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Embodied ethnicity: the ethnic affiliation grounded in the body

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Drawing on cultural phenomenology, this paper extends the literature on ethnicity by investigating its embodied dimensions and by studying infra-national referents (e.g., regionalism in France). Findings show the central role of embodiment in ethnicity. Three dimensions of ethnicity are outlined: embodied ethnicity (*being-in-the-world*), embodied ethnic imaginary (*remembering being-in-the-world*), and embodied ethnic interactions (*being-in-the-world with others*). This analysis extends the post-assimilationist model by adding an embodied dimension, highlights the specificities of local ethnicity, and questions the concept of habitus.

Keywords: ethnicity; embodiment; Merleau-Ponty; phenomenology; habitus; Bourdieu; regionalism; culture

Following pioneer articles of Hirschman (1981, 1982) a good deal of research has concentrated on ethnic minorities' acculturation and assimilation to the dominant culture. Most of this work has examined ethnicity as an inter-individual, group membership characteristic. That is, ethnicity has been viewed as a nominally codable demographic classification (for a meta-analysis, see Özçaglar-Toulouse et al. 2009). More recently, some researchers have focused on the understanding of situated ethnicity. In these studies, ethnic affiliation and behaviors are situationally determined, for example, ethnicity is not just *who one is* but *how one feels* in and about a particular situation (Stayman and Deshpande 1989). This perspective was introduced to study ethnic affiliation by Deshpande, Hoyer, and Donthu (1986). It was taken much further by Stayman and Deshpande (1989) to demonstrate the impact of situational dimensions on ethnic food choices and was followed by more research which tried to get a better understanding of ethnic experiences and of the construction process of these ethnic affiliations (Webster 1994; Peñaloza 1994; Venkatesh 1995; Oswald 1999, 2005; Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005). Following this interpretative perspective, we have focused our research on the (re-)emergence of regional ethnicities in France which has been witnessed throughout the world and principally in Europe (Bouchet 1995; Appadurai 1996; Griswold and Wright 2004; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006; Varman and Belk 2009). Resurgent regionalism questions marketing practices by providing new marketing opportunities (Cayla and Eckhardt 2008; Dion, Rémy, and Sitz 2010) and setting new frames of analysis in competition with nations (Cayla and Arnould 2008; Askegaard, Kjeldgaard, and Arnould 2009).

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To get a better understanding of regional ethnic affiliations, we have adopted an inductive approach which fosters interpretation based upon an emergent and interactive research process rooted in an ongoing engagement with a field of action (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Our analysis is thus built on continual comparisons between the data (obtained through a series of introspections and photo-elicitations), the inductive analysis of data and the scrutiny of this data through a number of conceptual lenses (Goulding 1999).

This investigation led us unexpectedly in the direction of cultural phenomenology (Csordas 1999, 2002), which allows us to explore the experience of ethnicity through the body. Data analysis shows the paramount role of the body and embodiment (e.g., a perceptual experience of presence and engagement in the world to understand *being-in-the-world*). We have identified three kinds of body experiences linked to ethnicity: embodied ethnicity (*being-in-the-world*), embodied ethnic imaginary (*remembering being-in-the-world*), and embodied ethnic interactions (*being-in-the-world with others*).

Previous post-assimilationist research focused on the way informants manipulated representations to produce their ethnic affiliations (Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006; Thompson and Tian 2008). Our findings show that ethnic research should not focus only on discursive elements but should also integrate corporeal experiences. Furthermore, this work questions the negotiability of ethnic affiliations by demonstration. Findings show that some bodily dimensions can be manipulated for ethnic positioning while others are so deeply rooted in individuals that they can hardly be annihilated. Finally, the analysis extends Bourdieu's concepts of habitus (1972). Rather than analyzing ethnicity and body practices in terms of wide structural constraints which are non-consciously and non-intentionally internalized (Bourdieu 1972), our analysis focuses on immediate experience of the individuals and on its subjectivity: body practices are treated as always in flux and as a set of trials. The body does not appear as a receptacle of internalized and fixed structures but as a mode of experiencing and interpreting the ever changing environment.

Context and setting

We have chosen to explore ethnicity in France because regional cultures have (re-)emerged and are now widely used in brand management and advertising by regional SMEs but also by multinational brands such as Coca-Cola, McCain, or Société Générale (Dion, Rémy, and Sitz 2010). Regional ethnic impulse is also underlined in other contexts, such as in Asia, Greenland, Spain, Italy, or the USA (Anderson 1983; Castells 1996; Mackerras 2003; Dematteo 2003; Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005; Thompson and Tian 2008). Studying regional affiliations in the French context is all the more interesting since France is facing a national identity crisis (Dessajan, Hossard, and Ramos 2009; Meyran 2009). The political definition of the nation based on the egalitarianism and universality principles (stated by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789) is actually challenged by a cultural definition of the nation based on ethnic and cultural criteria allowing particularism and multiculturalism (Thiesse 2008).

In contrast with federal states, France is a unitary state, i.e., a sovereign state governed as one single unit in which the central government is supreme (Krucic 2008). The 26 regions are for the most part quite similar to the provinces which existed before the French Revolution (1789) and had been suppressed in order to eradicate local loyalties

based on feudal ownership of land and focus all loyalty on the central government in Paris (Charle 1980). The revolutionary project was to eradicate social and regional particularisms in order to create a French citizen (considered as universal) (Krulic 2008). This philosophy has been followed by a strong centralization and nationalization movement which is still embedded in the French political system.

The first modern resurgence of regionalism in France (as well as in Europe) is linked to nineteenth-century romanticism with an upsurge of the so-called traditions (Calhoun 1993). During this period regional cultures were gradually constructed (collections of regional tales and songs, inventory of traditions, formalization of regional languages, etc.) through a cultural enterprise relying heavily on the embryonic ethnography (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Thiesse 2001).

