasion to socialize customers, to reveal personal taste to novices and amateurs, to further train the taste of connoisseurs and to achieve the material, sensorial, cultural, social, and economic value of the objects tasted.

In sum, a systematic analysis of actions projecting, preparing, and performing touching, smelling, and tasting in the cheese shop enables both to develop an interactional embodied intersubjective approach of sensoriality and to contribute to empirical studies of food practices, economic activities, knowledge production and diversification, as well as socialization, culture and identity.

The book elaborates on these topics on the basis of an ethnomethodological and conversation analytic approach, relying on video data, further developing techniques for video graphing social life, ways of transcribing

the minute and precise details that constitutively matter to understand the practices studied, and multimodal analyses able to make sense of the rich details of situated, lively activities.

For doing that, the book is organized into four parts. Part I offers an introduction situating the contribution of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, of video and multimodal studies of social interaction within a growing multidisciplinary landscape interested in sensoriality (Chapter 1), and a presentation of the methodology consequently developed on this basis (Chapter 2 – ending on a more detailed outline of the book, Section 1.6). The next parts are devoted to the development of a systematic empirical analysis of sensorial practices video-recorded in cheese shops across Europe. Part II deals with the way in which the purchase of a cheese is initiated, occasioning claims and displays of knowledge that are consequential for the way the sensory access to the product is projected and orchestrated (Chapters 3 and 4). Part III focuses on customers' and sellers' practices of touching (Chapter 5) and smelling (Chapter 6) cheese and their specific interactional, praxeological and embodied trajectories. Part IV deals with how customers engage in tasting cheese samples, with particular attention to how tasting is prepared and made possible (Chapter 7), how tasting is systematically organized (Chapter 8) and how resulting judgments of taste are expressed (Chapter 9). A conclusion discusses the results of the empirical studies and how they enrich an interactional approach of multisensoriality (Chapter 10).

The book aims at proposing an integrated multimodal approach of multisensoriality in social interaction, which is developed within the framework of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, but which also relates to the long tradition of studies on the senses, the sensorium, sensoriality, and sensorial practices. That is why this first chapter develops some of the inputs of this rich literature. It focuses first on the model of the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch) as it has been formulated since Aristotle and has continued to organize modern and contemporary debates about sensoriality (Section 1.2). It then presents the bourgeoning emergence of a 'sensory' turn and 'sensory' studies in the social sciences since the 1990s (Section 1.3), before focusing on two areas particularly relevant for the analyses of this book, the study of the expression of sensoriality in language (Section 1.4) and in action (Section 1.5). Finally, the chapter locates existing approaches and the current proposal concerning sensoriality of and in interaction within the framework of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (EM) (Section 1.6).

1.2 The Model of the Five Senses

It is common wisdom that there are five senses – sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. Their number and the order in which they are named relies on a conceptualization of the senses in the Western tradition that shows a remarkable continuity from Aristotle on. Despite recurrent critiques to the model of the five senses, it continues to be referred to and to structure discussions about the senses, both in common knowledge and among scholars. In this section, I present this model and some discussions it has raised.

Within the model of the five senses, the senses are hierarchized. Vision occupies the first place and its superiority has been unchallenged for a long time (Korsmeyer, 1999: chapter 1). Already for Plato, vision is the least encumbered of the senses in its attachment to the body; it not only permits cultivating intelligence, but also morality and aspiration to the divine. Sight – with hearing, which is related to language – are the noblest of the senses, enabling wisdom. They contrast with taste, which produces gluttony and, with smell and touch, constitutes pleasurable distractions and obstacles to knowledge and morality.

Aristotle (*De Anima*) develops the model of the five senses in a less idealistic and more scientific way (Sorabji, 1971). The senses are distinguished from one another by reference to their *proper objects* of perception: each sense is receptive to a type of quality that cannot be sensed by any other (e.g., color is the proper object of vision and can only be sensed by the eyes). On this basis, Aristotle recognizes that there are five senses – sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch – although he recognizes that the model encounters some problems of categorization and differentiation (to speak of a unique sense of touch, for example, is not enough to differentiate texture vs. temperature). Beside proper objects, senses also perceive *common sensibles*, which can be perceived by more than one sense (such as movement, shape and magnitude, particularly well perceived by vision and touch). Sight, hearing and smell operate at distance and are not exercised through contact. By contrast, touch and taste apprehend things with direct contact (with the tongue and the skin being sometimes considered as the organ of taste and touch, sometimes as their medium) – that is why taste is sometimes considered as a form of touch. Touch is considered as the lowest sense, being the basic common denominator between all living beings, including animals and plants.

The hierarchy of the senses promoted by Aristotle positions sight as the noblest sense, followed by hearing, then smell and finally taste and touch

(Jutte, 2005: 61). The hierarchy is based on a fundamental distinction between distant senses – vision and hearing – and contact senses – touch and taste – with smell in an intermediary position. For vision and hearing – whose mediums are light and air – the distance from the object enables one to perceive it in its entirety and complexity, highlighting the common *sensibles*. This guarantees not only the possibility of a rational understanding of the object, but also its objectivity, since vision and hearing are not directly affected by the object, and do not transform the object they sense, contrary to touch and taste, which can even destroy it. Distant senses are related to the intellect, which enables reflection, generalization and abstraction, and which, therefore, are considered as uniquely human. By contrast, touch and taste, shared with animals, have not only a more limited scope, but occasion the perceiver to sense their own body, and not only the objects. Therefore, they are considered as more subjective. The proximal senses are also more prone to produce pleasure – for example, taste is not only serving nutrition but also greediness. So, the use of the 'lower' senses can be morally reprehensible, when it is overindulged, for example, in gluttony, drunkenness or sexual debauchery. By contrast, the 'higher' senses, vision and hearing, are considered as senses that cannot be overindulged, being related to beauty and harmony (although Aristotle admits that distant senses can have their own obsessions and forms of immoderation).

