OF PROUST'S MADELEINES AND WHALES' SONGS: AN AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVE ON EXPERTISE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the overlooked role of senses in generating, applying, and recognizing expertise. Drawing from scholarly work on aesthetics, we highlight the role of aesthetic knowledge in expertise – knowledge that resides in cultivated sensory judgments that experts employ to work with and through materiality. We elaborate on three ways in which aesthetic knowledge is implicated in expertise. First, sensory judgments elicit interactions between experts, artifacts and technologies within the webs of relations in which expertise is generated. Second, as experts apply expertise to cases and problems, they produce, evaluate, and manipulate artifacts and technologies relying on their senses. Third, judgments and representations of expertise are implicated in negotiations on who is an expert and which expertise is valuable. Together, these insights suggest an understanding of expertise that accounts for sensory faculties and experience as social practices intertwined with the material environment.

Keywords: Expertise; work; aesthetics; senses; materiality

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INTRODUCTION

Expertise operates and occasions effects in and through webs of social and material relations (Eyal, 2013; Latour & Woolgar, 1986; MacKenzie, 2006) as practitioners that viably claim authority via expertise (Abbott, 1988; Anteby & Holm, 2021) engage with and through materiality to accomplish work (Bailey et al., 2011; Bechky, 2021; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012). Empirical findings suggest that sensory judgments of the material environment are inherent in how experts accomplish their tasks, diagnose and treat problems, and claim authority (see Baldessarelli et al., 2022, for a review). Practitioners in different fields approach their work and the materiality it entails, from specimens and prototypes to tools and technologies, by employing their senses – that is, hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste (e.g., Christin & Lewis, 2021; Elias et al., 2018; Goodwin, 1994; Lynch, 1985; Rostain & Huising, 2024; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2018; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2011).

These sensory judgments constitute and are constituted through what researchers refer to as *aesthetic knowledge*, that is, a practical form of knowing that resides in sense-induced judgments vis-à-vis materiality (Strati, 1992). To illustrate, narcotics analysts in crime laboratories intuit "drugs on the basis of their smell," firearms examiners use comparison microscopes "to make judgments based on visual cues," and toxicologists "hear problems with their instruments" (Bechky, 2021, p. 55). Surgeons in operating rooms employ haptic, visual, and auditory cues of patients' bodies during surgical operations (Sergeeva et al., 2020). Technicians rely on their "ability to make sense of subtle differences in the appearance of materials and the behavior of machines" (Barley, 1996, p. 425), and mathematicians follow "the feeling of mathematical beauty, of the harmony of numbers and forms, of geometric elegance" to perform their work (Poincaré, 1910, p. 331).

Despite abundant empirical evidence, these observations are overlooked, marginalized, and left anecdotal in theoretical conversations on expertise. Even when these observations are attended to, they are typically considered embodied skills pertaining to the individual (Collins & Evans, 2002). Current scholarship falls short of appreciating these observations in connection to broader contexts such as expert jobs, professions, and networks of expertise within which expertise is applied, generated, and recognized (Pakarinen & Huising, 2023). As a result, empirical evidence documenting the role of senses and aesthetic knowledge in experts' work is sidelined in theorizations on expertise, professional authority, and expert performances beyond creative industries and occupations.

This insight motivates our paper, which aims to put aesthetics into focus in research on expertise. For instance, if a cursory touch of the wood tells a flute maker whether the quality is good (Cook & Yanow, 1993) and a glance at financial reports tells auditors whether they are satisfactory (Guénin-Paracini et al., 2014), then understanding produced through the senses is implicated in how experts enact expertise. The modernist conception of knowledge which emphasizes rationality, standardization, and universality (Scott, 1998; Weber, 1978) and simultaneously excludes local and sensual, has deterred us from acknowledging the role of senses in expertise. In this paper, we argue that, on the contrary,

the webs of relations constituting expertise entail aesthetic judgments – visual, sonic, haptic, olfactory, and gustatory – and that aesthetic knowledge is central to enacting expertise within these relations.