This interest for regional characteristics was then curbed by a centralizing tendency during the Third Republic (1870–1940). It has been followed by a political mythification of the nation (Meyran 2009; Thiesse 2008) mainly organized through the educational system since the government voted a law in 1882 to make primary school free and mandatory. Education was the primary acculturation device and teaching was focused on national identity: the French language was mandatory, key characters and events of national history were worshiped, etc. (Duby 1973; Legris 2009). This idealization of the nation was all the more important that wars were recurrent (1870; 1914–18; 1939–45) and national boundaries remained quite fuzzy (Meyran 2009). This period is also marked by increased population flows due to the emergence of tourism (1890–1910) and the First World War (1914–18) during which soldiers discovered new cultural contexts (Bertho Lavenir 1999). In the post-Second World War years, rural exodus sharply increased which made peasants settle in large cities (sometimes far away from their home countryside). French language and culture was considered as the device for social promotion and many families chose to teach their children the French language rather than transmit their first (regional) language (Jones 1998). Regional identities were experienced as marks of shame and people tried their best to erase any trace of a regional trait, especially the local expressions and the regional accent (Gemie 2005).

Regionalism re-emerged in the 1970s with a new interest for authenticity and a return to nature (Krulic 2008). In a few regions (Corsica, the Basque country, and Brittany), this movement was accompanied by armed independence movements which perpetuated several bomb attacks but are no longer active today (Linstroth 2002). The 1970s saw also the emergence of regional folk music singers and festivals, and of regional media (magazines, newspapers, radio and television stations) which suggested significant and complex changes in regional cultures (Linstroth 2002). Instead of appearing out-dated, regional cultures are now considered as dynamic, trendy, and powerful (Gemie 2005). These regional movements have been facilitated by a political decentralization, engaged in 1981, delegating to the regions power on education, public transit, funding universities and research, and assistance for business owners (Krulic 2008). This political decentralization has been accompanied by an institutional reemergence of regional cultures through actions such as bi-language schools (1982), bi-language road-signs (1982), regional languages and history teaching in high school (2001), emphasis on regional heritage and traditions (Gossiaux 1995), etc.

Behind these resurgences of French regionalism lies the question of the salience of national boundaries in marketing (Craig and Douglas 2006; Cayla and Arnould 2008; Askegaard, Kjeldgaard, and Arnould 2009). Research has mainly concentrated on globalization (Thompson and Tambyah 1999; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006; Cayla and

Eckhardt 2008; Amis and Silk 2010). Instead, in this paper we examine infra-national referents (Bouchet 1995). Looking at the ways regional affiliations are experienced helps us to understand how consumers think beyond the nation they live in, as an imagined community. This investigation into regional affiliations leads us unexpectedly in the direction of the embodiment.

Embodiment

In the Western tradition, the body moves in the Euclidian space while the mind is in charge of knowledge and choice (Duhaime, Joy, and Ross 1995; Thompson and Hirschman 1995). Ensuing from this view, Descartes' principle that *cogito ergo sum* leads to a dichotomy between a somewhat computerized mind and an instrumental body. In contrast with this classical view, growing emphasis is placed on the entanglement of cognition and body (Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Wilson 2002). This interest in the body can be linked to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception (1945) which takes the relationships between the subject and the world as a starting point. In developing Husserl's work further, Merleau-Ponty contributes to a view of the person as embedded and immersed in a world of objects and relationships (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009). He considers the body as the central element to understand perceptible and cognitive processes (Wilson 2002; Le Breton 2006). Humans are considered unified body-subjects, beings, and consciousness (Wilde 1999). However, phenomenology of perception is not about the body *per se* but rather about perceptions through the body (Merleau-Ponty 1945). It analyses experiences starting from bodily perceptions and makes a distinction between the objective body which is regarded as a physiological entity and the phenomenal body which is the actual experience of the body as a physiological entity (Le Breton 2006). The embodied nature of our relationship to the world leads to the primacy of the situated viewpoint (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009). Perception depends on the position of the actor and their intentionality. For instance, the way individuals perceive a forest depends on their intention (e.g., going for a walk, hunting, gathering mushrooms, etc.) (Le Breton 2006) (for a comprehensive review, see Joy and Sherry 2003).

Csordas extended Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to develop a cultural phenomenology, concerned with "synthesizing the immediacy of embodied experience with the multiplicity of cultural meaning in which we are always and inevitably immersed" (Csordas 1999, 143). Thus, culture depends on the way people inhabit their bodies, the way they experience *being-in-the-world* through their bodies. Rather than considering abstract socio-cultural structures and institutions, cultural phenomenology focuses on practices, processes, and patterns of experiencing the world. Cultural phenomenology is not interested in the body *per se*, nor in the process of embodiment but in culture and self in terms of embodiment. The body is not an object to be studied in relation to culture but is considered as the subject of culture, or in other words as the existential ground of culture (Csordas 2002).

The concept of embodiment has been introduced into various research areas such as nursing (Wilde 1999; Thomas 2005), gender studies (Ahmed and Stacey 2001; Mackay Yarnal, Hutchinson, and Chow 2006), cultural geography (Gagen 2004; John and Metzko 2008), psychology (Barsalou 2008), education (Macintyre Latta and Buck 2008), or archeology (Joyce 2005). It has been used in marketing by Merritt and Sopousek (2002) to analyze immersive 3D aesthetic experience. It was taken much further by Joy and Sherry (2003) to study how the body informs the logic of thinking about art. They

analyzed the links between embodiment, movement, and multisensory experience to understand aesthetic experiences (see Charters 2006 for a meta analysis on aesthetic experiences). More recently consumer psychology research relied on embodiment to underline the consequence of body movement in product and brand evaluation (Labroo and Nielsen 2010). In anthropology, few recent papers have taken embodiment as a central concern when investigating ethnicity. These works are interested in understanding different modes of body engagement (Retsikas 2007) and body perceptions (Geurts 2002).

