



University of Dundee

Don't You Think It's a Bit...

Linsley, Johanna; Mertens, Jan

Publication date:
2023

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Linsley, J., & Mertens, J. (2023, Mar). Don't You Think It's a Bit... University of St Andrews.

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A REFLECTION ON MULTILINGUAL PRACTICES AT THE TIEPIDO COOL WORKSHOP (7 FEBRUARY)

Tilly Nevin

On the 7th of February 2023 in Parliament Hall in St Andrews, the Centre for Poetic Innovation hosted a workshop organised as part of the *Tiepido-Cool* research project, in collaboration with Italian artist Davide D’Elia. Participants were invited to place images, provided by D’Elia, along a spectrum from warm to cool, and to choose a word to accompany each image. The participants then negotiated with each other over the placement of these image-words along the spectrum, image-words which were then translated into the form of a collective poem.

In the process of negotiation, participants were pushed to also translate their own inner (visual and linguistic) worlds. From the images D’Elia selected (many of which appear in his eponymous book [2022], but here were provided in an unedited format), the one I chose was of a deep-sea diver, the light attached to their forehead casting a glow of turquoise around them as they moved through the black depths, as if they were surrounded by a protective bubble. Reacting instinctually to this image, I placed it towards the warmer end of the scale, which another participant disagreed with; they would have placed the image towards the cooler end of the scale. For me, however, the image evoked instantly the word ‘glas’ (‘blue’ in Welsh), a word which for me speaks of warmth. The ‘cool’ tones of blue, like the iris blue antifouling paint D’Elia often uses in his work to arrest the passage of time, are undeniably warm to me, because of the association I have between Welsh, its vocabulary of colours, which in the process of learning the language I encountered first, and warmth. Another participant selected an image depicting a range of hills, which recalled to her the Scottish landscape, and which brought to mind, for her, the expression ‘ca’canny’, a Scots word which signifies a warning to step carefully. The participant explained that she often uses this word when speaking to friends, before a hiking trip for instance, telling them to take care. The image spoke not of simple warning to her, then, but well-wishing, and she placed it at the middle of the spectrum, edged towards warmth rather than coolness. As the negotiations went on, we became more alert to the investments we make in warmth and coolness: warmth we may associate with ‘home’ (as one participant did), with languages that are the most precious to us (all the more perhaps because they are threatened), with familiar landscapes and landmarks; coolness with

being lost, being alone, being in danger. Although D’Elia’s spectrum resists the endpoints of ‘cold’ and ‘hot’, therefore, there seems to be something ingrained about how we perceive these temperatures dichotomously, a dichotomy that came to be undermined throughout the process of reconfiguring the spectrum, of creating a collective colour theory.

As a researcher who works on multilingual texts and the perception of the ‘mother tongue’, I found it interesting that participants didn’t always associate their ‘mother tongue’ with warmth, or second languages with coolness. As Yasemin Yildiz writes, ‘presumptions that the mother tongue is always the language of emotion and subsequent languages are merely languages of distance and detachment’ still persist; ‘however, despite these strictures, different languages can and do elicit heterogeneous affective investments and emotional reactions [...] As psychoanalyst Jacqueline Amati-Mehler and her colleagues note, new languages can open up “new intellectual and affective pathways”’¹. A first language, whether or not one’s ‘mother’s tongue’, does not only speak of affect, nor does a second language always echo emptily. In a room full of modern languages students and multilingual people, this was evident.

For D’Elia himself, neither Italian nor English is fully warm nor cool; his relationship towards the languages changes and evolves, fluid as the colour blue. Perhaps our relationship to the languages we speak is not fully translatable, not fully able to be articulated; instead, we move within a constellation of affect, emotion, and analysis. The title of the project, and D’Elia’s book, suggests this: the two words, in Italian and English, are not interchangeable. ‘*Tiepido*’ can translate, in Italian, as warm, or lukewarm, or coolness (‘fare un’accoglienza tiepida’ translates to ‘to give a cold welcome’). For an English speaker, however, it speaks of ‘tepidness’. Rather than being antithetical to the English word ‘cool’, therefore, the two words merge and transform under the pressure of their partner-word: a hidden hyphenation suggests itself in the interstice between the two words, a neologism and new concept emerging into this space.