In what follows, we first introduce the concepts of sensory judgment and knowledge rooted in research on organizational aesthetics. We elaborate the notion of aesthetic knowledge within the broader "elusive knowledges" (Toraldo et al., 2018) that also encompass embodied and tacit forms of knowing. After that, to elaborate on the role of aesthetic knowledge, we detail ways in which expertise is relationally generated, applied, and recognized through the senses. We argue that attending to senses in expert work can advance our understanding of relational expertise.

AESTHETICS: AN INTRODUCTION TO ITS FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS

The word "aesthetics" derives from the Greek αἴσθησις (aísthēsis) and αἰσθητῐκός (aisthētikós), "of or for perception by the senses, perceptive."[1] The term was first introduced in the 18th century by philosopher Baumgarten to "protest against the rationalist devaluation of sense cognition" (Gregor, 1983, p. 369). By stating that "[a]esthetics (theory of the liberal arts, doctrine of inferior knowledge, art of beautiful thinking, art of the analogous of reason) is the science of sensory knowledge" (Baumgarten, 1750, p. 2),[2] the philosopher sought to dignify aesthetics as an essential knowledge as deserving of examination as rational thinking.

While it originated in the mid-1700s, aesthetic knowledge gained traction in the study of organizations only in the early 1990s (Gagliardi, 2007), coinciding with a newfound awareness of the value of sensory judgments in organizational settings (e.g., Gagliardi, 1990; Strati, 1992). Since then, researchers have dedicated growing attention to aesthetics and its influence on work (Baldessarelli et al., 2022; Cattani et al., 2020). In particular, scholars have focused on two fundamental concepts – sensory judgments and aesthetic knowledge – that we describe next.

Sensory Judgments: Interacting with the Material World Through the Senses

A sensory judgment is a sense-induced response to events and interactions (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990; Stephens, 2021; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2018). It is an immediate perception triggered as individuals interact with the material world surrounding them (Dewey, 1934). An aesthetic or sensorial judgment unfolds as an "initial perceptual hook followed by a more detached, intellectual appreciation that returns the viewer to the work with a deeper understanding" (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990, p. 118). Put differently, sensory judgments generate immediate, visceral reactions that often evolve into secondary considerations, such as cognitive and instrumental evaluations (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004; Rindova & Petkova, 2007). To illustrate, roaming through the rooms of a museum, an art piece might catch the visitor's attention and surprise them. They might find it shocking,

comforting, confusing, or exciting (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012). Another example is as follows, Marcel in Proust's (1914) *In Search of Lost Time* eats the crumbs of a madeleine dipped in lime blossom tea and sensorially and cognitively experiences it: "No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin."

Immediate, intuitive reactions might, then, generate lasting emotional responses, symbolic associations, and logical analyses leading to further assessments (Rindova & Petkova, 2007). For example, individuals might experience shock or strong dislike when encountering disturbing views, which generate lasting meanings and propel actions (e.g., Barberá-Tomás et al., 2019; Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004).

Aesthetic Knowledge: Understanding and Building the Material World Through the Senses

Informed by the role of sensory judgments, a growing body of research in organization studies has explored aesthetic knowledge in work and organizations. This research conceptualizes aesthetic knowledge as a type of practical knowing employed by experts who deliberately use their cultivated sensory judgments to carry out tasks (Gagliardi, 1990; Strati, 1992, 1999; Strati & deMontoux, 2002). Aesthetic knowledge is "acquired through the senses [and] is employed to enact day-to-day work and to infuse material artifacts and workspaces with aesthetic properties" (Baldessarelli et al., 2022, p. 235).

Aesthetic knowledge, alongside embodied and tacit forms of knowledge, makes up what Toraldo and colleagues call "elusive knowledges" (2018) – that is, knowledge that is difficult to articulate in words and epistemologically challenging to study. Even though such forms of knowledge are often used interchangeably, and we acknowledge that overlaps exist (i.e., all three depend on personal, direct involvement in a task), each has a distinct historical trajectory and a different focal interest (Table 1 summarizes the three forms of knowledge).

