

## The Varieties of Sensory Experience

### A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses

Western societies are overwhelmingly dependent on visual and verbal faculties for their experience of the world. But different societies use and combine the senses in different ways and to different ends. What is the world like to a culture that takes actuality in less visual, more gustatory or tactile, auditory or olfactory terms than those to which we are accustomed? What is the impact of other 'sensory ratios' on the life of the mind and the emotions? What is the relation of the hierarchy of the senses to social hierarchy, or relations between the sexes?

The essays in this collection address these questions, and open up many new directions for research, by breaking with the visualism and verbocentrism of the sensually limited approaches of traditional anthropology, and by focusing on the interplay of all the senses.

Among the topics explored are the visual politics of the 'tourist gaze'; matters of taste on an Indonesian island; the use of incense in a Moroccan 'ritual of silent wishes'; the social structuring of sound and emotion in a New Guinea society; the power of touch in a traditional South Indian medical system; the contrasting sensory orders of the cultures of the Andes and the Amazon; and the history of the senses in Western philosophy. The concluding chapter offers a holistic paradigm for sensing and making sense of other cultures. The book is ideal both for guiding research in the field and for orienting discussion in the classroom.

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# THE VARIETIES OF SENSORY EXPERIENCE

A Sourcebook in the  
Anthropology of the Senses

Edited by David Howes

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# CONTENTS

Foreword  
– *Michael Lambek* ix

Acknowledgments xiii

Introduction: ‘To Summon All the Senses’  
– *David Howes* 3

## **Part I: Uncommon Sense**

1 The Shifting Sensorium  
– *Walter J. Ong, SJ* 25

2 The Sensotype Hypothesis  
– *Mallory Wober* 31

3 Ethnopsychological Aspects of the Terms ‘Deaf’ and ‘Dumb’  
– *George Devereux* 43

4 The Sensory Orders of ‘Wild Children’  
– *Constance Classen* 47

5 Puzzling over the Senses: From Plato to Marx  
– *Anthony Synnott* 61

## **Part II: The Sensory Construction of Reality**

- 6 Sound as a Symbolic System: The Kaluli Drum  
– *Steven Feld* 79
- 7 The Pulse as an Icon in Siddha Medicine  
– *E. Valentine Daniel* 100
- 8 Matters of Taste in Weyéwa  
– *Joel C. Kuipers* 111
- 9 Olfaction and Transition  
– *David Howes* 128
- 10 On Safari: The Visual Politics of a Tourist Representation  
– *Kenneth Little* 148

## **Part III: Sensorial Investigations**

- 11 Sensorial Anthropology  
– *David Howes* 167
- 12 Fusion of the Faculties: A Study of the Language of the Senses  
in Hausaland  
– *Ian Ritchie* 192
- 13 ‘To Render Visible’: Making Sense among the Ndembu  
– *Lisa Andermann* 203
- 14 The Ritual of Silent Wishes: Notes on the Moroccan Sensorium  
– *Kit Griffin* 210
- 15 A Taste of India: On the Role of Gustation in the Hindu  
Sensorium  
– *Sylvain Pinard* 221
- 16 ‘The Great Seeing’: The Senses in Zinacanteco Ritual Life  
– *Lisa Andermann* 231
- 17 Creation by Sound / Creation by Light: A Sensory Analysis of  
Two South American Cosmologies  
– *Constance Classen* 239

Conclusion: Sounding Sensory Profiles  
– *David Howes and Constance Classen* 257

References 289

Notes on Contributors 317

Index 319



# FOREWORD

*The Varieties of Sensory Experience* is no mere collection of articles around a theme. Instead it offers us David Howes's imagination of a new field, an anthropology of the senses. In its various segments this book provides a history of the field, a set of theoretical arguments concerning the significance of the senses, a series of pictures of selected portions of the world seen from the new angle of vision, and a variety of practical illustrations. It even concludes with a manual of instructions on how to go about gaining access to the view for yourself. All of this is tied together by the lucid and brilliant textual interventions of the editor who constructs and sustains his own argument throughout the text in counterpoint with the portraits of senses and culturally particular sensory ratios painted by his guests.

Hence my first sensory impression of this book is one of bedazzlement. A dazzling of multiple facets, cut from the nuggets of cultural descriptions and revealed by the strongly focused light that Howes and his cohort cast upon them. The book offers us a new angle of vision on cultures and cultural texts with which we have grown overly familiar. Like the invention of the microscope it opens up for our inspection another dimension of the world that we had hitherto missed. It renews the sense of wonderment at cultural difference and wonderment at difference and human sameness in the face of one another.

Bedazzlement leaves a splinter in the eye. My second reaction is to instantly retract all the visual imagery in which I have just represented by experience and invited yours, to recompose it in the key of taste or smell, sound or touch, or better still some delicious, polyphonous mix of these. This book will make you scratch with interest against the rub

of its ideas, direct you to portions of your anatomy you never imagined could itch. It is a harmonious feast of varied yet balanced proportions, an Indonesian rijstaffel of delicacies to make you salivate, to satisfy your palate, and to stir your digestive juices into postprandial eructation – all laid out around the substantive rice mound of Howes's judicious reasoning. In its focus on the senses this book alerts us to our dependence on the sense of vision for conceptualizing experience, thought, and understanding (*enlightenment*).

Alternate metaphors induce stumbling, confusion, vertigo, indigestion, nausea. They sound foolish. But ultimately the book instructs us that all metaphor is based on the senses; indeed that metaphor is nothing but the selective ways in which we experience the world and conceptualize, report on, or attempt to solicit that experience in others. It demonstrates the intrinsic link between *sense* (reason, thought) and the *senses*. And further, if sensation is essential to living, so is selective attention. We know that we select phonemes from the range of sound, discarding other variation as noise and eventually not even hearing it. But so too, this book argues, do we select certain components of each of the senses and certain combinations, what are here called sense ratios, among them. It is this understanding that invites us to new experience, to new appreciation of cultural particularities and similarities, to new thinking about our contemporary condition, our hypervisuality and tactile impoverishment, in relation to the sensory, hence sensible, worlds of others.

To give a sense of the ambition as well as the possible scope and importance of this work, consider that Howes's direction is not so different from that of Roman Jakobson when he attempted to apply the insights of phonology to poetics, to literature, and to communication more broadly. Yet Howes would begin not just with sound but with all the senses. Strong poetry resituates us by changing the tropes through which we imagine the world, but all metaphor is sense based. Along this path from primary experience to poesis a whole series of doors appear. In the ethnographic case studies, in the range of senses investigated, in the questions of theory and connection addressed, this book does not neglect to open them.

*The Varieties of Sensory Experience* is a superb work with which to introduce the University of Toronto Press's new series 'Anthropological Horizons.' It moves us beyond the horizon of vision itself into as yet to be charted sensory worlds of taste, touch, sight, and smell, and the conjunctions among them. And yet, in my view it is not a radical break with the hermeneutic tradition. In his metaphor of expanding horizons Gadamer suggests we expose our prejudices to the conversations we

engage with others. We can bring our prejudices to consciousness, perhaps the better to change them, but we cannot detach ourselves from the chains of prejudice itself to float, somehow freely, to a vantage point above the horizon. So too there is less need to regret visualist metaphors or textualizing procedures per se than to learn how to enjoy them. To appreciate a cultural world composed more immediately of touch and smell than of sight is to engage in an act of imagination. To report on our experience rather than merely to go native is to engage in translation. To reflect on it is to engage in theory. We are not replacing a hermeneutics for an erotics of culture (pace Sontag) but are engaged instead in an exciting new hermeneutic departure.

*Michael Lambek*



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# THE VARIETIES OF SENSORY EXPERIENCE



# INTRODUCTION

## 'To Summon All the Senses'

*David Howes*

*Just as time and space are not perceived by the vast majority of human societies as a regular continuum and grid, so the [sensorium] is rarely thought of in strictly biological terms ... The five senses are given different emphases and different meanings in different societies. A certain sense may be privileged as a sensory mode. It is important to analyse how people think they perceive.*

Anthony Seeger, *Nature and Society in Central Brazil* (1981)

This book brings together a series of essays in anthropology and adjacent disciplines (psychology, linguistics, cultural history) which are noteworthy for the attention they pay to the senses as shapers and bearers of culture. The approach / field of study these essays articulate may be called the 'anthropology of the senses.'<sup>1</sup>

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 modalities of perception. 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. The most basic tenet of this emergent field of study is that 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.

The anthropology of the senses grows out of the interest in bodily modes of knowing, and the place of the body in the mind, which gripped the imaginations of ethnographers and philosophers alike in the 1980s

(see Jackson 1983, 1989; Fernandez 1985; Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1987; Johnson 1987; Csordas 1990). But its goal is not simply to expand social science discourse on the body so as to include the senses. Rather, it is hoped that the wisdom gained by *plunging* into the realm of the non-visual senses – and exploring how the possibilities of awareness contained within these senses have been exploited by others – can help to *liberate* us from the hegemony which sight has for so long exercised over our own culture's social, intellectual, and aesthetic life (Foucault 1979; Tyler 1984; Summers 1987; Synnott, ch. 5).

### The World outside the 'Civilization of the Image'

The need for us to experiment with other ways of sensing the world has never been more acute. Indeed, if we do not 'come to our senses' soon, we will have permanently forfeited the chance of constructing any meaningful alternatives to the pseudo-existence which passes for life in our current 'Civilization of the Image.' This rather dire prognosis is based on Richard Kearney's analysis of the image of today as compared to those of bygone centuries in *The Wake of Imagination*:

now the image *precedes* the reality it is supposed to represent ... This reversal is evident at a number of levels. In politics, we find presidents and prime ministers being elected because of the media image they represent ... [At] the economic level, it is now a well-documented fact that our consumerist society ... can sustain material production only by means of the 'hidden persuaders' of new brand-images and ever more elaborate advertising campaigns. Even at the everyday social level, we notice the image taking pride of place over the real, as in Boorstin's humorous anecdote about the contemporary suburban housewife who responds to a neighbour's compliment to her child with the boast: 'Yes, he is lovely, but you should see the photograph.' (1988: 2)

It is instructive to inquire into the origins of the hyper-visual aesthetic expressed by Boorstin's suburbanite, an aesthetic within which the 'real' child figures as but a pale reflection of its technologically generated image. The origin of this aesthetic can be traced to the invention of linear perspective vision by the fifteenth-century Italian painter Alberti. Linear perspective does not come naturally to humans; initially it required the support of a physical structure, a grid, which served to fix the eye upon its object, as in Dürer's etching of a *Man Drawing a Reclining Woman* (Figure 1).

The cultural repercussions of Alberti's little invention have been many



FIGURE 1  
Albrecht Dürer, *Man Drawing Reclining Woman*

and far-reaching. I shall not dwell on them here, for they have already been described in detail in *Technology as Symptom and Dream* (1989), where Robert Romanyshyn does a magnificent job of reconstructing how 'within this landscape of linear perspective vision the self becomes a spectator ensconced behind his or her window on the world, how the body, now divorced from this self, becomes a specimen, and how the world, as a matter for this detached and observing eye, becomes a spectacle' (1989: 31). Neither shall I dwell on the gender dimensions of this particular 'way of seeing,' as those too have been amply documented (Berger 1972; Irigaray 1980). What I would like to underline, however, is the stultification of the non-visual senses which results from the interposition of the window between the artist and his model. In effect, Alberti's grid screens out all the smells and sounds, tastes and textures, of the artist's environment. It 'steps up' the natural power of the eye to survey things from afar, while at the same time de-emphasizing the other senses as ways of knowing and communicating.

As an antidote to the fixity of Dürer's representation, consider the design in Figure 2, which *pulsates* and will not remain still. This design comes from the Shipibo-Conibo Indians of eastern Peru. Such designs, which are kept by the Shipibo-Conibo in glyphic books, are said to embody songs. During the healing ritual, the shaman, in a hallucinogenic trance, perceives these designs floating downwards. When the designs reach the shaman's lips he sings them into songs. On coming into contact with the patient, the songs once again turn into designs which penetrate the patient's body and heal the illness. These design-songs also have an olfactory dimension, as their power is said to reside in their 'fragrance.' Indeed, the Shipibo-Conibo term *quiquin*, which means both 'aesthetic'

and 'appropriate,' is used to refer to pleasant auditory and olfactory as well as visual sensations (Gebhart-Sayer 1985: 161–72).

The essence of aesthetic experience by Shipibo-Conibo standards is, therefore, *pluri-sensorial*, whereas the contemporary Western aesthetic is almost exclusively visual. The former integrates the senses while the latter dissociates them. This may explain why there is nothing healing about most contemporary Western art,<sup>2</sup> and why a child's photograph can appear preferable to the child itself, as in Boorstin's anecdote.

There is a world of difference between the uttering of geometric designs, which are also fragrant, by the Shipibo-Conibo shaman, and the reduction of the world to a geometric composition by the Western 'spectator-self.' Is it possible for us to liberate ourselves from the latter perspective and approach the world through the Shipibo-Conibo 'ratio of sense'? What is the world like to a culture that takes actuality in less visual, more auditory or olfactory, gustatory or tactile, terms than those to which we are accustomed? These are the two most central questions of the anthropology of the senses, and they will be addressed at numerous points throughout this book. The first question is especially vexing, for as Romanyshyn observes: 'what originated with Alberti and his times as a metaphor – look at the world through this grid and it looks like a geometrical pattern – has become for us a map. The grid-like structure of the window and even the window itself have become invisible, and all that remains is the reproduction which we now take for the world itself' (1989: 82).

### **Making Sense in the Human Sciences**

The ethnographer desirous of 'interpreting' some other culture assumes a perspective remarkably similar to, if not identical with, that of Dürer's artist. The only difference is that it is the 'model of the text' instead of Alberti's window that serves to filter his or her perceptions. In the words of Clifford Geertz, the founder of 'interpretive anthropology': 'The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong' (1973: 452).

The 'metaphor of the text' has generated many fine 'readings' of the possible meanings contained in such events as the Balinese cockfight. However, as anthropologists have since come to recognize, it also tends to suppress the interactive, negotiative, or 'dialogical' aspects of the ethnographic encounter. That realization has led some ethnographers to experiment with a range of 'other' modes of 'text construction,' all

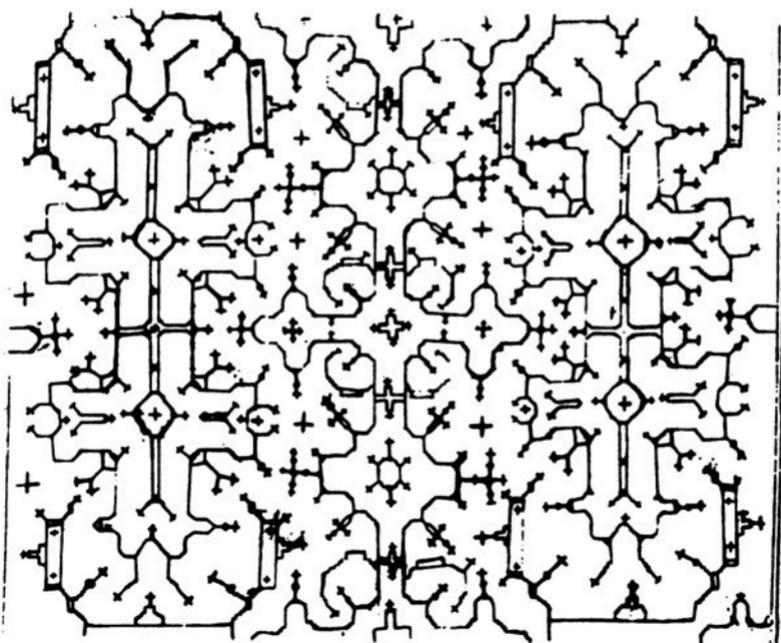


FIGURE 2  
Shipibo-Conibo geometric design (after Gebhart-Sayer 1985: 158)

of which emphasize dialogue as opposed to Geertzian 'thick description.' James Clifford evokes this new turn, the rise of 'dialogical anthropology,' as follows: 'Once cultures are no longer prefigured visually – as objects, theatres, texts – it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances. In a discursive rather than a visual paradigm, the dominant metaphors for ethnography shift away from the observing eye and toward expressive speech (and gesture)' (1986: 12).

It is certainly more lifelike and (as we are repeatedly reminded) more politic to conceive of cultures as involving an 'interplay of voices' than to treat them as objects to be viewed or texts to be read; hence, the emergence of dialogical anthropology is to be applauded. However, the 'discursive paradigm' of dialogical anthropology is itself lacking in at least one dimension – namely, what Ohnuki-Tierney (1981) has called the 'sensory dimension.' This dimension cannot be comprehended within the framework of either interpretive or dialogical anthropology because both remain, in effect, 'verbocentric' (text-centred in the first case, and

speech-centred in the second). Thus, the shift from the ocular to the oral must be accompanied by a further shift, which takes in the gustatory, olfactory, and tactile modalities as well. With these other senses in mind, it becomes possible to think of cultures as contrasting in terms of the distinctive patterns to the *interplay of the senses* they present.

This idea of cultures as consisting of contrasting 'ratios of sense' has, in fact, been around for some time. It was first introduced by Marshall McLuhan, Edmund Carpenter and Walter Ong (see Carpenter and McLuhan 1960).<sup>3</sup> It has influenced a number of ethnographers, most notably Anthony Seeger (1975), Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (1981), Steven Feld (1982 and 1986), Paul Stoller (1984), Stephen Tyler (1984), and most recently Michael Jackson (1989).<sup>4</sup> Readers familiar with Stoller's and Tyler's work might think that they belong more to the school of 'dialogical anthropology' than to the emergent discipline of 'sensorial anthropology' (as defined in chapter 11 of this book). But Stoller, certainly, has veered in the latter direction more than once, and may even be considered one of sensorial anthropology's leading proponents (see especially Stoller 1989).

If, as Clifford suggests, the 'dominant metaphors for ethnography' are truly shifting, then perhaps the work of the McLuhan-Carpenter-Ong triumvirate can finally get a proper hearing. The anti-textual/sensual approach they pioneered was sidetracked by the rise of interpretive anthropology but, as noted above, never completely silenced because of the ongoing work of their more enlightened follower-critics (Seeger, Ohnuki-Tierney, Feld, etc.). That work now commands our attention as never before because it would seem to offer the only practicable solution to the widespread (and still growing) 'crisis of representation' in the human sciences (Marcus and Fischer 1986). Simply put, that solution consists in 1) reconvening our senses, 2) recognizing cultures as 'ways of sensing the world,' and 3) learning how to use and combine our senses in accordance with the preferences of the cultures we study – so that we actually *make some sense* of them, instead of looking for a 'world-view' where there may not be one, or 'positioning utterances' without reference to all the other senses engaged in the communicative process, and so on.

### **The Senses in Cultural Context**

Before introducing the chapters of this book, I would like to comment in some detail on an article by Paul Stoller first published in 1984, and since reprinted elsewhere (Stoller 1989), which I consider to be one of

the charters of sensorial anthropology. It recounts how Stoller had his ears 'opened' to the significance of sound among the Songhay of Niger by an incident involving a sorcerer. Stoller relates how he accompanied the sorcerer to the top of a dune (where Songhay women traditionally sift millet seed from husk) in search of a sick man's 'double,' or spirit. The sorcerer went to work sifting, and suddenly jumped up, exclaiming: 'Wo wo wo wo'. When asked whether he had heard, or felt, or seen, the sick man's double as the sorcerer liberated it, Stoller, bewildered, had to confess that he had not. The sorcerer admonished him: ' "You look, but you do not see. You touch, but you do not feel. You listen, but you do not hear. Without sight or touch, ... one can learn a great deal. But you *must* learn how to hear, or you will learn little about our ways" ' (Stoller 1984: 560). So began Stoller's apprenticeship in 'Songhay hearing,' which in turn developed into one of the most profound critiques of Western epistemology ever written by an anthropologist. Stoller is particularly critical of the way we tend to 'reach through the sensation to the object' when we perceive things, instead of heeding the way the sensations present themselves to consciousness, or attending to the differences between sensations in different modalities (see Zukerkandl 1958: 70).

The knowledge Stoller acquired from his Songhay teachers also led him to reject two widely accepted explanations for the magical power of words (see Searle 1968; Tambiah 1968) mostly on account of these explanations being too discursive (or verbocentric). In their place, he suggests that ethnographers should take seriously and at face-value that oft-repeated native explanation for the efficacy of magical utterances: 'The power is in the words.' For the Songhay, according to Stoller, words are not knowledge or information, they are not representations *of* something, they are power, energy, the reason for this being that: 'Words in the oral-aural culture are inseparable from action for they are always sound' (Ong, cited in Stoller 1984: 561). Indeed, it was only by coming to hear the words in and of themselves, instead of trying to picture what they meant, that Stoller came to understand how they were understood to operate by the Songhay:

[The Songhay] believe that sound, being an existential phenomenon in and of itself, can be the carrier of powerful forces. This simple point undermines a major premise of Western epistemology: we conceive-perceive the world in terms of space rather than sound. Sound gets filtered out within an episteme which considers language ... a neutral instrument of representation. More specifically, most

anthropologists use the sound of language or music as a means to gather information with which they 'construct' the culture of the Other. We take the sound of language for granted. The Other, however, may consider language ... as an embodiment of sound which practitioners can use to bring rain to a parched village or to maim or kill their enemies. (Stoller 1984: 569).