Eva Karpinski writes that ‘in the process of translation’, which she takes to mean not only the act of translating from one language to another words but selves, ‘what is recalled is both preserved and altered, not just in its meaning but also its affective quality’². Translating to each other not only the meaning of words, such as ‘glas’, but the sounds of words, and the associations we made between image and word, participants ‘preserved and altered’ the affectiveness of warmth and coolness, both within and without language. Bilingual or multilingual writers, Ann Pavlenko argues, ‘display a unique sensitivity to intrinsic links between languages and selves and are painfully cognizant of the fact that in different

¹ Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (Fordham University Press, 2013), 13.

² Eva Karpinski, *Borrowed Tongues: Life Writing, Migration and Translation*, Life Writing Series (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 165.

languages their voices may sound differently even when telling the “same” stories’³. Our voices may have been made strange to us in one way at this workshop, ordered on a spectrum from warm to cool by Dr Johanna Linsley and Jan Mertens at the end of the workshop on the 7th (who reacted instinctively (perhaps affectively) to what they heard), but they were also made ‘sound different’ in the process of negotiation, as the words ‘*tiepido*’ or ‘cool’ sound different to D’Elia depending on the context in which he speaks them, or in which they are printed, or sounded out.

As D’Elia says, the spectrum moves ‘from warm to cold and viceversa, through a moderate aesthetic microclimate, a pleasant short circuit’ (<https://www.nosproduction.com/tiepidocool>). Making circuits around the table on which we’d laid our colour spectrum, the participants created their own circuits of meaning and affect, their own ‘microclimate’ of multilingualism.

³ Aneta Pavlenko, ed., “Bilingual Selves,” in *Bilingual Minds : Emotional Experience, Expression, and Representation.*, Bilingual Education and Bilingualism 56 (Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2006), 3.

TWO TEMPERATE ENTRIES⁴

Vahid Davar

SORUSH

Sorush (Persian سروش, so.ruš) is the messenger of God in Persian literature, sometimes identified with Gabriel. The name derives from the Avestan ‘*sru*’, meaning ‘hearing’ and ‘obedience’, especially hearing and obeying divine commands (Doostkhah, 1991, p. 1007). The Persian words ‘*sorud*’ and ‘*sorudan*’ (‘poetry’ and ‘to compose poetry’) are also derivatives of ‘*sru*’ (Yāḥaqqi, 2009, p. 462).

Tiepido: Artist Davide D’Elia appeared on the screen as a *deus ex machina* to put us in a difficult situation. Each participant was given two images created by the artist and asked to *look* for two words in languages of their choosing as titles for them. A collective poem was to be composed with our vocables. My first image was a salmon-lit statuette of the Virgin. The light susurrated ‘Sorush’: and I saw that it was good. So we heard Davide and (dis)obeyed him, *listening* for words in our minds. In the end, we brought forth a disjointed body of words, a hyperobject of a poem.

In the Avesta, Sorush is called ‘*tan-manthra*’, meaning the one whose body is full of *manthras* (holy words). As Sorush is the angel who hears God and obeys Him with all his body, he can be pictured as a creature covered with ears. These two images are comparable to the living beings in Revelation 4:6, who are full of eyes, or the scarlet beast in Revelation 17:3, whose body is covered with blasphemous names. Derived from the Sanskrit word ‘*mantraḥ*’, ‘*manthra*’ means ‘holy word’, ‘prayer’, and ‘a prayer or an incantation which enables a person to influence objects and people’. In modern Persian, the compound verb ‘*mantar sbodan*’ means ‘1. To become subjected to somebody’s charm or whims. 2. To be kept waiting for no good reason’ (Emāmi, 2007, p. 865). The English ‘mantra’ and the Persian ‘*mantar*’ are etymological sisters.⁵

Cool: Once each of us subjected two images to the charm of two vocables, we were asked to stand in a queue to repeat and audio-record each other’s words in groups of three. We were given tongue twisters from a panoply of languages, cryptic as spells in an incantation. Out of our labour came a collective jabberwocky, which kept us waiting for some curious reason.

⁴ The two entries are inspired by A. Van Jordan’s *Fair*.

