

35. Embodied knowledge as epistemic labor: Knowledge in and in between bodies (Workshop)

Anne, Kukuczka, Freie Universität Berlin

Stefan Binder, University of Zurich

This panel focuses on contestations around embodied, sensory, or socially enacted knowledge. Bodily knowledge, habituated skills, or relational ways of knowing are often misrecognized, (made) invisible, or devalued, leading to situations of “epistemic injustice” (Fricker 2009) at the intersections of gendered, racialized, and classed labor in the global economy. Rather than presupposing fixed epistemic hierarchies, this panel foregrounds questions of labor or exchange in order to examine complex configurations of knowledge and power. When, how, and by whom is embodied knowledge (de)valued? When and how can it turn into a resource for political mobilization, solidarity, claims to belonging, or forms of refusal?

For this panel, we invite contributions that attend to the generative, ethical, or political potentials attached to marginalized forms of embodied and bodily knowledge. We also seek to explore social spaces and interactions as well as corporeal and material practices that transcend cognitive or intellectualist conceptions of ‘the epistemic’ by centering the role of bodies, the senses, aesthetic sensibilities, or intersubjective experience. For example, what kind of knowledge is produced in and in between bodies through everyday interactions in the body-centered service industry? How do non-normative intimacies or queer practices of kinship generate not only sociality but also knowledge and skills? Drawing on traditions in queer, feminist, and critical race studies, the panel thinks such questions in relation to our embodied presence as ethnographers as well as asymmetrical power relations in and beyond academia: How do gendered and racialized conditions of labor affect the attribution and circulation of epistemic value? How can we better attune ourselves to the sensuous and embodied dimensions of the relational epistemic labor that is ethnographic theorizing and writing?

(De-)escalating Bodies: Knowing difference in de-escalation trainings and practices

Maja Sisnowski, University of Amsterdam

In this contribution, I query bodies as a means of knowing at the intersections of care and security concerns. I draw on ethnographic fieldwork exploring de-

escalation, a professional approach to aggressive and potentially violent behavior, in German health and social welfare services.

Fraught with the potential of physical harm, de-escalation is profoundly embodied, with aggression, tension and fear locatable in and expressed through individual bodies. Situations must be assessed every time anew, through what Berring, Hummelvoll et al. (2016) term experiential knowing: "generated in face-to-face meetings in direct encounters." The body figures in these encounters as a source of knowledge and mode of knowing, grounded in perception and experience. I follow these embodied, situated modes of knowing through everyday practices and through de-escalation trainings, where they are partially articulated through methods such as stories, models or role-play. How, I ask, do such methods relate to the universality or particularity of bodies and embodied knowledge? Thinking bodies as material-semiotic nodes (Haraway 1991), I trace how bodies in (de-)escalation come to relate to other bodies, to identity categories, and to different forms and distributions of violence and aggression along axis of inequality.

Multi-sensorial repertoires of hierarchy, inequality, and desire in Rio de Janeiro

Tilmann Heil, University of Cologne

How do newcomers to an extremely unequal city like Rio de Janeiro engage with the sensorial cues of difference and inequality? Urban dwellers experience hierarchies through their bodies in relation to the landscape of a previously unknown urban space and the bodies circulating within it. Emerging multi-sensorial repertoires challenge the epistemic hegemony of Western visualism that are the basis for simple stereotyping and prejudice. In the 2010s, recently arrived Senegalese and Spanish dwellers of Rio de Janeiro have worked through their bodies and minds to compose sensorial repertoires of urban social relations of which they are becoming part. Sustained by the anthropological critique of Western visualism as well as gender and critical race studies, I argue that newcomers develop repertoires from both embodied and reflexive ways of relating to a city and its inhabitants. Even if they simplify the encountered hierarchical orders, these repertoires are not only a description of, and important response to, inequality, racism, fear, admiration, or desire. They also co-constitute knowledge of these dense configurations of valued difference inscribed in urban bodies and the city overall.

Bodies in Time: On the temporality of ethnographic knowledge (about femininity, for example)

Stefan Binder, University of Zurich

This contribution examines the role of time in the production of ethnographic knowledge conceived as an embodied and interactional form of epistemic labor. Based on an extended ethnographic episode during International Women's Day in the South Indian city of Hyderabad, I examine how long-term and repeated ethnographic engagements with a single fieldwork site can afford different kinds of bodily knowing, which are shaped by multiple and complex temporalities. Drawing on Marilyn Strathern's concept of "ethnographic moment" (1999, *Property, substance and effect*), the paper explores how my embodied and situated presence as anthropologist allowed me to experience feminist, male (gay), and postfeminist performances of femininity within the experiential unit of a single fieldwork day. Against the background of current methodological debates in anthropology, I argue for a more sustained attention to time and temporality in critical reflections on the possible "fields" and "objects" of ethnographic knowledge.