Following these pioneers' articles, we analyze how ethnicity is *lived* and *felt* through bodily perceptions. Rather than analyzing the body as being in the world, we are studying *being-in-the-world* through the body. In other words, we are studying an experience grounded in the body and not bodily representations or bodily practices. An embodied conceptualization of ethnicity is thorough and parsimonious since it suggests studying what people actually feel through their senses.

Methodology

We used a methodology based on a *syncretic* combination of introspections (e.g., both researchers and informants are included as elements in the sample with any differentiation made between the two during data analysis) (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). Our data collection started with the three authors' introspections and was extended to introspections of 26 informants (Hirschman 1992; Carù and Cova 2003). In order to get a good understanding of the ethnic affiliations, introspections were organized around a very general instruction: *narrating these moments when I feel . . .* [depending on auto-stated affiliation]. Introspection allows us to move away from an *etic* perspective (a somewhat "external" point of view) and to adopt an *emic* perspective (an "internal" viewpoint). Consequently, it enables us to get descriptions of behaviors, experiences, or beliefs that are meaningful for the actor and from his own perspective. It invites people to narrate their feelings, thus giving a narrative frame to their experience. However, since this data collection process relies on memory, it induces particular biases. Introspection has a tendency to provide a cause-consequence and temporal dynamic to fuzzy, unclear, and retrospective experiences. It also induces significant unintentional distortions due to memorization but also intentional distortion due to social desirability (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993; Woodside 2004).

To get better access to people's subjective experience, we combined introspection with a photo-elicitation technique (Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Woodside 2004; Holbrook 2005). We asked informants to take 15 pictures representing their regional affiliation and to write a comment on each one. Our objective was to gain access to other kinds of narration and to allow informants to point out significant elements for them (Dion 2007; Hirsch 2007). This technique is defended for its unveiling potential (Zaltman and Zaltman 2008). The images produced by the subjects depict their subjective vision of their ethnic affiliation. Since this subjectivity becomes the object of analysis, the interpretation of the collected images must necessarily be conducted by the informants themselves and not by the researcher. That is why we asked our informants to comment on their pictures (Collier and Collier 1986; Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988). We did not analyze the pictures per se but the texts written on them (Dion 2007).

The sample was constructed progressively using a snowball technique. Our objective was to recruit informants with varied positions allowing us to access new perceptions and different experiences. This internal diversification approach of the sample group relies on the will to reach an empirical saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

The inclusion of new informants stops when theoretical saturation level is reached, i.e., we stopped adding new narratives when recurrences between narratives emerged and no new elements arose (Bertaux 1997). Consequently, the size of the sample is not determined *a priori* but *ex post* according to emerging results of the analysis (Özçaglar-Toulouse 2008).

The final sample is composed of 29 French informants (cf., Appendix 1). We selected informants not based on their place of birth or their ethnic background but on their perceived ethnic affiliation. The sample is heterogeneous in terms of socio-demographics (age and occupation), ethnic biography, and the intensity of their ethnic affiliation (Ogden, Ogden, and Schau 2004).

We collected 29 narratives from one to five pages constituting a corpus of 82 pages and 280 pictures with comments varying from one paragraph to more than one page. The narrative accounts collected through introspections and comments on pictures have been analyzed comparatively (Bertaux 1997) and have been submitted to a triangulation among researchers (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988). Comparative analysis started with the tracking of the main themes tackled in each narrative. Through a validation between the researchers, each of us has carried out a categorization, by grouping the indexed themes within a common set of categories. Then, a cross validation enabled us to compare the narratives in order to identify recurrent situations and similar logics of behavior (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988; Hirschman and Holbrook 1992). We progressively elaborated an accurate and rich understanding. Each researcher's analysis was compared with the others so as to come to a shared understanding (Goulding 1999).

During the data collection and analysis process, we were particularly careful to preserve the analytic distance (i.e., we wanted to make sure that the findings were not assimilated to the confirmation of the data of our own experience). This was particularly at stake since we used a syncretic form of introspection (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). To preserve the analytic distance we relied on four elements: (1) we were three researchers with different ethnic backgrounds (coming from different regions and having different ethnic biographies and experiences) (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993); (2) we were not familiar with the literature on ethnicity (we wrote our introspections and collected our pictures before reading any article on ethnicity); (3) we combined introspections with photo-elicitations (Holbrook 2005; Woodside 2004); and (4) we compared our findings several times to get a shared understanding of the phenomena. We were not looking for confirmation (convergence of views) but for comparisons (convergences and divergences) (Gould 2006).

Results

Data analysis gives us a lot of interesting insights into ethnic experiences. However, in this paper, we have decided to focus on the embodied dimension. Our results show that ethnicity is embodied and thus appears as a way of *being-in-the-world*, remembering *being-in-the-world*, and *being-in-the-world with others*.

Embodiment: being-in-the-world

Spontaneously, informants refer to sensorial dimensions when they describe their ethnic affiliation. For instance, Nicole describes several situations when she experiences a strong ethnic affiliation:

I feel Alsatian when **I smell** sauerkraut [a traditional Alsatian meal], baekeofe [*idem*] or flammeküch [*idem*]; when I go to shows in dialectical **language** such as “Choucrouterie” or “les scouts” [popular Alsatian shows in regional language]; when the Christmas times are coming and when the city glorifies itself through city **lights** plays; during the **asparagus** and **rhubarb** season; during the **mirabelle** and **plum** season; when I **drink** a Gewürz or a Riesling [classic Alsatian wines]; when I **go for a walk** in the magnificent Alsatian villages, in the vineyards, especially during Fall; when I **hear** the horrible humpa humpa [traditional Alsatian music] I yet hate but makes me smile because it is music from our region; when I **smell** glüwine [hot wine, a typical Christmas beverage] or Christmas cakes. [...] **Alsace, I’ve got it in my sight, in my ears, in the smell and in the flavor.**¹ (Nicole)

