1 Entanglement, Divergence

When we first met, at the research seminar hosted by Constance Classen and David Howes at Concordia University in Montreal in 2017, we immediately tapped into a sense of shared critical frustration about our respective fields, the history of emotions and the history of the senses. This has developed into what we hope will be received as a pointed intervention, to some a provocation, that aims to reorientate scholarship in these fields towards a new history of experience, or at least to explore its possibilities. But insofar as we aim to innovate, we feel it is also important to share our converging criticisms, as well as pointing out where we feel there is a substantial platform upon which to build. On the one hand, we could not fathom how, given the historical contingency of both 'emotional' and 'sensory' experience and knowledge, these two fields could be so separate. Certainly, they were not always so, but it seems a fair assessment that much of the recent literature in the history of emotions has been unaware of the parallel work going on in the history of the senses, and, we think, *vice versa*. So, we wanted to join forces, but to what end? It seemed to us that historians of the emotions and historians of the senses were both trying to get at isolated facets of the same thing – experience – but could only see part of the picture. To be more critical, in focusing on ring-fenced categories – 'emotions' and 'senses' – they were risking anachronism, or a kind of archival blindness to the ways in which historical experience was constructed out of situated feelings, admixtures of situated historical affective categories that do not make sense considered simply as 'emotion' or 'sense'. These discrete categories are reflections of both academic and popular psychology's recent past, which has formalised both 'basic emotions' and the canonical 'five senses'. While we are not calling for the end of either sensory or emotions histories – for there is still much more to be learned from discrete scholarship in both fields – we are nevertheless calling for their dialogue. Should this not occur, we believe the central interpretive contributions of each field will not only begin to etiolate but that we will end up denying ourselves access to a more accurate, robust and, ultimately, more meaningful history of human experience. As will become clear, there has been, in recent years, significant disruption of these categories within psychological research, but the more simplistic view remains popular and it has, perhaps unwittingly, overly determined the research goals of historians who are interested in emotions and senses in the past.

What was remarkable to us was that this very criticism existed right at the beginning of a formal attempt to fashion both the history of emotions and the history of the senses. It has not been well observed. Lucien Febvre, about whom more to follow, reflected in 1938 that contemporary Western psychological

categories could not possibly work for other times and places, since *mentalités* were wrapped up with local and temporal contingencies. General schemes would always be more revealing of the present than the past, front-loaded with anachronism.

Searching for the origins of work braiding emotion and the senses is not an especially profitable enterprise: antecedents always exist. Still, it is worth dwelling on some of the earliest professional historical work on emotion, the senses and experience which called for precisely the sort of examination we undertake here – not least because, first, there was genuine and usable insight in this work, insight which we think enduring and valuable; and, second, because, as Bettina Hitzer (2020a) has recently, and correctly, remarked, it is 'dumbfounding' that more has not been made of these insights generally, especially in light of recent work on the biocultural history of the body.

If we sensibly hesitate to identify a 'first' we nevertheless happily locate early gestures calling for the inclusion of the sensate and emotion. One such gesture is found in the work of the influential Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga (1872–1945).[1] Critically, Huizinga was preoccupied with trying to better understand the idea of human experience, a principal aim of our work here. A founder of modern cultural history, Huizinga (2009) brought to bear a concern with recognising the importance of what David Howes terms 'historical sensation', particularly during the Middle Ages and Renaissance (Howes, 2018a, vol. 2, 2; Otterspeer, 2010). Frank Ankersmit (2018) has paid particular attention to the sensory and emotive language and content of Huizinga's work and maintains that Huizinga's attention to the senses and emotion, particularly in his influential 1919 work, *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen: Studie Over Levens-en Gedachtenvormen der Veertiende en Vijftiende Eeuw in Frankkrijk en de Nederlanden* (*The Autumn of the Middle Ages*; alternatively titled, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*) was a product of his training as a linguist and his keen interest in the Dutch literary genre of sensitivism. Huizinga believed that to capture historical experience the historian had to think in terms of historical sensation. The temporal and local situation of that sensation, however (and, given the nature of his later work, perhaps oddly), was not important to Huizinga here; he was simply concerned to establish the idea of how emotion and the senses might work together to inform and articulate human experience. Huizinga's understanding of historical experience was predicated on that moment when, notes Ankersmit, 'spatial and temporal demarcations have momentarily been lifted; it is as if the temporal trajectory between past and present, instead of separating the two, has become the locus of