Embodied knowledge is lodged in the body, which is the primary means to reflect and enact realities (e.g., Meziani & Cabantous, 2020; Sele et al., 2024). Embodied knowledge is "coming from experience of the body from within," that is, from "involving bodily senses and a process of becoming aware of the body as a source of … knowledge" (Rigg, 2018, p. 153). Embodied knowing acknowledges the "agency of flesh" (Harding et al., 2022) and, thus, treats the body as "central to the perceiving, feeling, communicating, judging, reflecting and moving" (Blanche & Feldman, 2021). In this sense, for example, when considering writing a letter, "it is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 166).

Tacit knowledge, instead, is "the knowledge that we draw on in use, but is difficult to have consciousness of, or to express in language" (Hadjimichael & Tsoukas, 2019, p. 672). It allows one to be aware of a task (e.g., writing a letter)

Table 1. Classification of "elusive knowledges."

Form of Knowledge	Definition	Focus of Research (= focus of inquiry)	References
Embodied knowledge 	Knowledge acquired and used through sensing and inscribed within/on/as flesh	Bodies and somatic sensations For example, the body that perceives comfort/discomfort	*Foundational work*: Merleau-Ponty (1945) *Other key references*[a]: Lawrence et al. (2023), Shapiro (2019), Wacquant (2015)
Tacit knowledge 	Knowledge that people use in action but is difficult to have consciousness of and to put into words	Task at hand (which the person is focally aware of) For example, the words and sentences that are being written	*Foundational work*: Polanyi (1958, 1966) *Other key references*: Hadjimichael et al. (2023, 2024), Tsoukas and Hadjimichael (2019)
Aesthetic knowledge 	Knowledge developed and utilized as people use their senses (i.e., hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste) to engage with materials	Relation between senses and the materiality of the task at hand For example, the touch of the clay to shape a vase	*Foundational work:* Baumgarten (1750); see also Kant (1987) *Other key references:* Baldessarelli et al. (2022), Gagliardi (1990), Strati (1992, 1999)

[a]We include additional references of recently published conceptual papers that speak to management and organization scholars.

because one attends unconsciously to it *from* its subsidiary aspects (e.g., when writing a letter, one uses pen and paper, "but attending *from* them *to* that which they mean, reduces them to a subsidiary status" (Polanyi, 1967, original emphasis). As such, tacit knowing implies a process of integration, called "indwelling" (Polanyi, 1966), that goes unnoticed and is mostly inaccessible to people's consciousness. In decision-making, such a process entails a rapid and nonconscious processing of subsidiary aspects that some scholars have called intuitive processing (Dane & Pratt, 2007; Salas et al., 2010).

Finally, aesthetic knowledge is a form of "knowledge used to construct, represent, and interpret the felt meanings and sensory experiences related to organizational life" (Hansen et al., 2007). As such, aesthetic knowledge is deliberately developed and utilized by tapping into one's sensory capacity to produce, interpret, and work through the material environment (Gagliardi, 1990; Strati, 1992). Aesthetic knowledge, then, emerges and is employed through a process of situated sensory know*ing* and directs one's attention to the relation between the senses (i.e., hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste) and the materiality under scrutiny. Returning to the example of writing a letter, aesthetic knowing entails a deliberate awareness of the contact between the hand and the pen and the motion of the hand to write.

In a nutshell, while partly overlapping with embodied and tacit forms of knowledge, aesthetic knowledge has a distinct character in that (a) it places an explicit focus on aesthetic experiences vis-à-vis materiality, and (b) it acknowledges that the materiality of organizing has an agential role.

AESTHETIC EXPERTISE

Although the role of aesthetic knowledge in expert work has been documented in various fields, it has been primarily investigated in research on creative occupations, such as product design (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2018), fashion design (Bazin & Korica, 2021), architecture (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2007), dance (Harrison & Rouse, 2015), and visual art (Wohl, 2021). Scholars have long recognized that members of creative professions utilize aesthetic knowledge to carry out expert work, such as developing new products, art pieces, styles, and buildings and interacting with their clients and peers while doing so (Baldessarelli et al., 2022).

