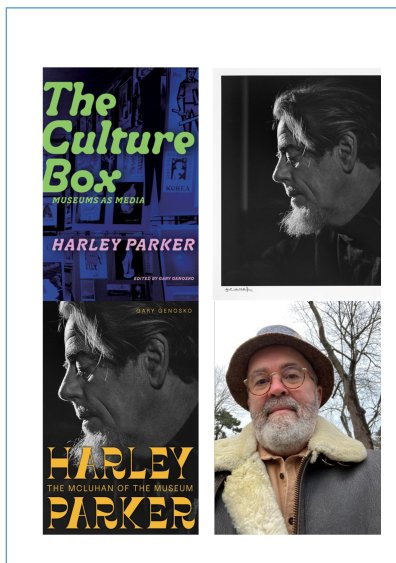


CENTRE FOR SENSORY STUDIES

MULTISENSORY MUSEOLOGY LECTURE SERIES



Decoding the Sensory Mixes of Cultural Artefacts: Harley Parker's Semio-Affective Indices

Gary Genosko

Friday, 1 November 2024

4:00-5:40 PM EST, [Webinar Registration Link](#)

From the early 1960s to the early 1970s, Canadian exhibition designer and painter Harley Parker developed a sensory museology by applying Marshall McLuhan's ideas about the sensorium and media to exhibition design. At the core of this applied theory was the idea that cultural artefacts could be decoded according to the sensory preferences of their makers and users that they bear. The designer's goal would be to provoke in contemporary museum visitors an indirect experience of the sensory profiles of distant cultures, by bringing both memory and imagination into play. In his lost book manuscript - recently recovered and currently in press – *The Culture Box*, Parker outlined the goal of restimulating the sense lives of museum visitors by orienting them to an empathic, and reflexive, grasp of cultures distant and different from their own. Fructuous encounters between the remote sensory orientations of makers and those of contemporary visitors, were not based on a forced attempt at verisimilitude (by facsimile, or by strict identity) but, instead, by a correspondence or “affinity” that used techniques recalling or “re-knowing” (including by contrast and abrasion) the original sensory inter-relations, rather than specific kinds of content. This paper borrows ideas from literary criticism and Peircean semiotics to explicate Parker's strategy for decoding cultural artefacts and to bring his insights into current discourses on sensory museology.

Gary Genosko is Professor of Communication and Digital Media at Ontario Tech University in Oshawa, Ontario. His forthcoming books are *Harley Parker: The McLuhan of the Museum*, and as editor, *Harley Parker, The Culture Box: Museums as Media*, both with University of Alberta Press.