[1] There are any number of historians we could identify here. We elect to light on just three whose work best exemplifies the points we take to be foundational to our project. For other work of importance, see Smith, forthcoming; Boddice, 2018a, 8–32.

their encounter. Historical experience pulls the faces of past and present together in a short but ecstatic kiss' (vol. 2, 24). Sounds especially grant us access to what Huizinga considered a deeper understanding of human experience. Trying to fathom the sounds of the past and how people heard them – the meaning people attached to what they heard – was an exercise in historical intimacy and Huizinga believed that a thoroughly decontextualised approach and appeal to language was key to accessing this understanding. Huizinga relied heavily on synesthetic metaphor in an effort to grasp what we might think of as the feel of an age. In the late French and Dutch Middle Ages, 'Life was so bright and colorful, it bore the scent of blood and roses' [*Zoo fel en bont was het leven, zoo verdroeg het den geur van bloed en rozen dooreen*] (Huizinga, 1919, 18). Here, Huizinga relies on the interplay between sight and smell in an effort to capture the sensory atmospherics of a place, people and time. Huizinga used language as a medium to convey the sensate past but not without cost. As Ankersmit says: 'historical experience and contextualization mutually exclude each other' (vol. 2, 27) in *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*; the Dutch historian stripped away the distracting gauze of historiography and relied very heavily on language alone to bridge the 'sound or the smell of the past' and interpret its emotional meaning for not just people in the past but also for writers in the present (vol. 2, 29). Huizinga's experiment was short-lived: a decade later he abandoned his heavy reliance on language alone.[2] In essence, Huizinga gave us a good basis and justification for needing to think about how central the senses and emotions were to understanding human experience in the past but he left us wanting when it came to how best to access that understanding.

A number of scholars have highlighted the importance of Lucien Febvre, the eminent French historian and member of the influential *Annales* school of historical inquiry, for the foundation of the history of emotions and the history of the senses (Hitzer, 2020a; Boddice, 2018a; Plamper, 2015; Smith, forthcoming; Rosenfeld, 2011; Dixon, 2011), but few have observed his call for a greater dialogue between emotions and senses. In 1941, Febvre spoke explicitly about the '*vie affective*'. Central to Febvre's understanding of this life – one constituted by the braiding of the senses and emotions – is the highly context-specific idea and language of *sensibilité*. Febvre insists, for example, that in the seventeenth century (in France, at least), *sensibilité* was deployed when attempting to identify impressions of a moral quality, viz. a *sensibilité* towards the truth. In the following century, says Febvre, 'the word refers to a particular way of experiencing human feelings – feelings of pity, sadness, etc'. The word '*sensible*'

[2] On Huizinga's shift from experience to sensation, see Howes, 2018a, 2; Huizinga, 1984. The basis of Huizinga's essay was first given as a speech in 1926 and then published in 1929.

captured this set of feelings and was, he says, increasingly distinguished from the quality of '*tendre*' [passionate, affectionate]. Added to this was a more recent understanding that treats *sensibilité* as a property of the nervous system which receives impressions – such as sensory perception and experience. For Febvre (1973, 13), *sensibilité* was a context-specific word used to understand 'the emotional life of man and all its manifestations' ('la vie affective et ses manifestations').

To be sure, in this essay at least, Febvre (1973) spends rather more time deliberating on how historians can attend to emotion as an historical subject than he does on the senses. But what he says about the history of emotion here is worth exploring in some detail. 'In the first instance', writes Febvre, 'an *emotion* is certainly not the same thing as a mere *automatic* reaction of the organism to an external stimuli [sic]' (13). Instead, emotions have 'a particular character which no man concerned with the social life of other men can any longer disregard' (14). In an important respect, emotional life is part and parcel of an intellectual life, a form of expression of consciousness. 'Intellectual activity presupposes social life', he argues, and it is in the realm of the emotional life that 'the initial ground for . . . inter-individual relations between the consciousness of men' is located (15). His understanding of history is at times unhelpfully framed in zero-sum fashion which posits the emergence of intellectual life at the expense of emotion but even here he is careful to qualify and stresses that context might well allow for interplay between the emotions and intellect.

