Introduction

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Following on from *Body and Religion* 2(1)'s focus on the sensuality of ancient religions, this issue concerns the senses in contemporary religions. It too makes use of the privileging of five senses – smell, touch, sight, hearing and taste – by devoting one article to each. It also selects five case studies from the extravagant diversity of religious sensuality. Importantly, while the authors focus on a particular sense and a particular religious activity, they are not only fully aware of the continuous interplay between those and other senses, but also between those and other religious activities. Nonetheless, there is value in selectively touching on particularities, or in tasting one treat before moving on to the next course. In part, this is because some senses are of heightened significance in the performance or ideology of particular religions or of specific ritual or daily activities. For example, to participate in Chinese religious rites is to burn incense; to venerate the *orixás* of Brazilian Candomblé is to serve and share foods; for Sikhs to enter the presence of the divine is to be seen and to see; when First Nation and Métis people honour the larger-than-human community they make and share music; and when Spanish Catholics honour the Virgin Mary they touch her in her statue form.

These short statements tease with the promise of sensuality and of a more complex understanding of what it is like to do these and other religions. Certainly, they are far from complete in themselves, offering only short summaries of the themes of the articles which follow. The lived reality of religions is not so well organised or strongly bounded that all practitioners – even elite leaders among them – always do the one thing that may seem

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definitive or at least exemplary. Words like 'some' or 'sometimes' should perhaps be added to point to significant variations and even contests of performance and preference. Simultaneously, as is made completely clear in the articles that follow, no single sense or single event is complete and sufficient in itself or in isolation. Indeed, each or even all of the senses may be understood or experienced as utterly or relatively inadequate. Thus, for example, to elevate sight in Sikhi perspectives requires recognition that invisibility and therefore 'not seeing' are vitally important and vitalising of engagement with the transcendent divine.

Furthermore, to reiterate more clearly, no bodily sense works alone. There is a rich and immersive sensorial world through which each bodily sensorium moves. A Chinese visitor to a temple or shrine not only smells incense but also sees architecture and hears invocations. Candomblé is as full of colourful and tactile costumes as it is replete with the tastes preferred or avoided by *orixás* and their devotees. Sikh *darsan* is at least supported by devotional music and readings, and is often followed by shared meals. North American Indigenous music is performed at vibrantly colourful dance events and in more sombre mourning wakes. Devotion to the Virgin is braided with sights of ornate shrines and the sounds of hymns and prayers.

Even when these and other religious people seek to pay attention to a particular task, activity or experience by limiting distractions from some or all (other) senses, they thereby indicate something about the whole bodily and worldly sensorium. Indeed, many religious activities are precisely concerned with abstinence from or restriction of particular modes of sensuality. Bodies moving through the world can be seen as detrimental to fully embracing the transcendence that seems definitive of some (but far from all) religions or religious acts. In this frame, religions could be seen as bodily disciplines and/or as means of disciplining bodies (whether or not this involves ideas about souls or spirits somehow separate from or related to bodies).

There is, then, much to consider about senses and the sensuality of religion(s). This journal's devotion to debates about religion(s) and bodies is the perfect venue for pursuing this topic. Indeed, a focus on senses solidly grounds discussion of bodies and religion(s) in the physical and material realities and activities of both bodies and the world. It is also significant to the project of this journal that the following articles (like those in *Body and Religion* 2(1)) often indicate the sensuality of scholarly learning and research. Neither bodies nor religions – or the doing of religion by bodies – are well served by the old-style pretence of scholarly distance, absence or disembodiedness. The articles that follow are rich not only in data but also

in indicating (some more explicitly than others) methodological reflections that will reward further engagement.

As ever, the abstracts of the articles provide the best entry points, tasters or previews. I will, therefore, only briefly indicate the main topics now. This issue begins with Shawn Arthur's engagement with the 'importance of smell in Chinese religion' but does not neglect other forms of sensuality. The researcher and chef Patricia Rodrigues de Souza guides us through the tastes of Brazilian Candomblé, not only evoking ritual and everyday practices, but also exploring the parallels between foodways and (more verbal) languages. Opinderjit Kaur Takhar's discussion of Sikhi perspectives on *darśan*, the 'seeing' of and by the deity, weaves a pattern from textual, communal and personal resources for devotional activities. A different register of religious practices is considered in Byron Dueck's ethnomusicology of North American Indigenous music. The soundscapes of powwows and wakes are not only distinctive from each other, but also indicate interesting continuities with and discontinuities from settler cultural complexes. Finally, Amy Whitehead takes us to southern Spain where devotion to the Virgin Mary in her form as a local statue-person invites careful tactile approaches.

In all these articles an interplay between intimacy and transcendence deeply implicates sensual bodies as they do religion in diverse contexts and communities and with diverse ambitions and outcomes. This is far from the last word in the study of bodies and religion(s), but clarity about sensuality and sensual practices is an absolutely critical step in reshaping the study of religion as a disciplined engagement with what people do in the lively-material world. Attention to religious acts that emphasise particular senses – but do not neglect the multi-sensory or the disciplining of senses – should enable and enrich our further efforts in body and religion debates.