I have quoted this passage at length because it brings out three points which are central to the anthropology of the senses: first, concerning cosmology, that it is possible to conceive-perceive the world as constructed on an acoustic scaffolding, as the Songhay do, rather than a visual-spatial one, as in the West; second, concerning language, that the relation between the signifier and the signified, sound and meaning, may not be as 'indissociable' as the French linguist de Saussure (1959) would have us believe – Songhay signifiers can function independently of their signifieds;<sup>5</sup> third, concerning method, that anthropologists would be well-advised to pay more attention to the media through which they 'gather information,' since the medium may well be the message, to paraphrase McLuhan, or in any event have a force quite independent of its content.<sup>6</sup>

The Songhay example helps us to understand how inappropriate the concept of 'world-view' is when applied to certain non-Western cosmologies (Ong 1969). It also brings out how people can 'think in' a medium which is neither verbal nor visual but, in the Songhay case, fundamentally aural. If people can think in sound, is it also possible to think in touch? The idea of touch as a medium of intelligence seems foreign to us because of a long-established Western bias in favour of sight as 'the most informative' and 'intellectual' of the senses (Synnott, ch. 5). But, as Helen Keller once noted: 'Touch brings the blind many sweet certainties which our more fortunate fellows miss, because their sense of touch is uncultivated. When they look at things, they put their hands in their pockets. No doubt that is one reason why their knowledge is often so vague, inaccurate and useless' (1909: 42). What Keller says of touch could also, in principle, be said of taste and smell.<sup>7</sup>

The preceding discussion raises a fascinating question which has for too long been neglected by anthropology – no doubt because it encroaches on territory normally reserved to psychology. That question may be put as follows: What if there exist different forms of reasoning, memory, and attention for each of the modalities or faculties of consciousness (seeing, smelling, speaking, hearing, etc.) instead of reasoning, memory, and attention being general mental powers? It has long been assumed that the latter is the case, that reasoning and memory are

unitary rather than modality-specific processes. But recent advances in cognitive psychology have led to this assumption being overthrown, and it is now recognized that there may exist a variety of specific 'intelligences.' One of the implications of this new theory of the 'modularity of mind' (Fodor 1983) is that the logico-mathematical intelligence of the scientist, which is the standard by which individual intelligence has traditionally been measured, is but one intelligence among others (Gardner 1983). The musical intelligence of the composer, the bodily-kin-aesthetic intelligence of the dancer, the visual intelligence of the painter, and so on, all involve the cultivation of qualitatively different sorts of 'competences.' They are neither to be preferred nor (more important) devalued relative to that of the scientist.

It is good that the idea of intelligence as singular is finally being dismantled and replaced by the recognition that individuals may be equally intelligent in different intelligences. But Howard Gardner, the chief proponent of the theory of 'multiple intelligences,' displays a characteristically Western bias (and ignorance) when he writes: 'Acute use of sensory systems is another obvious candidate for a human intelligence ... [but] when it comes to keen gustatory or olfactory senses, these abilities have little special value across cultures' (1983: 61). Gardner accordingly dismisses olfaction and gustation from his list of seven intelligences. Similarly, in *Visual Thinking*, Rudolf Arnheim argues that seeing and thinking are one and the same, but as for smell and taste, 'one can indulge in smells and tastes, but one can hardly think in them' (1969: 19). Both of these authors, therefore, foreclose what could have been a highly productive inquiry into the varieties of sensory refinement in different cultures.

That is precisely where this book, with its focus on the senses in cultural context, begins. It challenges the conclusions of Western psychology by confronting those conclusions with the evidence of diverse ethnotheories of perception and cognition. The anthropology of the senses also provides a platform from which to critique the visual reductionism of Western canons of aesthetics, as discussed in the first section of this Introduction. But psychology and aesthetics are not the only disciplines which are called upon to rethink their sensory underpinnings by the essays in this book, for scholars of religion, linguistics, philosophy, museology, communication studies, and education will also find much that is of critical relevance to their disciplines in what follows.

### **On the Format of This Sourcebook**

The present book is divided into three parts. The first consists of three landmark essays from the 1960s, which may be regarded as precursors

to the anthropology of the senses proper. Part I also contains two essays of more recent vintage, which are concerned with historicizing the senses. The second part is made up of essays from the 1980s, each of which explores how a specific sense or medium is elaborated symbolically in a given culture. The third part opens with a chapter which sums up the implications of the two preceding parts and sets the stage for the study of intersensory relationships in specific cultures in the chapters which follow. All of the latter essays were written by members of the Concordia Sensoria Research Group, a research team constituted in 1988 with the express purpose of documenting some of the 'varieties of sensory experience.' The book ends with a chapter entitled 'Sounding Sensory Profiles.' In it, Constance Classen and myself present a paradigm for sensing and making sense of other cultures. This paradigm is designed primarily for use by field researchers, and by students in advanced undergraduate or graduate courses in anthropology (and adjacent disciplines) interested in writing on a subject within the anthropology of the senses, but it also speaks to a general audience.

One further aspect of the format of this book that bears underlining at the present juncture is its cyclical structure. Thus, parts I and II both end with essays, by Anthony Synnott and Kenneth Little respectively, that incorporate ourselves 'into the picture' by turning the 'anthropological lens' back on Western society. The importance of such a reflexive approach to the study of our own and other cultures has been stressed by numerous scholars (Fabian 1983; Herzfeld 1987; Mitchell 1989). The present chapter is also part of a cycle. It provides a preliminary reconnaissance of the terrain of the anthropology of the senses. That ground is reconnoitred again in chapter II. But it is not until the Conclusion that a complete map, or 'fieldguide to the senses,' is given. Readers interested in 'the total picture' may therefore wish to start with the Conclusion, and cycle back to the present juncture along the above-mentioned paths.

### **On the Chapters of Part I**

Chapter I, 'The Shifting Sensorium,' by Walter J. Ong SJ, was chosen from the vast corpus of works by Ong himself, McLuhan, and Carpenter, because of the clarity with which it introduces the idea of shifts in the 'ratio or balance of the senses' as one passes from one culture to another, and within the same culture over time. In later works, such as *Orality and Literacy* (1982), Ong seems to go back on, or retreat from, his original theory: a fundamental duality of sense experience – ear/eye, oral/literate – is posited in place of the infinite varieties contemplated

in the original model. Like all 'Great Divide' theories (another example would be Goody 1977), Ong's radical discontinuity argument is of limited use with regard to the analysis or explication of concrete cases (see Feld 1986; Finnegan 1988). His original model, however, seems to me to contain a great wealth of potential applications.

'The Sensotype Hypothesis' (chapter 2), by Mallory Wober, is a case in point. This chapter provides some intriguing evidence of what Ong would call 'productive specialization' in the organization of the sensorium. Wober discusses the results of a series of tests which revealed that African subjects display significantly more 'analytic ability' than American subjects in tasks involving proprioceptive discrimination, while the reverse holds true in the case of tasks involving visual discrimination. The 'sensotype hypothesis' is of interest because it anticipated the theory of 'multiple intelligences' (Gardner 1983) by a good fifteen years. It also poses a direct challenge to Western beliefs in the 'unity of the subject' by showing that individuals do not necessarily display the same degree of 'psychological differentiation' in all domains of cognitive functioning.<sup>8</sup>

Chapter 3, by the late George Devereux, is another article which appeared far in advance of its time. In this chapter, Devereux argues that certain differences in psychological disposition ('self-oriented' versus 'reality-oriented') can be seen to underlie the selection by different cultures of different faculties (speaking versus hearing) as *the* defining characteristic or locus of the intellect.<sup>9</sup> It is unfortunate that Devereux's article is so little known, for it might have encouraged other ethnopsychologists to focus more on indigenous theories of perception and intelligence and less overwhelmingly on 'the emotions' (e.g., Rosaldo 1980; White and Kirkpatrick 1985; Lutz 1988). The latter focus seems to have been inspired by Geertz's suggestion that anthropologists look closely at how a given 'world-view' is made 'emotionally acceptable' by an ethos, and an ethos is made 'intellectually reasonable' by a 'world-view' (Geertz 1973: 127). Thought-provoking as this suggestion may be, it completely ignores the 'sensory dimension of symbolic perception' (Ohnuki-Tierney 1981: 8, 17). My hope is that the inclusion of Devereux's piece will inspire ethnopsychologists to be more attentive, in future, to the role of sensory techniques and imagery in uniting idea and affect, or cosmology and ethos.

The fourth chapter, by Constance Classen, explodes what she calls the myth of 'perceptual transparency' (the notion that the senses give us direct, unmediated access to reality) in a singularly compelling way. Classen examines three classic cases of 'wild children' and the responses they provoked in the scientific communities of the day. The sensory

prejudices of the latter stand clearly revealed in the manner in which they went about 'educating' the senses of the children to conform to the dominant sensory model. This chapter raises many fascinating questions, such as: Is there a natural order to the senses, or is that order invariably historical? Do human beings naturally prefer some colours or tastes or sounds to others, or are all of our likes and dislikes conditioned by culture?

In the fifth chapter, Anthony Synnott presents a brief history of the senses in Western philosophy and culture. His account ranges from the Greeks, who lived and loved the sensuous life (but had already begun to suspect the senses), to Descartes, who proclaimed: 'I shall now close my eyes, I shall stop my ears, I shall call away all my senses' (Descartes was a thinking man), to Marx, who railed against the alienation of the senses under industrial capitalism. One question that arises from Synnott's account, which stops with Marx, is whether the extinction of the senses under industrial capitalism has not been reversed by the rise of post-industrial, consumer capitalism. Rather than repressing the senses, the latter seems bent on fulfilling them (but see Haug 1986, who regards this development – i.e., the lavish amounts now spent on enhancing the 'sense-appeal' of commodities – as doubly alienating and exploitative of 'human nature'). Another question is whether female philosophers would evaluate the sensorium, or rank the senses, the same way the all-male cast of philosophers Synnott considers do; Luce Irigaray (1980), for example, has argued that women prefer touch to sight (see also Bordo 1986). Finally, the question arises of whether 'the problems of Western philosophy' are genuine problems, or simply problems thrown up by the way that tradition has tended to accord pride of place to the sense of sight (Rorty 1979). It is interesting to note that the so-called mind-body problem, or subject/object dichotomy, dissolves when one substitutes 'acting' for 'seeing,' as in traditional Chinese philosophy, which privileged 'the act' as opposed to 'the gaze' (Billeter 1984). This leads one to wonder how many other seemingly intractable 'problems' could be resolved by inverting or otherwise altering the conventional Western hierarchy or sensing?

### **On the Chapters of Part II**

One would expect those engaged in cross-cultural research to be extremely conscious of how the sensory priorities of their own society differ from those of other societies, and that such scholars would adjust their research agendas accordingly. But so far, at least, the requisite sensitivity has been lacking, for as Charles Adams points out: 'Far more

cross-cultural research has been undertaken on the topics of visual illusion and colour classification than on the perception of timbre or tactile qualities' (1986: 307) – not to mention the perception of olfactory or gustatory qualities. The five essays in part II manifest a different sensibility, one that is sensitive to local particularities: the first four explore how those senses which in the West are defined as 'other' have been elaborated symbolically in 'other' cultures, while the fifth takes a critical look at the role of sight in the construction of the very category of 'otherness.'

Chapter 6, by Steven Feld, introduces us to the Kaluli of the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, and the special role that drumming plays in Kaluli ceremonial life. The Kaluli use drumming to convey messages and mobilize emotions in a range of ways that the Western ear is but poorly tuned to pick up. There are two reasons for this. The first has to do with the silence that inevitably descends when Papuan drums are put on display in Western museums: transformed into 'art objects,' they become imprisoned within an aesthetic that confuses the apprehension of beauty with the disengagement of all the senses, save for sight. In short, the drums are rarely sounded. The second has to do with our not being disposed to listen attentively enough to perceive what the Kaluli call 'the "inside" of a beat.' Feld helps us to achieve this experience by means of various graphs. His essay is also a model example of the approach advocated earlier in connection with our discussion of Devereux's article, for it shows how idea and affect, cosmology and ethos, are integrated, in the Kaluli case, through the medium of sound.

In chapter 7, Valentine Daniel describes the pulse-taking technique of the Siddha medical practitioners of South India. Interestingly, the Siddha physician is enabled by his training to detect six pulses where the Western physician would discern only one. Daniel shows how the tactile involvement of the Siddha physician contrasts with the visual detachment of the Western physician, and draws out the implications of these contrasting epistemes for the quality of doctor-patient interaction. This chapter also contains a discussion of the Peircean doctrine of the sign. Despite the lucidity of Daniel's account of Peirce's threefold classification of signs, some readers may find this chapter difficult to follow. It is important, though, to acquire an appreciation for the differing levels of abstraction involved in the relationship between the signifier and the signified in the case of the 'index,' the 'icon,' and the 'symbol,' for it is only by attuning ourselves to such differences that we can begin to perceive how some signs 'matter' more than others, and thus affect the consciousness of their users in different ways.

The next chapter, by Joel Kuipers, is an ethnolinguistic study of taste-term usage among the Weyéwa of Sumba, eastern Indonesia. The main interest of this chapter lies in the way it reopens the debate over the relativity of perception which Berlin and Kay's (1969) monumental study of colour classification *seemed* to close down (but see Sahlins 1977; Bousfield 1979). Kuipers does so by extending the search for lexical universals to one of the (many) domains Berlin and Kay overlooked – the domain of gustation – and pointing out some of the reasons why the Berlin and Kay approach cannot be applied to the study of taste perception. Kuipers's essay is also of interest for the way it gives the lie to the old saying: 'There can be no disputing taste.' This saying implies that taste is a matter of purely personal preference, hence not codable or social in a way that would permit so subjective a medium to be the bearer of shared meanings. Whatever the case may be in bourgeois society, taste has a social structure on Sumba, for as Kuipers shows, there is a definite correlation between the use of taste terms or substances and such 'external' social factors as the phases of a social visit.

The ninth chapter, 'Olfaction and Transition,' begins by exploring the phenomenology of the 'speechless sense' (Howes 1986) – namely, smell – and goes on to describe and analyse the rationale behind the apparently universal practice of using odoriferous substances in the context of puberty, death, and other rites of passage. The author argues that it is the continuous character of smells that makes them so suitable for both signalling and precipitating the transition from one socially defined category (such as 'boy' or 'girl') to another (such as 'man' or 'woman'). While the primary concern of this chapter is to establish a universal connection, it also examines how that connection has been weakened in the case of Western society as a result of the declining presence of smells in social life in the wake of the perceptual revolution of the mid-eighteenth century. It is further suggested that the emergence of the modern concept of the person was directly linked to the sudden lowering of thresholds of olfactory tolerance which took place during that period. Hence, our current sense of personal identity may be nothing more than the effect of a shift in the ratio of the senses.

The last chapter in part II, 'On Safari' by Ken Little, is a very humorous and deadly serious critique of 'the tourist perspective.' Taking the Kenya safari tour as the focus of his inquiry, Little examines how productions of this type are centred around the enactment of the visualist metaphor of 'observing the natives and seeing the sights.' The safari tour is shown to be the expression of a cultural logic of objectification, which transforms the peoples and landscape of East Africa into

'authentic spectacle.' Little does far more in this essay than simply demythologize the 'authenticity' or 'realism' of the tourist's experience of 'wild nature' and 'proud Samburu warriors,' however. For he also challenges anthropologists, who are, after all, also in the business of producing and consuming representations of Africa and Africans (but who think they speak from the 'superior' perspective of an 'ethnographic natural') to examine the visual presuppositions and politics of their own discourse. In the end, Little argues, it is the construction of the very idea of a privileged 'vantage point' on 'the Other' that we must question, and there can be no escape from the Western episteme until we do.

Little's deconstruction of the 'ethnographic gaze' clears the way for the emergence of the anthropology of the senses. The latter paradigm is distinguished by the fact that, unlike any previous school of anthropology, it has no 'perspective' or 'vision' to defend, because it is equally open to, and interested in, what all of the senses have to contribute to our knowledge of the world and other cultures.

### A Clash of Sensory Ratios

In *The Absent Body*, Drew Leder makes the important point that cross-cultural variations in the use of the senses (like those we shall be considering) 'are possible only within, and are limited by, the common structure of the human body. Its sensory organs, ... its muscular capacities, are prearticulations upon which all cultures must build' (1990: 29). Some of these 'prearticulations' we even share with the primates, such as the practical dominance of sight and touch over hearing, olfaction, and taste – an articulation which appears to have been 'selected' on the basis of the greater power in the manipulation of nature the former senses give (Passingham 1982: 23–53).

Practical dominance, however, is no guarantee of cultural dominance, and the cultural history of the senses deserves study quite apart from their natural history. The senses are shapers of culture, but they are also bearers of culture, and that means that one can never assume in advance what their *ratio* (in the fullest sense) in another culture will be. Let me illustrate what I mean by presenting a scene from the play *Jero's Metamorphosis* by the great West African playwright Wole Soyinka.<sup>10</sup> In the interpretation that follows, I shall develop what I take to be the parallels between Soyinka's message and the message of the anthropology of the senses.

*Jero's Metamorphosis* is set in Nigeria, and the scene in question involves two characters, Major Silva, who is British, and a local Yoruba man by the name of Chume. As the scene opens, Major Silva is trying

to teach Chume how to play the trumpet for the Salvation Army Band. Chume has his own ideas about how the hymns Silva has him play should sound. He adds an extra note here, varies the beat there, and so on. These improvisations distress Major Silva: 'No flourishes please, no flourishes ... We march to [the hymn] remember, not dance' (Soyinka 1973: 65).

One of the reasons Chume does not stick to the score is that he cannot read music, but the Major does not know this. The ruse is finally exposed when Silva sees that Chume's music sheet is, in fact, upside down on the stand. The major immediately accuses Chume of being 'musically illiterate.' Chume reverses the charge, pointing out that at least he can play music whereas Silva only knows how to read.

While there is a sense in which Chume simply 'plays it by ear,' in point of fact he is interpreting the music in a richly synaesthetic way. This comes out when Silva corrects him a third time for playing 'Ta-a-ta' instead of 'ta-ta,' and Chume finally realizes what the Major means by 'flourish':

*Chume:* Oh you mean the pepper.

*Silva:* Pepper?

*Chume:* Enh, pepper. When you cook soup you go put small pepper.

Otherwise the thing no go taste. I mean to say, 'e go taste like something. (Soyinka 1973: 66)

Major Silva is mystified by this allusion, and visibly begins to 'doubt his senses' as Chume goes on to discourse about the *iru*, salt, *ogiri*, *kaun*, and other condiments he puts into his playing.

*Silva:* Mr Chume, I'm afraid I don't quite see the relevance.

*Chume:* No no, no try for *see am*. Make you just *hear am*.

(Soyinka 1973: 66)

So Chume begins to blow, introducing each note by reference to its corresponding taste (stockfish, *ngwam-ngwan*, smokefish, etc.). In this way he tries to teach the Major how to *hear* tastefully. But Major Silva only has eyes (and ears) for the score, and 'no time for all this nonsense.' Chume is offended by this dismissal of traditional Yoruba cuisine, and the situation quickly deteriorates. He proceeds to give Silva a taste of locust bean on his trumpet. Then he launches into a tune, turns it into a traditional beat, and dances menacingly in the direction of the Major. The latter flees in terror.

To interpret, in this scene, the problem of contact between two cultures is represented as a clash between two mutually refractory 'sense ratios' or 'sensory orders' – one visually biased, the other tastefully

biased, in its appreciation for music. Chume cannot see what Silva means, the Major has no taste for Chume's metaphors. In short, each apprehends the music in accordance with his own sensory preferences. The two characters would also seem to be at odds over the question of what rhythm or beat to give the music. The problem in this case is that Silva has no rhythm to speak of, while Chume has many. To be precise, the African musician resists being confined within the single metrical perspective typical of most Western music (see Chernoff 1979).

Now, some would attribute the breakdown in communication between the Englishman and the Yoruban to the fact that the latter belongs to a 'non-literate' or 'pre-literate' culture, but this interpretation goes against the intention of the playwright. What Soyinka wants us to recognize, I think, is that the lack or deficiency is best regarded as reciprocal. Thus, Chume's power of sight may be 'underdeveloped' in that he does not know how to read, but by the same token Silva's sight is 'overdeveloped' and, what is more, impinges on his ability to hear or taste things as fully as does Chume. To put this another way, the Major's auditory and gustatory faculties are 'restricted' to the same extent that Chume's are 'elaborated' (Douglas 1982b). It is on this ground, the ground that *their sense ratios don't quadrature*, and only secondarily because they are situated to either side of the so-called orality/literacy divide, that they have such difficulty communicating.

To conclude, Soyinka calls upon us to open our minds to the different meanings that different senses have for different peoples; to resist the hegemony of the visual faculty (and the imperialist order it supports); to respect other ways of combining the senses (instead of dismissing them as nonsense); and, to recognize that the division of the world's cultures into two categories, literate and nonliterate, masks a far more interesting and complex reality of multiple, conflicting sensory (and cognitive) models, which we really ought to be exploring. That, very briefly, is also the call of the anthropology of the senses.

## Notes

- 1 To the best of my knowledge, the first scholar to use the expression 'cultural anthropology of the senses' was the historian Roy Porter (1986: vii). I should also note that the title of the present essay, 'To Summon All the Senses,' is borrowed from a passage in Book IX of William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1959).
- 2 There are those, such as Romanyshyn (1989: 58–64), who regard the artistic experiments of the Cubists as having a therapeutic effect because of the way their style challenged the conventions of linear perspective vision,

and thus helped to restore the body to the viewer. As is well known: 'For the Cubists the visible was no longer what confronted the single eye, but the totality of possible views taken from points all round the object (or person) being depicted' (Berger 1972: 18). My own sense is that Cubism augmented the fragmentation of the sensorium, that it furthered the dissociation of sensibility, because multiplying perspectives remains, after all, a *visualist* strategy. Rather than decentering the subject, the Cubists ought to have explored ways of decentering sight.

- 3 Many who read McLuhan assume that what he meant by the expression 'sense ratio' was a kind of quantification of the senses. Nothing could have been further from the mind of the man who described himself as 'a Thomist for whom the sensory order resonates with the divine Logos' (quoted in Jeffrey 1989: 21). The expression 'ratio of sense' is perhaps best translated as 'each sense has its reason' (in both senses). See Bateson's (1973) discussion of Pascal's aphorism *la coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connait point*, which embodies an analogous thought.
- 4 Of course, Michael Jackson's work, like that of Renaat Devisch (1985), owes more by way of inspiration to phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1962) than it does to the concerns raised by McLuhan and Ong. I cite the work of these 'cultural phenomenologists' here by way of illustration of how many paths are now converging on the anthropology of the senses. Other convergent paths include Peircean semiotics as explored by Daniel in chapter 7, 'performance theory' as explored by Sullivan (1986) and Gill (1987), the notion of 'lived myth' (Leenhardt 1979) as explored by Howell (1984) and the present writer (Howes 1988), and the heterodox approach of Jim Fernandez (1985).
- 5 The Songhay case is not unique. The same absence of fusion between signifier and signified has been documented for the Hindu tradition in the Vedic period 1500–700 BC. During this era, meaning was 'radically subordinated' to sound: 'There [was] no tradition for the preservation of meaning, a concern regarded as a mere individualistic pastime. The brahmans' task [was] more noble: to preserve the sound for posterity, maintain it in its purity' (Staal, cited in Mackenzie Brown 1986: 73). These sacred sounds, or mantras, were held to produce vibrations having real effects in the universe. Only much later did the texts 'become conscious of themselves as books' and 'a synthesis of sound and meaning' take place (Mackenzie Brown 1986: 75–6). Each culture thus makes the link between the signifier and the signified in its own way and in its own time.
- 6 Abrahams (1983: 7–8) and Chernoff (1979: 143, 158) put forward a compelling argument to the effect that in order to apprehend West African social forms, dance forms – and even such ostensibly visual phenomena as dress styles and woven fabrics – in a culturally appropriate manner, one

must approach them from an acoustic angle. Such phenomena cannot be comprehended from a conventional Western 'point of view' (see, further, Jackson 1989: 10–11).