This hierarchy of the senses has circulated for centuries in almost an unchanged way. The model of the five senses has remained basically unchanged, despite continuous and repeated critiques and counter-proposals formulated along the history of the senses and history of aesthetics (Summers, 1987). These suggestions hint at the fact that some senses should be better differentiated (like taste and smell, touch and temperature), and that more senses should be added (dozens of extra senses were suggested; see Macpherson, 2011), like pain (nociception), temperature (thermoception), movement (kinesthesia), balance (equilibrioception), and the senses of our internal body (proprioception, interoception). Furthermore, a recurrent critique concerns the separation of the senses, considered in their singularities, ignoring cross-modal relationships – also called synesthesia.

This stability of the model has several consequences, which are both moral and epistemic, both affecting norms and knowledge. On the one hand, the hierarchy implies a moral and normative conception of the senses, strongly present since Plato and enhanced by Christianity. This moral view also entails and fortifies the divide between body and mind, as

well as the association between the sensual body and sins, deviance and excesses.

On the other hand, the senses have been heavily discussed in their contribution to knowledge, and in terms of the embodied knowledge they produce. The superiority of sight for producing knowledge is a *topos* running through Western philosophy. A good synthesis of the arguments recognizing the "nobility of sight" is proposed by Jonas (1954) from a phenomenological perspective. Sight is understood in relation to its temporal characteristics: it is the only sense that gives access to the object in its totality in a simultaneous way, whereas the other senses require its successive experiencing over time. This property ultimately enables the perceiver to distinguish form from matter, essence from existence, and ultimately theory and practice. By contrast, hearing is temporal, and its duration is the duration of the sound: what is perceived is not an object but a dynamic event (Jonas, 1954: 508). Tactile qualities are experienced by movements of the body, often the hand, temporally organized in series of touches. This kinesthetic dimension gives touch its spatial order, which nonetheless remains distinct from the simultaneous presentation of multiple qualities made possible by sight. Consequently, sight gives access to what is coexistent and to what is static versus changing, being able to register change but also to have a sense of the immutability of things – a distinction that the other senses cannot make, since they operate within time, thus continuous change.

The relations between touch and vision have been at the center of constant philosophical discussions interested in their difference. They constitute the Molyneux's question in the eighteenth century, raised by a letter of Molyneux to Locke and further discussed by several philosophers, including Diderot's ([1749] 1977) "Letter on the Blind" (see Morgan, 1977). Given that touch relies on the successive exploration of smaller perceptual fields, whereas vision simultaneously captures wider fields, the question is whether a blind person who would suddenly see, could differentiate a cube from a sphere by just looking at it without touching it. The Molyneux question raises the issue of whether the access to the world is shaped by the specificity of the senses or whether there is a transcendental knowledge pre-existing sensorial experience.

The question has continued to be debated in more recent times (Katz, 1925; Montagu, 1986; O'Shaughnessy, 1989; Martin, 1992; Ratcliffe, 2008). Merleau-Ponty (1962) summarizes the difference between touch and sight in the following way: "we can, at least at first sight, flatter ourselves that we constitute the world, because it presents us with a

spectacle spread out before us at a distance, and gives us the illusion of being immediately present everywhere and being situated nowhere. Tactile experience, on the other hand, adheres to the surface of the body; we cannot unfold it before us and it never quite becomes an object. Correspondingly, as the subject of touch, I cannot flatter myself that I am everywhere and nowhere; I cannot forget in this case that it is through my body that I go to the world" (316).

Beyond what opposes these two senses, some psychological and philosophical approaches to vision inspired by touch have highlighted that vision too implies an active (kinesthetic) exploration of the world and is related to movement (Gibson, 1962; Ingold, 2000; Noë, 2004). For Gibson (1979) vision depends upon bodily activity; embodied movements generate changes in the ambient optic array, and in turn constantly adjust to the specific features of the visual environment. Authors like Noë (2004), have been inspired by Gibson for appealing to the similarity between vision and touch in order to challenge entrenched models of vision, criticizing approaches that construe vision in terms of static pictorial representations of the world: organisms do not passively observe global visual scenes, but perceive the world through a process of active exploration. Ignoring the integration of the senses and bodily skills would produce a "experiential blindness" (Noë, 2004: 5). Visual perception, as the use of other senses, thus becomes a skillful activity (Ingold, 2000), relying on the integration between several/all the senses mobilized in the environment. Mobilized is used here in the literal sense: looking and listening consists "in a kind of scanning movement, accomplished by the whole body – albeit from a fixed location – and which both seeks out, and responds to, modulations or inflections in the environment to which it is attuned" (Ingold, 2000: 244). Merleau-Ponty (1962) too claims that visual and tactile perception are intermingled: objects, presented visually, incorporate a sense of salient tactile possibilities; "any object presented to one sense calls upon itself the concordant operation of all the others" (318); "my gaze, my touch and all my other senses are together the powers of one and the same body integrated into one and the same action" (317–318).

In sum, whether adopted or contested, the model of the five senses has been reproduced throughout Western history. It has been the starting point for a critique of the compartmentalization into discrete and hierarchized senses and for a conception of sensoriality strongly associated with embodied action. These discussions do not only concern philosophical approaches but have fundamental consequences for the way we conceive