Take, for example, his critique of Huizinga. The Dutch historian, argued Febvre, was clumsy, using entirely too broad a brush to characterize entire epochs – such as the Middle Ages – as almost exclusively wedded to a limited number of forms of emotional expression: anger, violence, impulsivity. To Huizinga's poetic claim that the late Middle Ages was 'too violent and so contrasting that it had the mixed smell of blood and roses', Febvre replies: 'Well, all this is quite well and even attractively put, but, nevertheless, it leaves a certain disquiet in the reader. Is it in fact sound work?' (16–17). Febvre says it is not simply because he believes that no era or even society can be reduced to one or even a limited set of emotional signatures. The effective (and affective) historian, says Febvre, details the interaction among the emotions and hesitates to consign vast swaths of the past to a particular sensory or emotional category. Simply put, says Febvre, Huizinga poses his historical problem 'out of context' (18). Understanding the meaning of emotion (and, by extension, the senses) in the context in which they circulated is critical, maintains Febvre. Febvre calls for historians to borrow what they can from cognate disciplines to achieve this reading, notably psychology:

> If from the outset we can lean firmly on the latest critical and positive achievements of our neighbours the psychologists, then we might, I feel, be able to undertake a whole series of studies none of which have yet been done, and as long as they have not been done *there will be no real history possible*. No history of love, just remember that. We have no history of death. We have no history of pity, or of cruelty. We have no history of joy. (24; his emphasis)

As we suggest in the following, Febvre was on to something important in this call for cross-disciplinary fertilization and emotion.

Febvre also took the senses seriously. Indeed, to demonstrate his central thesis about the nature of religious belief in the sixteenth century, he was obliged to think carefully about the sensate. If Huizinga used language to gesture broadly to the sensory atmospherics of an era, Febvre examined the senses of necessity because he believed it was one of the main ways in which he could explain the context-specific nature of the mental world of the sixteenth century.

Febvre (1947, 424–33, 438; English translation, 1982, 423–32, 437) saw the senses and emotions as interlaced. In his 1947 work, *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle. La religion de Rabelais,* Febvre maintained that 'men' of the sixteenth century (in his hands, they were always male), were people of 'feeling' [*sentant*] because of their sensory environment and their engagement with it. 'We are hothouse plants; those men grew out of doors', he argued: 'They were men close to the earth and to rural life, who encountered the countryside even in their cities, its plants and animals, its smells and noises' (1982, 427) [nous sommes des hommes de serre ; ils étaient des plein-vent. Des hommes proches de la terre et de la vie rurale. Des hommes qui, dans leurs cités même, retrouvaient la campagne, ses bêtes et ses plantes, ses odeurs et ses bruits (1947, 428)]. They were 'open-air men, seeing nature but also feeling, sniffing, hearing, touching, breathing her through all her senses' (427) [Des hommes de plein air, voyant mais sentant aussi, humant, écoutant, palpant, aspirant la nature par tous leurs sens (1947, 428)]. This is not the place to offer a formal critique of Febvre's reading: there is quite a lot wrong with it, in fact (it assumes a uniformity among all classes of sensory experience, for example). But whatever the shortcomings of Febvre's treatment of the senses, his brush was not so frustratingly broad as Huizinga's and Febvre was careful to contextualize his understanding. Place and time mattered. More than that, Febvre also thought in multisensory terms, treating sound, smell and touch as intimately related and unfriendly to disaggregation. He properly treated the past as a multisensory and even intersensory universe, something that sensory history has recently taken up in earnest (Howes, 2018a, vol. 2, 2; Smith, forthcoming; 2007). Imprecise though it was, Febvre's treatment of religion in the sixteenth century happily

and compellingly incorporated appeals to emotion, the senses, and, critically, context.