- 7 For example, the biologist Lewis Thomas has remarked: 'The act of smelling something, anything, is remarkably like the act of thinking itself' (1980: 42). See also Classen (ch. 4) on this and the previous point.
- 8 The literature on Witkin's field independence theory is vast and complex. See Witkin and Berry (1975) for a good overview. The sensotype hypothesis has been criticized on technical grounds by Berry et al. (1988: 200–3), even though some of the data presented by these authors clearly support it.
- 9 My own inclination would be to reverse the sequence Devereux posits (see Howes 1980).
- 10 I am indebted to Ian Ritchie for bringing this play to my attention, and my interpretation should be read in the light of his discussion of the sensory order of another Nigerian people, the Hausa (ch. 12).



▼PART I  
UNCOMMON SENSE



## CHAPTER 1

# The Shifting Sensorium

*Walter J. Ong, SJ*

Man communicates with his whole body, and yet the word is his primary medium. Communication, like knowledge itself, flowers in speech.

The fact that man communicates with his whole body through all his senses is evident enough to us today. Modern psychology has underscored the way in which the child constructs his first world under the influence of touch (including kinaesthesia), of taste, and of smell, as well as of sound and sight. The child's physical contact with his mother's body and hers with his is already communication, a sharing through touch, which will influence not only his feeling but his thought throughout his life. Taste and smell attract and repel him in his relations with persons and things around him, helping him ultimately to shape his life-world in which his thought itself will take form. Sight, at first perhaps less informative, soon becomes in many ways the most informative of the senses, commonly in connection with kinaesthesia and other senses of touch, for the tactile senses combine with sight to register depth and distance when these are presented in the visual field.

Finally sound, a medium of communication since the child's first cry, manifests new potential of meaning as the child passes through the lalling stage, where he constructs around himself a vast bubble of sound, burbling, gurgling, playing with his diversifying vocal powers – and with his lips at the same time, for sound, both in speaking and in hearing, is closely linked with touch and kinaesthesia. One 'mouths' words quite literally, and our hearing is partly feeling, as Ilse LeHiste and Gordon E. Peterson (1959) have shown. The term 'seesaw,' to take an example related to theirs, seems to our hearing to have the accent on the first syllable, even though the last syllable may actually be pronounced to

produce more volume (this can be tested on a moderately sensitive oscilloscope), for we have to work harder to produce the sound 'see-,' constricting our oral muscles and pushing air through a small space, and we interpret this greater effort (whether we make it ourselves or by listening share in the effort of others) as greater noise.

The oral-aural world of words is a highly complex and mystifying construct, but as he passes through the lalling stage the child learns to insert himself into it, and this world of words soon becomes paramount in the communications process. By the same token it becomes paramount in the child's thinking processes, since human thought apparently cannot arise at all outside a communications setting, either proximate or remote.

This is not to say that for the child or the adult all communication is lodged in speech or even, in the deepest sense of communication, in other bodily activities as apprehended by the senses. It is quite true, as Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1962, 1: sec. 34) and other existentialist thinkers like to insist, that language itself is at its deepest level not primarily even a system of sounds. There is a primordial attunement of one human existent to another out of which all language comes. Man is rooted in 'speaking silence.' All this is true, and in a certain sense commonplace, but it is noteworthy that when we thus think of silence as communicating, we are likely to think of it as a kind of speech rather than as a kind of touch or taste or smell or vision – '*speaking* silence,' we say. The reason is plain: silence itself is conceived of by reference to sound; it is sound's polar opposite. Thus, even when we conceive of communication as a transaction more fundamental than speech, we still conceive of it with reference to the world of sound where speech has its being, and thus attest in a reverse way to the paramouncy of sound and the oral-aural world in communication.

Because words are always primarily spoken things – writing transposes language to a spatial medium, but the language so transposed has come into existence in the world of sound and remains permanently a part of this world – to a certain degree the oral-aural world, the world of voice and hearing which the child enters in learning verbal communication, will retain its paramouncy for good. But only to a certain degree. For, as we have lately learned, the world of sound itself does not have always the same importance in all cultures with relation to the worlds of the other senses.

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. It has been a commonplace that the ancient Hebrews and the ancient Greeks differed in the value they set on the auditory. The He-

brews tended to think of understanding as a kind of hearing, whereas the Greeks thought of it more as a kind of seeing, although far less exclusively as seeing than post-Cartesian Western man generally has tended to do. Thorlief Boman (1961) has brought together massive evidence of the Hebrew-Greek contrast, and, although James Barr (1961) has contested some of Boman's interpretations and procedures, the contrast itself remains clear enough. The work of Benjamin Whorf (1956) with the Hopi Indians has shown how, in the Hopi life-world, time is retained as a sense of duration (with a base which appears largely kin-aesthetic) and how this life-world contrasts with that built into and out of what Whorf styles Standard Average European languages, which present time as 'long' or 'short' (as though it were a stick) and as discontinuously quantified, with one minute or hour or day broken off from the next as on a clock face or calendar, as time itself never is.

Some cultures, similarly, make more of the tactile than do others. In his *Art and Geometry*, William M. Ivins, Jr., has pointed out that ancient Greek geometry differs from most modern geometry in that the ancient Greeks thought more about the way the various shapes felt (they tended to imagine themselves fingering their way around a geometrical figure), whereas modern geometricians think more about the way the various shapes look (1946: 1-13). Ours, consequently, is a spectator's geometry, theirs was a participator's.

Some cultures make more of taste than do others. Whereas modern English, for example, has only a handful of concepts formed directly from gustatory sensations (concepts such as sweet, bitter, sour), complementing these with analogies borrowed from other sensory fields (a taste is flat or sharp) or with crude similitudes (it tastes like an overripe pineapple), the Korean language, I am told by Korean friends, has many more concepts referring more directly to taste.

Taste provides a good example of a sensory field which even the same culture attends to with different intensity at different points in its history. In the eighteenth century through much Western culture, questions concerning taste somehow or other become extraordinarily urgent. In England Pope cried out against vulgar 'taste'; Dr John Armstrong published an important poem entitled *Taste* (1753); and Hume wrote an essay 'Of the Standard of Taste' (1757). The questions agitated did not concern the sense of taste directly in any obvious way, it is true, but rather its analogical extensions into other areas of life - taste in poetry, art, style of living. Nevertheless, this analogical taste had indubitable, real connections with the sense of taste. That is why the term taste rather than smell or hearing or touch or vision came into play.

Some reasons for the ascendancy of taste in the eighteenth century

can readily be seen. The sense of taste is basically a discriminatory sense as the other senses are not (Hume's title registers this fact: taste provides a standard or norm). Taste is a yes-or-no sense, a take-it-or-don't-take-it sense, letting us know what is good and what is bad for us in the most crucial physical way, for taste concerns what we are inclined to take into ourselves by eating, what will by intussusception either actually become ourselves or refuse to be assimilated and perhaps kill us. Undoubtedly the eighteenth-century concern with taste, analogously understood, derived in great part from the growing number of acts of discrimination which men were having to make. As feudal society finally bowed out, the individual and even a whole society were being forced to make decisions which an older, more tradition-bound culture used to provide ready-made. With democracy, the concern with taste wanes, as 'public opinion' is formed to take over regulatory functions, the crises of decision assume other shapes, and the relationship of the human life-world to the complex of the senses changes once more.

The relationship of sound and of the word itself to the human life-world varies, too. Sound and the word itself must thus be considered in terms of the shifting relationships between the senses. These relationships must not be taken merely abstractly but in connection with variations in cultures. In this connection, it is useful to think of cultures in terms of the organization of the sensorium. By the sensorium we mean here the entire sensory apparatus as an operational complex. The differences in cultures which we have just suggested can be thought of as differences in the sensorium, the organization of which is in part determined by culture while at the same time it makes culture. Freudians have long pointed out that for abstract thinking the proximity senses – smell, taste, and in a special way touch (although touch concerns space as well as contact and is thus simultaneously concrete and abstract) – must be minimized in favour of the more abstract hearing and sight. Growing up, assimilating the wisdom of the past, is in great part learning how to organize the sensorium productively for intellectual purposes. Man's sensory perceptions are abundant and overwhelming. He cannot attend to them all at once. In great part a given culture teaches him one or another way of productive specialization. It brings him to organize his sensorium by attending to some types of perception more than others, by making an issue of certain ones while relatively neglecting other ones. The sensorium is a fascinating focus for cultural studies. Given sufficient knowledge of the sensorium exploited within a specific culture, one could probably define the culture as a whole in virtually all its aspects. Such full or exhaustive knowledge is not easy to come by, and

we are a long way from it at present. But to say we are far from knowing all about the sensorium is not to say we know nothing about it.

A seminal book by Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), shows, among other things, how widespread the interest in the sensorium has become, often among authors who do not even think of the sensorium as such under that name. McLuhan's work connects closely with that of Harold A. Innis (1950, 1951), as McLuhan himself has always graciously insisted, though few of his admirers or critics seem aware of the connection. In addition to Innis, McLuhan quotes from scores of scholars in vastly different historical fields – art history, literature, economic history, sociology, anthropology, religion, and many others – who have been turning up more and more material relevant to variations in the ratio or balance between the senses. The interests of most of these authors are not technically psychological but historical or cultural. Vast as McLuhan's spread of citations is, one could enlarge it indefinitely. There is, for example the well-known interest of the French *symboliste* poets in the transposition of the senses (assigning specific colours to specific sounds, as Baudelaire and Mallarmé do). The work of a number of recent philosophers enters into or touches on the organization of the sensorium. One thinks of Bergson's misgivings in *Time and Free Will* (1960) about the tendency of the past few centuries to over-spatialize the universe so that everything is reduced to models picturable in space, and what is unpicturable ('unimaginable' is often the term invoked) is discarded as impossible or unreal. Or one thinks of Whitehead's subsequent comments in *Process and Reality* (1929). Louis Lavelle (1942) and Jean Nogué (1943) elaborate discussion of the sensorium far beyond Bergson. Others concerned in one way or another with what we are here styling the sensorium include of course Freud and his followers, linguistic historians such as Jespersen and Sapir, psychologists such as Jean Piaget and Jerome Bruner, and a number of phenomenologists. Many in these last three groups can be identified through the comprehensive bibliography in John W.M. Verhaar's valuable work, *Some Relations between Perception, Speech, and Thought: A Contribution toward the Phenomenology of Speech* (1963).

Whitehead, in his *Modes of Thought* (1958), was one of the earliest to call rather specific attention to the need for study of the effects of changes in the communications media on the organization of the sensorium (without, however, naming the sensorium as such). Today there is a common awareness of the general pattern of these changes as man has developed his verbal communications media out of the initial spoken word. In general, before the invention of script man is more

oral-aural than afterward, not merely in that his words are all spoken and heard words, never visually perceived marks on a surface, but in that his whole response to actuality is thereby organized differently from that of typographic man. Writing, and most particularly the alphabet, shifts the balance of the senses away from the aural to the visual, favouring a new kind of personality structure, and alphabetic typography strengthens this shift, as I pointed out at length some years ago when assessing the significance of Ramism in *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Ong 1958).

The greater visualism initiated by script and the alphabet is given more and more play in the West through the Middle Ages and then suddenly is brought to a new intensity in the fifteenth century and thereafter with the invention of alphabetic typography. As will be seen, this new intensity involves much more than print – the word literally locked in space – for at approximately the same time that alphabetic typography appears, painting is being swept by a revolution in its treatment of perspective, and the mechanical reproduction of instructional (as against decorative) illustrations and diagrams becomes widespread. Historians of art and design, such as Erwin Panofsky (1955) and Gyorgy Kepes (1956), have traced this and other developments in the use of vision. The visualism encouraged by print connects also with the increased use of maps and with the actual physical exploration of the globe (dependent on visual control of space in maps and imagination) which opens the modern age.

The modern age was thus much more the child of typography than it has commonly been made out to be. And, largely by reason of this fact, the modern age is now a thing of the past. Our own age today, as has by now frequently been pointed out, is marked by a new stress on the auditory. We live by telephone, radio, and television (which is never mere pictures, but is unequivocally a sound medium quite as much as it is a visual one), as well as by rapid transit, which expedites physical presence, and the use of voice to a degree unthinkable for typographic man.

But this is not to say that we are returning to an earlier oral-aural world. There is no return to the past. The successive verbal media do not abolish one another but overlies one another. The present sensorium is dismayingly mixed and we are hard put to understand it, but for the first time in the history of mankind the possibility of some kind of understanding is opening up. This itself gives us a unique opportunity to become aware at a new depth of the significance of the word.

## CHAPTER 2

# The Sensotype Hypothesis

*Mallory Wober*

A modern rapprochement between theories of personality and of intellectual development has been made by Witkin and his collaborators who introduced the concept of field independence (Witkin, Lewis, Hertzman, Machover, Brettnall-Meissner, and Wapner 1954). Receiving support from the work of Bennett (1956), Epstein (1957), Young (1959), and others, though with some equivocal findings as for example from Gruen (1955), the position was thoroughly reviewed and restated in terms of the concept of psychological differentiation by Witkin, Dyk, Faterson, Goodenough, and Karp (1962).

Recent work in Africa is relevant to refining Witkin's theories, and it is suggested that the skills involved in the performance of tests used by Witkin need to be more carefully understood than hitherto. Particular skills might be associated with particular cultural backgrounds, and the finding of a given degree of psychological differentiation might not be so generalized throughout all aspects of an individual's functioning as Witkin's theories suggest. Use is made of the idea of 'sensotypes' put forward by Wober (1966) to suggest that in the field of visual perception and the exercise of allied powers of psychological differentiation, Witkin's schema associating social and psychological test data may hold good; but that it remains to be shown if it also holds good for transactions in the field of proprioception, which may be culturally of salient importance in parts of Africa.

### **Theory of Field Independence and Psychological Differentiation**

Field independence was defined by Witkin et al. (1962: 47) as the ability to separate an item perceived from its context. Most experiments used

visually presented material which was described in the context of the 'visual field.' An extension of the theory linked visual with social and maturational phenomena. The ability to separate visual items from their context was shown to be aligned with the development of a sense of distinct personal identity. The person is considered to be an item, set in the context or 'social field' of his family and the society around him.

Witkin et al. (1962) described two extremes of practices in the socializing of children. The first tends to produce a conformist child through strict punishment and by preventing the assumption of individual responsibility. Such children are said to 'perceive globally'; they do not structure the perceived world actively and hence they tend not to deal skilfully with problems of visual analysis. The other extreme produces the individualist, who is considered to have to assess the world for himself; because he develops the habit of analysing structure, he is able to do well at certain types of problem. In this way, the theory becomes a theory of psychological differentiation: tests of field independence, social conformity, and general ability all measure activities which can be described in similar terms.

Dawson (1963) was the first to apply field independence theory to findings in Africa. He noted that socialization practices in certain African tribal societies resembled the situation producing the classical extreme of Witkin's field-dependent type. People were taught to respond to social standards, to be 'other-directed' in Riesman, Glazer and Denney's (1953) nomenclature rather than individualistic. Further, tests of field independence of the kind used by Witkin evoked very poor performance from Dawson's subjects (Africans from the Temne tribal group), suggesting a lack of habits of analysis for some types of visual material.

Two kinds of reason were suggested for these poor performances of Temne subjects. One was Witkin's orthodox explanation, that a high degree of socialization as distinct from individualization underlay a low level of psychological differentiation which was responsible both for poor test performance and for the patterns of social behaviour observed. The second explanation concentrated on the lack of familiarity which Temne subjects had with Western modes of communication, especially print, diagrams, and transactions in visual codes; this lack of familiarity would explain poor test scores, and socialization practices and social behaviour would remain to be accounted for separately. This second explanation, however, received no support from the observations of Preston (1964) and the experiment of Berry (1956). They showed that Eskimos, as unlettered as Temne and with equally little contact with Western cultures, did much better on tests such as 'block designs' than

did Temne. The findings left the orthodox Witkin-Dawson explanation of Temne socialization practices and resultant psychological differentiation in a strengthened position.

This was the stage at which the present refinement to the above theory was introduced. It was noticed that the tests used by Witkin of field independence and of psychological differentiation involved transactions and skills in the visual field. Certain tests also involved the subjects in integrating data from visual and proprioceptive fields, though the term 'field' appears to have been used by Witkin et al. (1962) ambiguously to refer to sources of both modalities of perception. It appeared possible that American subjects, brought up in a culture emphasizing visual values and codes for communicating information, might be a valid population in which the Witkin theory could stand. However, African (Temne) subjects were brought up in a culture emphasizing proprioceptive values and skills, and thus their relevant field of psychological differentiation might be that of proprioception or audition and, at any rate, not so much the field of visual transactions. Evidence on the nature of Temne and other West African cultures includes the absence of writing previous to Western or Muslim contact, the shortage of colour terms, and even of analysis of stars into constellations by pattern. However, Temne and other West African cultures include an elaboration of the proprioceptively and aurally perceived world. Thus, music is an extension of speech, rhythm an extension of movement, beauty a function of grace of movement as much as of configuration of visage, and dance is a regular and favoured form of elaboration of activity, started at an early age.

The idea of sensotypes has therefore been put forward by Wober (1966), that is, that the prevailing patterns of childhood intake and proliferation of information from the various sense modalities differ according to culture. Thus, while Witkin's whole work was done among Americans largely of one sensotype, the application of his theories and tests might not be valid for Africans of another sensotype. The use of one of Witkin's tests involving proprioception might therefore be a more appropriate index of psychological differentiation among Africans of the type tested by Dawson (1963) and Berry (1956) than the use of the entirely visual tests.

The following hypotheses need to be tested as a preliminary to future work on the question of the appropriate sensory modality for tests of differentiation: (1) that in the sensotype common in certain West African cultures, proprioceptivity is (still) relatively more elaborated with respect to visuality than would be the case in Western cultures; (2) that, therefore, West African subjects would have better scores on tests where

proprioceptivity was important (a) relative to their scores on tests dependent on visuality, and (b) relative to scores of Westerners on similar tests; (3) that results of West African subjects would approximate more towards those of any Western groups in whom proprioceptivity was highly trained than to results of normal Western groups.

## Method

Two tests of the group described by Witkin et al. (1962) as being indices of field independence were included in a battery given to subjects in Southern Nigeria. The mean scores of the Nigerian subjects have been compared with mean scores found by American workers, and correlations between test scores and an index of educational level have been examined for the Nigerian subjects.

### *The Tests*

*The Rod and Frame Test (RFT).* The subject is seated in a totally dark room and views a display consisting of a luminous square frame and a luminous rod mounted centrally within it. The frame has its bottom edge parallel to the ground, but it can be tilted about a horizontal axis so that either of the bottom corners can be pointing almost towards the ground. The rod is mounted on the same axis and can be pointed towards the ground ('vertical') or tilted away from the vertical with or against the tilt of the square. In the apparatus used, the dark room was a 6 ft. 6 in. cube internally. The luminous square had sides 13 in. long, and the width of the slit actually visible was  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. The rod was 11 in. long and also bore a slit  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. wide. An arrangement was made with bulbs, a rheostat, and a battery charger, whereby just enough current was supplied to make the slits comfortably visible.

The subject deals not only with a visual display, but in a sense also with a proprioceptive display, as he sits in a high-backed armchair which is tiltable to right or left by wedges placed under the legs. A footboard is attached to the chair, which keeps the subject's feet off the ground. Both the subject in his chair, and the square frame and rod may therefore be tilted (see Figure 1).

The task for the subject is to tell the experimenter to move the rod which has been tilted away from the vertical before the illumination is made, back to a vertical position. When the subject believes the rod is resting in a vertical position, its actual displacement from the vertical is read off by an assistant outside the dark room, who views a suitably

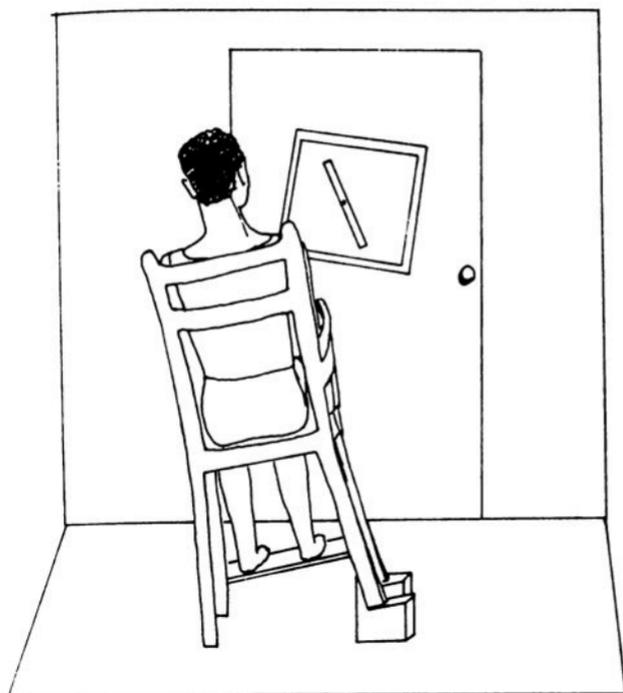


FIGURE 1  
The Rod-and-Frame Test

arranged pointer and scale. This error from the true vertical constitutes the score. A high score thus indicates a poor performance.