Yet, senses and aesthetic knowledge are implicated in how all kinds of experts construct new knowledge, diagnose and treat cases, and claim their status as experts among peers and audiences. Therefore, it is warranted to discuss aesthetic expertise as distinct from – for instance – substantial and interactional expertise (Barley, 1996; Collins et al., 2007; Sandefur, 2015). On the one hand, aesthetic expertise entails the capacity to retrieve relevant qualities of the material environment through sensory judgments that are relatively uniform among an expert community such as a profession. On the other hand, aesthetic expertise highlights the organization of social and material environment that afford such judgments and differential sensitization to the material environment. Following field theoretical approaches (Bourdieu, 1984; Martin, 2003, 2011; Sgourev et al., 2023), we claim that these two aspects are correlative.

Below, we elaborate on the aesthetic perspective to expertise by detailing the role of the senses in expert work (see Table 2 for a summary). We organize our analysis of aesthetic expertise following three critical processes that constitute relational expertise: generation, application, and recognition (Pakarinen & Huising, 2023). First, sensory judgments elicit interactions within the assemblages through which expertise is generated. Second, experts utilize their senses to concretize, evaluate, and validate expertise in and through materiality (e.g., physical and digital objects, tools, technologies, and materials). Third, aesthetic knowledge and artifacts are resources to claim membership in expert communities and authority in audience interactions. Together, these three processes highlight how senses and aesthetic knowledge enact, shape, and mediate interactions within which expertise is generated, applied, and recognized. Table 2 summarizes the three processes, which we will detail below.

Generating Expertise Through the Senses

Experts work with and through materiality to generate expertise that emerges in an interactional relationship between experts and their material surroundings.

Table 2. How Aesthetic Knowledge Informs Expertise.

Process Informed by the Senses	Generation of Expertise Through Senses	Application of Expertise Through Senses	Recognition of Expertise Through Senses
The role of aesthetic knowledge	**Sensory judgments connect interactants in the webs of relations in which expertise is generated.** • Artifacts and the material environment shape expertise by conveying affordances, qualities, and organization • Experts generate expertise by using their senses to relate to, draw meanings from, and modify physical and digital objects, technologies, and materials	**Experts apply expertise to cases and problems by utilizing, producing, and evaluating artifacts through their senses** • Experts articulate, evaluate, and modify their expertise vis-à-vis cases and problems through sensory judgments of artifacts • Experts tailor outcomes of expertise to make them intelligible for patients, clients, and audiences by deploying aesthetic knowledge	**Sensory judgments are used as a resource to claim membership in expert communities and authority vis-à-vis audiences** • Membership in expert communities is claimed, demarcated, and recognized through relatively uniform sensory judgments drawing from experts' aesthetic knowledge developed through socialization • Experts use representations and performances to elicit recognition of their expertise
Examples	Scientists in particle physics tracking weak neutral currents use enlargement of photographs "so that the group as a whole could judge their validity" visually (Galison, 1987, p. 187) Scientists in laboratories generate expertise by modifying materials, specimens, and organisms through and for their senses by using radioactive substances and dyes (Rheinberger, 2023)	Weather and macroeconomic forecasters apply their expertise to particular forecast by working with simulation models that they evaluate and manipulate through their senses (Daipha, 2015; Pakarinen, 2019) Engineers, architects, and designers work with and through artifacts such as blueprints and 3D-models, and prototypes as they apply their expertise to a problem or a project (Boland et al., 2007; Henderson, 1999; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012)	Code writers and hackers use shared sensory judgments of code to demarcate their community from that of managers they work for (Case & Piñeiro, 2006) Public presentations of sensory judgments, for instance by sommeliers, help claims of expertise when they interact with guests (Bosker, 2017)

For example, practitioners use their senses to draw information from materials, samples, instruments (Barley, 1996; Barley & Bechky, 1994; Bechky, 2021) and patients, bodies, and specimens (Craciun, 2018; Timmermans, 2006). They also use their senses to produce and manipulate representations and instruments of expertise (Carlile, 2004; Kaplan, 2011; Kaplan et al., 2016). For instance, forensic scientists visualize and diagnose bodily fluids by using chemical reagents and alternative lights (Bechky, 2021). Similarly, neuroscientists modify and transform specimens (e.g., brain tissue) through different steps constituting the "sensible, palpable, and tangible, and appreciable properties" of data (Lynch, 1985, p. 59). Furthermore, experts in economics, finance, and atmospheric science use simulation models to render their otherwise invisible objects of expertise visible and tangible (Daipha, 2015; MacKenzie, 2006; Pakarinen, 2019). In carrying out different tasks, experts interact with, interpret, and modify materiality through sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell relying on aesthetic knowledge.