Describing her Alsatian ethnicity, Nicole refers to many sensorial carriers (smells, odors, colors, tastes, etc.). She outlines explicitly that being Alsatian is a sensorial experience embedded in her body. As she says: *Alsace, I’ve got it in my sight, in my ears, in the smell and in the flavor.* Saying this she acknowledges the “somatic modes of attention” (Csordas 1999) linked with her ethnicity. For some informants the body experiences are even more important than other dimensions of their ethnicity. For instance, commenting on one of her pictures, Julie says:

Here is my boyfriend to whom I introduced the neighborhood [in Brittany]. His parents are Alsations but they love Brittany and come here very often. His father has numerous books on Brittany. He has lent me many of them to help me discover the Breton heritage. **But I prefer to feel the things without necessarily reading about them.** (Julie, 20)

For Julie, being Breton is primarily a question of body perceptions. Rather than acquiring knowledge on her culture, she prefers to experience the region through her body. Through her body, she is able to feel her ethnicity and to experience her identity as a member of an imagined community. In other words, her ethnicity cannot be disentangled from lived experiences and should be considered as a situated phenomenological construct. She clearly opposes reading and experiencing. For her, being Breton is first of all a question of *being-in-the-world*. As embodied beings, the world is perceived through our live experiences which stimulate our body and engage perceptions and cognitions.

In ethnic settings, one can experience intense physiological perturbations which reinforce their ethnic feelings:

I feel Breton each time I listen to Breton music. I feel an **intense internal vibration**. I think to myself it’s so beautiful and, after all, it’s also a bit of myself. Some months ago there was the *Breizh Pride* [Breton parade similar to the Gay pride] in Paris and I watched it on TV. **I cried**. It was so beautiful, so **vibrant**. (Michelle)

Landscapes and music also **thrill me. It shakes me in my stomach**. When one listens to a bagad [traditional Breton music], one could **cry**. It is so beautiful. I’m not very sensitive but when I participate in Breton dances **it moves me deeply**. (Claude)

We can observe that in ethnic settings informants can experience strong physiological perturbations. Such states can be very intense and even lead one to break into tears such as when Michelle watched the *Breizh Pride* on television or when Claude listens to traditional music. Those physical states experienced in ethnic settings reinforce ethnic feelings because they can live in their flesh their ethnic singularities.

The sensory stimulations linked to ethnicity are not necessarily nice, enjoyable, or desired. Some can be quite upsetting, annoying, and even harmful:

These Catalan moments, it is also when you get this **crazy wind** which pushes you in the streets and stops you from going out. It's the **unbearable** wind that blows for days and makes you curse this land before liking it more right away. **To be Catalan, it means loving this ever changing weather, which goes from terrible heat to storm** . . . (Gaëlle)

For Gaëlle, feeling from Catalonia is to be able to enjoy the difficult climatic conditions in the area. She talks about the *terrible heat* and the *crazy and unbearable wind*. Those unpleasant stimulations are part of her ethnicity. However, even if those stimuli can be unpleasant, one can learn to like them. Gaëlle specifies that she loves *this ever changing weather, which goes from terrible heat to storm*. Indeed, through their day-to-day experiences, people learn to enjoy those specific situations which can be perceived as harmful or unpleasant by foreigners. For example, in the following narrative account, Daphné explains how much and why she enjoys swimming in the cold ocean in Brittany:

This is MY beach [. . .] It's not exactly the same swimming here. **Of course the water is cold, but I love to swim here**. It's far better than anywhere else (even better than on the heavenly beaches of Seychelles). When I bathe here, I know how to swim according to the waves, where to swim, where to enjoy the waves. I feel the coldness everywhere . . . Sometimes, I swim late in the year (late October). **I love to feel the water biting me and stiffening my members**. [. . .]. Getting out of the water is always a **difficult moment**. We are freezing but so happy to have done it. It's kind of a challenge. I can say to myself "Yes! I did it!" And then, we roll ourselves in our towel trying to warm ourselves up. **My daughters are like me, they love it. Paul's [her partner] sons find it difficult to enjoy this**. They are used to the Mediterranean sea and **don't see the point of bathing here**. I wear myself out explaining to them that the water is unbelievably pure, that the sea bottom is admirable and that, after five minutes, we find it delightful . . . **they are not convinced**. (Daphné)

We can see how Daphné has learned to cope with swimming in the cold ocean in Brittany and how she learned to enjoy those sensations that can be disliked by non-initiated persons such as her partner's sons. We face the same process described by Becker (1963) with young smokers learning how to enjoy smoking marijuana. He underlines that the effects of marijuana are not natural, insofar as they are not merely given but rather learnt by the individuals. This learning process occurs through a socialization process giving the individual the knowledge concerning how to smoke in order to feel something. Thus, the phenomenological effects of *reality* are culturally entangled (Geurts 2002). The last extract shows that Daphné's daughters enjoy the cold water whereas her companion's children do not like it, even though she tries hard to convert their sensations with several arguments and efforts. But as the children do not link those experiences to a valued ethnic symbolic system, they are not convinced. In other words, the experience doesn't make any sense for them and thus they continue to dislike it. This echoes the elements of the sociology of passion as developed by Hennion (2001): individuals do not think ethnic products have taste ontologically, but they make themselves detect this "ethnic" taste through a continuous elaboration of procedures that put ethnic taste to the test.

