

Foundations for an anthropology of the senses

Constance Classen

Premises

The fundamental premiss underlying the concept of an 'anthropology of the senses' is that sensory perception is a cultural, as well as a physical, act. That is, sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell are not only means of apprehending physical phenomena, but also avenues for the transmission of cultural values. Here we refer to such characteristic modes of sensory communication as speech and writing, music and visual arts, and also to the range of values and ideas which may be conveyed through olfactory, gustatory and tactile sensations.

Given that perception is conditioned by culture, it follows that the ways in which people perceive the world may vary as cultures vary. This variation, in fact, is true even as regards the enumeration of the senses. Within Western history we find, aside from the customary grouping into five senses, enumerations of four, six or seven senses described at different periods by different persons. Thus, for example, taste and touch are sometimes grouped together as one sense, and touch is sometimes divided into several senses (Classen, 1993a, pp. 2–3). Similar variations in the enumeration of the senses can be found in non-Western cultures. Ian Ritchie writes that the Hausa of Nigeria, for example, recognize two general senses: visual perception and non-

visual perception (Ritchie, 1991, p. 195). Such basic differences in the divisions of the sensorium recognized by different cultures suggest the extent to which perception is fashioned by culture.

There are many ways in which sensory perception may be imbued with cultural significance. The senses themselves may each be linked with different trains of associations, and certain senses ranked higher in value than

others. Particular sensations – a red colour, a foul odour, a sweet flavour – may have symbolic value in different contexts. Sensory metaphors – as when one says of an idea that it stinks – may be used to convey meaning through evocative sensory referents. Not all cultures will make use of all sensory domains to the same extent. Christian mystical culture, for example, is characterized by a strict asceticism of the body coupled with a

Constance Classen holds a doctorate from McGill University, Montreal. Her Montreal address is 602 Côte St. Antoine, Westmount, Quebec, Canada H3Y 2K7. She has undertaken field research on ethnomedicine in Northwestern Argentina. Her current research centres on the history of the senses in the West. She is the author of *Inca Cosmology and the Human Body* (1993), *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (1993) and *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (1994), co-written with David Howes and Anthony Synnott.

rich sensuality of the spirit, whereby the divine is conceptualized and mystically experienced through a wealth of sensory symbols. It is the task of the scholar to uncover the distinctions and interrelationships of sensory meaning and practice particular to a culture. In order to do so the scholar must not only look at the practical uses to which the senses are put – for every society will make practical use of all of the senses – but at the ways in which different sensory domains are invested with social value.

When we examine the meanings associated with various sensory faculties and sensations in different cultures we find a cornucopia of potent sensory symbolism. Sight may be linked to reason or to witchcraft, taste may be used as a metaphor for aesthetic discrimination or for sexual experience, an odour may signify sanctity or sin, political power or social exclusion. Together, these sensory meanings and values form the *sensory model* espoused by a society, according to which the members of that society 'make sense' of the world, or translate sensory perceptions and concepts into a particular 'worldview'. There will likely be challenges to this model from within the society, persons and groups who differ on certain sensory values, yet this model will provide the basic perceptual paradigm to be followed or resisted.

Conceptual impediments

The anthropology of the senses has had to overcome three prevalent assumptions in order to establish itself as an alternative approach to the study of culture. The first is the assumption that the senses are 'windows on the world', or in other words transparent in nature, and therefore precultural. Considering the amount of attention paid in recent years to the different ways in which the human body is socially constructed, it is surprising that the senses should still be thought of as purely biological in nature. The senses, in fact, are as regulated by society as most other aspects of bodily existence, from eating to aging. Social codes determine what constitutes acceptable sensory behaviour at any time for anyone, and indicate what different sensory experiences mean. To stare at someone may signify rudeness, flattery or domination depending on the circumstances and the culture. Downcast eyes, in turn, may suggest modesty, fear, contemplation or inattention.