⁵ For my reflections on ‘*manthra*’, I am indebted to Masoud Toofan.

KHĀHAR

Khāhar (Persian خواهر, *xā.har*) is the Persian word for sister.

Tiepido: Ayah, the calm woman standing next to me in the workshop, is from Damascus. She once wrote a poem entitled *The Gift of Poetry*, which featured Ahura Mazdā, the chief deity of Zoroastrianism. I am from Shiraz, and a Damascus sword hamstrings some fleeing gazelles in the middle of a poem in my debut collection. Ayah and I often anglicise our words for one another but never our skin colour. She may well be my sister through a sibyl in the Achaemenid Satrapy of Trans-Euphrates, a worshipper of Sorush perhaps.

In the Province of Hormozgan, Iran, when the sea is calm, people say *‘Daryā kbāhar ast’* (the sea is sister).

Cool-Tiepido: I was chosen by an image showing a wader at low tide. The grey sea was perfectly sister. A pale hand came to take my sister away, for it was already assigned a name: ‘Wade’. Another image found me: An imposing Sacramento green tree with its reflection in a tranquil body of water. The image muttered *‘kbāhar’*; I uttered *‘kbāhar’*; three European women incanted *‘kbāhar, kbāhar, kbāhar’*.

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FARBENGEOMETRIE

Mark Robson

I

That which comes between is that which comes between.

I will not be explaining this sentence, but I will not stray far from it.

Far from it.

Between Tiepido and Cool, what may be seen beyond the space? The same space separates a sequence of face-down photographs functioning as prompts. Is that right? Is this a sequence? Yes and no, that is, the answer lies between the two. The book that bears that title traces a sequence, certainly, but the workshop is an invitation to create one, or, better, more than one.

In place of create, we should say an invitation to invent, that is, inventing naming that practice that opens to finding the singular work in arranging images existent. Invention in the rhetorical sense, then, using that which is to hand, before our eyes.

Images squat like stepping stones – from warm to cool but not from hot to cold – and, as such, stepping stones seemingly across a stream with no banks.

II

It is more accurate to say that what we did in the workshop was to invent the space between the images, to determine the order of the spaces between two images as a ghosted form of aesthetic judgment as poietics.

That which does not appear in the image determines how the image appears.

The Kelvin scale lays down a linearity, a distribution in spacings between sunrise and a clear blue day. Or sunset and the clear blue. The spacing was always there, awaited in the structure of signification like a trap into which one cannot not fall.

As Jacques Derrida puts it concerning any present element: ‘An interval must separate it from what is not itself in order for it to be itself. No image simply is, singularly warm or cool in essence.

Baudelaire says: ‘La couleur est ... l'accord de deux tons. Le ton chaud et le ton froid, dans l'opposition desquels consiste toute la théorie, ne peuvent se définir d'une manière absolue : ils n'existent que relativement’.

That which comes between is that which comes between.

III

In the workshop for Tiepido Cool, I observe that when people come to explain why they have placed an image at a particular point on the Kelvin scale – or why they have chosen a particular word to accompany it, or why a word in one language rather than another – some participants note that they are responding to a colour or combination of colours. Others are led by objects or geometries and their spacings, let's say, by what is called composition.

A metaphor for translation – metaphor as translation – in the transport of one language into another as a matter of colour and structure, as colour's matter that is never pure structure.

Anne Michaels says, in ‘What the Light Teaches’:

Language is how ghosts enter the world.

Each image becomes a word. Between the Adamic power of naming and being found; between phatic and vatic.

This is what led me to invent my title: *Farbengeometrie*. It is a word borrowed from Ludwig Wittgenstein and his *Bemerkungen über die Farben*, or remarks on colour. The compound noun allows for no spacing between its component parts, between colour and geometry. The elision of the genitive suggests no hierarchy. A *Bemerkung* is at once perception and expression, an observation testifying to something observed. The gap opens between observation and observation.