*The Embedded Figures Test (EFT).* The subject is shown a simple geometrical figure on a card. He then sees a complex figure which contains the original simple figure as a part of it (the first card having been removed). The task is for the subject to find where the simple figure is 'hidden' and then to point it out. The present version of the test used eight items from those of Witkin (1950). These items were A-3, A-4, C-1, C-4, D-1, D-2, F-1, and P-1 (see Figure 2). The time taken to find each item is noted (with a maximum of five minutes allowed) and the total for the test found. The selection of these particular items and their order had been determined by pre-testing among schoolchildren. The procedure in testing was to show each simple figure for fifteen seconds and then to start timing the period required to find it in the complex figure. If subjects asked to see the simple figure again the complex figure

was removed and the simple one shown again for five seconds, the stopwatch being stopped. No subject asked for more than four repetitions; some asked for one or two, but most often none was requested. The time reckoned was the total search time, without counting time for repetitions of the simple figure. As with the RFT, a high score indicated a poor performance.

The test is clearly one of transactions entirely in the visual field and similar in the skills required for it to Raven's Matrices and the Block of Designs Test, used by Dawson (1963) and Wober (1966) respectively, with which significant correlations were reported.

### *The Subjects*

The eighty-six subjects were all male employees of a large company in Southern Nigeria. They were chiefly from Ibo tribal groups, with Edo groups furnishing the others. Both these tribal groups have had similar exposure to Western influences, and both live in geographically similar conditions; both depended for livelihood on subsistence farming and evolved cultures lacking literacy but with intense development of music, dancing, and tonal language. All the men were manual workers ranging from completely unskilled to skilled artisans. Literacy ranged from nil to fair and was influenced by formal education which was assessed by a four-point scale. All those with no school experience were marked 1, and those who had only completed 'primary VI,' which was a long-established watershed in common education experience in Nigeria, were marked 3. Those with school experience less than primary VI were marked 2, and those who had gone on from primary VI to secondary modern, grammar schools, colleges for teacher training, or the company's apprentice school were marked 4. The scale thus did not attempt to represent equal intervals by educational criteria, but the categories were occupied by numbers not greatly skewed in any direction. The average age of the men was 32.2 years.

### *The Testing Situations*

All the tests were given individually. The instructions were spoken in English or pidgin-English appropriate to the understanding of each subject. Before the RFT the author, aided by a Nigerian assistant, carefully explained the meaning of the idea 'vertical' to each subject with the aid of a plumb-line and other demonstrations. During trials of the RFT, the author remained in the dark room with the subject, and the assistant stayed outside to realign the rod after each trial and to read off scores

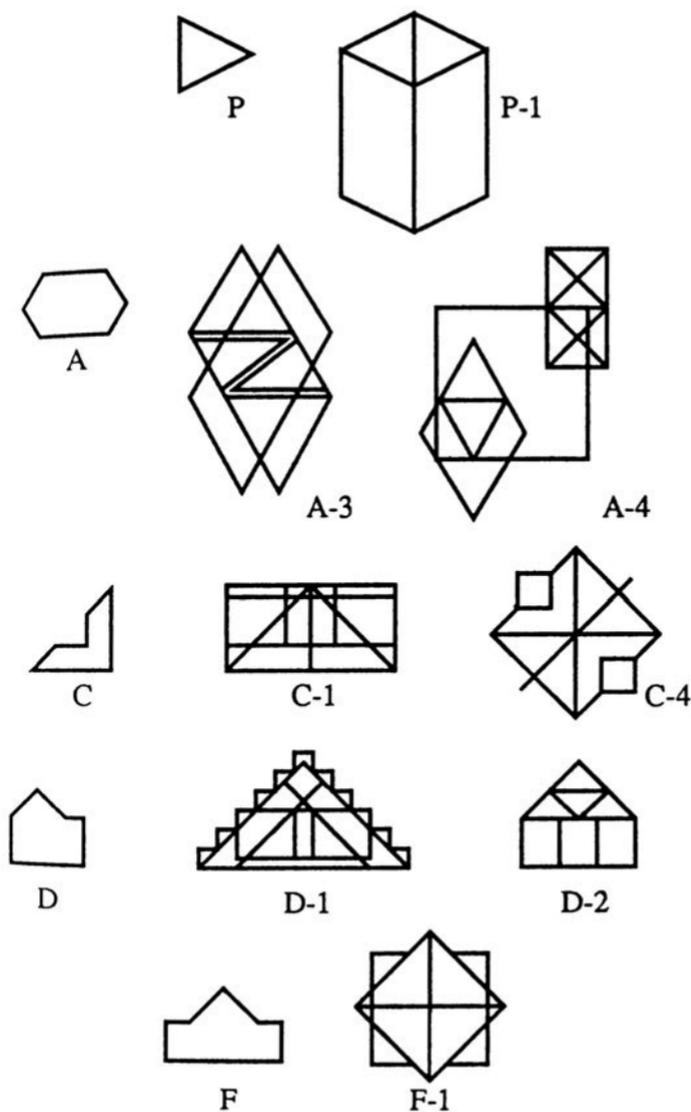


FIGURE 2  
 Selection of items from Witkin's (1950) Embedded Figures Test. The respondent is asked: 'Can you find figures A, B, C, etc., embedded in the larger figures beside them?'

on a scale provided. The room became exceedingly hot quite rapidly, and the door was opened and air and light were admitted twice during each run of trials for each subject; during the pauses the tilt of the chair was also adjusted. There is no doubt that social conditions differed in the Nigerian work from what has been described as the setting in American laboratories; if any systematic differences likely to affect good performance occurred, it seems likely that the Nigerian subjects had the less favourable conditions.

In the case of the EFT, the author gave all the tests individually. The preceding explanations were thorough and the subjects were motivated as keenly as possible to work without delay. Though it is probable that some of the slowness of performance among Nigerians was due to a lack of the competitive zest that subjects often bring to such tasks in Western countries, it is nevertheless thought that subjects' difficulties with this test were very real. Several men failed nearly every item, while the quickest finished the eight items in under four minutes. Encouragement was given in between items to those failing items early on.

Rigid orthodoxy in keeping to print instructions for test administration was not the guiding principle of the test administration. The two chief points were held to be: to explain the nature of the problems, and to create and sustain maximum motivation. It is believed that the subjects were thus showing their best available performances in each of the above tests.

## Results

The scores of the RFT gained by Nigerian subjects are first compared with two other sets of American results. Only those conditions of the test where the square frame was kept straight are considered here, for reasons explained after Table 1.

The conditions experienced by subjects whose results are in Table 1 are those where the proprioceptive problem is of comparative prominence. In the present experiment, and in that of Witkin, the frame-straight condition was used; in the investigation of Comalli, Wapner, and Werner (1959) no square frame at all enclosed the tilted rod. In all three investigations, however, the subject's body was tilted considerably. The result is that in both cases of American subjects, the level of error was greater than that found for Nigerians. Where the body was tilted to the right, the mean Nigerian score was significantly better than for Comalli's subjects ( $t = 7.60$ ;  $DF 159$ ;  $P < 0.01$ ). Where the body was tilted left, the mean Nigerian score was again significantly better than

TABLE 1

Scores for Nigerian workers compared with American subjects on RFT with frame kept straight (scores in mean degrees of displacement of rod from true vertical)

Frame	Body position		n	Source of data
	Right, 28°	Left, 28°		
Straight	-	-	53	Witkin and Asch (1948)
	Right, 30°	Left, 30°		
None	3.30	-	75	Comalli et al. (1959)
	Right, 28°	Left, 28°		
Straight	1.20	1.18	86	(Present data)

for Comalli's subjects ( $t = 4.65$ ; DF 159;  $P < 0.01$ ); and the same superiority held good over Witkin's subjects ( $t = 3.54$ ; DF 137;  $P < 0.01$ ).

The conclusion is clear that, in circumstances of what Witkin terms 'analytic functioning' where proprioceptive information (body tilt) is more prominent than the visual inconsistencies, the Nigerians were better than the Americans. One possible interpretation could be that the testing situation was easier for the Nigerians. It has been suggested that this was unlikely owing to social disparity between subjects and English investigator, and to physically hot and stressful conditions; the data of Tables 2 and 3 also argue against this possibility.

The situation giving rise to the results in Table 2 had both proprioceptive and visual displacements for the subjects to deal with. Comparison of Witkin's results for his American subjects with the performance of Nigerian subjects in the body-tilted condition showed no significant differences (for the condition with both frame and body tilted left,  $t = 0.072$ ; DF 137,  $P > 0.05$ ; and for the condition with frame tilted right and body tilted left,  $t = 0.04$ ; DF 137,  $P > 0.05$ ). In the condition where the body was straight, however, and the task was primarily one of having adjustments made to a tilted visual display, the Americans made less error than Nigerians.

The findings in Tables 1 and 2 tend to support hypotheses 2(a) and 2(b) and therefore, by implication, hypothesis 1. It is also damaging to the argument that the testing situations were unequal and in favour of the Nigerians, to find that they systematically did worse in the body-straight situation shown in Table 2.

A further test of hypothesis 2(b) may be made by comparing the results of the Nigerian subjects with those of two groups studied in America by Gruen (1955). One of these groups was of dancers, highly trained in proprioceptive sensitivity; the other was of normal subjects (non-dan-

TABLE 2

Scores for Nigerian workers compared with American subjects on RFT with frame tilted (scores in mean degrees of displacement of rod from true vertical)

Frame	Body position			n	Source of data
	Right, 28°	Straight	Left, 28°		
28° Left	—	6.2	9.4	53	Witkin and Asch (1948)
28° Left	11.08	10.86	11.47	86	(Present data)
28° Right	—	5.7	11.98	53	Witkin and Asch (1948)
28° Right	11.16	11.8	12.06	86	(Present data)

TABLE 3

Comparison of RFT scores between Nigerians, Americans, and American professional dancers (scores in mean degrees of displacement from true vertical)

Group	n	Body and frame tilted same way, 28°	Body and frame tilted opposite, 28°	Body straight, frame tilted, 28°	Source
Normals	46	12.33	14.14	7.07	Gruen (1955)
Dancers	30	13.57	15.00	6.58	Gruen (1955)
Nigerians	86	11.32	11.57	11.02	(Present data)

cers). Gruen classified her results slightly differently, and the present data have been rearranged in Table 3 to parallel her classification.

Gruen stated that there was no significant differences in performance between normals and trained dancers. As in the comparison with Witkin's data, Nigerians were better when body-tilt was involved (proprioceptivity becoming important) and worse than Americans when the body was straight. (Gruen's data were not presented in a form in which significance of differences could be readily estimated.) This is additional support for hypothesis 2(b).

Among the Nigerian subjects only, comparison of performance in conditions where the frame was straight and body tilted, with performance when the frame was tilted with the body kept straight, shows that the former elicited much more accurate judgments, i.e., it was easier for them to resolve a proprioceptive than a visual displacement from normal conditions. This supports hypothesis 2(a).

Gruen gave her two groups of subjects the EFT as well as the RFT, and the correlations between the tests are available. The Nigerians also did both tests, and so the patterns of intercorrelations can be compared.

TABLE 4

Product-moment correlations between RFT and EFT results for Gruen's American subjects (Gruen 1955)

Group	Conditions of RFT		
	Body and frame tilted same way	Body and frame tilted opposite ways	Body straight, frame tilted
Normals	0.47**	0.43**	0.75**
Dancers	0.32	0.32	0.36**

\*  $P < 0.05$  for difference from zero.    \*\*  $P < 0.01$ .

TABLE 5

Product-moment correlations between RFT and EFT and educational level for Nigerian subjects ( $n = 86$ )

Variate	RFT	Educational level
EFT	0.21	-0.37*
RFT	-	0.08

\*  $P < 0.05$  for difference from zero.

The evidence from these correlations can be interpreted as support for hypothesis 3. Thus, in Gruen's investigations, for those parts of the RFT involving body-tilt (proprioceptive problems) the dancers showed no significant correlation with their performance on the EFT. That is to say, the two tests posed to them problems which were dealt with in basically different ways. In the condition where the body was kept straight (the problem principally visual) there was a significant correlation for dancers with their EFT results. In any case, the situation for normals was different from that for dancers. The Nigerian subjects showed no significant correlation between EFT and RFT results, thus showing their closer similarity to American professional dancers than to other American subjects. This appears to be good support for hypothesis 3. It is also shown among Nigerian subjects that formal (Western) education has more bearing upon EFT than upon RFT results.

## Discussion

It has been argued that Witkin's Rod and Frame Test contains a proprioceptive component which makes it essentially different from tests involving purely visually mediated transactions. This being so, groups

of subjects who might by culture or by training be especially sensitive to the proprioceptive field would show characteristically different patterns of scoring on this test. This has been found to be the case. American dancers, and especially Nigerian manual workers, have shown that for them the RFT does not measure the same skills or analytic style as the EFT.

This finding has two areas of applicability. The first is that there exists a test of 'analytic functioning' (Witkin's term, 1962) in which Africans have been shown to do as well as, or better than, Americans or Europeans. This is a rare finding that has occurred once only before in the work of Beveridge (1939) who compared fifty-two Ghanaian students with twenty Europeans on a test of adjusting a rod to the horizontal, inside a tilted room. Though half the Europeans were women and their average age nearly twice that of the Africans, rendering the results equivocal, nevertheless in this task involving action in a proprioceptive field the Africans did better than the Europeans. Beveridge (1939) wrote: 'their perception is guided less by visual and more by other cues than is that of the European.'

The second application of the present findings is the modification of Witkin's theory of psychological differentiation. It would appear that 'style of cognitive functioning' is not so uniform throughout all fields of an individual's expression as had originally been supposed by Witkin. The finding in America that the EFT and similar visual tests indicated a person's level of psychological differentiation was supported in Sierra Leone by Dawson (1963) using visual tests. However, visual tests appear not to be sole indicators of psychological differentiation. The evidence here is that such differentiation may occur in sensory fields other than the visual one. Using the idea of sensotypes introduced by Wober (1966) it may be suggested that suitable tests in visual idiom indicate levels of differentiation implying certain sorts of socialization experience and social behaviour. Tests in proprioceptive idiom, however, may be more appropriate for measuring differentiation among those of a less visual sensotype and may be associated with experiences of socialization and with social behaviour in patterns that have not as yet been worked out.

## CHAPTER 3

# Ethnopsychological Aspects of the Terms 'Deaf' and 'Dumb'

*George Devereux*

I propose to discuss two mutually contradictory popular conceptions of stupidity, as mirrored in linguistic usage.

In English the word 'dumb' has come to mean so exclusively 'stupid' – except in the increasingly obsolescent expression 'deaf and dumb' – that it is nowadays almost completely superseded by the term 'mute' when denoting an inability to speak, i.e., to express intrapsychic states and to convey symbolic information pertaining to reality.

The tendency to equate speech with intelligence, or at least with culture, is also manifest in classical Malay. In the national prose epic *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, the father of the hero justifies his plan to move to Bintan by emphasizing that his son Hang Tuah, reared on the isolated Duyong River, did not know the 'speech (*bahasa*) of men' – i.e., that the son was lacking culture which could be acquired at Bintan. In ancient Malaya speech or words in general seem to have been deemed the chief means of activity. The first sentence of the first chapter dealing with Hang Tuah himself begins as follows: *Sabermula maka tersebutlah perkataan Hang Tuah ...* i.e., 'First-of-all then shall-be-told the-dicta (of) Mr. Tuah ...' In this sentence *per-kata-an*, whose root is *kata*, meaning word, is the equivalent of the Latin *gesta* (as in the medieval epic *Gesta Dei per Francos*, i.e., the deeds of God as executed by the French) which could be translated into English as 'the deeds' or, better still, into French as *les faits et gestes*. If a culture defines speech as a symbol of human activity in general, then it is easy to understand why the term *bahasa*, meaning *speech, language, and to speak*, should symbolize cultured and intelligent deportment in general.

This interpretation is amply supported by the semi-jocular and semi-

serious Malay popular belief that the orang-outangs – from *orang hutan*, literally ‘man (of the) forest,’ and denoting equally jungle-dwelling tribes and the great ape in question – once were men, but decided to pretend they could not speak because they did not wish to pay taxes, or, according to another version, did not care to work. In this belief, speech alone differentiates these apes from jungle tribes.

A pretended inability to speak a human tongue, combined with the pretence of only being able to bleat as a sheep, is the focus of the well-known medieval French farce *Maistre Pierre Pathelin*. A shepherd seeking to escape the payment of a debt is advised by the shyster Pathelin to play the imbecile, by pretending to be able only to bleat like his own sheep. When the shyster wins the case and seeks to collect his fee from the shepherd, the latter simply bleats at him.

The ability to speak, viewed as a criterion of intelligence, is the polar opposite of the conception of the Sedang Moi of Indochina that the ear is the seat of reason. *Oh ta ay tue(n)*, i.e., ‘has no ear,’ means that a person is bereft of intelligence. *Tlek*, i.e., ‘deaf,’ also means stupid. The intelligent, but very old and, therefore, emotionally somewhat labile chief of Tea Ha once told the writer: ‘When I was young, I had much ear. Now that I am old I no longer have ear. I have a good wife, but I get angry at her over trifles and hit her. That is not good.’

The conception that one may have ‘ear’ (intelligence) and yet be unable to speak well exists explicitly in that tribe. A certain medicine-man of that tribe was once questioned about his shamanistic experiences, but produced only an extremely confused and confusing account which puzzled even the native informants present. When he left, one of the best regular informants remarked: ‘As I told you, he has much ear, but cannot speak well.’ Other informants vigorously concurred with this view. Since this medicine-man impressed the writer as a so-called borderline case, pains were taken to make certain that the informants truly meant to imply that this man had intelligence, and not simply that he had supernatural power, or *mana*.

On another occasion a good informant was asked to characterize briefly every inhabitant of the village. When he came to the smaller children, he apparently differentiated between the very young, who could only *speak*, and slightly older children of whom he specifically said that they ‘already had ear,’ in that they were capable of performing various useful tasks, and were also well behaved.

Still another proof that, among the Sedang, the ear, rather than speech, is the organ of intelligence is the peculiar reason offered by members of this tribe for their failure to use the domestic buffalo as a draft animal, even though they are familiar with the sight of buffaloes pulling the

plows of the Anamese. They say: 'We do not know how to *talk* to the buffaloes.' This statement does not cast an invidious light upon the 'ear' of the buffalo, who is deemed to have all the requisite intelligence for pulling a plow. The fault is deemed to lie with the speaker who, nevertheless, is not held to be 'lacking in ear' because of his inability to speak to the buffaloes in a manner which the latter could understand. Lest this point should seem over-subtle, brief reference may be made to a native legend. When, at the time of creation, each group of men received whatever it needed for life, the French and the literate groups living in Indochina took some leaves on which to write, and preserved them, while the Moi did not. This explains why the Moi – who do not feel that others are more intelligent than they are – do not know how to write.

Another Asiatic example of the role assigned to the ear in the function of intelligence is that of Buddhistic iconography, which represents sages with extremely large ears.

It would be tempting, but impossible, to suggest that people who live on so low a level of technology that much of their time and effort is directed toward inarticulate nature tend to view the ear as the seat of intelligence, while groups which live chiefly through interaction with others emphasize speech. Indeed, while the Moi are certainly less advanced in technological skill than the Malays, the latter are in turn technologically inferior to large and civilized Buddhistic nations. This simple sociological explanation is therefore altogether unable to account for the facts under consideration.

A more plausible ethnopsychological interpretation would be one which would consider the concept which equates speech with intelligence as an expression of self-oriented, mastery-seeking cultural attitudes; while the concept which equates intelligence with hearing would reflect a reality-oriented, adaptive attitude. The 'speech' group would seek self-expression and the imposition of the self upon reality – which is fairly characteristic of Western Europeans and of Malays. The 'hearing' group would, in that case, seek selflessness rather than self-expression. This characterization is certainly applicable to the Buddhists – who ultimately seek to overcome selfhood by merging with the world and ceasing to exist.

This hypothesis, while admittedly tentative and speculative, derives unexpected support from the basic significance of the word 'idiot' which ultimately is derived from the concept of distinctive, isolated a-social, autarchic selfness, impervious to reality, and not seeking to make a basic impact upon reality. (In Greek the word *idios* simply means 'private'.)

Even if some of the tentative hypotheses advanced above should be found ultimately unacceptable, as they well may be, it is nonetheless of some interest that the two components of the communication process, speaking and hearing, should be used in widely separated areas to characterize intelligence, or the lack of it.

## CHAPTER 4

# The Sensory Orders of 'Wild Children'

*Constance Classen*

'Wild' or 'feral' children is the term used for children who have developed in isolation from human society.<sup>1</sup> It refers particularly to those who have grown up in the wild, but includes those who have been kept in seclusion within society. In the late nineteenth century and first half of this century the subject of feral children drew the attention of many anthropologists, including E.B. Tyler (1863) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1949: 1–12). These anthropologists vigorously debated whether such children were actually normal children whose extraordinary behaviour was the result of their experience in the wild, or mentally disabled children who would have manifested certain abnormalities regardless of their environment.

The principal argument against the former thesis was the lack of unquestionably authentic accounts of children having grown up outside culture, while the principal argument against the latter was that mentally disabled children would be unable to survive on their own in the wild. In 1959 Bruno Bettelheim argued that what had been called feral children were actually children suffering from autism, whose strange, often animal-like behaviour had led observers to concoct fanciful accounts of their upbringing in the wild. He concluded that 'feral children seem to be produced not when wolves behave like mothers but when mothers behave like wolves' (1959: 467). After this time academic interest in the subject of 'wild children' quieted down.

It is not the intention of this essay to reopen the debate over whether there are any true cases of normal children who have been forced to fend for themselves for an extended period in the wild. Certainly there are known cases of children who have grown up severely secluded from

human society, a recent one being that of Genie, a California girl who was kept isolated in a room by her father, with only the barest of care, until the age of fourteen (Curtiss 1977). It is sadly true that Genie's case is but an extreme example of the state of abandonment in which many children live.

The objective of this essay is to examine three classic cases of 'wild children' – the Wild Boy of Aveyron, the Wolf Children of India, and Kaspar Hauser – to see what each one reveals about the sensory order, or modes of perceiving, of the child in question. It is unfortunate that the debate over authenticity has deflected attention from the many interesting perceptual and epistemological questions that the case of the 'wild child' raises. For example: What effects do environment and culture have on sensory perception? How does an individual's sensory order relate to the social order? What alternatives are there to our own ways of sensing the world? The early anthropologists who examined cases of feral children were concerned with what they could tell us about the state of the human being in nature. Is there a natural state of the senses? Do feral children have any perceptual traits in common or are their sensory orders completely idiosyncratic?