Ethnic body experiences are sometimes so much embedded in the individual that it can lead to withdrawal symptoms. That is, for instance, the case of Christian who is Corsican and lives in Normandy:

I was flabbergasted the first time a Norman told me that he didn't like the heat of the Midi [South of France] and the "too violent" sun. I first thought it was a joke. After 10 year in

Normandy, this kind of comment still surprises me and I can't understand it. **I miss tremendously the feeling of the sun on my skin.** (Christian)

Although Christian has been living in Normandy for 10 years, he is still not acclimatized to the weather. The climatic conditions are so deeply embodied that it can be compared to a drug addiction. He still feels strong physiological withdrawal symptoms such as a drug addict could experience. As he said: *I miss tremendously the feeling of the sun on my skin.*

Specific body experiences can be considered as initiation rituals, for example, one has to experience them in order to feel like a real member of the community. In Figure 1, we can see Ernest on Mount Canigou, a symbolic place for Catalonians. Commenting on the picture, he specifies that doing this trekking, he wanted to *immerse himself* into the Catalonian landscape. For him, it was an absolute necessity to feel like a real Catalanian:

On this picture [Figure 1], one can see us at the peak of the Canigou [a Catalonian mountain]. [...] As for many other places, **this walk is a little bit like a pilgrimage.** [...] **It was a necessity for me** to climb the Canigou. **Any good and deferential Catalan knows this place.** A Catalanian kept asking me if I had ever climbed the Canigou. **Now it's done. I did it** in September 2005. In fact it is not a big deal, one cannot say it is hard. But each time, as for the Carlit or Montserrat [Catalonian mountains], **I got the feeling that my Catalinity comes through these moments. It is necessary that I discover, or re-discover these places.** As if I had to immerse myself in these places, as if I had to say "I did it." **This distinguishes me from other people.** (Ernest)

Through this combination of corporeal experiences the community feeling emerges. Feeling part of or belonging to a group is based on sensory experiences (cf., Turner 1969). To belong to the group, one needs to experience singular and shared body experiences. In this narrative account, we can also notice how Ernest uses body experiences to

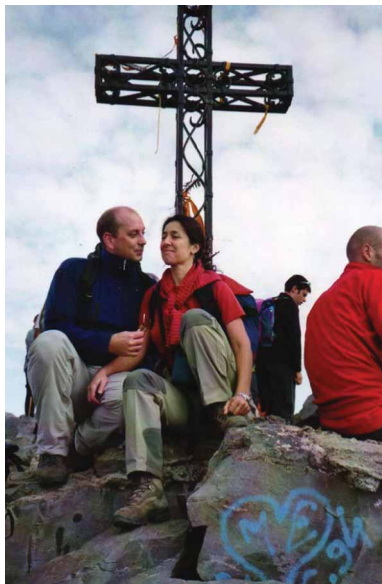


Figure 1. Ernest on top of Mount Canigou.

negotiate his affiliation to Catalonia. Similarly with products and consumption practices (Thompson and Tambyah 1999), the body is used to forge ethnic affiliations. Paraphrasing Peñaloza (2001), we could say that Ernest is consuming Catalonia through his body. Climbing the Canigou peak is a way of getting the myth of Catalonia embedded.

In conclusion, these narrative accounts on body perceptions linked to ethnicity echo the situated nature of ethnicity but go a step further by emphasizing not only the cultural or social dimensions of ethnicity (Fischer 1986) but also its embodied nature. *Being-in-the-world* is a way of constructing one's ethnicity. Through the here-and-now presence, our informants can make sense of their ethnicity. What is at stake is an incommensurable dimension: our informants rely on specific lived experiences to narrate their regional identity. Hence, this underlines the centrality of *being-in-the-world* to experience one's ethnicity.

Embodied imaginary: remembering being-in-the-world

When remembering *being-in-the-world* informants give rich descriptions of their bodily perceptions experienced in ethnic settings. For instance, in the following extract Sylvie describes what she thinks about when she imagines herself in the region where she comes from:

From time to time, I like to dream about the Mediterranean Sea, about its particular **flavors**, its **light**, its **landscapes** both arid and luxuriant, aloes, mimosa and agapanthus. It is this **light** – still and always, this **bright light** I have only found in the Pacific –, **smells, flavors**, ways of behaving at table, of seizing the time that passes, of not **exposing oneself to the sun**, but of enjoying it and of looking for its warmth each time it agrees to **warm us up**; it is the joy of living when the sky is azure-blue, when the sea changes **color**, becomes restless or calm, always there to **rock us** [. . .] . . . It is also the **sun in my plate**: tomatoes, garlic [. . .], thyme, marjoram, spices, olives, virgin olive oil of course, anchovies, artichokes, eggplants . . . Fresh products . . . Fruit . . . **singing tastes** . . . (Sylvie)

In her description, Sylvie uses not only visual elements but all the sensory modalities: visual perceptions (*this bright light I have only found in the Pacific, the sky is azure-blue, the sea changes color . . .*), olfactory perceptions (*thyme, garlic, marjoram . . .*), tactile perceptions (*not exposing oneself to the sun, but enjoying it and looking for its warmth each time, the sea changes always there to rock us . . .*), and tastes (*tomatoes, garlic, oregano, olive oil, fresh products . . .*). Embodiment is not exhausted only by sensory experiences conceived strictly in terms of the five major modalities (Csordas 1999). Some cannot be classified in a specific sensory modality. To express her imaginary, she creates expressions mixing sensory modalities: *singing flavors, sun in my plate*. Although, in the Western tradition, the mental imaginary is most of the time assumed to be visual (Csordas 1999), our narratives show that informants use more elaborate and rich descriptions when they talk about their region. Sylvie literally imagines herself *being-in-the-world* through a metaphoric system which is based on an array of body perceptions. Those body perceptions are incorporated since our birth and grounded in our culture and ethnicity (Le Breton 2006). This learning process entails a way of remembering the ethnic experiences: these experiences are qualified differently from other experiences. They are intertwined with what Lakoff (1987) has called *deep metaphors*. Indeed, our informants' discourses are revealing of their ways of making sense of their past experiences (Zaltman and Zaltman 2008). The metaphoric system used by our informants reveals the imaginary dimension of the ethnic experience.