IV

In his *Remarks on Colour*, Wittgenstein remarks: ‘Must it be the case that everyone knows “warm” and “cool” colours? *‘Müßten alle Leute ‘warme ‘und ‘kalte ‘Farben kennen?* In a later version of this thought, it becomes: ‘Can't we imagine certain people having a different geometry of colour than we do?’ *Kann man sich nicht denken, daß gewisse Menschen eine andere Farbengeometrie als die unsere hätten?*

To look at one of these images is to enter into a realm of feeling in which feeling even almost nothing finds its place on the scale of sensibility.

What prompts the response? Attunement to the palette, a colour's saturation or intensity, its weight. Or else the resonances – associative, memorial, instinctive – of the objects composing the image. Or else an effect of composition itself, a sense of space and spacing, shapes that may be nothing more than abstractions found or formed on a surface that offers a shiver of depth.

Stepping stones become standing stones, as if at sunrise or sunset.

V

What Davide D'Elia's work in *Tiepido Cool* asks whether this division of form and feeling might be something in play in any attempt to find a scale, sequence or order for images. Each image stands in place only when set against others. Intersections of colour and geometry translating into temperature.

A synaesthetic invitation to invention.

Is a smooth curve cool or does it become so only if blue?

There is a sediment here. Kandinsky asks: is yellow round or square? What is at work in what I earlier named an attunement to a palette is what Kandinsky tries to name with the word *Stimmung*. When seeing a palette of colours, he says, 'the eye is either warmed or else soothed and cooled'.

VI

The workshop has its own geometry, but it is subject also to translation. The fate of the linearity of the Kelvin scale – the flight of time's arrow, tempered with the second law of thermodynamics and entropy – is to become Ouroboros, head of the scale biting its tail, circling between sunrise and sunset placed at the same point.

If there is something mysterious in this process, something that escapes (in) the spaces between the photographs or between the words chosen, it is to be found in the spectrum, that is, in the colours Kelvin does not capture. The etymology of the word spectrum is rooted in seeing – an appearance, vision or image, from the Latin *specere* – but it is the same root that leads to spectre or apparition. A ghost glimpsed in the uncanny spacings of the scale.

Who is the third who walks always beside you?. When I count there are only you and I together. A poet's question. And yet ...

Goethe speaks of a third colour, one that emerges from the relationship between any two colours brought together: is it this that makes an image cool or warm? Always our relation to another, to an other relation.

Kandinsky speaks of the spiritual in art.

Wittgenstein ponders the colour of ghosts, but the thought is exorcised from his later remarks.

Might they all be talking about the same thing?

That which comes between is that which comes between.

Note

The version of this text performed on 9 March 2023 in St Andrews was accompanied by a gradually revealed projection of a quotation from Frank Stella:

Thinking abstractly about colour has never done me any real good.

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THIRTY-ONE FRAGMENTS FOR A *DISPOSITIF*

Elodie Laügt

1. One image, one word. Such is one of the requirements built in the *dispositif*: that we come up with one word for each of the forty-five images. It is, it seems, as simple as it gets.

2. The right word should appear in a kind of evidence. Yet it should not be so obvious that it won't do any work.

3. The right word won't be the last but it can withstand a certain level of scrutiny.

4. The right word bestows on the image a meaning that was already there. It functions as a supplement.

5. '*Dispositif*': often translated into English as 'apparatus', refers to the way an ensemble of elements are arranged or set up in order to achieve a particular end (as in, for instance, 'un dispositif militaire'). The '*dispositif*' is both a device and a structure or a layout. Echoes of 'posit', 'positing' and 'position' ring in the *dispositif*, which also functions like a *proposition* designed to enable something.

6. 'Something' here indexes what cannot possibly be known yet. What in the thing remains to-come.

7. We know that one word won't be enough. How could we do justice to the image, or to any reality for that matter, by means of only one word?

8. The word 'singularity' itself won't do the trick.

9. We are bound to experience a sense of approximation, a 'not quite' and with it, proximation, proximity, *proche*, *propinquity*, approach, approaching, *approche*, *presque*, a nearly or nearby, nearness or nearing.

10. Bluntness tends to focus one's mind. Think of a blade, the guillotine.

11. As for the *dispositif* that concerns us, it does, thankfully, mobilize our minds somehow more creatively. We become attentive to nuances, we are drawn toward the gaps, the cracks, the overlaps and the duplications, reflections stemming from specific junctions or thresholds created by and within the body of forty-five images.