As experts choose and employ apt tools and materials by using their senses, they simultaneously generate expertise on the work itself and how to best conduct it. Once again, expertise is generated through the senses. For instance, fashion designers "craft in space" through trial and error informed by sensory judgments to manipulate garments (Bazin & Korica, 2021), supermarket employees as sales experts construct what pleasing displays should look like (Endrissat et al., 2015), and building inspectors generate knowledge concerning property owners' code violations by observing buildings and objects around (Bartram, 2021).

As aesthetic expertise is generated through the senses, its generation depends on practitioners' engagement with materiality and their prior experiences. On the one hand, an object will convey its purpose through what *gestalt* theorists call "demand character," famously elaborated by Koffka as follows: "A fruit says, 'Eat me'; water says, 'Drink me'; thunder says, 'Fear me'" (Koffka, 1935, p. 7). Demand character, further elaborated by Gibson (1971, 1979) in his concept of "affordance," is "neither a subjective nor an objective property," but it "points both ways, to the environment, and the observer" (p. 129) – that is, to the interaction between the two interactants. On the other hand, however, not all artifacts spur the same web of relations in actors because the relationship between the qualities of an object and the qualities of a sensory judgment is not the same for everybody (Martin, 2011; Martin & Merriman, 2015). Actors with different social positions such as memberships in different expert communities and prior experiences not only draw different conclusions but also have qualitatively different experiences (Martin, 2011). Therefore, experiencing artifacts that animate a given expert domain is an activity shaped by mastering historically constituted expert practices (Goodwin, 1994). To illustrate, very few can perceive a philharmonic hall as having "an antiseptic sound, very weak in the bass, with little color and presence," as the music critic Schonberg (1974) did. Similarly, only experts can understand a flute maker's "cryptic remarks, such as, 'It doesn't feel right' or 'this bit doesn't look quite right'," which lead to the rework of a flute to make it perfect (Cook & Yanow, 1993, p. 380).

In summary, aesthetic expertise is generated in and through relationships between experts and their material surroundings as they experience, interpret, and act upon the web of relations that materiality affords.

Applying Expertise Through the Senses

Experts' aesthetic knowledge informs the application of expertise to cases and problems, and to materially mediated interactions with audiences. Engineers and architects, for example, employ their senses to produce designs and work with drawings, sketches, and 3D models they then use to interact with other experts and clients (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2007; Henderson, 1999). Engineers and data scientists rely on their vision to build and maintain crypto market indices and monitor them for errors, malfunctions, and "strange cases" (Preda, 2025). Haute couture textile experts from ateliers assess new fabrics for potential inclusion in the upcoming collection by "trying the textiles out, touching, modeling and 'playing' with them" (Grand, 2016). Finally, physicians' touch and patients' physical responses, such as "the withdrawal of their gaze and the tightening of… facial muscles expressions," are fundamental in diagnosing pain in medical consultation (Heath, 1989, p. 123).

As practitioners carry out their work with and through artifacts, they evaluate, calibrate, and manipulate expertise embedded in materiality through their senses. In the application of expertise, professionals employ their senses to carry out daily tasks, such as sight to calibrate raw images taken by a rover on Mars to extract trustworthy data (Vertesi, 2015) or evaluate macroeconomic forecast simulation in search of anomalies and inconsistencies (Pakarinen, 2019) or even all senses – including taste to judge the porosity of clay – while making pottery (Brown et al., 2016).