Imaginary is not static but refers to lived experiences. Informants project themselves in singular ethnic experiences:

When I think about it, I see myself walking along the sea in the wind with huge waves exploding on the rocks, a fishing boat in the distance followed by seagulls. Well, a real *cliché*. I also smell wrack and I hear seagulls following the fishing boat. And then, from time to time, it rains but not so long. The sun is never far away. [...] (Daphné)

Daphné imagines herself *being-in-the-world* through a metaphoric system which is based nonetheless on an array of body perceptions but also on singular actions. She projects herself in action (*walking on the beach*) in a lived environment (*waves are breaking on the shore; seagulls are flying behind the fishing boat . . .*). This narrative account shows that ethnic imaginary involves every aspect of the kinesthetic dimensions (Lakoff 1987). Imaginary should not be considered as consciousness of non-real objects but as a projection of a lived body in a lived environment (de Warren 2009). Csordas (1999) names this *embodied imaginary*, meaning that when an event is experienced, the underlying sensory, motor, and introspective states are partially stored. Later, when knowledge of the event becomes relevant in memory, language, or thought, these original states are partially simulated. Thus, remembering an event arises from partially simulating the sensory, motor, and introspective states active at the time (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1999).

These projections are induced by an array of stimuli. For instance, when Laurent wears his trekking shoes, he always projects himself in his home country and that makes him happy:

When I “dress up” (walking shoes, walking pants, T-shirt and hunting vest . . . even if I don’t hunt . . .). **The simple act of putting on my walking shoes moves me closer to Alsace . . .** These last years, I go less regularly to Alsace but each time I take my walking shoes. When I put them in the bag, **I can’t prevent myself from smiling happily.** (Laurent)

Laurent’s walking shoes appear as a powerful projection tool. Just putting on his shoes triggers and activates his imaginary. He insists on the fact that these reactions are automatic. They are so deeply anchored that it comes spontaneously and unconsciously. As he says: *I can’t prevent myself from smiling happily*. This narrative account echoes Joy and Sherry’s findings (2003) on embodied imagination of art and virtual body exploration. Similarly to one of their informants who smelled the perfume of the painted flowers just looking at a painting, Laurent is virtually transported to Alsace just by looking at his trekking shoes.

Embodied interactions: being-in-the-world with others

Embodiment is also at stake in interactions between ethnic fellows. Because of similar past experiences, people acquire body techniques which allow them to interact between us in a singular way:

I am working with a guy from Montpellier. [. . .]. **We both feel we are from the South** and we talk about it quite often. One can tell that **in the way we say hello to each other, in the way we make fun of each other . . .** We often make jokes together. [. . .]. **Things that**

only guys from the South can understand ... We play with the accents, we refer to the same celebrities, etc. (Julien)

We can observe how much Julien likes working with his new colleague because they come from the same region. Because they share the same ethnic background, they have the same references and also the same body techniques (*the accents, the way we say hello ...*). Learning how to use one's body in an everyday way is a prerequisite to experience culturally meaningful embodied imaginary in ritual settings (Bourdieu 1980; Csordas 1999). The body acquires skills which are stored not as representations in the mind, but as dispositions making it able to respond to solicitations of situations in the world (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1999). The know-how acquired through one's experiences is mirrored in the solicitations of situations correlative with our dispositions to respond to them (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1999). For instance, Julien is quite happy to have a new co-worker with the same ethnic background because they can know how to behave. Our results underline the importance of learning the *tricks of the trade* of being from a specific region. People need to know the rituals, the practices, and the proper manners of acting in order to be able to feel like a Breton or a Catalan. These *techniques du corps* (Bourdieu 1972) are enmeshed with emotional and cultural work: the individuals who feel truly from a region try to distribute their knowledge to others in order to extend the ethnic imagined community. This incorporation echoes the notion of habitus which strives at reconciling the experiential and the perceptual on the one hand and the material and the practical on the other (Bourdieu 1972). Body practices also serve as an axis for ethnic distinction (Kray 2005).

Beside body techniques, people acquire through their day-to-day experiences similar embodied imaginary which allows them to share experiences:

Once, I organized a sausage pancake picnic [traditional Breton dish] in Paris. But I don't think I should have done it because **Parisians found it weird to eat pancakes as we do in Brittany**. I have done this kind of party in Brittany and the people simply loved it. They really enjoyed it because it is a culinary specialty from around there. Parisians found it **strange to eat sausage pancakes with their fingers. They found it dry. True, it's dry. But we don't care, it's the way we enjoy it. Plus, we all link this to some past experiences**. For me, it echoes the farmer's market in the Rennes medieval town where I used to go every Saturday, and also the big fair which takes place in Rennes in June. (Daphné)

Daphné talks about a Breton experience she wanted to share with non-native people. She then realized that people couldn't have liked it because they did not have the same background and they hadn't experienced the same body perceptions in the past. The shared embodied imaginary leads people to engage in settings in the same way. Although experience is individual and phenomenological, individuals have to *do* things to be able to make sense and to think about them.

Because of their similar embodied imaginary, people sharing the same ethnic background have the ability to immerse themselves in an ethnic setting. This immersion can sometimes be so strong that people can feel an intense community feeling. This is the case of Michelle when she sings traditional Breton songs at family or friends' parties:

What I love are the songs. When we gather, in family or friends' parties, we often sing traditional songs everyone knows. When someone begins to sing a fishermen's song (and that happens each time), **we all feel something special is going on**. Everyone starts to sing at the top of his voice. **We feel in communion, in a community**. (Michelle)

In these situations, the body is not individualized anymore. Rather it is merged with others in a common flow. As Michelle says, she feels in communion with others. Hence, the ethnic dimension is also expressed through body unification. The shared body perceptions give us the feeling of being in a shared community. This element echoes the findings on rituals, showing how these shared practices give rise to deep emotional connection. Turner (1969) calls this connection a *communitas*. During this period, people feel a deep connection with one another and with the community as a whole. For instance, when Gaëlle watches rugby games in the Perpignan stadium, she enters the *communitas* described by Turner. She has a feeling of merging with others in a flow:

The Catalan moments, it is also when you are in the stadium and you hear the Estaca [the Catalan anthem], when you hear the elders who speak Catalan, **when you are fused with the whole public** who support his red and gold team. (Gaëlle)

Through this array of narratives, body perceptions appear to be key elements in interacting with ethnic counterparts. Because people share the same body techniques and the same perceptions and imaginary, they can engage together in specific relationships and activities and interact in ritual and community settings (Le Breton 2006). As embodied beings, we know the world through shared understanding, making the world a social and intersubjective experience (Wilde 1999). However, the experience doesn't rest *in abstracto*, waiting to be lived. Rather, it constitutes a sort of test: one might like it or not, some can experience it and others can simply overlook it, etc. This fluid nature of the experience gives it a status of test. Accordingly experience can be linked to the "tournaments of value" described by Appadurai (1986): elements are qualified and give value through a kind of "value test." These tests require a lot of knowledge from the individuals in order to be carried out (Bessy and Chateauraynaud 1995; Dodier 1994).

Discussion and conclusions

Understanding the body differs when it is construed as representation or as *being-in-the-world*. Most research develops on representations: the body is either considered as a source of representation or as the product of representation (Csordas 1999). Contrary to this strand of research, we were not interested in studying the body per se but by the experience of ethnic affiliation through the body. Our findings make evident the potential of cultural phenomenology in a better understanding of ethnicity. Elaborating on the embodiment paradigm (Csordas 1999, 2002), we show that ethnicity is not only a question of representations and practices but also a question of being-in-the-world through the body. Following recent research in the anthropology of the senses (Howes 1991; Ahmed and Stacey 2001; Geurts 2002), our findings show ethnicity is also a grammar of feelings and experiencing the world. To paraphrase Lakoff and Johnson (1999) we could talk about ethnicity in the flesh. The body is here placed in a non-instrumental position and takes at face value how and what people feel or want to feel to be part of an ethnicity. Rather than isolating an ethnic moment, our research illustrates the fact that ethnicity is permanently in the making with, through, and on the body. In this regard, the body is multiple (Mol 2002) and the "ethnic body" is revealed from whence ethnicity surfaces. The ethnic embodiment has three main dimensions: the experiences, the imaginary, and the interactions (see Figure 2). Hence, the embodied dimension must neither be ignored nor overlooked (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009).

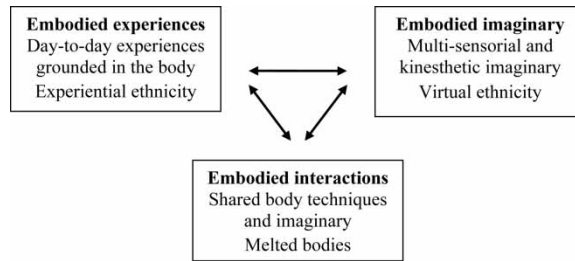


Figure 2. Ethnic embodiment.

One issue emphasized by our data is the nature of ethnic affiliation. In post-assimilationist models, identity positions are described as discursive outcomes of existential negotiation between discursive elements from the host culture, the home culture, and global consumer culture (Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005). Our research suggests that ethnic research should introduce body experiences allowing one to define oneself as a member of an ethnic group. This has two implications on the very nature of ethnicity: (1) ethnicity is based on an array of discursive and embodied elements; (2) ethnicity cannot be restricted to a discursive position but should rather be defined as both a discursive and an embodied position. However, the embodied dimension may not have the same importance depending on the level of analysis. Our data shows that it is quite important at the micro level (studying regionalism) but it may not have so much importance at a macro level. Since embodied ethnicity is linked to day-to-day experiences, we believe that local ethnicity (such as regionalism) is more embodied than national or supra-national ones (such as European identity or Asian identity). We suggest that the more we focus on local scales, the more ethnicity is concrete and experiential and the more embodiment is central to one's identification process. Studying the phenomenological experience of ethnic affiliations both at a regional, national, and supra-national level would allow us to go further in understanding the embodied nature of ethnicity.

Our data also questions the negotiability of identity (for a comprehensive review see Üstüner and Holt 2007). Similar to product consumption, individuals use embodiment as a resource for ethnic construction. In addition to manipulating discursive elements, they use their body as a source of ethnic construction. For instance, individuals can look to experiencing specific sensorial experiences in order to feel and to be recognized as a member of an ethnic community; consumers manipulate objects to project themselves into a multisensory and kinesthetic imaginative world. Thus they manipulate real and imaginary bodily sensations to feel their ethnicity in their flesh. However, our findings show that several sensory perceptions are so deeply rooted in the body that they are persistent and difficult to erase. They are so anchored in the body that their absence can lead to withdrawal symptoms. The body seems to be less malleable and may need a quite long weaning process. These deeply rooted sensations are thus hardly negotiable. Hence, ethnic experiences are not limited to one's phenomenological experiences and can be understood in a broader context in which the individuals need to position themselves in the socio-cultural landscape. Our study illustrates that this positioning is primarily done through one's body.