Sensory perception, in fact, is not simply one aspect of bodily experience, but the basis for bodily experience. We experience our bodies – and the world – *through* our senses. Thus the cultural construction of sensory perception conditions our experience and understanding of our bodies and the world at a fundamental level. The sensory model supported by a society reveals that society's aspirations and preoccupations,

its divisions, hierarchies, and interrelationships. Hence, insofar as the senses may be likened to windows, this analogy should be understood to rest not so much on their imagined capacity to admit physical data in a transparent fashion, as on their role in *framing* perceptual experience in accordance with socially prescribed norms.

The second assumption that has impeded the development of an anthropology of the senses is the one which holds that, in terms of cultural significance, sight is the only sense of major importance. This assumption reflects the bias of Western culture in favour of vision. Sight is held to be the most important of the senses and the sense most closely allied with reason. We can find this bias in favour of sight already in ancient philosophy. Aristotle, for example, considered sight to be the most highly developed of the senses. However, while vision was usually considered the first and most important of the senses, it was still the 'first among equals' (Classen, 1993a, pp. 3–4; Synnott, 1991).

Sight came to distance itself significantly from the other senses in terms of cultural importance only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when vision became associated with the burgeoning field of science. The enquiring and penetrating gaze of the scientist became the metaphor for the acquisition of knowledge at this time (Foucault, 1973; Le Breton, 1990). Evolutionary theories propounded by prominent figures such as Charles Darwin and later Sigmund Freud, supported the elevation of sight by decreeing vision to be the sense of civilization. The 'lower', 'animal' senses of smell, touch and taste, by contrast supposedly lost importance as 'man' climbed up the evolutionary ladder. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the role of sight in Western society was further enlarged by the development of such highly influential visual technologies as photography and cinema (Jay 1993; Classen, Howes and Synnott, 1994, pp. 88–92).

As a result of this Western emphasis on vision, a description and interpretation of a society's visual culture (such as may be seen in artefacts or styles of dress) is often as far as anthropologists will go in search of 'sensory' meaning. The anthropology of the senses, however, argues that we must try to understand the

values of the various senses within the context of the culture under study and not within the context of the sensory model of the anthropologist's own culture. This means attending to the meanings encoded in all of the senses. Such attention can uncover a wealth of sensory symbolism previously overlooked by scholars and can reveal hierarchies of sensory values different from the visually dominated Western order.

Focusing on the visual (or the audio-visual) elements of culture to the neglect of other sensory phenomena can furthermore introduce a rupture in the interconnected sensory system of a society. This occurs most notably with artefacts, which are frequently abstracted from a dynamic context of multisensory uses and meanings and transformed into static objects for the gaze inside the glass cases of museums or within books of photography. Navajo sandpaintings, to give an example, are much more than simply visual representations for the Navajo. Sandpaintings, which are created in the context of healing ceremonies, are made to be pressed onto the bodies of the participants, and not simply seen. From a conventional Western perspective, picking up sand from the sandpainting and applying it to the body 'destroys' the painting. From the Navajo perspective, this act 'completes' the painting by transferring the healing power contained in the visual representation to the patient's body through the medium of touch. According to traditional Navajo religion it is, in fact, sacrilegious to preserve a sandpainting untouched: such an act of visual hubris is said to be punished by blindness. The interest of Western art collectors and scholars in the visual designs of Navajo sandpaintings, however, has led to a number of attempts to permanently 'fix' this ephemeral art form in the manner of Western paintings. Such attempts include photographing sandpaintings, gluing them onto canvasses, and preserving them in airtight glass cases. The tactile element of the sandpaintings is thus suppressed and receives little or no attention in scholarly interpretations of the works (Gill, 1982; Parezco, 1983).

The visualist preoccupations of many contemporary academics are evident in the extent to which 'writing' or 'reading' and 'texts' have been employed as models for culture and cultural analysis. Within anthropology this literary-minded approach to ethnography was fostered

in the 1970s by Clifford Geertz, who wrote: 'The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts . . . which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong' (Geertz, 1973, p. 452). Anthropologists' use of this approach across cultures means not only that Western textual ideologies are applied to non-Western, non-text-based societies, but also that the dynamic multisensory dimensions of culture are suppressed or transformed in order to make of culture a static, visual document which can then be read using the tools of textual criticism.