Febvre's thinking reached fuller refinement in the work of Alain Corbin, arguably the modern founder of the history of the senses and also an astute observer of the history of emotion. Corbin wrote not simply of the sensate past – although that is often his focus – but on how emotion and the senses worked in tandem to reflect and actively help create the context of historical experience. This much is apparent from Corbin's (1995) *Time, Desire, and Horror: Toward a History of the Senses*, as well as from his other work, in which he theorizes the writing of the history of the senses and emotions.

The senses, he suggests, are inextricable to emotions: horror, desire, any number of emotions, were indexed to sensory experiences and hitched to a specific context. 'There is no other way', writes Corbin, 'to know men of the past than by trying to borrow their glasses and to live their emotions' [connaître les hommes du passé qu'en essayant d'emprunter leurs lunettes et de vivre leurs émotion] (Corbin, 2000, 67; Godfrey 2002, 387). Smells, sounds, touches, sensory experiences generally, informed the emotional cadence of a particular people at a given time and it is Corbin's firm belief that we cannot understand those experiences outside the context in which they were experienced. Corbin was convinced that to access the past, historians needed to embrace evidence from all sources and multiple genres. Literature, poetry especially, could be helpful not as a source of empirical proof but, rather, in its discursive power; a careful appreciation of the environment, read broadly, was also useful in helping situate emotion and the senses; and psychology, properly applied, granted historians access to shifting modes of perception. On the potential of psychology especially to inform the history of emotion, the senses and experience, Corbin was on to something, as we demonstrate in the following and as a few other historians have also suggested. Still, all had to be handled with care in an effort to avoid unwitting anachronism. Context reigns supreme for Corbin and any disciplinary borrowing had to bend to the historian's utter insistence on the preeminent importance of understanding time, place and constituency (Corbin, 1995, 183). It is these insights (although still an admittedly underdeveloped intellectual architecture) which inform our understanding of the history of experience and allow us to push for a more robust, articulated and rigorous way of thinking about emotion, the senses and human historical experience (Corbin, 1995, 183 esp.; Godfrey, 2002, 387; Parr, 2010, 189 esp.; Smith, 2010).

Since the 1980s, writing on the history of the senses and the history of emotion has diverged, the early braiding of the two fields apparent in the work of Corbin and others gradually evaporating. The result has been

a quarantining with histories of emotion becoming increasing insensitive to the history of the senses and sensory history rarely even gesturing towards the emotional register of its work. Why this has been the case is not entirely clear and it is possible that there is more than one cause. Part of the explanation is field-contingent: emotion and sensory history have had their own interpretive imperatives. It may also be the case that the unfortunate divergence is also reflective of more systemic changes in the structure of the historical profession generally.

Historians of emotion, especially at the beginning of the second wave of emotions research beginning in the mid-1980s, appear to have discounted sustained and meaningful engagement with the senses in favour of speaking to a contemporary psychological debate about emotions concerning nature versus nurture, cognitive versus non-cognitive, and the universal as opposed to the situationally constructed. At that point, exacerbated by the ongoing existence of psychohistory, which most mainstream historians would eventually come to reject, these questions were essentially deferred. Nature (or biology), so the argument went, was not the historian's remit, and that meant focusing on culturally contingent *expressions* of emotion.[3] The corollary was the implicit adoption of a psychological orthodoxy of emotional categories, essentially surrendering the field of emotion knowledge production to psychologists, rendering history a subfield in the conversation and consigning historians to work within contemporary psychology's emotion categories (which is precisely what Febvre warned against). The net effect has been to steer historians of emotion away from due consideration of the senses.[4] Historians of emotions continue to raise the nature/nurture, constructivist/universalist debate, but rarely do they break out of orthodox psychological framing of what emotions *are*. And this blinds them not only to the historiography of the senses, but to the senses per se.