All three cases examined here are well documented, if not conclusively so. If these cases actually deal with feral children, such a sensory analysis offers insights into how the senses may be ordered by an individual outside of human society. However, even if they are not true cases of feral children, they still provide a fascinating look at extraordinary sensory orders, and at what happens to such orders when they come into contact with the sensory model of the dominant culture. In other words, these cases can enable us to step outside the sensory model of our society and speculate on the ways and means by which perception is constructed within and without culture.

Feral children, of course, are not the only persons with extraordinary sensory orders. There are many people within society with perceptual models which differ widely from the norm, for example, the deaf and the blind. The perceptual experiences of such persons can provide an interesting comparison to the sensory characteristics of the 'wild children,' and I will therefore make reference to these data at various points in my narrative.

## The Cases

The Wild Boy of Aveyron was observed in the woods of Aveyron, France, by local villagers for some three years, and had actually been briefly captured twice before he was definitively reintroduced into so-

ciety in the year 1800. He was estimated to be about twelve years old and to have been living in the woods for about six years. The boy was taken to Paris where he was studied by a number of scientists and then given into the care of the physician Jean Itard, who named him Victor.

The interest at the time in sensory perception, inspired by the sensory philosophies of Locke and Condillac, resulted in a great deal of attention being paid to Victor's sensory functioning. One of the scientists who originally examined him, Pierre-Joseph Bonnaterre, in fact, ranked the order of Victor's senses as follows in his report: 'The sense of smell is first and most perfected; taste is second, or rather these senses are but one; vision occupies the position of third importance, hearing the fourth, and touch the last' (1976: 37). Bonnaterre contrasts this order with that of the man of intelligence, in whom 'the sense of touch is of first importance, because it is this sense which is most closely related to thought and knowledge' (1976: 37). Phillippe Pinel, an authority on mental disorders who also examined the boy, used a similar contrast of sensory orders to argue that Victor lacked intelligence: 'It has justifiably been said that the sense of touch is the sense of intellect, and it is easy to see how imperfect this sense is in the so-called wild boy of Aveyron' (1976: 59-60).<sup>2</sup>

Itard did not agree with Bonnaterre or Pinel; he believed that Victor was not intellectually deficient, but rather displayed the consequences of his years of isolation. He therefore sought to enculturate the boy and awaken his intellectual faculties by systematically educating his senses. Itard was able to socialize Victor to a large extent, but he was not able to develop the boy's intellectual faculties beyond an elementary level, and he discontinued the training after five years. Victor then went to live in the home of a governess where he stayed until his death in 1828 (Itard 1972; Lane 1976).

The 'wolf children' of India were two girls, one aged approximately eight years and the other a year and a half, who were discovered in 1920 by the director of a local orphanage, Reverend J.A.L. Singh, allegedly living in a wolf den with a mother wolf and her cubs. 'The two cubs and the other two hideous beings [the girls] were there in one corner, all four clutching together in a monkey-ball' (Singh and Zingg 1966: 8). Unfortunately, none of the villagers who had been present at the capture of the girls was asked to verify Singh's account.

The girls were taken by Singh to his orphanage where he kept a diary of their behaviour, including their sensory inclinations, and his attempts to socialize them. The younger of the girls, named Amala, died after a year, but the elder, named Kamala, lived for nine years after her capture. Kamala was gradually socialized out of her wolflike habits and had

attained the intellectual level of a normal child of about two at the time of her death in 1929 (Singh and Zingg 1966).

This case created a great deal of controversy in the academic world when it was brought to its attention in 1941.<sup>3</sup> Most of the controversy centred on whether the discovery of the girls in the wolf den could be accepted as authentic on the basis of only one eyewitness, Reverend Singh, no matter how reliable. Singh's account of the girls' capture was investigated in the 1950s by William Ogburn and Nirmal Bose (1959) and thrown into serious doubt. Charles Maclean, however, in his examination of the case, has shown that Ogburn and Bose were not thorough or careful in their investigation. Maclean records that he was able to find villagers who distinctly recalled being present with Reverend Singh at the discovery of the girls in the wolf den (1978: 294–300). While this does not prove that the girls were actually raised by a wolf, it does lend greater credence to the story.

Kaspar Hauser, the third case examined here, was found at the age of sixteen in Nuremberg in 1828. He was dazed and virtually without speech and his only identification was a note he carried which gave his name and date of birth. Kaspar was taken to live with a physician, Dr Daumer, who patiently educated him and taught him to speak. A prominent jurist, Anselm von Feuerbach, spent some time with the boy and wrote a well-documented account of the case (Feuerbach 1966).

On learning to speak Kaspar was able to relate how he had spent his childhood in a small dark room, with virtually nothing to occupy him, given bread and water daily by someone he never saw and whom he knew only as 'Man.' In 1829 Kaspar was attacked by an unknown assailant and seriously injured. When found, he could only repeat the word 'Man' over and over again. In 1833, while he was staying with Feuerbach, Kaspar was attacked for a second time and killed. Subsequent investigations have shown that Kaspar was quite possibly an heir to the throne of Baden and was the victim, first in his confinement and then in his murder, of political intrigue (Malson 1972: 67).

Kaspar Hauser is, in a way, the most interesting case for our present study, for his senses were kept in a state of dormancy in the cell to which he was confined, while the other children had the whole of nature to excite their sensoria. Kaspar's senses, far from being dulled by the lack of stimuli in his environment, were so sensitive as to be a source of almost constant pain to him after he was released into the sensorially overwhelming larger world. In this, and also in the fact that he did have some human care during his years of isolation, Kaspar's sensory order provides a valuable contrast to those of the other 'wild children' looked at here.

Kaspar had some language when he was found; however this consisted only of a few set words and phrases. Kamala and Victor were both unable to speak. Prolonged efforts were made to teach all three to speak normally, but only Kaspar learned to speak well. Kamala, at the time of her death, had acquired a vocabulary of about fifty words, while Victor never learned to speak and could only communicate through simple signs and a few written words. It is tempting to suggest that Kaspar's success and Kamala's partial success at learning to speak were partly due to the social contact they had enjoyed during their years of isolation: Kaspar with his keeper and Kamala with the wolves. Victor had never interacted with other beings, his habits were all of solitude, and thus he could not learn to communicate through speech. However, there are too many other possible factors to permit such an interpretation.

All three children had a very keen sense of hearing. Kamala was attentive to the least sounds (Singh and Zingg 1966: 24). Victor was attentive only to those sounds which had direct bearing on his needs: the sound of a walnut being cracked, however gently, alerted his attention, while after the initial surprise, a pistol shot close to his ear was a matter of indifference to him (Itard 1972: 106). Kaspar's hearing was so acute that he could distinguish people at a distance by the sound of their footsteps, and the noise of a drum would throw him into convulsions (Feuerbach 1966: 296).

When Victor was found his gaze was very erratic, but at the same time he would spend long periods looking at water or a country landscape (Itard 1972: 104, 114). Kamala could see extraordinarily well at night, but only poorly in the light, which hurt her eyes (Singh and Zingg 1966: 33). Kaspar also saw very well in the dark and found light painful at first (Feuerbach 1966: 316). His vision was so sharp that he was able to distinguish barely perceptible stars; however, a summer landscape appeared a repulsive blur of colours to him and he preferred to look at a plain white wall (Feuerbach 1966: 316, 322, 332). Kaspar, like Kamala, nonetheless, was extremely fond of the colour red. Kamala always preferred red clothes (Singh and Zingg 1966: 101) and, if the choice had been given Kaspar, 'he would have clothed himself and all for whom he had a regard from head to foot in scarlet or purple' (Feuerbach 1966: 318).

Both Victor (Itard 1972: 97) and Kaspar (Feuerbach 1966: 323) had to be taught to distinguish between objects in relief and flat paintings (there are no data for this on Kamala). For Kaspar, 'the men and horses represented on sheets of pictures, appeared to him precisely as the men and horses that were carved in wood, the first as round as the latter, or

these as flat as those' (Feuerbach 1966: 323). It is interesting to note that this inability to distinguish paintings from the objects they represent is often manifested by blind people who have recently recovered their sight. In the 1720s, William Cheselden conducted the first scientific study of a blind individual, a thirteen-year-old boy, who had had his sight restored. The boy could not at first distinguish flat objects from round ones by sight alone and, indeed, was very surprised to find that those things which were most pleasing to his touch and taste were not necessarily most pleasing to his sight. Interestingly, like Kaspar and Kamala, the boy also preferred scarlet to all other colours (Ross 1951: 77–8), leading one to wonder if there might not exist a natural preference for this colour.

In *Space and Sight: The Perception of Space and Shape in the Congenitally Blind before and after Operation*, M. von Senden gives instances of similar cases. One young man who had recently recovered his sight mistook a painting of a table for a table. For a long while after this experience he expressed fear on approaching a real table 'for he always suspected that he was deceived, that it was a painting he saw before him, and that he was in danger of thrusting a hole in it with the involuntary groping of his hands' (Senden 1960: 213). Again, like Kaspar, the newly sighted often perceive landscapes as a painful blur of colours and forms. These data raise the question (one which fascinated the philosophers of the Enlightenment [Paulson 1987]) of to what extent visual perception is a learned ability. Kaspar, for all his acuteness of eyesight, was not able to make the discriminations of form and shape which we, with our generally mediocre powers of sight, take for granted.

All three 'wild children' had extraordinary olfactory abilities. Victor carefully, and with apparent enjoyment, smelled everything that he came across, even objects, such as pebbles, that appeared odourless to others (Itard 1972: 150). Kamala could smell meat and other things at a great distance (Singh and Zingg 1966: 23). Kaspar's sense of smell was so fine that he could distinguish different fruit trees at a distance by the smell of their leaves alone.

In this olfactory acuity Kaspar resembled certain blind individuals who have developed their sense of smell to a high degree. Helen Keller, a blind-deaf woman, for instance, could also distinguish fruit trees by their odours; like Kaspar, she could recognize people by their footsteps as well, but in her case it was vibrations, not sounds, which guided her (Keller 1909: 43–5, 69). However, whereas Helen Keller derived a great deal of pleasure from her sense of smell, Kaspar found his hypersensitivity to odour a constant source of discomfort. All smells were more

or less repugnant to him, except for those he had been accustomed to in his cell (Feuerbach 1966: 335). In fact, it was his sense of smell which occasioned Kaspar the most pain. Even at a distance, smells imperceptible to others would make him ill (Feuerbach 1966: 336).

This profound negative reaction to odours can occur with individuals who have lost their sense of smell for a period and then had it restored. A biochemist who lost and then regained his sense of smell, for instance, reported that odours which he had formerly experienced as pleasant, such as those of tobacco and coffee, now caused him intense displeasure (Harper et al. 1968: 161–2). A similar negative reaction may occur with regard to sounds in the case of deaf people who recover their hearing (Higgins 1980: 91–3), and sights in the case of blind people who regain sight (Senden 1960: 130–5). Thus, the recovery of a lost sense is not necessarily the thoroughly pleasurable experience that one might imagine it to be.

Victor, Kamala, and Kaspar showed different taste preferences, always preferring the foods they had been accustomed to, no matter how bland or monotonous. Victor was fond of nuts and vegetables and drank water as though it were an exquisite wine. In an attempt to stimulate Victor's sense of taste, Itard offered him strong liquors and richly seasoned foods, but, even when extremely hungry and thirsty, the boy refused them (Itard 1972: 112–13, 151). Kamala avidly devoured raw meat and was fond of milk but rarely drank water. She quickly learned to like sweets, but could not abide salt (Singh and Zingg 1966: 78). (After she became socialized, Kamala refused to eat her food *without* salt [Singh and Zingg 1966: 95].)

Kaspar's delicate system could tolerate only bread and water. After being forced to eat meat he became very ill. Likewise, 'the least drop of wine, of coffee, or the like, mixed clandestinely with his water, occasioned him cold sweats, or caused him to be seized with vomiting or violent headaches' (Feuerbach 1966: 293). All of the children eventually had their tastes at least somewhat reconditioned by their caretakers until they were able to eat, and even like, most of the ordinary foods of the cultures in which they lived.

Victor and Kamala were indifferent to heat and cold. Victor was able to pick up and eat boiling potatoes (Itard 1972: 105), and Kamala went naked in the chill of winter with no ill effects (Singh and Zingg 1966: 31). They had to be conditioned into feeling differences in temperature (Itard 1972: 107; Singh and Zingg 1966: 92). Kaspar, having lived in an environment of uniform temperature, had no prior experience with heat or cold and was extremely sensitive to both. The first time he

touched snow, in fact, he howled with pain (Feuerbach 1966: 321). Victor, in contrast, rolled himself half-dressed in the snow with delight (Itard 1972: 104).

Although she was indifferent to temperature, Kamala was sensitive to the least touch (Singh and Zingg 1966: 25). Victor was indifferent to being touched and could not distinguish different shapes by touch alone. He had to be taught to differentiate between an acorn and a chestnut, a coin and a key, and other objects, by their feel (Itard 1972: 149).

Kaspar had an almost supernatural sense of touch. The touch of humans and animals gave him a sensation of heat or cold, at times so strong that he felt as if he had received a blow. He was able to distinguish certain metals by their touch alone, and once had to rush out of a hardware shop because the metals there made him feel as though his body were being pulled in all directions (Feuerbach 1966: 337). Indeed Feuerbach relates that Kaspar was able to tell in repeated experiments whether the north or south pole of a magnet was being pointed at him because in the former case he felt a current of air proceeding from his body, and in the latter, a current of air blowing on his body (Feuerbach 1966: 337-9).

## Conclusion

Some interesting conclusions can be drawn from these data, although they must remain tentative given the uniqueness of the cases and the uncertainties involved. To begin with, all three children had grown up in apparent isolation from human society and their sensoria would seem to have been strongly conditioned by their respective experiences. If the story of her having been raised by wolves is true, then Kamala was the only one of the three to have had a sensory model, that of the wolves, to pattern her own after. In fact, she was able to order her sensory perceptions quite well and displayed few of the erratic responses to sensory stimuli characteristic of the two boys.

Victor and Kaspar had no guide for structuring their sensory perceptions. Victor's senses were acute, but not discriminating. Overwhelmed by sensations in the forest, he discriminated only between those which had direct bearing on his physical needs and those which did not. Thus, after being captured, he was attentive to the sound of a nut being cracked, but not that of a pistol being fired; he was interested in the smell of food, but unmoved by stench or perfume (Itard 1972: 97).

Kaspar had been exposed to few sensory stimuli in his dark cell and so did not have the chance to become accustomed to varied sensations, but had rather to make the most of the few sensations which were

available to him. (One suspects that Kaspar was by nature a sensitive person and that this natural sensitivity was greatly intensified by his confinement.) Most sensations of the outside world struck him as new and painfully strong. His new sensory order was in part an extension and flooding of his previous, limited one, and, in part, a response to the social order which accompanied his first experiences of sensory richness. That is, he was gradually, but relentlessly, taught to regulate his new and overwhelming sensory experiences according to the accepted cultural sensory model.

The different results of sensory abundance and sensory deprivation for Victor and Kaspar are illustrated by Victor's pleasure or indifference at most powerful sensory experiences and Kaspar's repugnance. Victor often stopped to look through the window at the view of the countryside, whereas Kaspar would turn away from a similar view as a disgusting confusion of forms and colours. Victor was able to pick up boiling potatoes and roll in the snow, and he carefully smelled everything in his path. Strong sensations of heat and cold made Kaspar cry with pain and he avoided most odours as nauseating.

The fact that all three children, despite their different backgrounds, had an extraordinarily keen sense of smell suggests that this sense may be by nature of great importance to humans and that it loses its importance only when suppressed by culture.<sup>4</sup> More than any other sense, smell seems to function as an indicator of presence and identity. Kamala smelled for traces of Amala after the younger girl's death and burial (Singh and Zingg 1966: 60). When Victor was lost and found by his governess, it was only after sniffing her hands and arms repeatedly that he decided to go home with her and allowed himself to express joy at seeing her again (Itard 1972: 150). For Kaspar, it was the odour of a thing, above all, which affected him (Feuerbach 1966: 335-6).

The data also show how completely taste preferences and aversions are determined by custom. Kamala, accustomed to eating meat, preferred it to all other food. The taste of meat made Kaspar, accustomed to bread and water, extremely ill. (Of course, not only the taste of the food was involved, but also its digestion.) The children slowly had their tastes reconditioned by the foods of their new environment. Kamala acquired a mostly vegetarian diet in accordance with the gastronomic customs of India (Singh and Zingg 1966: 77), and Kaspar learned to eat meat (except pork), in accordance with those of Europe (Feuerbach 1966: 356). This was not an easy process, however. According to Feuerbach: 'One of the most difficult undertakings was to accustom [Kaspar] to the use of ordinary food ... The first that he was willing to take was water gruel, which he learned to relish daily more and more, and on

this account he imagined that it was every day made better and better' (1966: 329).

Although the children at first long for their former homes, they are eventually socialized and adopt the sensory codes of their new social environments. One characteristic they share after they are socialized is a strong sense of order.<sup>5</sup> Kamala likes everything to be done in its 'proper' way and becomes annoyed at changes in routine (Singh and Zingg 1966: 92-3, 95). At first Victor ate food which was dirty without minding; later he would throw away his food if any speck of dirt fell upon it (Itard 1972: 110). Feuerbach notes that Kaspar 'observed almost every grain of dust upon our clothes; and when he once saw a few grains of snuff on my frill, he showed them to me, briskly indicating that he wished me to wipe those nasty things away' (1966: 322). This may indicate the children's need for a strong order to replace their previous customs, and their inability, after adapting themselves to a new system of life, to further adapt themselves to any variations within the system.

Social conditioning seems, in some ways, to have had the result of lessening the importance of sensory data for the children. This is perhaps because a high value was not usually placed on keen sensory ability in the cultures into which the children were incorporated, and the children had to direct their attention instead to learning the social skills necessary for survival in their new environments. This process is most evident with Kaspar, who had the sharpest senses of all the children and who was socialized to the greatest extent.

As Kaspar's intellect developed and his interests extended beyond the material world, his exquisite sensitivity declined. Feuerbach writes of him as a young man: 'The extraordinary, almost preternatural elevation of his senses ... has sunk almost to the common level ... Of the gigantic powers of his memory ... not a trace remains' (1966: 356). Whereas we tend to think that the senses become keen through extensive training and use, Kaspar's senses were apparently keen from not being trained or used, or, at least, having had to make the most out of a scarcity of sensations. As the constant repetition of experience dulled this keenness and his mind became distracted with other things, Kaspar's sensorium adjusted itself to its new role and processed only that information which was required by the cultural order.

If culture dulled the children's senses in some respects, in other respects it educated them. Victor and Kaspar, and perhaps Kamala as well, had to be trained to distinguish three-dimensional objects from their two-dimensional representations. Victor and Kamala had to learn to be sensitive to changes in temperature, and Victor to distinguish objects by touch alone. A fundamental part of this sensory education

consisted of teaching the children to restrain their sensuality in various ways: from Kaspar's learning that he could not always indulge in his predilection for scarlet, to Victor's learning to suppress his sexual impulses (Itard 1972: 176–7). The fact that the children's senses could be so well educated, under the circumstances, demonstrates how amenable the senses are to cultural influence.

The care taken in conditioning the children's senses to conform to the cultural norm, even where their deviations from it appeared peripheral – for example, Victor's and Kamala's indifference to heat and cold and Kaspar's aversion to the smell and taste of meat – illustrates the degree to which society directs what and how we perceive. In order to function as a member of a culture, one must be able to adopt its sensory order. Kaspar was able to achieve this to a large extent, Victor and Kamala less so. Victor, for example, may have been manifesting the socially appropriate emotion by expressing joy on being reunited with his governess after an absence; however, so long as he recognized her primarily through smell, rather than sight, he remained a cultural outsider.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, the accounts of these three cases reveal as much about the perceptual preoccupations of the cultures in which the children were discovered, as about the sensory functioning of the children themselves. This is particularly noticeable in the case of Victor, who, appearing in Enlightenment France, stepped not only into the ready-made cultural niche of the 'savage,' noble or otherwise, but also became a living experiment in sensationalist philosophy.

The question which had absorbed Locke, Condillac, and other sensationalists was the extent to which thought was based on sensory experience. So eager were some of these philosophers to test their theories on human subjects that one of them proposed that a group of orphans be kept in complete darkness until they reached the age of reason, so that their virgin visual experiences could be recorded (Paulson 1987: 37). Little wonder then that Itard, strongly influenced as he was by sensationalism, would attempt to structure Victor's mind by structuring his senses and see in the results of this experiment 'material proof of the most important truths, of those truths for the discovery of which Locke and Condillac were indebted merely to the force of their genius' (1972: 138).<sup>7</sup>

In his approach to Victor's sensory education, Itard displayed many of the sensory prejudices of his culture. The sense which appeared the most developed in Victor, and therefore the one which might provide the best access to his mind, was smell. Itard, however, in accordance with the sensory order of his (and our own) culture, dismissed smell as

having only a biological role: 'linked as [smell] is more to the digestive functions than to the development of the intellectual faculties, it lay somewhat outside the scope of my study' (1972: 150). This in spite of the fact that, by Itard's own evidence, Victor used his sense of smell not only in relation to food, but as a fundamental and pleasurable means of gaining knowledge of the world (for example, in his habit of carefully smelling everything in his path).

Taste, however, which for Victor was purely related to food, was viewed by Itard in a quite different regard: 'It would seem perhaps that the sense of taste, being related to the same [digestive] functions [as smell], would be equally foreign to my purpose. I did not consider the matter in this light, however, believing that taste plays a greater role than the limited function assigned to it by nature in that it relates to pleasures as varied as they are numerous – a gift of civilization – and it seemed to me advantageous to develop, or rather pervert it' (1972: 150). Itard here is evidently associating the biological sense of taste with the metaphorical meaning of taste as 'aesthetic discernment,' a concept so important to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century culture. By developing Victor's biological taste, Itard therefore hoped to develop the boy's intellectual taste. Hence, the satisfaction with which he declared that he had 'succeeded in awakening the taste of our young man for a whole quantity of dishes he had hitherto always distained' (1972: 150).

The social program which lay behind this elaboration of Victor's taste is revealed by Itard in the following statement.