Ironically, the third obstacle hindering the development of an anthropology of the senses comes from the work of certain academics who have challenged the hegemony of sight in cultural studies. These academics have suggested replacing or supplementing visual models of interpretation with models based on speech and aurality. Marshall McLuhan (1962) and Walter Ong (1967), notably, argued that the sensory model of a society is determined by its technologies of communication. According to this theory, literate, and particularly print, societies emphasize sight due to the visual nature of writing, while non-literate societies emphasize hearing due to the auditory nature of speech. For the latter, consequently, the notion of a 'world harmony' is more appropriate than that of a 'worldview' (Ong, 1969).

While such approaches have helped prepare the ground for an anthropology of the senses by proposing alternate sensory paradigms for the study of culture, they have one major drawback from the perspective of sensory anthropology. This drawback is that they do not allow for sufficient variation in sensory models across cultures. In terms of the McLuhanesque theory which links perceptual models to media of communication, the sensory combinatories of culture are much too complex to be stereotyped as either auditory or visual according to the dominant mode of communication. The oral culture of the Hopi of Arizona, for example, places an emphasis on sensations of vibration, while that of the Desana of Colombia highlights the symbolic importance of colour (Classen, 1993a, pp. 11, 131–34).

Furthermore, the oral/literate model of culture tends to assume that the different senses will possess the same social values and have



Bushman of South-West Africa with his granddaughter. Photograph taken by the L.K. Marshall expedition, Peabody Museum of Harvard University, Smithsonian Institute

the same social effects across cultures. Thus societies which give priority to sight (pre-eminently the West) will be analytic and concerned with structure and appearance, for such is the nature of sight. Societies which give priority to hearing, in turn, will be synthetic and concerned with interiority and integration, such being the nature of hearing. The vision which is deemed rational and analytical in the West, however, may be associated with irrationality in another society, or with the dynamic fluidity of colour. In the light of such potential cultural differences in sensory meaning, the anthropology of the

senses holds that universalist sensory models of culture, whether they be visual or auditory, text-based or speech-based, must give way to culturally-specific investigations of particular sensory orders.

One of the primary concerns of the anthropology of the senses is to go beyond the audiovisual and recover the senses of smell, taste and touch as subjects of serious inquiry. The reluctance of late-twentieth-century anthropologists to examine or recognize the cultural importance of smell, taste and touch is due not only to the relative marginalization of these

senses in the modern West, but also to the racist tendencies of an earlier anthropology to associate the 'lower' senses with the 'lower' races. As sight and, to a lesser extent, hearing were deemed to be the predominant senses of 'civilized' Westerners, smell, taste and touch were assumed to predominate among 'primitive' non-Westerners.

Many early scholars were interested in depicting the 'animalistic' importance of smell, taste and touch in non-Western cultures. This trend is already evident and widespread in the eighteenth century. In his study of aesthetics, for example, Friedrich Schiller stated that 'as long as man is still a savage he enjoys by means of [the] tactile senses [i.e. touch, taste and smell]', rather than through the 'higher' senses of sight and hearing (Schiller, 1982, p. 195). Using somewhat coarser language, Edward Long, an eighteenth-century 'authority' on African slaves, stated that Africans' 'faculties of smell are truly bestial, nor less their commerce with the other sexes; in these acts they are as libidinous and shameless as monkeys' (cited by Pieterse, 1992, p. 41). In the early nineteenth century the natural historian Lorenz Oken postulated a sensory hierarchy of human races, with the European 'eye-man' at the top, followed by the Asian 'ear-man', the Native American 'nose-man', the Australian 'tongue-man', and the African 'skin-man' (Gould, 1985, pp. 204–205).

Primed by such 'sensist' lore, the anthropologist Charles Myer was surprised to find when he set out to explore the importance of smell among the inhabitants of the Torres Straits at the turn of the twentieth century that 'the people of the Torres Straits have much the same liking and disliking for various odours as obtains among ourselves' (Myers, 1903, p. 185). Nonetheless, Myers suggested that the strong power of evocation which odours held for the Islanders provided 'yet another expression of the high degree to which the sensory side of mental life [as opposed to the rational side] is elaborated among primitive peoples' (p. 184).