These findings extend Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Bourdieu (1972) uses the notion of *habitus* to apprehend an internalized structure or set of structures determining

how an individual acts in and with the world. *Habitus* generates attitudes, practices, and perceptions without consciousness and intentionality. Studying Kabila, Bourdieu (1972) directly links *habitus* to the body through the use of *hexis* (i.e., pattern of internalized body practices). The focus is on the unconscious incorporation of the external and wide structures and the durability of the incorporated patterns and dispositions (Crossley 2004; Throop and Murphy 2002; Hammoudi 2007). Bourdieu sees comportment as predominantly configured by the social structures that individuals acquire through their upbringing in a particular culture or class (Couzens Hoy 1999). The body is considered as a receptacle of internalized and fixed structures. *Habitus* is acquired from early experience and then becomes second nature (Bourdieu 1972). Our approach contends that the body is not the last step of the process but rather a mode of perception and knowledge; in that sense, we tackle a connection between mind and body similar to the one put forward by Belk, Ger, and Askegaard (2003). In our perspective, embodiment only exists in, through, and thanks to the practices of the individuals. Hence, this work adds a process-based dimension to the study of *habitus* by considering the construction of ethnicity through the body. Through day-to-day experiences individuals come into contact with different environments, situations, and people and develop specific patterns of behaviour. The process is always going on allowing one to develop a set of ethnic patterns. Ethnicity has an experiential grounding, entangled in embodied practices transmitted, learned, and solidified through interactions with the world. Along with most recent ethnic research (Üstüner and Holt 2007), this analysis reifies the role of the individual who does not only undergo the external structures but appropriates them through his experience. While Bourdieu focuses on repetition and inertia (Couzens Hoy 1999; Hammoudi 2007), our analysis insists on the constant fluxes of experimentation throughout one's life.

In this regard, our work completes existing research by enlarging the question of ethnicity: our results underline that the phenomenological approach of ethnicity sheds fresh light on the concept of ideology. Ideology shouldn't be conceived as a set of external structures but rather as tied reflexively to shared experiences centered in phenomenological experiences. In this regard, the notion of embodiment could bridge the gap between microcultural perspective on consumption patterns and broader cultural frameworks (Askegaard, Kjeldgaard, and Arnould 2009). It opens new strands of research in linking ethnicity to ideology not in a structuralist but in a dialogical and reflexive way.

Note

1. Emphasis is added in all the narrative accounts presented in this paper.

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Appendix 1. Informants' information.

Name	Occupation	Age	Ethnic affiliation	Ethnic biography
Anne	Marketing manager	28	Alsace	Born in Alsace, she moved to Paris at the age of 20 to pursue her education. She has been living in Lyon for two years.
Catherine	Economist	35	Brittany	Born in Brittany, she moved to London at the age of 20 to study at the university. She still lives in London.
Christian	Professor	42	Corsica	Born in Marseille, he spent all his vacations at his grandparents' house in Corsica. He has been living in Normandy for 15 years.
Claude	Retired	67	Brittany	Born in Normandy and married to a Breton woman, he worked in Normandy all his life. He has been living in Brittany since he retired.
Daphné	Associate professor	35	Brittany	Born in Brittany, she moved out to La Rochelle at the age of 25 to get her first position. She has been living in Paris for five years.
Ernest	Associate professor	39	Catalonia	Born in Lyon. His parents are Catalan and Chti. During his childhood, he used to spend his vacations in Catalonia. He has been living in Catalonia for two years.
Floriane	University student	24	Alsace	Born in Alsace where she still lives and pursues her education.
Gaëlle	School teacher	33	Catalonia	Born in Catalonia. She has never left this region.
Gérard	Sales manager	52	Alsace	Born in the South East of France. He lived there until recently when he had to move to Alsace for his work.
Gwénaëlle	Doctoral student	26	Brittany	Born in Brittany, she spent her childhood in Eastern France and then in Southern France. She came back to Brittany for high school and university. She has been living in Paris for four years.
Hélène	Account manager	25	Nord	Born in the region and still lives there.
Hélène	Manager	37	Basque country	Born in the Basque country. She moved out at the age of 22 to pursue her education. She now lives in the Basque country.
Julie	College student	20	Brittany	Born in Normandy, she still lives there. She spends her vacations at her grandparents' house in Brittany.
Julien	Market study assistant	31	Catalonia	Born in Paris. He lived in Catalonia for 10 years (from 12 to 22 years old). He lives in Paris.
Patricia	Associate professor	44	Brittany	Born in Normandy, she has spent all her life in Normandy. Her mother comes from Brittany where she spends her vacations.

(Continued)

Appendix 1. (Continued).

Name	Occupation	Age	Ethnic affiliation	Ethnic biography
Pierre	High school student	18	Brittany	Born in Normandy, he still lives there. He spends his vacations at his grandparents' house in Brittany.
Pierrick	Bank manager	48	Brittany	Born in Brittany, he has been living in Normandy for 20 years.
Laurent	Associate professor	29	Alsace	Born in Alsace, he had to move to Paris to complete his PhD. He has been working in Lyon for two years.
Madeleine	Retired	73	Corsica	Born in Corsica, she left the region to work in Marseille where she is still living.
Marthe	Nurse	55	Alsace	Born in Alsace, she never moved away, even though she travels a lot for pleasure.
Mathieu	High school student	19	Brittany	Born in Normandy, he still lives there. He spends his vacations at his grandparents' house in Brittany.
Michel	Manager	62	Brittany	Born in Pays de Loire, he moved to Brittany to work at the age of 25. He still lives there (even though he travels a lot for business and vacations).
Michelle	Retired	64	Brittany	Born in Brittany, she married a Norman and then moved to Normandy. Since her husband retired, she has been living in Brittany.
Muriel	Farmer	43	Brittany	Born in Brittany, she has never moved out to another region.
Nicole	Pharmacist	58	Alsace	Born in Lorraine, her mother is German born and her father was French. She had to move to Paris at the age of 24. She then moved to South East of France before returning to Alsace at 29. She married an Alsatian and never moved except for tourism.
Sophie	Sales engineer	35	Brittany	Born in Brittany, she moved to Paris at the age of 25 to work. She now lives in the Paris suburbs.
Sylvie	Market study assistant	48	Provence	Born in Paris, she spent her vacations during her childhood at her grandmother's house in Provence. She lives in Paris.
Valérie	Librarian	35	Brittany	Born in Brittany, she moved to Paris at the age of 24 to work. She now lives in the Paris suburbs.
Yolande	Retired	60	Catalonia	Born in Catalonia, she moved out at the age of 20 to get married. When she got divorced (at 40), she returned to Catalonia. She has been living there since then.