There exists equally with the savage the most insulated, as with the citizen raised to the highest point of civilization, a uniform proportion between their ideas and their wants; that their continually increasing multiplicity, in a state of polished society, ought to be regarded as one of the grand instruments for producing the development of the human mind; so that we may be allowed to lay it down as a general proposition, that all the causes, whether accidental, local, or political, which tend to augment or diminish the number of our wants, contribute of necessity to extend or contract the sphere of our knowledge, and the empire of the sciences, of the fine arts, and of social industry. (1972: 139)

Victor's tastes were limited and his wants few; consequently on first being re-introduced to society, according to Itard's logic, his thoughts and social uses were also limited. Teaching Victor to acquire a taste for the dainties of French cuisine was thus quite clearly the first step in

teaching him to become a consumer (and producer) of the dainties of French civilization.

The platitude 'there is no accounting for taste' would certainly seem to be belied by the foregoing. Not only can taste, and other sensory traits, be accounted for, their elaboration within society is rarely simply a matter of chance or of personal preference. As our habits of eating, dress, language, and so on are determined by our culture, so are our habits of perception, and as the former express cultural codes, so do the latter. The myth of perceptual transparency would, indeed, be hard to sustain given the cultural imprint which so many other functions of the human body undeniably manifest.

It is, in part, the very multiplicity of codes and discourses in our culture which distracts our attention from the ways in which perception itself is culturally constructed and coded. The 'wild child,' who appears among us with apparently no cultural baggage and no language, without a world-view, but with a very different way of perceiving the world, compels us to come to our senses. In considering the sensory orders of 'wild children,' and how these orders are restructured according to the norms of the societies in which they are discovered, we grow aware of the extent to which our own sensory consciousness is structured by our culture.

### Acknowledgments

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### Notes

- 1 J.A.L. Singh and Robert Zingg discuss many of the presumed cases of feral humans in *Wolf-Children and Feral Man* (1966: 177–365).
- 2 For a discussion of the importance attributed to the sense of touch in eighteenth-century thought see Summers (1987: 325).
- 3 Charles Maclean discusses this controversy in *The Wolf Children* (1978: 266–83).
- 4 Bruno Bettelheim reports that autistic or schizophrenic children sometimes manifest a hypersensitivity to smell and touch, while they are unresponsive to vision or sounds (1967: 369).
- 5 The craving for order is also characteristic of the autistic child (Bettelheim 1967: 83). 'Wild' children, because of their isolation from society, may, in fact, have traits in common with autistic children, who have often been

abandoned by society. None of the wild children examined here, however, displayed the hostility which is often characteristic of autistic children, nor did any of them refuse to interact with their environments after the initial shock of capture.

- 6 An interesting example of the impropriety of smell as a means of recognition in Western culture is provided by Peter Gay in *The Education of the Senses* (1984: 415). Gay notes that when Thomas Carlyle's *Journey to Germany, Autumn 1858* was edited by his nephew, the word 'see' was substituted for the word 'smell' in a phrase concerning the eagerness of a waiting crowd to 'smell the Prince of Prussia.'
- 7 Many of the techniques of sensory education developed by Itard for use with Victor, such as recognizing objects through touch, would later be appropriated by Maria Montessori in her method of child education.

## CHAPTER 5

# Puzzling over the Senses: From Plato to Marx

*Anthony Synnott*

This essay presents a brief overview of Western thinking about the senses from Plato and Aristotle, through the range of Christian thought, to Hegel and Marx. Particular attention is paid to attitudes towards the senses, to the hierarchization of the sensorium, and to how the senses are, or were, lived. Certain questions or puzzles recur throughout this discussion, such as: are the senses valid or invalid ways to knowledge? morally good or bad? means or ends? which sense is noblest, and why? As will be shown, the answers to these questions have varied over the ages, in particular oscillating between sense-positive and sense-negative, also between the superiority and inferiority of sense-knowledge with respect to reason. The puzzles are indeed very ancient.

### **The Ancient Greeks**

The Greeks lived and loved the sensuous life. The Olympic Games, the banquets, pottery, sculptures, erotic paintings, and plays all proclaimed their enjoyment of beauty, food and drink, sex and love, music and debate. The Greeks have often been portrayed as a hedonistic people, and there may be some truth in this. The first philosophy of hedonism was developed by Aristippus (c. 435–350 BC), a friend of Socrates. He asserted that pleasure is an end in itself, insisted that ‘bodily pleasures are far better than mental pleasures,’ and lived a luxurious life (Laertius, vol. 1, 1972: 215–19).

Yet there is also a strong streak of scepticism, a distrust of the senses, among the earliest Greek philosophers, notably Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Empedocles (Guthrie 1962: 394). Parmenides, it seems,

was the first to make the momentous distinction between the senses and reason; in his poem the goddess warns him not to trust the senses but to judge by reason (Guthrie 1965: 25).

Yet, while Empedocles was persuaded of the fallibility of the senses, he argued that the mind too is a feeble instrument:

Narrow are the powers that are spread through the body, and many the miseries that burst in, blunting thought. Men behold in their span but a little part of life, then swift to die are carried off and fly away like smoke, persuaded of one thing only, that which each has chanced on as they are driven every way; yet each boasts that he has found the whole. So little are these things to be seen or heard by men, or grasped by the understanding. Thou then, since thou hast turned aside to this place [i.e. earth], shalt learn no further than mortal wit can reach. (In Guthrie 1965: 138)

Indeed, in his view, the senses *are* one way to understanding and all ways may be valid: 'Come now, observe with all thy powers how each thing is clear, neither holding sight in greater trust compared with hearing, nor noisy hearing above what the tongue makes plain, nor withhold trust from any of the other limbs [i.e., organs, parts of the body], by whatever way there is a channel to understanding, but grasp each thing in the way in which it is clear' (in Guthrie 1965: 139).

Despite Empedocles, the Greek tradition insisted on drawing a clear distinction between the senses and the mind, and on the epistemological and metaphysical superiority of the latter. The senses had a place, but that place was low, restricted to the animal part of humanity. Animals had senses; but the distinctive characteristic of humans was the faculty of reason. This is very clear in Plato's famous allegory of the cave in Book 7 of the *Republic*. The captive audience in the cave, trusting to their senses, believe that the flickering shadows on the wall, and the sonorous echoes, are 'real,' but they are deluded; reason, says Plato, not the senses, is necessary for the understanding of 'the real' and 'the good' (Book 7; 1963: 748–50, 764).

Elsewhere, Plato argues that there are three types of men: of gold, silver, and bronze, ruled by the head, the heart, and the belly, corresponding to reason, courage, and ... the senses. To be ruled by the senses is to be the lowest type of humanity, fitted only for menial labour, such as farming, in the *Republic*. For Plato, the superiority of mind over matter was a given; and the social structure of his ideal Republic – guardians/philosophers, warriors, and farmers/artisans – reflected the congruence of politics and biology (*Republic*, Books 3 and 4; 1963: 659–88).

Yet Plato was interested in the senses. He attempted to explain, mythologically, the origins of the senses. The most notable aspect of his discussion is the primacy he accords to the sense of sight as the foundation of philosophy, and hence the sense that leads to God and Truth: 'The sight in my opinion is the source of greatest benefit for us, for had we never seen the stars and the sun and the heaven, none of the words which we have spoken about the universe would ever have been uttered ... And from this source we have derived philosophy, than which no greater good ever was or will be given by the gods to mortal man' (*Timaeus* 47; 1963: 1174–5). Similarly in the *Symposium* (210–12; 1963: 562–3), Plato argued that it is *visual* beauty which initially inspires the philosopher to mount the 'heavenly ladder' to God, who is Absolute Beauty (see further Synnott 1989, 1990). Plato did not discuss the sense of touch, however, nor the relationships between the senses.

Aristotle was equally delighted with the sense of sight. Echoing Plato, he began his *Metaphysics* linking sight to knowledge, the distinguishing feature of humanity: 'All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight ... The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things' (*Metaphysics* 980; 1984: 1552). Unlike Plato, Aristotle did discuss all five senses; he also ranked them: 'Now sight is superior to touch in purity, and hearing and smell to taste' (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1176; 1984: 1858; see further *On the Soul* 421; 1985: 670; *Sense and Sensibilia* 437; 1985: 694).

Sight is privileged. Aristotle not only devoted more time and space to sight than to the other senses, he described it as being, of all the senses, 'The most highly developed sense' (*On the Soul* 429; 1984: 682); it is also 'the clearest, and it is for this reason that we prefer it to the other senses' (*Dialogues*; 1984: 2412) – no doubt because it is so enlightening, so pure and so clear! Touch he described as 'the primary form of sense'; primary because it belongs to all animals for 'many animals have neither sight, hearing nor smell'; also because unlike other senses touch works by direct contact (so does taste, he added, but taste is a form of touch); and also because touch is essential not only for well-being but also for being (*On the Soul* 413–15, 435; 1984: 658–60, 691–2). Despite these arguments from ubiquity, directness, and necessity, Aristotle regarded touch as metaphysically and morally inferior to the other senses.

Touch and taste are 'animal' senses, in his view, unlike the other three 'human' senses. In touch and taste, through lust and gluttony, humanity is 'incontinent and intemperate.' These are, he insisted, the senses of

'least honour ... and the only pleasures deserving of reproach' (*Problems* 949–50; 1984: 1491–3). In contrast, he pointed out that 'in regard to the pleasures of sight, hearing and smell, no-one is called profligate if he is in excess' (*Eudemean Ethics* 1231; 1984: 1950).

Aristotle's rank ordering of the senses, by criteria such as clarity, purity, degree of development, desirability, honour, enlightenment, and indeed 'animality,' is presented in Table 1. This Aristotelian ranking of the senses has persisted over the centuries; indeed Hegel's hierarchy is very similar, as we shall see presently. The principal change since Aristotle has been in the *evaluation* of the sensorium.

### The Early Christians

While the Greeks gloried in the senses, particularly sight, Christian thinking about, and practice of, the senses has been deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, the senses are good as created by God. On the other hand, the senses may lead the Christian down the broad road to sin, hell, and damnation.

Christ's life may be said to have exemplified a positive attitude towards the senses and to human life: he fed the hungry, healed the sick, raised the dead, and turned water into wine (good wine at that). He taught his disciples to pray: 'Give us this day our daily bread' (Matthew 6: 11). And, according to the Book of Matthew (25: 34–5), at the Last Judgment the Son of Man will admit the righteous to the Kingdom saying: 'For when I was hungry, you gave me food; when thirsty you gave me drink, when I was a stranger you took me into your home, and naked you clothed me.' Christ therefore recognized human sensory and physical needs for food, drink, warmth, and comfort as legitimate, natural, and normal. Recently, such 'secular' and 'physical' concerns have been taken to legitimate liberation theology.

But Christ also warned that the senses are a means to an end, not an end in themselves: 'if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire' (Matthew 18: 9). And his personal life was austere, with fasting, watches, prayer, poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Paul, like Christ, led an ascetic life and, if anything, was more cautious about sensory gratification than his teacher. He frequently condemned gluttony, lust, drunkenness and adultery, which he described as 'sins of the flesh.' As an example, Saint Paul warns the Philippians: 'I have told you this many times before, and now I repeat it with tears: there are many whose lives make them enemies of Christ's death on the cross.'

TABLE 1  
The Aristotelian hierarchical order of the senses

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Sight	}	Human
Hearing		
Smell		
Taste	}	Animal
Touch		

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They are going to end up in hell, because their god is their bodily desires. They are proud of what they should be ashamed of, and they think only of things that belong to this world' (Philippians 3: 18–20). It is not simply the abuse of the senses, it is the senses themselves that are at fault; for, Saint Paul argues, the senses are 'natural,' they are part of human nature – and as such they are opposed to the Spirit. Human nature and the Spirit are 'enemies,' Saint Paul warned the Galatians: 'What our human nature wants is opposed to what the Spirit wants, and what the Spirit wants is opposed to what our human nature wants. These two are enemies, and this means that you cannot do what you want to do' (Galatians 5: 16–17).

This idea of the self at war with itself – the Spirit against human nature – is found elsewhere in Saint Paul; it is recoded as mind against body in this well-known passage: 'I don't do the good I want to do; instead I do the evil that I do not want to do ... My inner being delights in the law of God. But I see a different law at work in my body – a law that fights against the law which my mind approves of ... Who will rescue me from this body which is taking me to my death?' (Romans 7: 19–24). Saint Paul insists that the Christian should 'mortify' the senses (Romans 8: 13). He told the Corinthians: 'I bruise my body and make it know its master' (1 Corinthians 9: 27); and he instructed the Galatians: 'they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts' (Galatians 5: 24). These ideas of mortification, bruising, and crucifixion were very un-Greek notions of the body and the senses; to the Greeks, the body and the senses should be enjoyed, in moderation.

This dualistic and ascetic tradition persists through many of the Church Fathers to Saint Ignatius and beyond (cf. Synnott 1988). John Chrysostom (c. 347–407), Archbishop of Constantinople, was particularly articulate on the matter of the senses, and the parts of this 'body which is taking me to my death.' Here he is preaching on various types of sensory 'fasting':

let not my mouth only fast, but also the eye, and the ear, and the

feet, and the hands, and all the members of our bodies. Let the hands fast, by being pure from raping and avarice. Let the feet fast, by ceasing from running to the unlawful spectacles ... Let the ear fast also. The fasting of the ear consists in refusing to receive evil speakings and calumnies ... Let the mouth too fast from disgraceful speeches and railing.

The beauty of woman is the greatest snare. Or rather, not the beauty of woman but unchastened gazing! For we should not accuse the objects, but ourselves, and our own carelessness. (1956: 359, 442)

Yet Chrysostom was not entirely sense- or body-negative. He wrote eloquently of the body as a manifestation of God's 'own power and wisdom': the eye, the eyelashes, the eyebrows, hair, the brain, the heart, even the nails, but especially the eye. He thought of the eye as beautiful and powerful, as 'instructing us' to God, and as 'more sure and distinct' than the ear:

God, the Supreme Artist ... hath been able to make an eye so beautiful, as to astonish all who behold it, and to implant in it such power, that it can at once survey the high aerial expanse, and by the aid of a small pupil embrace the mountains, forests, hills, the ocean, yea, the heaven, by so small a thing.

The heavens may be silent, but the sight of them emits a voice, that is louder than a trumpet's sound; instructing us not by the ear, but through the medium of the eyes; for the latter is a sense which is more sure and distinct than the former. (1956: 414–5, 401)

Chrysostom clearly reflects the Aristotelian politics of the senses, ranking the eye as superior to the ear, but he also insists on the 'bi-morality' of the eye: it can look either way, up or down, at God or woman, and so can other senses be directed either way.

In his *Confessions*, Saint Augustine (354–430) described with remarkable frankness his ambivalence towards, and his battles with, the senses. On the one hand, they are the channels through which the glory of God is experienced: 'You called me; you cried aloud to me; you broke my barrier of deafness. You shone upon me; your radiance enveloped me; you put my blindness to flight. You shed your fragrance about me; I drew breath and now I gasp for your sweet odour. I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am inflamed with love of your peace' (Book x: 27; 1961: 232). On the other hand, they are occasions of sin, and dangerous. He complains that 'the senses are not content to take second place. Simply because I allow them their

due, as adjuncts to reason, they attempt to take precedence and forge ahead of it, with the result that I sometimes sin' (Book x: 33; 1961: 238). All the senses are problematic in this way, but some more than others. 'The sense of smell does not trouble me greatly with its attractions' but, he admits, 'I am tempted through the eye' and 'more fascinated by the pleasures of sound.' Augustine loved music; 'So I waver between the danger that lies in gratifying the senses [i.e. simply listening to music] and the benefits which, as I know from experience, can accrue from singing' (Book x: 29–34; 1961: 233–41). Augustine's conflict between the enjoyment and the renunciation of sensual pleasure is perhaps best illustrated by his famous prayer: 'Give me chastity and continence, but not yet' (Book VIII: 7; 1961: 169).

Augustine's contemporary, Saint Jerome (347–c. 419), was not so ambivalent. Jerome praised marriages only because they bore virgins: 'I praise marriage and wedlock, but only because they beget celibates; I gather roses from thorns, gold from earth, pearls from shells' (in Nelson 1978: 52). He insisted that 'all sexual intercourse is unclean' (in Pagels 1988: 94; see further Brown 1988).

The early church institutionalized this ascetic tradition: the renunciation of sensual gratification and the mortification of the flesh. Chastity, martyrdom, and virginity were celebrated in the imminent expectation of the Second Coming. The Stylites or pillar ascetics who emerged in the fifth century pioneered what could be called competitive sensory deprivation; and the first monastic communities were developed in the Eastern and the Western churches in the fourth to the sixth centuries. In this time, for many Christians, life was no doubt hard: scrabbling to make a living through war and plague, drought and flood. For them, Christian ascetic doctrine may have been a consolation, an 'opiate' in Marx's famous phrase, because suffering and pain were ennobled and graced.

### The Second Millennium

Christian reservations about sensory gratification notwithstanding, Christians did create works of surpassing beauty, as the soaring Gothic cathedral and abbey demonstrate. The oral and aural senses were also gratified by the chanting of the Gregorian liturgy. And on feast days Christians feasted; they celebrated with food and drink, wines and spirits. The Carthusians invented chartreuse and the Benedictines, naturally, benedictine. Sensory gratification could be good, so long as it was directed toward the glory of God.

But it was the ascetic tradition that gained the most ground in the

Middle Ages. New monastic orders were founded from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries: the Cistercians, Carthusians, Franciscans, and Dominicans. The Flagellant movement, in which bands of Christians walked from town to town, praying, doing penance, and scourging themselves, indicates the depth of ascetic thought in popular culture. Indeed a new spirituality demanded the imposition of physical pain on the self, in imitation of Christ's passion and death.

In the public life of the church, the Cistercians and Carthusians attacked the expense and luxury and decorations of the churches as distracting from the adoration of God; and in the thirteenth century Saint Thomas Aquinas protested against instrumental music in church, not because it was not beautiful, but precisely because it *was* so beautiful. Saint Bernard, who had preached the Second Crusade, struck the authentic note of asceticism when he cried: 'For us all bodily delights are nothing but dung' (Eco 1986: 4–11).

Aquinas (c. 1225–74), known as the Angelic Doctor, presented the most systematic analysis of the senses. No question that he privileged sight, following both Plato and Aristotle: he states clearly that 'the highest and perfect felicity of intellectual nature consists in the vision of God' – not corporeal vision, admittedly, for God is not corporeal, but not touch nor smell nor taste nor sound either (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 3, pt. 1, chs. 60, 51; 1956: 199, 177). This doctrine of the Beatific Vision, perhaps rooted ultimately in Plato's discussion in the *Symposium*, is also founded on Saint Paul's assertion: 'What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face to face' (1 Corinthians 13: 12). Thus, Aquinas gave theological sanction to a long-established philosophical and cultural tradition of the hegemony of sight.

In his many discussions on human happiness and the meaning of life, Aquinas makes it quite clear that human happiness does not consist in riches, glory, honours, and so on; nor does it consist in 'pleasures of the flesh,' 'the chief of which are those of food and sex,' nor in 'goods of the body' such as health, beauty, and strength; nor in 'the senses.' The arguments are similar in each chapter, hinging (in this last case) on the superiority of the intellect over the senses, and of men over animals, which also have senses but not intellect (Book 3, pt. 1, chs. 27, 32, 33; 1956: 110–13, 119–20). More bluntly he argues that through the pleasures of the flesh and the senses: 'Man is kept away from a close approach to God, for this approach is effected through contemplation, and the aforementioned pleasures are the chief impediment to contemplation, since they plunge man very deep into sensible things, consequently distracting him from intelligible objects' (1956: 113). Most interesting is his implicit rank order, reflecting Aristotle, with vision at

the top and 'food and sex' (taste and touch) at the bottom; and his negative evaluation of the pleasures of the senses as an 'impediment to contemplation'.<sup>1</sup>

Saint Ignatius Loyola (1491–1536), the founder of the Society of Jesus, was equally concerned about the senses. In his *Spiritual Exercises* he advised retreatants to maintain 'custody of the eyes' at all times; also custody of the mouth, both as an instrument of nutrition and as a medium of communication. He proposed eight 'Rules for Eating,' by which the individual 'will experience less pleasurable gratification in feeding his body' and will remain 'master of himself,' rather than slave of his appetite. With regard to speech: 'No one may swear'; 'Do not speak a thoughtless word'; 'Nothing should be said to take away another's character or for mere gossip' (1963: 39, 73–5, 26–7). In one of his more contentious recommendations he insists that even sight should be doubted: 'this is the attitude of mind we should maintain: I will believe that the white object I see is black if that should be the decision of the hierarchical Church' (1963: 122). Finally, the Rules of the Order insist that 'No-one may touch another, even in jest.'

Not content with controlling the sensory appetites, Ignatius also recommended penance to those following his spiritual exercises; retreatants should cut down on food and sleep and 'chastise the body by inflicting actual pain on it. This is done by wearing hairshirts or cords or iron chains, by scourging or beating ourselves and by other kinds of harsh treatment' (1963: 39–40). The redemptive value of pain and mortification has a long history.<sup>2</sup>

### The Early Moderns

Christians therefore were very ambivalent toward the senses. Necessary for life, they could, however, lead to damnation; they could be enjoyed, but not too much; they reflected God's goodness, but could lead into temptation. After the Renaissance, concern with the senses became less moralistic, and more practical, more epistemological, and more scientific.

Montaigne (1533–1592) adopted both the old and the new attitudes to the senses. One of his essays is entitled 'To flee from sensual pleasures at the price of life'; and he argues that 'there is no sensual pleasure so just that excess and intemperance in it are not a matter of reproach.' Yet he also confessed: 'I like very much to be surrounded with good smells, and I hate bad ones beyond measure' (1965: 161, 148, 228).

Thomas Hobbes is most well-known for his political philosophy, but he began *Leviathan* (1651) with a theory of knowledge that opens with

the chapter 'Of Sense.' He states firmly his materialism and the utility and value of the senses: 'there is no conception in a man's world which has not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense' (1960: 7). The senses are the foundation of thought as thought is the foundation of politics and social life. Hobbes began with the senses and concluded with the state.