Consciously or unconsciously, contemporary anthropologists have compensated for the sensory racism of many of their predecessors by downplaying or ignoring the role of the 'lower' senses in non-Western cultures and highlighting the importance of audiovisual ima-

gery or of desensitized conceptual systems. The objective of the anthropology of the senses, however, is neither to assume that smell, taste and touch will be dominant in a particular culture, nor to assume that they will be marginal, but to investigate the ways in which meanings are, in fact, invested in and conveyed through each of these senses. Once free of the Western prejudice against smell, taste and touch as 'animal' senses, the fact that the Sereer Ndut of Senegal have a complex olfactory vocabulary (Dupire, 1987) or that the Tzotzil of Mexico describe the cosmos in thermal terms (Gossen, 1974), no longer appears a telltale mark of 'savagery', but rather a sophisticated cultural elaboration of a particular sensory domain. Indeed, to neglect to investigate such elaborations of the 'proximity' senses is often to practise reverse sensory discrimination by disregarding a body of symbolism considered of prime importance by a society. Even those societies which minimize the importance of these senses may nevertheless be found to utilize them to convey social values.

The sensory anthropologist attends to the role of odours, tastes and tactilities – as to the role of sights and sounds – not as evidence of evolutionary status, nor as picturesque detail such as may be found in a travel guide, but as essential clues to the ways by which a society fashions and embodies a meaningful world.

Groundwork in the field

A number of different people have been influential in the development of the anthropology of the senses. It is beyond the scope of this article to trace all the predecessors in the field (one could follow the subject back to the ancient fascination with the different sensory lives of diverse peoples (Classen, 1993a, p. 3)) or to refer to all the scholars who are currently making contributions to it. What will be presented here is a brief summary of the role played by some of the major contributors to sensory anthropology in shaping this new area of research.

As mentioned above, both the media specialist Marshall McLuhan (1962; 1964) and his student Walter J. Ong (1969; 1982) were important prototheorists of the anthropology of

the senses. In *The Presence of the Word* Ong stated that 'cultures vary greatly in their exploitation of the various senses and in the way in which they relate their conceptual apparatus to the various senses' (1967, p. 3). The conclusion he reached was that 'given sufficient knowledge of the sensorium exploited within a culture, one could probably define the culture as a whole in virtually all its aspects' (1967, p. 6). While Ong, like McLuhan, was primarily concerned with formulating distinctions between oral and literate (or 'visual') societies, nevertheless statements like the ones above encouraged other scholars (such as Edmund Carpenter, 1972; 1973) to explore the whole of the cultural sensorium.

Within anthropology, Claude Lévi-Strauss was an important forerunner of the anthropology of the senses. He was responsible for introducing the notion of the 'science of the concrete', according to which the 'savage mind' draws on the sensual properties and contrasts of things to construct an ordered universe (Lévi-Strauss, 1966). Inspired by the synaesthetic ideals of the nineteenth-century Symbolists, Lévi-Strauss pioneered the study of the sensory codes of myths. The key Lévi-Straussian text on this score is a short section in the first volume of *Mythologiques* entitled 'Fugue of the Five Senses' (Lévi-Strauss, 1969). There he traces how oppositions between sensations in one modality, such as hearing, may be transposed into those of another modality, such as taste, and in turn related to various conceptual oppositions – life/death or nature/culture – and to their attempted resolution in mythical thought. Lévi-Strauss did not, however, make the transition from analysing the sensory codes of myths to analysing the sensory codes of culture as a whole. His interest, indeed, lay more in tracing the operations of the mind than with analysing the social life of the senses.

