

11. Sensing Urban Environments (Workshop)

Sandra Calkins, Freie Universität Berlin

Jon Schubert, University of Basel

Cities have become climate change hotspots and key sites of environmental risk mitigation. Knowledge about urban environmental risks—floods, storms or air pollution—is largely mediated by scientific data, devices and technologies. Often such top-down knowledge is hegemonic in crafting policy responses, regardless of the particular origins of such knowledge. In response, anthropological scholarship has foregrounded embodied experience and sensory practices as an alternative source of place-based environmental knowledge that evades official recognition. This panel seeks to move the conversation beyond this opposition between everyday, lay modes of perceiving the environment and top-down scientific ways of appraising them — especially when the dichotomy does not hold up in the flow and eddies of urban life.

Urban dwellers have always been quick to integrate new forms of sensing their environments, adapting technologies, infrastructures and knowledge practices in ways that cut across facile oppositions between scientific and lay knowledge, 'local' and 'global' or the formal and the unofficial. Making the middle ground analytically productive can help de-exoticize lay knowledge, while at the same time parochializing official expertise on urban environments. We seek ethnographic contributions that explore the rich middle ground between these poles and illustrate patchworked ways of knowing, advancing conversations on the knowledge politics in urban environmental anthropology. Through which means and technologies are urban environments—and particularly exposures to threats and harm—sensed, felt, known and confronted?

Cycloactivists' bodies as sensory tools: environmental advocacy and engagement in Mexico City

Raúl Acosta, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

Over the last two decades, Mexico City's cycloactivists have emphasised their bodily experiences as key tools to appraise the urban environment around them. Their campaigns have included demands for cleaner air and more trees to reduce temperatures in streets and avenues. Using social media as group chats or to gather remarks about what cyclists identify as key concerns in city streets, cycloactivists have kept a unique type of aggregated bank of perceptions. This has been crucial in their wider campaigns demanding an overhaul of Mexico City's mobility system. It has also informed methodologies of several non-governmental

organizations who translate such perceptions into quantifiable indicators and categories. This paper thus argues that cycloactivists use their own and other cyclists' bodily perceptions as techniques for sensing urban environments. The on-the-ground and on-the-move character of their reports provide them with significant legitimacy.

Sensing and conditioning heat as a multispecies endeavour. Reflections on doing ethnography with humans and dogs in hot cities.

Elisabeth Luggauer, Humboldt Universität Berlin

This paper builds on taking literally the opening of this workshop call by referring to cities as "climate change hotspots": with the aim to understand how heat in urban spaces - as a multiplicity of local dynamics of global warming (urban microclimates), urban heat islands and temporal heat waves - matter in everyday lives of humans and non-humans, it discusses methodological strategies of sensing heat and making multispecies heat perceptions ethnographically researchable. Based on sensory go-alongs with humans and their (pet) dogs through different urban spaces, I will reflect upon (1) how living in the heat and being exposed to heat leads to the multispecies endeavour of sensing heat with each other, (2) how heat itself and the exposure to heat become problematized as a multispecies risk (not so much in the final form of extinction, but more as an everyday risk for well-being and health), and (3) how practices of multispecies sensing and to conditioning the air through navigating between indoors and outdoors, day and night, open and closed windows and doors, using devices such as cooling blankets and air conditioning machines negotiate lay knowledge and scientific knowledge and create new multispecies heat knowledges.

Spectral Storytelling: Muds, Mudskippers and an Estuary in the Anthropocene

Indrawan Prabaharyaka, Humboldt University of Berlin

Labtek Apung, Humboldt University of Berlin

Take a walk along the end of Citarum river, down the alleys of Muaragembong, past the rows of mangrove apples, fisher settlements built atop muds of wetland, surrounded by parked boats; go along until the end of the road, the estuary where the sweet water meets the sea. If you meet a local, the person might remind you, "Be careful with the slippery riverbank and the crocodiles in the water that could transform into a tree"—a remnant of a forest decades ago. In this presentation,

we would like to introduce 'spectral storytelling', a form of narration that we craft from our engagement with residents who have been enduring and surrounded by aquatic pollutions beyond the horizon of our bare eye perceptibility. By spectral, we refer to the chromatography experiment of testing different materials (e.g. mud and mudskipper) with the residents *and* the ghostly, haunting stories of coastal urbanism in the Anthropocene.

Urban Climate Risks and Thermal Sensing in and around Buildings in Chongqing

Madlen Kobi, University of Fribourg

Sensing and navigating urban climate risks such as urban heat and air pollution happen not only through nose and skin, but citizens perceptions and practices are responses to App technologies, official publications and building materials among others. Based on anthropological fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, and oral history, the presentation analyzes how thermal governance and urban environmental knowledge politics in Chongqing are constantly negotiated: citizens contest for example officially communicated air temperatures in summer as being below the real temperatures in order to keep schools and businesses open. The paper particularly focuses on the ways in which Chongqing residents cope with climate risks in and around residential spaces. The thermal-material culture of cooling, for example, is not only a means to regulate one's body temperature, but is spatially embedded in infrastructure networks that have changed over time. The built environment plays a fundamental role in navigating urban heat island effects and air pollution and the use of indoor and outdoor spaces has changed since the rapid urbanization starting in the 1980s. Buildings have both accelerated (e.g. through energy consumption and soil-sealing) and helped mitigating outdoor climates (e.g. offering an air-conditioned environment during the hot summers).