12. The spaces between images are for us both to gauge and to re-create as we let ourselves slip into the very interstices, the in-betweens of their potential articulations.

13. The play between the images is made possible by what brings them together and at the same time separates them, the proximity within which they exist and the distance, the discontinuous between them, their touching and un-touching. Let us call it their 'touching discontinuities'.

14. What would be a 'tactile corpus'? What ought to be such a corpus if it is meant to speak to the untouching at the heart of touching as well as to the fact that touching is always also being touched? It is a philosopher who asks.⁶

15. He became curious about the to-and-fro inherent in touch, the folding as well as the interruption or syncopation constitutive of touch, also where the poem comes from and where it goes, itself touching in detachment.

16. Forty-five images, by means of an original *dispositif*, partake in the opening up of the dynamic multiple space of the poem, and for it.

17. Vertical folds soaked in light fall flush with a tiled floor. From where they touch, a thin cable sheathed in white runs along the wall. Together they form a time capsule.

18. Is a shadow a touch or an absence of touch? Is it the rail kissing the wall while itself out of frame, or is it the light sparing the wall its glare?

19. Blue lines and red ones run parallel until finally some of them intersect. They cut each other as they separate what on the canvas once seemed to be one. At first, they block the view toward a body of water, make it recede, together with a footbridge among textured foliage. Until, almost out of sight, in the corner, *in extremis*, the lines do intersect. But do they touch?

20. The tool of the stonemason recalls that every blow, be it to the head, may not be a 'species of destructive touch'.⁷

21. Two wide white and blue bands run along parallel walls that they divide horizontally. The lower band is wider than the upper one, it is blue on the left, white on the right. And *vice versa*. A cone like one you'd find signalling roadworks, topped with a bare

⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy refers to a 'corpus du tact' in *Corpus*, Paris, Métailié, 1992, p. 82.

⁷ 'Le coup n'est peut-être pas une espèce du toucher destructeur', Derrida writes in *Le Toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 84.

bulb at the end of a stick, has been put so as to lit the access while at the same time barring it. We are looking at the creation of the installation, the separate or the distinct in the making. Where the sacred begins.⁸

22. Blue and white uncloak each other as they revolve around an infinite horizontal axis.

23. Could blue be the colour both of the thing and of the nothing, the colour of the thing *of* the nothing, *de la res du rien, della cosa e del niente, della cosa del niente*, which is not nothing?

24. Blue takes our breath away, then enjoins us to find it again.

25. Windows wet with rain are faces we have trouble reading. Their gazes bestow on bodies an accrued density.

26. I mistook what I was seeing for a flower because of the intimacy the image was throwing in my face.⁹ Because of the excessive close-up I thought there were pistils and I got drawn in like a busy insect. Yet all the while what I was looking at was precisely the withdrawal from the 'world of availability'.¹⁰

27. In the next image a man is standing some way from the shore across a body of water, his feet lightly touching their own reflections on the serene surface. Sole to sole. In another image, a dog pauses for an instant, looking sideways before resuming his race toward the sea. One recalls the miracle of walking on water while the other still finds the impetus of his freedom. Some day one of them may save the other.

28. *Orangerie*. Robin chose this word. Perhaps he remembered the lines of another poet: 'La terre est bleue comme une orange / Jamais une erreur les mots ne mentent pas'¹¹; 'The earth is blue like an orange / Never a mistake words don't lie'. I'd like to ask him.

29. Is it possible that what we experience together is images imagining us? We'd be verifying the possibility of 'a participation or a contagion through which the image seizes us'.¹²

⁸ See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the image*, trans. Jeff Fort, Fordham, 2005, p. 1.

⁹ 'The image throws in my face an intimacy that reaches me in the midst of intimacy - through sight, through hearing, or through the very meaning of words. Indeed, the image is not only visual: it is also musical, poetic, even tactile, olfactory or gustatory, kinesthetic, and so on.', Nancy, *The ground of the image*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Nancy, *The Ground of the image*, p. 2.

¹¹ Paul Eluard, *L'amour la poésie*, in *Œuvres Complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1968/1997, p. 232.

¹² Nancy, *The Ground of the image*, p. 9.