If psychology hobbled emotions history in this way, the heavy influence of sensory anthropology in the writing of sensory history should have ensured that

[3] See, for example Stearns and Stearns, 1986, 4–8. The Stearns never showed any love for psychohistory, but its importance was evident in the framing of their (1988) edited volume, *Emotion and Social Change: Toward a New Psychohistory*. Following the intellectual thread all the way down to Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns (2013), one finds no mention of the senses at all. For a general account of the development of Peter Stearns' ideas in the history of emotions, see Olsen and Boddice, 2017.

[4] Most histories of emotion simply ignore the senses altogether. For a recent example where an engagement with the history of the senses seemed both necessary, even obvious, but was nonetheless essentially missing, see Downes, Holloway, and Randles, (2018). Jan Plamper (2015) puts Febvre squarely in the frame, but aside from a single footnote (295*n*170) offering a 'few examples which link the history of the senses with the history of emotion', the thread is dropped. The senses make no substantial appearance at all in Rosenwein and Cristiani, 2018.

histories of the senses continued to engage fully with the emotions. After all, the foundational work of sensory anthropologists was always closely and personally related to historical research. We are thinking of David Howes (1989; 1990; 1991; 2018a; 2018b) and Constance Classen, (1993a; 1993b; 1997; 1998; 2014; Classen and Howes, 2006) here especially. They continually suggested the importance not only of emotion to the historical study of the senses but also recognized the desirability of a (historically contextualized) incorporation of the natural sciences into studies of the sensate, very much along the lines we are calling for in this Element.[5]

Although emotion is sometimes still apparent in some sensory histories, it largely plays a distant second fiddle; moreover, some sensory histories have forgotten the valuable calls for a fully context-sensitive sensory scholarship championed by Febvre, Corbin, Howes and Classen especially.[6] Whether or not these missteps are a function of faulty memory, a lack of familiarization with earlier scholarship, or down to changes within the historical profession at large remains unclear. The historical profession's increasing calls for interdisciplinarity are often honoured by sensory historians and much to the benefit of all. That much said, given this tendency, it is odd to see that the key insights offered by sensory anthropology have been taken on board by sensory history only partially and sometimes not at all. Perhaps other pressures within the historical profession better explain why sensory history has tended to not only sidestep emotions history but also sometimes court a certain anachronism. Institutional calls for 'relevance' – for history to be made more accessible, popular, and, in effect, consumable – invite a heavily decontextualized historical sensory writing, where sensory literary flourish improperly stands in for sustained contextualized analysis. Some of the most popular books on, for example, the US Civil War are rife with animating sounds, smells and tastes, yet frequently fail to tell readers what was meant, historically, by those same sounds, smells and tastes (Smith, 2015, 4–5). Professional pressures have also led historians of all persuasions, sensory ones included, to write about ever-smaller slivers of historical space and time. If the deliberately ecumenical approach of the *Annales* sensory history school helped invite and stimulate considerations of emotions and psychology, the more narrow and professionally inspired focus of some subsequent writing on the history of the senses tells us about the costs of research in the modern university setting. Febvre and Corbin may well have been less hostage to the pressure of specialization and the dividend of their work

[5] See Howes, 2018b. In the 1990s, both Classen and Howes kept alive the emotion/senses/natural science dialogue. See Classen, 1993a; 1993b; 1997; 1998; Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994; Howes, 1989; 1991; 1990.

[6] Quick access to examples may be found in Howes, 2018a, vol. 2, 4, 112, 231.

is in real danger of being lost to the research imperatives and limiting structures of modern higher education, limitations that even the more insistent calls for interdisciplinarity cannot quite overcome (Smith, 2007b; Smith, forthcoming).

2 Languages of Feeling

The most orthodoxly historicist of our claims is the need for a renewed sensitivity to language in the archives. We discuss the importance of languages of 'feeling' in general and raise awareness of the necessity to employ historical language that transcends contemporary (universal) notions of emotion and sense. Historical concepts of experience often bear little resemblance to 'emotion' or 'sense', but rather combine affective and cognitive categories in more general concepts of feeling. We must also go beyond the word. 'Language', we argue, might usefully include the non-verbal, such as posture, expression, etc., as modes of affective bodily expression that are plausibly recoverable and historically distinct. It prompts us to suggest collapsing the usually parceled-off category of reason (mind/soul/thought/speech/brain, depending on the context) into a more inclusive category of felt experience.