Influenced by both McLuhan and Lévi-Strauss, Anthony Seeger (1975; 1981) examined how the Suya of the Mato Grosso region of Brazil classify humans, animals and plants according to their presumed sensory traits. As regards humans Seeger found, for example, that the Suya characterize men as pleasantly bland-smelling, while women and children are deemed to be unpleasantly strong-smelling. This characterization is due to the association of men with

the valued domain of culture, and the association of women and children with the suspect domain of nature. Seeger further found the Suya to emphasize the social importance of speaking and hearing, while linking sight with anti-social behaviour such as witchcraft. He argued that the importance of aurality was evident in the lip and ear discs worn by Suya men, an instance of body decoration serving to remind individuals of the proper sensory hierarchy (see further Turner, 1995; Howes, 1991, pp. 175–78).

The influence of Lévi-Strauss and McLuhan can be discerned as well in the work of the ethnomusicologist Steven Feld (1982; 1986; 1991; Keil and Feld, 1994), which examines the role of sound in the classificatory thought and performance art of the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea. As with Seeger on the Suya, Feld determined that hearing, rather than sight, is the sense of greatest cultural importance for the Kaluli, providing a model for aesthetic expression, social relations, and the orchestration of the emotions. Neither Seeger nor Feld, however, base the importance of aurality among the peoples they have studied on the fact that these peoples belong to non-literate cultures (as would McLuhan and Ong). In each case, the justification for the primacy of hearing is found within the society in question, and not within a generalized paradigm of oral versus literate cultures (for related studies see Laderman, 1991; Roseman, 1991; Peek, 1994).

The phrase 'the cultural anthropology of the senses' was coined by the historian Roy Porter in his preface to *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* by Alain Corbin (1986). The anthropology of the senses did not, however, arise as a distinct field until the late 1980s. In 1989 Paul Stoller published *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology*. Referring to the work of such predecessors in the area as Lévi-Strauss, Ong, and Feld, Stoller argued that 'anthropologists should open their senses to the worlds of their others' (1989, p. 7). Stoller called for the production of 'tasteful' ethnographies with vivid literary descriptions of 'the smells, tastes and textures of the land, the people, and the food' (1989, p. 29). In order for anthropologists to achieve this, he cautioned that they must reorient their senses away from the visualism of the West and towards the sen-

sory landscapes of other cultures (see further Fabian, 1983; Tyler, 1987). In his work among the Songhay of Niger, Paul Stoller explored the importance of such aspects of Songhay culture as perfume, sauces and music (Stoller and Olkes, 1987; Stoller, 1989; 1995). As regards perfume, for example, Stoller describes in rich detail a ceremony by which a Songhay woman offers up fragrance to the spirits (1989, pp. 128–29). Such description gives the reader a taste of Songhay sensory life.

A similar descriptive or evocative approach to the anthropology of the senses has been taken by C. Nadia Seremetakis (1991; 1994) in her work on Greece. Seremetakis has employed multisensory imaging – the taste and feel of a peach, the smell and texture of grandma's dress – to bring to sensory life her memories of childhood in rural Greece:

The grandma sits on a wooden stool . . . Her face dark, her hair tied in a bun, her hands freckled and rough. The child slips into her lap. It is time for fairy tales. Slipping into her lap is slipping into a surround of different smells and textures, sediments of her work in the fields, the kitchen, with the animals. (Seremetakis, 1994, p. 30)

Seremetakis states that her aim in undertaking an anthropology of the senses is to recover the 'often hidden sensory-perceptual dispositions' of traditional societies and thereby recover the memory of culture embedded in personal recollections and material artefacts (1994, pp. x, 9–12).

At the same time as Stoller, Seremetakis and others were developing an evocative anthropology of the senses in the United States, a group of scholars in Canada were exploring how an anthropology of the senses might help to uncover the symbolic codes by which societies order and integrate the world. The members of this group, based at Concordia University in Montreal, include David Howes (1988; 1991), Anthony Synnott (1991; 1993), Ian Ritchie (1991), and the author of the present paper (Classen, 1993a; 1993b). David Howes described the approach of this group in the introduction to the book he edited in 1991 entitled *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses*:

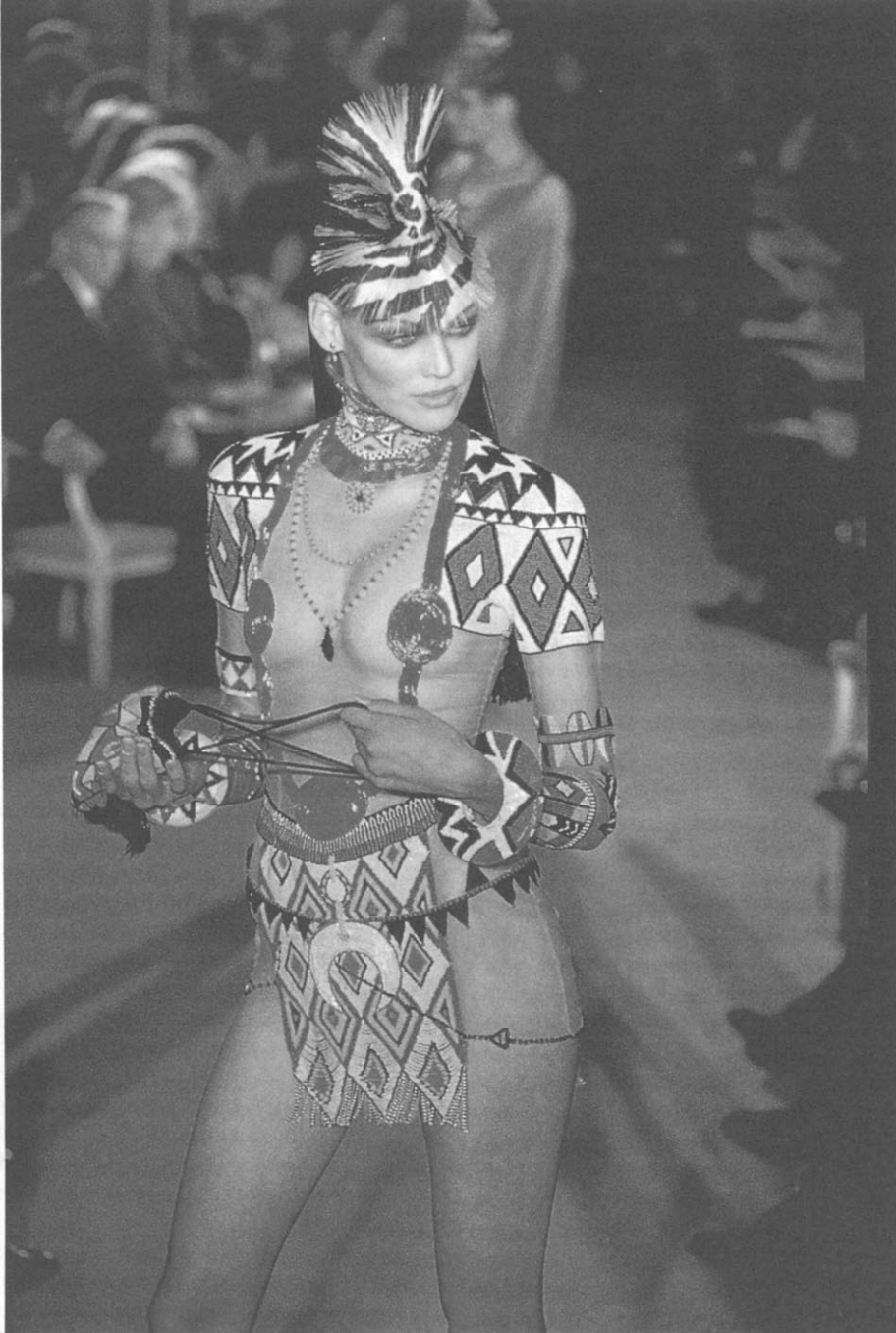
The anthropology of the senses is primarily concerned with how the patterning of sense experience varies from one culture to the next in accordance with the meaning and emphasis attached to each of the senses. It is also

concerned with tracing the influence such variations have on forms of social organization, conceptions of self and cosmos, the regulation of the emotions, and other domains of cultural expression . . . [It] is only by developing a rigorous awareness of the visual and textual biases of the Western episteme that we can hope to make sense of how life is lived in other cultural settings. (Howes, 1991, p. 4)

Howes has employed this approach to examine and compare the sensory models of Dobu and Kwoma society in Papua New Guinea (Howes, 1992) and to explore the elaboration of olfactory symbols and rites across cultures (Howes, 1991, pp. 128–47; Classen, Howes and Synnott, 1994). In the former work Howes analyses the social significance of diverse Melanesian sensory practices, such as the use of oil to give the body a brilliant shine, the employment of scents of mint and ginger in love magic, the bobbing motions of the dance, and the aural power of names. Throughout his writings, the emphasis is on tracing the cultural interplay of the senses, as opposed to treating a given sense in isolation.