30. The law of reciprocity is such that we can be seized and imagined or re-imagined by images as they touch and move us – in space and otherwise, positioning and repositioning us.

31. In that moment when we look at them together and thereby consent to be called by them, forty-five images and a *dispositif* enable us as another, unheard off, provisional community of poets.

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DON'T YOU THINK IT'S A BIT...

Johanna Linsley

I. Warm (Instrumental-Electronic)

Rich earth, a cliché for warmth: a circumference. A warm earth. A warm rich mud. Two surfaces rubbing together, frictional vibration – the energy made but not undone.

'Don't You Think It's a Bit' is an electroacoustic composition with voices that takes the logic of T'iepido Cool, and the project's notion of a human algorithm, and explores them sonically. The piece has two layers. There is a fourteen-minute evolving soundscape produced by sound artist Jan Mertens, in conversation with me. This part draws on electronic sounds, orchestral sample libraries and a range of percussive noises. The sounds are arranged on a spectrum from warm to cool, using some common visual metaphors as organising principles (the idea that lower frequencies are 'warmer', for example, and that electronic sounds are 'cooler'). We have not, however, used external measuring devices to determine the sequence. Rather, it is the result of our own listening, feeling and talking, and it reflects our associations, conditions and biases.

II. Warm-Cool (Vocal)

Configuration of the mouth joining together. The unique instance that makes the group something else to the discomfort of shaping. Who can actually say it with feeling but no significance when sequence no system. Overlap as method and method as marshal.

The second layer of 'Don't You Think It's a Bit' emerges at the mid-point of the piece. Twenty different voices speak forty-five different words. These words are the product of the workshop held at the University of St Andrews in February 2023. As the participants entered the workshop, Jan and I recorded each of their voices and used the recordings to place them on a warm-cool spectrum, again, using our own subjective judgment. At the end of the workshop, I organised the participants into a warm-cool chorus and orchestrated a complex, live vocal gradient. These voices punctuate the soundscape in the finished piece in a kind of mesmerising chant.

III. *Cool (Electronic-Instrumental)*

Glacial non-movement as layer in frequency of austere unease. A misty mild. A cool clink. Layers of glass in phase shift, a cellular arrangement. If you listen it gets cooler as you go. The time is cool percussive. What matches what tone with another vibration. It's time for tones to meet and mingle. Wind in the wilderness.

'Don't You Think It's a Bit' emerged out of conversation with Elodie Laügt and Derek Duncan, conversation with Davide D'Elia, conversation between Jan and I, conversation with people we met at the workshop, conversation punctuated by a proposal, permission slips and conducting a logistically complicated unrehearsed chorus (me), recording and improvisation with synthesised and acoustic sounds (Jan), lots of editing and refining (Jan again), lots more talk (Jan and me both). Now, writing this, I listen back to the piece and re-translate my impressions into the words alternating with this discursive text.

There is a common cliché that the visual is concerned with surfaces while the sonic is suited to the interior. Images appear, sounds emerge. In his book *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality*, Veit Erlmann argues that instead of seeking to document an acoustic interior, it is more interesting to ask 'what it is about the ear... that allows a person to speak of this experience as pertaining to his or her inner self in the first place'.¹³ In making 'Don't You Think It's a Bit', we discovered a kind of productive incoherence produced by collapsing the distinction between visual metaphor, sonic vibration, subjective judgment and terms of engagement. Without answering Erlmann's question, we explore some of the pleasures and uneasiness of asking it.

The title of our piece gestures to return, iteration, return, different iteration. Don't you think it's a little bit warm? Don't you think it's a little bit cool? Don't you think it's a bit dry? Don't you think it's a bit heavy? Don't you think it's a bit pink? Don't you think it's a bit blue? Modulating across the senses, a method for synaesthetic chit-chat that might also augur the end of the world. The macro and the micro. The three categories in operation at the workshop – aesthetics, multi-lingualism and climate change – informed our conversations and process, even if they are not necessarily detectable within the final piece.

Jan says, a shift in temperature can be uncomfortable: a simply true statement and a profound, even existential, understatement.

'Don't You Think It's a Bit' can be heard at
<https://on.soundcloud.com/aqkwJ>

¹³ Veit Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 23.