In Piroska Nagy and Damien Boquet's masterful (2018) study of medieval 'sensibilities' there is a clear historicist intention to be faithful to the linguistic affective concepts of the past. This fidelity is predicated on an understanding of a relationship between concepts and experience, between concepts and expressions and between concepts and value, which is to say the moral status of affective categories. For them, the medieval European master category is *affectus*, not 'emotion' and not even passion. Indeed, the fine-grained distinction between different concepts at different times is shown to be key to understanding shifts in emotional styles and scripts, of the drawing of lines of inclusion and exclusion around otherwise loosely bound communities that share a common orientation of correct 'feeling'. In their elaborate and compelling account, Nagy and Boquet show that there can be no easy parcelling-off of emotion, sense, reason, thought, soul or virtue. Reason is an affect, in their account, and the soul's state of grace is predicated not on a simple reading of piety, but on the correct orientation and balance of the whole being. Even in these most general terms, it is, quite plainly, absurd to think of medieval pasts in terms of six basic emotions or five senses, or with a clear demarcation of reason and emotion, or of soul and body, mind and spirit. Once one folds in the intricacies of discrete affective concepts in Latin, or else in situated vernacular languages, combined with shifting interpretations of Aristotelian and Galenic traditions, and an overall narrative arc of change in the relationship of Church,

State and society over the longue durée, then one ends up looking at a distinctly alien affective totality. It is, however, anything but simple. If ever a work of history demonstrated the historical complexity of past experience, this is it.

There are similar works for antiquity and early modernity, as well as works about modern history that disrupt the canonical boundaries of psychology's recent past, so why do we still parcel them off as 'histories of emotions' or 'histories of the senses'? They quite clearly encompass both, ably representing historical experience and knowledge of experience in its own terms.[7] Unfortunately, much recent work in our respective fields fails to be so holistic, presenting a warped, one-sided and anachronistic view of the felt past.[8]

2.1 Constructing Cruelty

We cannot hope to provide a working model of how to follow situated language in all periods and places, since by definition this work will vary according to the subject matter and the availability of source material.[9] We can, however, provide an example. A fruitful line of inquiry concerns the concept, charge and experience of 'cruelty' in English from the middle of the eighteenth century through to the middle of the nineteenth century.[10] It might seem, at first blush, that cruelty, or the act of being cruel, has little to do with emotions or senses, and much to do with morals and behaviour, but the gradual development of a modern concept of cruelty in this period encapsulated all of these categories and was, to boot, laden with class and gender chauvinism and political ideology. The charge of cruelty to animals, for example, was first applied to activities and institutions – blood sports, cattle markets – in which those making the charge took no direct part. To highlight how novel the charge of cruelty was, it should be stressed that an activity like cockfighting was an ancient, high-prestige sport of the aristocracy, sharing a stage with feted

[7] Exemplary works include Kaster, 2005; Sullivan, 2016; Illouz, 2007.

[8] Examples here are legion. Here we highlight a few otherwise worthy works in which the problem of emotional anachronism slips in. We do not intend to condemn or de-value this scholarship in general terms. Lateiner and Spatharas, 2016; Broomhall, 2015, with the exception of chapters by Stephanie Trigg and Thomas Dixon; Bailey and Barclay, 2017, with the exception of the chapter by Helen Hills. The last referenced collection, for example, includes an attempt to establish, at the end, 'standardised . . . variables' and 'constants in biology' (Whitehouse and François, 2017). This misstep was repeated by another (otherwise excellent) collection emerging from Australia-based scholars, Kerr, Lemmings, and Phiddian, 2016, the unfitting chapter in question being Parrott, 2016.

[9] A working example of how this might look, across different periods, with a particular sensitivity to the question of translation, is Boddice, 2019c.

[10] This example is drawn from extensive familiarity with printed literature, sermons, political debates, political commentary and archival records pertaining to social activism against cruelty to animals or to the defence of traditional activities involving animals in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain. This is necessarily only a sketch, but for a full account, see Boddice, 2009.