When practitioners apply their expertise to develop expert outcomes, they do this in relation to the recipients of their expertise – patients, peers, clients, and the general public – for whom experts seek to translate expertise and its outcomes understandable and valuable. Experts draw from their aesthetic knowledge to make their artifacts of expertise intelligible to relevant audiences (Anteby & Holm, 2021; Barley, 2015; Bechky, 2021). To this end, experts leverage their sensory judgments to anticipate and understand the needs and sensibilities of their audiences and infuse material outcomes with understandable and resonating properties and style (e.g., Bapuji et al., 2019; Barley, 2015; Golden & Bencherki, 2023). For example, architects and strategists craft PowerPoint presentations to visually introduce and validate an idea over alternatives across audiences (Kaplan, 2011; Stark & Paravel, 2008). Designers develop easy-to-understand prototypes to aid clients in their task of judging their designs (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012), and atmospheric scientists produce data representations to communicate effectively with their clients (Barley, 2015).

Collectively, therefore, the application of expertise through the senses entails the deliberate use of sensory judgments to solve cases and problems, and to produce outcomes anticipating and resonating with recipients' needs, and aesthetic understandings and sensibilities.

Recognizing Expertise Through the Senses

Sensory judgments on the qualities of objects drawing from the use of aesthetic knowledge are utilized as resources to claim membership in expert communities – typically professions – and to demarcate experts from non-experts. Similarly, aesthetic knowledge and material representations of expertise are leveraged to eliciting general expert authority and recognition among audiences.

Expert communities share values, skills, and characteristics that bind members together (Abbott, 1988; Anteby et al., 2016; Cattani et al., 2013; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). Within these communities, membership claims emerge through socialization taking place through training and participation in the core activities of the community (Kroezen et al., 2021; Van Maanen & Schein, 1977). Through training and participation, members develop relatively uniform aesthetic knowledge, as capacity, to judge what is credible and worthy (Lave & Wenger, 1991). For example, through socialization into an expert regime designed to foreground particular habits of judgment, weather forecasters become "'intuitively' drawn to and developing a taste for particular data and problem solutions" (Daipha, 2015, p. 96). Similarly, apprentice flute makers learn the skill by sitting at a workbench and producing flutes that they then show to experts for review (Cook & Yanow, 1993, p. 380). What's more, through socialization, "an apprentice … both acquires a set of skills in flutemaking and become a member of the informal quality control system that has unfalteringly maintained the style and quality of these instruments" (Cook & Yanow, 1993, p. 380).

Aesthetic expertise is, therefore, correlative to a specific social group and, hence, affords one to claim membership (Cattani et al., 2013; Martin, 2011; Wohl, 2015) and the authority to assert "right" interpretations of artifacts (Bechky, 2003). Relatively uniform sensory judgments constitute "disciplinary objectivity" that relies on "the artful application of insight that comes only with learned experience among peers" (Timmermans, 2008, p. 170). For example, in creative fields, what is described as having a "good eye" or a "strong vision" is tied to the expert community and its standards (Godart & Mears, 2009; Wohl, 2021). Through uniform sensory judgments, practitioners reveal their membership to a particular community while simultaneously demarcating group boundaries by assessing such judgments (Bourdieu, 1984; Martin & Merriman, 2015; Wohl, 2015). Citing Arendt ([1961] 2006), Wohl (2015) explains that "taste decides not only how the world is to look, but also who belongs together in it" (p. 304). Aesthetic knowledge, therefore, is implicated in how members define an "us" versus "them" (Wohl, 2015). This is also exhibited in how members engage in the public display of their membership, such as by following specific dress codes (Kachtan & Wasserman, 2015; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997), manufacturing public performances (Preda, 2023), and creating and displaying symbols (Ravasi et al., 2019).