For my part, I have followed the approach of David Howes in my examination of sensory models across cultures and in Western history. In *Inca Cosmology and the Human Body* (1993b) I explored the way in which the Incas ordered the cosmos and society through sensory symbols, and how this order was disrupted and reconfigured at the time of the Spanish Conquest. In *Worlds of Sense* (1993a) I attempted to demonstrate the potential breadth of a sensory approach to culture by applying it to a range of subjects, from the shifts in sensory values which have taken place at different periods of Western history to the diverse sensory priorities of various non-Western societies. Most recently, I have examined the historical embodiment of gender ideologies through sensory codes such as the masculine gaze and the feminine touch (Classen, in press).

Aside from the persons mentioned above, a number of anthropologists, while not strictly situated within the anthropology of the senses, have made valuable contributions to the field. Three such anthropologists are Allen Feldman, Robert Desjarlais, and Michael Taussig. In his studies of the politics of violence in Northern Ireland, Yugoslavia and the United States, Feldman (1991; 1994) has powerfully illustrated how the senses may be employed as media for



Haute couture, Christian Dior, Paris 1997. Daniel Simon/Gamma

political terrorism and for 'cultural anaesthesia' – the use of sensory techniques and technologies to distort and efface instances of political violence. In *Body and Emotion* Desjarlais (1992) has explored the sensory aesthetics of pain and healing among the Tibetan Yolmo Sherpa in order to present an 'embodied' analysis of emotional and physical suffering and the ritual cures used to treat them. In *Mimesis and Alterity* Michael Taussig focuses on 'understanding mimesis as both the faculty of imitation and the deployment of that faculty in sensuous knowing, sensuous Othering' within European history and Latin American colonial and postcolonial culture (1993, p. 68). These three avenues of research illustrate the range of subject-matter amenable to a sense-based investigation.

Directions

The anthropology of the senses has parallels in many fields of the social sciences and humanities. Within sociology Anthony Synnott, among others, has been concerned with examining the sensory codes of the contemporary West, from the symbolism of perfumes to the tactile intricacies of childcare (Synnott, 1993; Classen, Howes and Synnott, 1994). A sensuous geography has been elaborated by Yi-Fu Tuan (1995) and Paul Rodaway (1994). Historians such as Alain Corbin and Roy Porter have delved into the cultural shifts in sensory values which have taken place at different periods of Western history (Corbin, 1986; Porter, 1993). These parallel investigations help to supplement and inform the anthropology of the senses, placing it within a multi-disciplinary movement to explore the life of the senses in society.

The history of the senses, for example, reminds anthropologists that sensory models are not static, but develop and change over time. Within the West, as noted earlier, a rise can be traced in the cultural importance of sight and a decline in the importance of the non-visual senses from the Middle Ages to modernity (Classen 1993a). During this period, traditional sensory concepts such as the odour of sanctity largely passed away, while new concepts such as photographic truth were introduced. Nonetheless, anthropologists should not assume that, because smell, for instance, was more important in ear-

lier periods of Western culture than it is now, non-Western cultures in which the sense of smell is important today represent an earlier stage in the scale of sensory and social evolution. To make this assumption is to harken back to the old days of anthropological thought when the cultural transition from smell to sight was deemed to accompany the transition from savagery to civilization. The history of the senses in the West must not be considered a yardstick against which to measure the sensory development of other cultures. Each society has its own trajectory of sensory progression and change.