René Descartes developed his philosophy in his *Meditations* (1641) with a totally different evaluation of the senses. Inspired by the example of mathematics (with its deductive truths), he attempted to build a new philosophy from first principles, and to this end adopted the method of 'systematic doubt.' Rehearsing all the time-honoured arguments concerning the fallibility of the senses or sense *deception* (the stick in the water which appears bent, the invisibility of objects in the blind spot, warm water feeling hot if one's hand is cold), he concluded that 'it is easier not to trust entirely to any thing by which we have once been deceived.' So 'I shall consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, nor any senses' (1973: 145, 148). Or again, 'I shall now close my eyes, I shall stop my ears, I shall call away all my senses' (1973: 157). And when all this had been done, one inescapable, indubitable truth remained: 'I am, I exist, that is certain' (1973: 151).<sup>3</sup> This proposition, first framed in the *Discourse on Method* (1637) as 'I think, therefore I am: *Cogito ergo sum*,' represents mind-body dualism, or the split between thinking and sensing, at its most extreme, since for Descartes 'this "me," that is to say, the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from body' (1973: 101). It was fortunate for Descartes that he never came to doubt he had an 'I,' given the way he dismissed every other material support or proof of his existence.<sup>4</sup>

Descartes was not only a philosopher, he was also a scientist, and published work on astronomy, meteorology, music, and optics. The two careers were not well integrated in his mind. He began his *Dioptric* with superlatives: 'The entire conduct of our lives depends upon our senses, among which that of sight being the most universal and most noble, there is no doubt that inventions which serve to augment its power are the most useful which could exist.' And telescopes 'seem to have opened to us the way to attain a much greater and more perfect knowledge of nature' (in Vrooman 1970: 128). Thus, with his philosopher's hat on his head, Descartes closes his eyes; with his scientist's hat on, he uses a telescope.

The scientific and experimental paradigm of vision, which Descartes did so much to advance, had not long before been thought to challenge the church; for example, the Galileo fiasco. As will be recalled, during

the Middle Ages philosophers were prepared to believe that the white object they saw was black, if that was the wisdom of the church. After Descartes' century, religion and science, church and state, were divorced. And the scientific paradigm of the senses reinforced a materialistic sense-positive evaluation, in contrast to the Christian paradigm. This shift is reflected in the sensational philosophy of Condillac and Locke. In his *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690), Locke described the senses enthusiastically as 'this great source of most of the ideas we have,' and as one of the two 'fountains of knowledge' (Book 2, chs. 1, 2, and 3; 1964: 90). And he insisted that 'Nothing can be in the intellect which was not first in the senses' (Book 4, chs. 3, 5; 1964: 332). Locke, like Hobbes, began with the very senses which Descartes had rejected.

David Hume went further. Like Empedocles, but much more radically, he was equally sceptical of reason and the senses. Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) established scepticism as a philosophy with the principle of 'universal doubt.' Unable to put any faith in reason (as Descartes did), Hume found philosophy profoundly depressing sometimes, and had to rely on nature – the senses – for a cure: 'Since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds [of depression brought on by so much doubt], nature herself ... cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimera. I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse and am merry with my friends' (Book 1: 7; 1969: 316). The depressing logic of reason is therefore, in Hume's common-sense view, 'cured' by food and drink and talk and laughter. Reason, it seems, should not be taken too seriously.

Surprisingly, for a philosopher (in that philosophers tend to favour certainty), Hume insisted that 'all knowledge degenerates into probability ... that all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of out natures' (Book 1: 4, 1; 1969: 231, 234). Hume, therefore, rather casually reversed the traditional philosophy of the dominance of reason over the senses, mind over body, which had seemed so well entrenched from Plato and Aristotle through Aquinas to Descartes and Locke.<sup>5</sup> The light of reason was now found to be flawed, even depressing, *only* to be tolerated on a full stomach – that is, with the senses gratified. The piercing clarity of thought needs roast beef and laughter. The senses, therefore, do not necessarily imply hedonism; they may, in Hume's view, simply imply sense: common sense.

## The Nineteenth Century: Hegel and Marx

By the nineteenth century, attitudes had changed yet again. Hegel (1770–1831) treated the senses, and the related parts of the body, in a new paradigm, as symbols of the self, as survival mechanisms, and as instruments of communication. He developed an extremely sophisticated philosophy of the sensorium (see Table 2). He distinguished between animal and human biology, and upper and lower human senses. Here he describes the relation between animal biology and the sensorium: ‘In the formation of the animal head the predominant thing is the mouth, as the tool for chewing, with the upper and lower jaw, the teeth and the masticatory muscles. The other organs are added to this principal organ as only servants and helpers: the nose especially as sniffing out food, the eye, less important, for spying it’ (1975: 728).

The rank order of the sense organs for animals is, therefore, mouth, nose, and eyes, with the mouth as the principal survival mechanism and the nose and eyes as ‘servants and helpers.’ Hegel did not mention ears and skin, but one suspects he would rank them in that order. He argues, however, that neither the biology nor the hierarchy is the same for humans, for ‘the human appearance in its bodily form [bears] an impress of the spirit – indicative not of a practical relation to things but of an ideal or theoretical one.’ Thus, in the upper part of the face, the ‘soulful and spiritual relation to things is manifested ... in the intellectual brow and, lying under it, the eye, expressive of the soul’ (1975: 729). In the lower part of the face is the mouth, ‘the practical organ of nourishment,’ which Hegel evaluated as an animal function. Hegel largely ignored the function of the mouth as a medium of communication, which is particularly odd since he lectured on this matter! And he found it significant that the nose is intermediate between eye and mouth; but it still belongs to an ‘animal need’ and is ‘in the service of the mouth and feeding.’ Since the nose is ‘in the service of the mouth,’ it is ranked lower, despite its physical location.

Hegel identified the ear as more related to the spirit than to the practical sphere. The chin, not being a sense, only completes ‘the spiritual expression of the mouth.’ Of hair, the lowest-ranked part of the face, he says: ‘Hair as such has the character of a plant production rather than of an animal one. It is a sign of weakness rather than a proof of the organism’s strength’ (1975: 729–37).

Like Plato, Hegel did not discuss the sense of touch, nor the skin as a sensory organ. This omission suggests that Hegel thought this was the least important of the senses, a fact consistent with his idealism. But he was fascinated by the eye; believing that the soul or spirit is ‘diffused’

TABLE 2  
The hierarchy of the senses in animals and humans  
according to Hegel (1975: 728–37)

	Animals	Humans	Sphere
Primary	Mouth	Forehead Eyes Ears	Spiritual
Secondary	Nose Eyes Ears Skin	Mouth Nose Chin Hair	Animal  Vegetable

throughout the body, he observes: ‘If we ask in which particular organ the whole soul appears as soul, we will at once name the eye; for in the eye the soul is concentrated and the soul does not necessarily see through it but is also seen in it’ (1975: 153). Indeed the greatest differences between animals and humans in Hegel’s hierarchies of the senses are the reversed ranks of the mouth and the eyes: eyes are low for animals, high for humans.

For Marx, the greatest difference between humans and animals was problematic – but one thing was certain: it had nothing to do with the ranking of the sensorium and everything to do with the animalization of humanity in the capitalist mode of production. Marx criticized Hegelian philosophy for its idealism and its abstraction: ‘the philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to change it,’ he argued (1963: 84). Marx began, not with the Christian God, or with the Cartesian *cogito*, or Hume’s doubt, but with the satisfaction of human biological and sensory needs:

[We] must begin by stating the first presupposition of all human existence, and therefore of all history, namely, that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to ‘make history.’ But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing, and many other things. The first historical act is, therefore, the production of material life itself. This is indeed a historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must be accomplished every day and every hour merely in order to sustain human life. (1963: 75)

In contrast to the entire Western tradition from Plato to Hegel, Marx argues that: ‘Man is affirmed in the objective world not only in the act of thinking but with *all* his senses.’ This is not trivial, as Aquinas or

Descartes might have thought: 'the *forming* of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present' (Marx 1972: 140–1).

But the *degree* of human affirmation is a variable, determined by the relation to the means of production. The 'bestial barbarization' of the worker in the capitalist system not only provides a habitation which is a 'mortuary for which he has to pay', but also denies the worker simple 'animal' necessities, such as light and air:

*Filth ... the sewage of civilization (speaking quite literally) – comes to be the element of life for him. Utter, unnatural neglect, putrefied nature, comes to be his life-element. None of his senses exist any longer, and not only in his human fashion, but in an inhuman fashion, and therefore not even in an animal fashion ... The Irishman no longer knows any need now but the need to eat, and indeed only the need to eat potatoes – and scabby potatoes at that, the worst kind of potatoes. But in each of their industrial towns England and France have already a little Ireland. (Marx 1972: 148–9)*

Marx's burning indignation at the sensory deprivation of the proletariat makes a striking contrast to, for instance, Hegel's theory of the eye. The process of alienation reaches its inevitable conclusion in the 'animalization' of the proletariat: 'man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions – eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal' (Marx 1972: 111). For Marx it is through the senses and the body, in productive and reproductive labour, that people produce and reproduce themselves. Marx, therefore, moved the puzzle of the senses away from the endless debates over whether they are good or bad, how they should be ranked, and which of the senses pertain more to animals than to men. He situated his discourse on the senses squarely within the arena of real, material life – the arena of 'eating, drinking, procreating.'

## Conclusion

Philosophers have been puzzling over the senses for centuries; and the puzzling did not cease with Marx. Indeed each new school of thought seems to construct new paradigms of the sensorium. We have seen a shift from hedonism with Aristippus and moderation with Aristotle, to mortification with the Christians, to Marx's analysis of the alienation of the senses under industrial capitalism.

The distinction between the senses and reason, formulated by Parmenides and Plato, was transformed into an opposition in Christian thought: the spirit and human nature being 'enemies' according to Saint Paul. This hierarchical hostility received its most acute statement in Descartes, who totally rejected the senses, only to be inverted by Hume, who privileged the senses over reason.

In the traditional Christian paradigm, exemplified particularly by Paul, Chrysostom, Aquinas, and Loyola, the senses are a moral dilemma: they threaten the immortal soul. They are means not ends; and their imperatives challenge the working of reason. Yet Montaigne frankly enjoyed the senses; and Locke studied them as a 'fountain of knowledge.' Hume relied on the senses to cheer him up, and to roll away the 'dark clouds' of depression brought on by too much doubting.

For Hegel the senses are not so much moral phenomena, but physical survival systems, means of communication and, in the case of the eye, the concentration of the soul. By contrast, for Marx, humans are only fully human when their sensory needs are gratified; the sensory deprivation of so many workers, men, women, and children, is an alienation, an animalization, and a de-humanization. The negation of the senses under capitalism inspired his materialist sense-positive philosophy and political action. Perhaps ironically, Marxist philosophy has in turn inspired the liberation theology of contemporary Christianity in a powerful synthesis of idealism and materialism.

The solutions to the original questions are therefore perhaps more puzzling than the questions themselves. The answers vary from thinker to thinker, and there is no consensus; but our discussion surely 'illuminates' the range of thinking on the sensorium, as well as the vast importance of the senses in human life, even when they are denied.

### Acknowledgments

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Aquinas believed that his arguments successfully refuted the errors of the

ancient Epicureans (including Aristippus), and the Cerinthians (or Millennarians), who believed that after the Resurrection there would be 'a thousand years of carnal pleasures of the belly' (1956: 113) – that is, a superabundance of tactile and gustatory sensations. Such ideas about the afterlife show quite different evaluations of the senses of taste and touch.

- 2 Since Vatican II, the sensorial and embodied nature of humanity has been substantially revalued (see Nelson 1978; Bodo 1984; Pagels 1988).
- 3 There is an apocryphal tale to the effect that Descartes's corpse stank beyond measure. Defining himself as 'a thing which thinks' (1973: 152), Descartes would never have considered this (his own smell) as proof of his existence, but posterity certainly did (see Robbins 1984: 148–9).
- 4 In his Sixth Meditation, Descartes does admittedly seem to reintegrate self and body: 'Nature also teaches me by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst, etc., that I am not only lodged in my body as a pilot in a vessel, but that I am very closely united to it, and so to speak so intermingled with it that I seem to compose with it one whole' (1973: 192).
- 5 Hume does not draw out the implications of this insight; but later the contradictions were more clearly exposed. Rousseau in Switzerland, and Blake, Wordsworth, and the Romantics in England, glorified nature and the senses, which they associated with life, love, intuition, and passion, in contrast to sterile and death-dealing 'reason,' industry, commerce, law, and society. The tradition persisted with Nietzsche, Whitman, and D.H. Lawrence (see Benthall 1976).

▼PART II  
THE SENSORY CONSTRUCTION  
OF REALITY



## CHAPTER 6

# Sound as a Symbolic System: The Kaluli Drum

*Steven Feld*

How do sounds actively communicate and embody deeply felt sentiments? This question should be at the core of any ethnographic, humanistic, or social scientific concern with music, yet ethnomusicology is just beginning to untangle issues of the musical sign, the relations between symbolic form and social meaning, and the performance of sounds as communicative action. In this essay I wish to contribute an empirical example of how one class of sounds is socially structured to convey meaning. In doing so I will also try to raise issues that are generally relevant to theories of musical meaning and symbolism. By concentrating on the invention, performance, and understanding of drumming among the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea (PNG) I will show that while these sounds overtly communicate through and about acoustic patterns, they are socially organized to do far more, by modulating special categories of sentiment and action when brought forth and properly contextualized by features of staging and performance. This example illustrates how the study of sound as a symbolic system is situated at the intersection of acoustical and cultural analysis, in that such a study involves both an account of the physical or material conditions of sound production and the social and historical conditions of its invocation and interpretation.

There are two opening contexts, one anthropological, the other musical, which form the present arena in which PNG drums are ideologically situated. First is the social reduction of a sound to its visual source. Museum collections throughout the world contain drums from Papua New Guinea; books and catalogues of 'primitive art' are filled with their images. These celebrate shape, carving, patina, and decoration, often

indulging in superlatives about delicate lines, glistening colours, and intricate designs. But what is the consequence for sound? What do we know from these visual displays about the social life of the drum, which is its sound in performance? Unfortunately, all too little. At this point the sounds of PNG drums are rarely heard by outsiders who discourse about them; the sounds have become secondary to their source and the instruments are primarily objects for our visual contemplation. Of the thirty-five or so generally available commercial recordings of PNG music few devote much space to the presentation and analysis of drumming, and a search through Melanesian and Oceanic bibliographies and instrument catalogues (Chenoweth 1976; Fischer 1986; Gourlay 1980; Gourlay et al. 1981; McLean 1977, 1981) indicates a general lack of attention to the cultural analysis of drumming and drum symbolism; most articles focus on the construction and visual-material dimensions of drums and drumming, and comparatively greater attention is paid to the *garamut* wooden log 'slit-drum,' an idiophone, than the *kundu* skin-headed drum, a membranophone (for some of the significant literature see Larias 1983; Niles 1983, 1985; Penney 1980; Webb 1987; Zemp and Kaufmann 1969). It is just recently, with the publication of the first annotated audio survey of PNG music (Niles and Webb 1987), that one can hear some ninety examples of the varieties of *kundu* drumming in Papua New Guinea; unfortunately there is still little detailed acoustical or ethnographic information about these traditions.

Musicologically there is a deeper problem. The axiom of much work has been: when a sound is not complex in the material aspects of its acoustic organization, assume that its social meaning is essentially shallow. Musical meaning, in this view, is essentially 'in the notes' and not 'in the world.' The melodic, metric, and timbral organizations of sounds are taken as indexes of the social significance of musical action. For PNG drums, the consequences of such a view are considerable. Writers of general books, articles, and record jacket notes have assumed a kind of minimalism regarding the meaning of the drum sounds. Such assumptions rest simply on external auditory grounds: the singular timbres, isometric patterns, solo or group performances in or out of synchrony with singers, and lack of use in large multipart percussion ensembles that characterize PNG drum sounds have been read as if they were indexical to 'thin' social significances. The general Western colonial fascination with solo and ensemble technical virtuosity (the musical feature which aligns the 'musical genius' of exotic populations with that of Europe) and the simultaneous fascination with rhythmic and metric complexity unknown in Western traditions (hence an enduring mark of 'otherness') was never extended to Papua New Guinea, and with good

reason. What we are now discovering about the dynamics of the *kundu* involves a very different aesthetic, one that cannot be grasped or appropriated to the West within the same kind of framework that was extended, often positively, to the musics and especially the percussion traditions of Africa and Asia.

Without engaging in further polemic about the form and implication of these closures I hope to open some significant issues by addressing this question: What does it mean when a relatively simple acoustical phenomenon can *only* be apprehended through recourse to complex social facts? Treating the Kaluli drum sound as a symbolic system, rich both in the particulars of its situated meaning and in the general scheme of how Kaluli make sense of their world, we might also come around to the realization that acoustic organizations are always, at a prior level, socially organized.

### People and Place

The Kaluli are one of four subgroups (culturally identical but differentiated by slight dialect variations) who collectively refer to themselves as *Bosavi kalu*, 'Bosavi people' (book-length ethnographic accounts are Feld 1982; B.B. Schieffelin 1990; E.L. Schieffelin 1976). They number some twelve hundred and live on about five thousand square miles of tropical forest lands just north of the slopes of Mount Bosavi on the Great Papuan Plateau in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. They traditionally resided in longhouse communities separated from each other by an hour's walk along forest trails. Each community was made up of members of two or three named patrilineal descent groups, comprising about fifteen families or, in all, some sixty to eighty people. Today this pattern has been modified; communities move less frequently, and in addition to a main longhouse, each community consists of a number of smaller single or double family dwellings. These changes have been promoted by a number of factors and sources, including government and mission. Kaluli people are swidden horticulturalists whose staple food is sago; they also maintain large gardens and hunt small game, wild pigs, and birds in the surrounding primary forest.

Traditional ceremonial life in Bosavi was prolific. In addition to one major ceremony of local invention, several other ceremonies, incorporated from the Lake Kutubu area to the east, the Kamulu area to the south, and the Lake Campbell area to the west, gained great popularity. While Kaluli music activity is primarily vocal, mussel shell (*sob*), seed pod (*sologa*), and crayfish claw (*degegado*) rattles are used in song accompaniment for various ceremonies. It is in this instrumental and

ceremonial context that skin-headed drums have made their way into Kaluli ceremonial life, coming from the south side of Mount Bosavi in the last one hundred years. They are played in several settings, principally as a late-afternoon prelude to an all-night ceremony.

### The Artefact

The Kaluli drum is single-headed and conical, just short of three feet long, and generally measures about five inches across each opening. It is always decorated by a set of carved ridges above the open end, and painted with natural red, white, and black substances. Kaluli call it *ilib*, a polysemous term which also designates 'treehole,' 'chest' (of the body), or 'resonant chamber.' All drum parts are named with human body-part terms; most important here are the inner terms *uš*, *dagan*, and *megɔf*. *Uš* is the term used to describe the upper portion of the drum's inside chamber, below the skin *mise*, 'head' (note the same bodily metaphor in English percussion terminology). *Uš* is also a polysemous term which equally designates 'egg,' 'nut,' 'phlegm'; it has been semantically extended too in recent times to include significant aspects of the ethnographer's cargo, namely, 'batteries,' 'film,' and 'audio tape.' In effect *uš* denotes an outer hard shell or coating covering a softer inner substance that has some essence, living power, or quality. *Dagan* signifies 'voice' or 'throat'; this is the area just above the open *megɔf* or 'mouth' end of the drum. To produce sound from its *domo*, 'body,' a drum must resound from its 'head,' resonate in the 'inner chest,' and speak from its 'voice' and out its 'mouth.'

Drums are made, owned, cared for, passed on, and played by Kaluli men. No special status is attached to these activities and drums are not considered 'secret' or 'sacred' like the flutes, bullroarers, or *garamuts* (slit drums) found elsewhere in Papua New Guinea which figure prominently in initiation or otherwise in male-female relations (Gourlay 1975). While Kaluli women do not touch the drums or know about drum construction or magic, drums are kept in open view for all to see in the longhouse. There are no ritualized sanctions surrounding the gender specificity, and men do not go to elaborate or deceitful ends to hide drums from women, again quite in contrast to the aforementioned pattern surrounding certain instruments elsewhere in Papua New Guinea. Gourlay (1975) argues that social stratification and elaborateness of male initiation in PNG societies correlate closely with the secretiveness ascribed to instruments and instrumental usage, as well as with the degree of their ritualized association with male antagonism towards women. While male-female differences in Kaluli life are clearly marked

and socially salient, gender oppositions, including those in the expressive cultural arena, are often balanced by forms of complementarity; social patterns of male dominance, antagonism, secrecy, and violence well documented in the PNG Highlands are clearly muted here, as they tend to be in the smaller-scale forest and 'fringe' societies (Brown 1978), relative to the New Guinea Highlands proper (see E.L. Schieffelin 1982; Feld 1984 for further discussion). Hence there is a lack of specialness to drums, and certainly no cult of secrecy or highly ritualized behaviour surrounding their use or performative efficacy. At the same time there are dimensions of magic and secrecy that surround Kaluli drumming, and these will be detailed below.

### The Sound

Aside from these initial observations, the most striking impression that quickly develops about Kaluli drums derives from the sound. The drum pulse is regular and isometric, beating between one hundred and thirty and one hundred and forty times per minute of play. The pitch is singular, a low-frequency complex with a clear separation of the sound of the slap and the sound of the main pitch, the slap being the fundamental frequency (usually in the area of CC or 65 Hz) and the main audible pitch the first overtone one octave higher (in the area of C or 130 Hz). Additionally, the second overtone (in the area of G or 196 Hz) and the third overtone (in the area of c or 261 Hz) are quite prominent. The fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh overtones are also relatively strong; there is no rapid falloff until this point. The resultant auditory sensation is a shifting figure and ground, with strong sense images of the octaves at C and c, and their inner fifth at G. The spectral display of five drum pulses in Figure 1 illustrates this overtone pattern in visual grey scale.

The pulsation is regular, neither a slow throb nor a rapid warble. The envelope shape of each pulse is marked by a sharp and definite attack with no hesitation, a brief but full body sustain, and a long decay with no trailing effect. Each pulse continues to and overlaps the next; there are no discrete sound breaks or silences in between one pulse and the next. Figure 2 illustrates the waveform of a single drum; first five consecutive pulses, each three- to four-tenths of a second long, indicating a slightly different density yet constant distinguishing shape with no break between pulses; then a single pulse in a more microscopic view, illustrating the envelope shape with dense attack, very rapid body, and amplitude and waveform integrity throughout the lengthy decay.