Alongside demarcating experts from non-experts, practitioners use aesthetic knowledge as a resource when interacting with audiences. Experts persuade audiences of their expertise by using representational artifacts (such as visual metaphors, presentations, and prototypes) that invoke particular experiences. As Latour (Latour, 1986, p. 5) emphasizes: "We need, in other words, to look at the

way in which someone convinces someone else to take up a statement, to pass it along, to make it more of a fact." To this end, experts develop engaging and convincing representations of their work that are intended to generate recognition among audiences. Such representations go beyond the translation work necessary to interact with clients and patients; they encompass verbal and material representations meant to invoke particular sensory reactions and persuade the audience of their authority and the value of their expertise. For example, quantum physicists employ visual metaphors and analogies to communicate their expertise and even arouse awe and astonishment in the audience (Hilkamo & Granqvist, 2022), and designers utilize appealing prototypes and films to influence their clients and collaborators and to elicit recognition for their design expertise (Pakarinen, 2024). Going even further, some experts develop dramaturgical representations of their expertise to create and maintain recognition of their position as experts. For example, financial experts make a "spectacle" of their expertise on TV to ensure the audience's recognition of their claims (Preda, 2023), while shop assistants and models must "look good and sound right," that is, perform "aesthetic labor" to persuade clients of their expertise (Mears, 2015; Witz et al., 2003).

Collectively, aesthetic expertise correlates to the domain in which experts mutually define which sensory judgments are valid and credible. Hence, these judgments retrieve not only information about objects but about experts' position and membership in the domain (Martin, 2011; Martin & Merriman, 2015). In addition, experts produce representational outcomes used as resources to claim recognition among external audiences and to persuade them about the value of their expertise.

CONCLUSION

We began our quest by highlighting that while studies on expert work empirically document the use of senses (Barley, 1996; Bechky, 2021; Rostain & Huising, 2024), these observations have been largely disregarded in theorizing expertise. To call for greater attention to and appreciation for the role of the senses, we introduced an aesthetic perspective to the study of expertise. We argue that attending to aesthetic expertise inherent to expert work can enrich the scholarly conversation on expertise because sensory judgments mediate and elicit the webs of interactions in which experts accomplish their tasks and claim their expertise.

To this end, we have elaborated three ways aesthetic knowledge participates in the relational generation, application, and recognition of expertise. These three ways aesthetics is implicated in expert work contribute to the research on expertise and organizational aesthetics. First and foremost, while we acknowledge that the use of senses has been reported in the empirical findings of studies on expert work, we take a step forward and elaborate on the multifaceted role of aesthetic knowledge. We disentangle aesthetic knowledge from other forms of practical knowing, that is, embodied and tacit knowledge. We also draw attention to how experts use cultivated sensory judgments vis-à-vis the material environment (e.g., physical artifacts, digital tools, technologies, and visual representations) to enact

their expertise and how such use is derived from and regulated by the expert community. Interactions and relations that make up expertise are developed and sustained through the senses by invoking particular experiences and translating them into effective representations for relevant audiences.

These insights add to the scholarly conversation on expertise by highlighting how aesthetics is entwined with expertise, from its generation to recognition, and with the effects expertise generates in society. First, we point to the importance of accounting for the sensory faculties of individuals (Strati, 2007) and connecting them to interactions and social practices constituting expertise. Second, we highlight that aesthetics is implicated in how expertise is structured, recognized, and occasions effects. This is evident in the following example, which illustrates the role of aesthetics in the network of expertise, leading to a worldwide ban on whaling. Scientists changed public experience and appreciation of whales by utilizing recordings of the "surprisingly beautiful sounds" or "singing" of whales, captured by hydrophones initially designed for detecting submarines (Payne & McVay, 1971). These recordings and experiences led to the "Save the Whales" campaign, which ultimately resulted in a ban on whaling worldwide (Burnett, 2012).

Alongside the contribution to the study of expertise, our article serves as a reminder for those interested in aesthetics (Baldessarelli et al., 2022; Strati, 1992; Taylor & Hansen, 2005) that cultivated sensory judgments are pivotal in different domains beyond creative professions. First, we bring to the fore the role of aesthetic knowledge in a vast range of professions that, at first glance, might seem to have little to do with the senses. In this way, we remind ourselves and others that sensory judgments are involved in the day-to-day work of scientists, engineers, technicians, physicians, and many others. Second, we connect the work on aesthetics to discussions on expertise. This body of research suggests that sensations and aesthetic knowledge are situated in social practices and relations within specific domains of expertise in which credibility and meanings are negotiated. As such, aesthetic knowledge is relational (Sgourev et al., 2023), encompassing situated material practices and the broader webs of relations among communities of experts and their audiences.