The broad range of applications for a sensory analysis of culture indicates that the anthropology of the senses need not be only a 'sub-field' within anthropology, but may provide a fruitful perspective from which to examine many different anthropological concerns. Just as the anthropology of the senses is not a-historical, for example, neither is it a-political. Indeed, the study of sensory symbolism forcefully reveals the hierarchies and stereotypes through which certain social groups are invested with moral and political authority and other groups disempowered and condemned. The use of skin colour as a mark of discrimination is well known in many societies. Within the West, olfactory codes have served to support the 'fragrant' or 'inodorate' elite and stigmatize such marginal groups as Jews and Blacks. Among the Dassanetch of Ethiopia similar codes serve to distinguish 'superior' cattle herders from 'lowly' fishermen (Classen, 1993a, pp. 79–105).

Sensory codes are likewise employed across cultures to express and enforce gender divisions and hierarchies. Anthony Seeger, as noted above, has shown how the Suya negatively characterize women as 'strong-smelling' in relation to 'bland-smelling' men. Women are furthermore associated with disruptive touch by the Suya while men are deemed to possess superior powers of hearing (Seeger, 1981). In the West, women have traditionally been associated with the 'lower' 'sensual' realms of touch, taste and smell, the realms of the bedroom, the nursery and the kitchen. Men, on the other hand, have been linked with the 'higher' 'intellectual' realms of sight and hearing, the sensory domains of scholarship, exploration and government (Classen, in press).

Issues of politics and gender are permeated by sensory values, as are all issues of importance to a culture, from religious beliefs and practices to the production and exchange of goods. With regard to the latter, examples include the precautions taken by certain New Guinea peoples to avoid offending 'the sense of smell' of their garden-grown yams (Howes, 1992, pp. 289–90), the ritual exchange of differently flavoured ants (representing different moieties) by the Tukano of Colombia (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1985), and the concern of Western marketers to imbue their products with exactly the right look, feel and taste to appeal to (and manipulate) the consumer's sensory imagination (Howes, 1996).

The range and complexity of sensory symbolism in any given culture means that the anthropologist of the senses must decide whether to explore the general sensory model of a society or to dwell on one particular form of sensory symbolism. In *Goethe's Touch*, Sander Gilman argued that, in terms of the history of the senses, the study of individual cases of sensory formation provides a more fruitful approach than trying to undertake a broad analysis of the cultural sensory order (Gilman, 1988, p. 1). I would argue, however, that both approaches are necessary. In order to determine 'how central individual variations are in shaping the generalized response of a culture' (Gilman, 1988, p. 1), one must have an idea of what that generalized cultural order is. It is only possible to do so by moving, to some extent, away from the individual and examining the role of collective social structures in fostering certain sensory values.

Anthropologists who undertake to determine the general sensory model and trends of a society should support their work with characteristic examples of how this sensory model operates in particular instances. The goal of this

approach is to be able to draw out from a multiplicity of data an overall pattern of sensory meanings and relations. Examples of divergence from this pattern can and should be noted, but should be placed within the context of the main sensory model. To do otherwise would be to present a picture of complete sensory diversity, in which each individual or group within society is presumed to create its own world of sensory and social meaning without reference to any shared or dominant system of values.

Anthropologists who investigate more specific cases of social sensibilities complement the above approach by adding depth and subtlety to its broad outlines. Here the focus may be on the particular details of one aspect of the general sensory model, or on examples of opposition to that model. For instance, an anthropologist may explore the role music plays in contributing to the importance of the sense of hearing among the Suyu, or may examine how Suyu women, who are excluded from many musical rites, respond to their marginalized position in the sensory and social order.

In anthropology, therefore, as in other disciplines in my opinion, analyses of the general sensory trends of a society should be supplemented by in-depth investigations of particular expressions of sensory symbolism. In order for the anthropology of the senses to reach its full potential, however, we will need an increase in the number of scholars pursuing a sensory approach to culture. Judging by the widening influence of sensory anthropology, this increase is likely to occur. For now, thanks to the work of a group of dedicated scholars, we have the tantalizing beginnings of a field of research which promises to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the elaboration and transmission of cultural values within different societies at different periods of history.

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