Future Research

Thus far, we have stressed the need to systematically examine how experts interact with materiality through their senses and have elaborated three ways aesthetics contributes to generating, applying, and recognizing expertise. Specifically, we believe that scholars of expertise would benefit from productive conversations with adjacent empirical and theoretical discussions. Below, we outline a research program by detailing some promising future directions.

First, we anticipate research that explores in detail the pivotal role of aesthetic expertise in expert work and that creates empirically sound and theoretically insightful links among senses, work practices, and the webs of relations in which expertise resides. For example, researchers could theorize practices and assemblages through which experts deliberately call upon their sensory judgments to manipulate, interact, and monitor materiality. Moreover, researchers

could explore how the material environment and its affordances reciprocally shape expertise. Finally, researchers could identify and theorize the relationality of aesthetic expertise both in situated expert work (Barley & Bechky, 1994) and broader ecologies of expertise (Kuriyama, 1999; Sgourev et al., 2023; Tan, 2024).

Second, beyond deepening our understanding of how aesthetics informs expert work, we must understand how different modes of embodying expertise interact with aesthetic knowledge. Especially when expertise is increasingly embodied in organizations and technologies such as models, data spaces, interfaces, and platforms, instead of groups of experts (Abbott, 1991), we must understand how sensory judgments connect, integrate, and translate expertise in these increasingly heterogeneous assemblages. For example, research suggests that as models and algorithms take on an increasingly pivotal role in the chains of inferences through which expert outcomes are produced, experts' tasks increasingly focus on validating, supervising, and translating the outcomes (Anthony, 2021; Lebovitz et al., 2022). In such tasks, experts are likely to rely increasingly on sensory assessment and judgments.

Third, the technologization and hybridization of sense-induced experiences, as well as increased attention to nonhuman ecologies, force us to reconsider what counts as sensorial. New sensor technologies, such as sensors detecting and recording motion, temperature, stress, and biometrics, as well as digital online trackers, are shifting sensing from the human realm to a configuration of humans and more-than-humans (Gabrys, 2019). For example, sensing in oceanography is changing from ship-based sensing to satellites and remotely operated or automatic vehicles (Lehman, 2018); risk assessment in policing is changing from experience-based to data-driven knowledge (Brayne, 2020); and audience metrics increasingly determine the "newsworthiness" of events and phenomena (Christin, 2018). These examples suggest that researchers should explore how material mediation (McLuhan, 1964) and more-than-human assemblages may (re-)constitute sensory judgments, thus shaping expertise.

Fourth, the questions above suggest we need to revise our methodological approaches to study expertise. An essential method to capture sensory judgments and their role in expert work is the systematic observation of practitioners' interactions with the web of relations. Yet, as the ethnographic tradition relies so much on words (Mead, 1975), we must develop new means and sensibilities to observe, record, analyze, and communicate sensory judgments around expertise. The use of audiovisual methods, such as photographs and film (video), could be valuable in capturing sensory judgments and knowledge, or at the very least, the material environment and practices in and around work and expertise (e.g., Bateson & Mead, 1942; Pink, 2007; Toraldo et al., 2018). Also, systematically examining codified representations of expertise in archives (e.g., Henderson, 1999; Kuriyama, 1999) could help researchers link experiences to broader networks and institutions of expertise. Furthermore, new computational methods and technologies, such as computer vision (Brachmann & Redies, 2017), could enable researchers to capture both representations and the employment of aesthetic expertise beyond situated settings to broader scales.

NOTES

1. https://www.etymonline.com/word/aesthetic
2. "Die Ästhetik (als Theorie der freien Künste, als untere Erkenntnislehre, als Kunst des schönen Denkens und als Kunst des der Vernunft analogen Denkens) ist die Wissenschaft der sinnlichen Erkenntnis" in Baumgarten (1750), Aesthetica, page 2.

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