A slight reverberation from angling the drum towards the house floor is also apparent, but the general sensation of resonance – a thick, densely

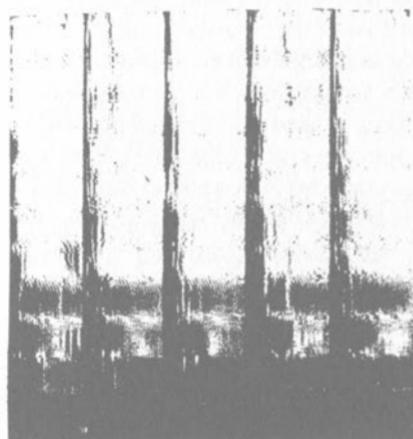


FIGURE 1  
Spectral display of five drum pulses

textured overlapping pulse – is not primarily an echo effect. Rather it derives directly from the instrumental materials and the prescribed manner of playing. The dynamics are held constant at one level once the drum pulsing begins. At five feet from a player the drum is one of the loudest sounds Kaluli make or hear; at about 80 decibels on the A scale (up to 85 dB with two or more players) it is easily two to three times louder than a normal face-to-face conversation. In summary, the immediately salient acoustic features of drumming are the loud intensity and regularity of pulsation, the denseness of the sound as a continual overlapping throb, and the layering quality of the pitches, with clear overtone octaves and the inner fifth constantly shifting figure and ground.

### Construction

The process of constructing a drum involves a magical mediation to impart sonic pattern to the material object and infuse it with aesthetic power. If pursued in a linear manner (which is rarely the case), it takes about six days for Kaluli to make a drum. On the first day a *dona* tree (a magnolia, *Elmirillia papuana*) is cut and a four-foot-long section is chosen, soaked in water, and prepared for hollowing. While four or five other tree types are occasionally used, *dona* is preferred by most Kaluli drummers because of its lightness and resonant qualities.

On the second day the soaking log is removed from water and one

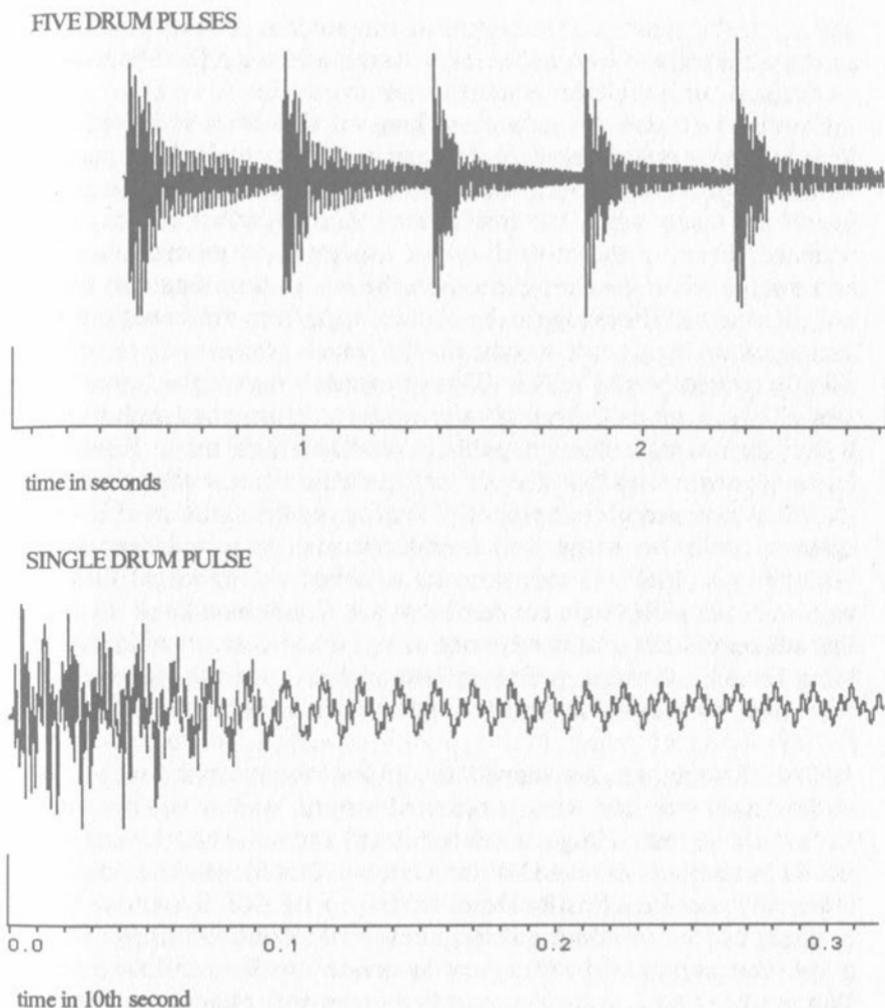


FIGURE 2  
Waveform of a single drum

end is hollowed in about two feet in length and two or three inches in diameter. Traditionally this was done by a combination of burning, scraping with bamboo, and sanding with rough leaves. Since the intensification of outside contact in the 1960s, and the greater access to steel tools that has been one of its consequences, machetes and small knives are also used today to quicken this process. Once one end is successfully

hollowed, the same process begins at the other end. When completed, a ridge about one to two inches thick remains between the two hollowed sections. Again the drum is left to soak overnight.

On the third day the actual working on the drum is halted and a hunting party is convened to capture a *tibodai* bird. This may take several days. Once the bird is caught the feathers are plucked and placed inside the drum while the inside surfaces are further smoothed and widened. Then, in the most dramatic aspect of the process, the throat and tongue of the bird are placed on the bridge that separates the two hollowed areas. The bridge is then cut through from top to bottom while a magical saying of five words, *tibodai ean ko tagale toli*, is softly or silently recited by the maker. This invocation makes the 'mouth' and 'voice' like a *tibodai*. This *tibodai* magic is considered rather secret; Kaluli do not talk about it publicly, and although many Kaluli men know it, most insist that they do not, perhaps because they do not feel that they have acquired it properly. During my fieldwork in 1976-7 and again in 1982 this magic was revealed to me, as it had been to E.L. Schieffelin in 1967. At this time I was asked not to reveal these five words. But in 1984 Gigio confided that few Kaluli men knew the magic, that makers of the drums were not using it, and that it would cause no harm for me to reveal it. Before further discussing the significance of the *tibodai* throat and its verbal magic, this is what happens in the next few days.

First, the openings are shaped, the ends of the drum are scaled down to their final size, and work is oriented towards preparing the drum for its first sound test. A large anglehead lizard named *yobo* (*Goniocephalus* sp.) is hunted and skinned. While certain other lizards and snakes occasionally provide skins for drumheads, most Kaluli like the *yobo* best because it is not too thick and responds well to heat in tuning. The rim of the drum is prepared with a gluey latex from tree bark and the stretched skin is placed around the rim and tied down with cane. It is then dried in the sun or by a low fire; fresh ashes are often spread over the head to heat it evenly.

Next, four lumps of beeswax are placed on the head, centred, and shaped. They are designated *kol* but metaphorically referred to as *seida gasa kelen id*, 'bush dog ear shit.' When these are attached another saying is softly recited so that the head of the drum will assimilate the quality of a *seida gasa himu* or 'bush dog heart.' The beeswax bumps are thus empowered to throb and pulse like the heart of a bush dog on the chase.

Sound tests then may take several hours. The *kol* are shaped and reshaped, heated and reheated; the head is 'fed' chewed ginger or cordyline leaf; players chew and then spit these substances into the open

end of the drum, thereby moistening the inner side of the skin while the outside is tightening from heat. Simultaneously the drum is played, listened to, and commented upon. If the sound 'hardens,' *halaido domeib*, the final day will be devoted to carving the ridges at the mouth end, sanding and refining the inner and outer surfaces, and painting. If the sound does not 'harden,' then another skin will be sought and the testing process will begin again. If several skins are unsuccessful the drum shell will be discarded.

While the final visual decorative processes are important in the overall appearance of the drum, it is worth noting here that a drum can be washed and painted in a matter of two hours. In the construction process it is the determination of the proper sound that takes precedence over all visual dimensions of the instrument. The painting materials consist of *sowan*, a white ground clay; *bin*, an orange-red substance from the seed pods of *Bixa orellana*; and *tig* or *asɔn*, black from tree resins (or, more recently, burnt rubber). Since it is the shiny, glistening quality of the paints that is most essential, particularly in their interaction with the colours and materials of the dance costume, it is important that the decoration be done within a day or two of the ceremonial performance.

Now back to the significance of *tibodai*. This bird is the crested Pitohui (*Pitohui cristatus*), commonly known as the Papuan bellbird (see Figure 3). The name derives from the way this shy little bird calls from tree perches with a continuous throbbing sound. Jared Diamond (1972: 293-4), a prominent observer of Papua New Guinea birds, writes: 'The song consists of a long series of identical notes which are initially all on the same pitch at equal time intervals. The pitch lies approximately an octave above middle C. One of the two remarkable features of the song is the length. One song which I timed and which seemed to be of average length lasted 175 seconds without interruption ... The other and more remarkable quality is the unusual throbbing ... Although the song is muted and not loud it carries for long distances of up to a half mile ...'

These qualities, equal pulsation at the same pitch, extraordinary length and consistency, throbbing quality, and resonant carrying power, are in fact the most desired acoustic properties of the drum. Breaking through the voice of the drum with the voice of the *tibodai* bird is a process that insures the drum its basic sonic character. Figure 4 illustrates the sound of this bird; notice how the throbbing pulses, four or five per second, have a parallel quality to the waveforms of the drum in their lack of discrete breaks between pulses.

But what is the significance of choosing a bird as the mediator of human instrumental sound? Kaluli classify birds both morphologically

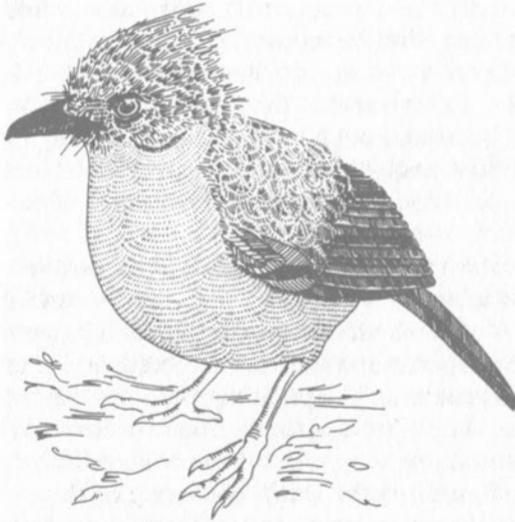


FIGURE 3  
The *tibodai* – crested Pitohui (*Pitohui cristatus*) (after Brian Coates, *Birds of Papua New Guinea* [Port Moresby, PNG: Robert Brown and Associates] 1977)

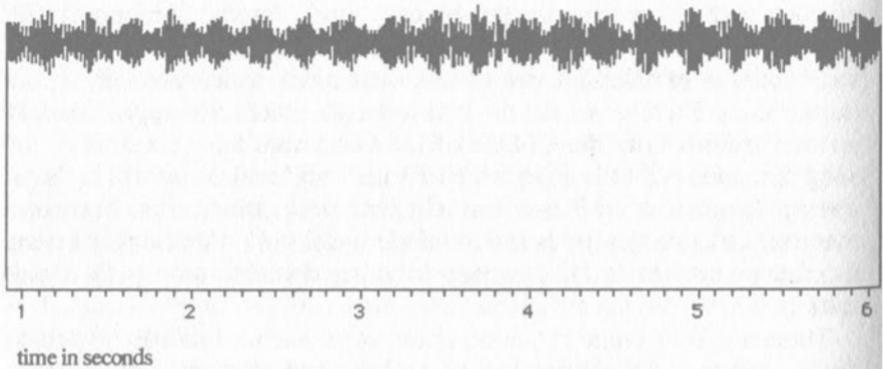


FIGURE 4  
Song of the *tibodai*

(based on similarities of beaks and feet) and by families of sound (Feld 1982: 44–85). The sound classification is more widely shared, and relates salient taxonomic categories to myths about the origin of sounds as well as congruent taboos and magical sayings. Additionally, in the tropical

forest sound is the principal means through which Kaluli recognize birds. They hunt by sound (mimicking the calls), relate to the cycle of daily and seasonal time by the cycle of bird calls and migrations, reckon space by acoustic indications of distance where one cannot see through the forest, and generally associate birds with the sounds they hear around them. In part, the reason for this is that birds are also *ane mama*, 'gone reflections,' spirits of the dead. Thus, categories of bird sound are also categories of spirit-human vocalization. There are seven sound groups: 'those who say their name,' *ene wi salan*; 'those who make a lot of noise,' *mada ganafodan*; 'those who only sound,' *imilisi ganalan*; 'those who speak the Bosavi language,' *Bosavi to salan*; 'those who whistle,' *holan*; 'those who weep,' *yelan*; 'those who sing,' *gisalo molan*. *Tibodai* is in two of these groups, those who say their names and those who whistle. The 'says its name' classification relates the name *tibodai* to the double pulse onomatopoeia in *tibo tibo tibo tibo*, a vocal representation of the throbbing sound. The 'whistle' classification is more significant. Birds with whistling voices are considered a special category of spirits whose sounds are often associated with the 'gone reflections' of dead children. Thus we have the notion that bird sounds are not only natural indicators of the Bosavi avifauna; they are equally considered communications from the dead to each other and to the living. As such, bird sounds and sound categories are powerful mediators; they link sonic patterns with social ethos and emotion. When Kaluli hear *tibodai* call they are apt to remark that it is the sound of a young child calling for its father.

### Play and Performance

Drumming is generally performed for four or five hours as a late-afternoon prelude to an all-night, major ceremony. This type of performance is called *ilib kuwo* (literally, 'cut drums'). One to five costumed dancers perform continuously. The usual number is four, typically organized in two groups of two, separated at either end of the longhouse, about sixty feet apart. They first play in place, bobbing up and down as they perform. Once the sound has 'hardened,' that is, has begun to pulsate strongly, the two groups may dance directly down the long corridor, with a skipping step, and switch positions at the *migi* and *sosa*, or 'front' and 'rear' entrance-ways to the house, then return to their own starting points.

If a drum sound becomes 'unhard' the player stops immediately and begins to rework the beeswax bumps. In this activity the actual performance of the drumming integrates the exercise of tuning. It is the continual reworking of the *kol* on the head and the 'feeding' of the ginger

or cordyline that is most important here. When queried about this 'feeding,' Kaluli often responded that like a child, whose language is 'unhard,' the drum must be fed so that its sound will 'harden.' As in the realms of maturation and language acquisition, *halaido*, 'hardness,' is a basic prerequisite of dramatic evocation.

In performance too, Kaluli cannot stand still when they tune or practise drumming. They bob up and down, sway to the side, and always remain in motion. Drumming must be a full bodily sensation, never just the slap of the wrist or palm onto the skin surface. The drum is usually held in the left hand; as the body moves up and down, the left hand pumps the drum so that it both angles down to the floor and meets the right hand which is swinging in a pendular movement. The right hand hits the *kol* squarely against the thick parts of the upper palm and lower portion of the third and fourth fingers. There is just the slightest flex of the wrist. When teaching me to drum and dance, Kaluli always stressed that I should feel the pulsing sensation in my upper arms and chest, not just in the lower hands and fingers.

This movement complex is related to both a conceptualization of dance and the nature of the costume worn for drumming. Like other expressive modalities (weeping, poetics, song), dance originates with a bird, *wokwele*, the giant cuckoo dove (*Reinwardtoena reinwardtsi*). Cuckoo doves nest in rock gorges near waterfalls, and their calls are a two-part *wok-wu*, heard above the sounds of water. In motion the bird bounces up and down in place, stable on the first syllable (*wok*), bouncing up on the higher outward syllable (*wu*). Kaluli dancers must move up and down like *wokwele* in front of a waterfall. In the rear of their costumes are palm streamers that spring from the waist to the shoulders and then fall down to their ankles. In movement these streamers, called *fasela*, make a *shhh* sound like a waterfall as the dancers move up and down creating their flow. The dancer's voice (or, in this case, drum) sounds above the continual *shhh* of the waterfall, like a *wokwele* in a rock gorge.

The drum costume contains another important feature, a crayfish claw rattle, designated *degegado*. *Dege* is the onomatopoeic sound of crisp rustling pulses of the shells; *gado* is the term for drooping cordyline leaves. This rattle consists of a piece of thick cane arching up and out of the dancer's waist bark belt, and bent around to suspend a cluster of fifteen to forty individual crayfish claw shells, loosely woven together into a packet with bark string. As the dancer bounces up and down the shell rattle pack makes a flapping motion, visible in the rear as an image rather like a continuously flicking wrist, and strongly audible overlapping each of the drum pulses.

Figure 5 illustrates the echo-pulsing of the rattle, less than two-tenths

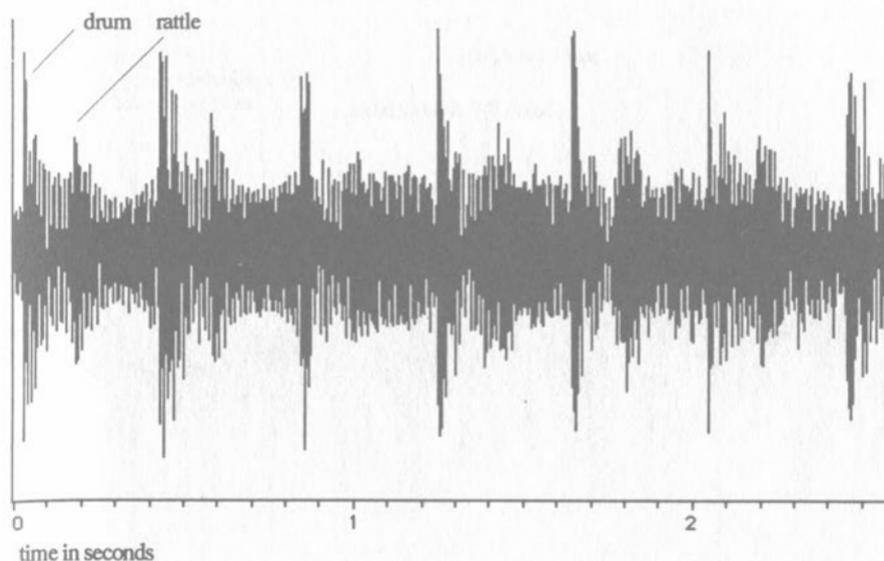


FIGURE 5  
Single drum and crayfish clawrattle

of a second after each drum pulse. The acoustic sensation of the overlapping crisp high-frequency rattle and booming low-frequency drum is very dense indeed, and Kaluli point out that the double-pulsing is like that of the *tibodai* bird as well. They vocally render the interaction of the drum and rattle with the two syllables of the onomatopoeic bird call: *bo* for the strong drum pulse, *ti* for the sound of the rattles. Note here that there is a strong iconic relationship between the resounding character of the drum sound and the syllable with a plosive and mid-back vowel, and the high-frequency character of the rattle sound and the syllable with a dental and high-front vowel (for a complete analysis of the iconic symbolism of Kaluli sound words, see Feld 1982: 144–50).

Kaluli exhibit a marked preference for dense, overlapped, interlocked, alternating sounds, and term this kind of production *dulugu ganalan*, 'lift-up-over sounding.' This kind of sound is the natural and preferred pattern for all instrumental and vocal music; additionally Kaluli liken the densifying interaction of visual costume layers, colours, and materials to this natural sonic pattern, and also use this notion to describe the layering of natural sounds in their tropical rain-forest environment (for an extended analysis of 'lift-up-over sounding' as a cross-modal Kaluli style trope, see Feld 1988; also Feld 1986; examples of all varieties

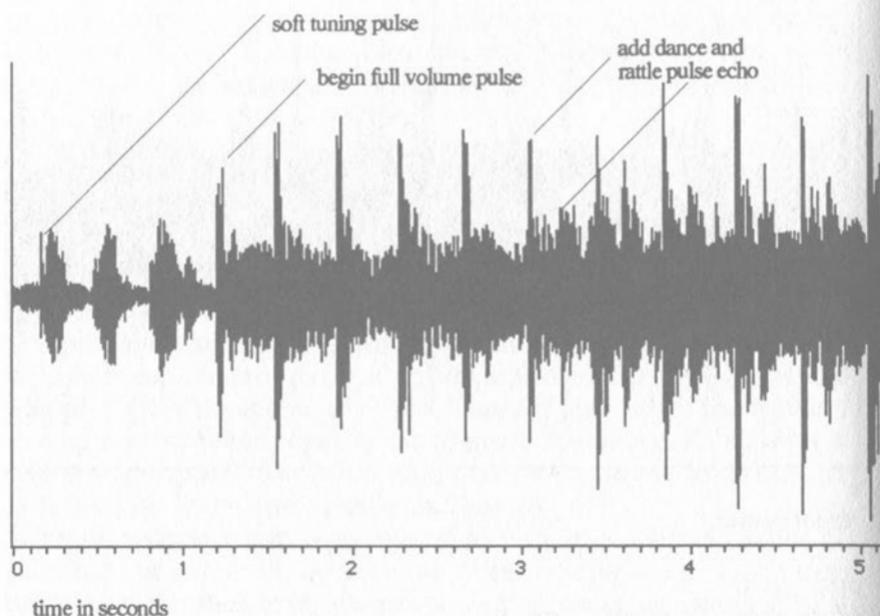


FIGURE 6  
Sequence of tuning and dancing in place

of Kaluli soundmaking illustrating this pattern for vocal, instrumental, and natural sound can be found in Feld 1981, 1985).

Figure 6 illustrates the progression from tuning, to playing the drum alone at full volume, to the 'lift-up-over sounding' of the drum and rattle as the dancer then begins to bob up and down in place. In Figure 7 the density of the drumming is further intensified as a second performer begins. Notice that performers never attempt to synchronize in unison so that their drum pulses and rattle pulses coincide; just as rattles 'lift-up-over' the drum sound, so each performer must 'lift-up-over' the sound of all other performers. Not only does this create a sound that is texturally dense, with no moments of quiet, no breaks or 'cracks' in the ongoing stream of sound; it also creates the sense that the drummers are in synchrony or playing together precisely by being out of phase, that is, each at a different point from a hypothetical unison. Avoidance of unison sound is a basic premise of all Kaluli soundmaking, and the principle is illustrated quite powerfully when two, three, or four drummers perform *ilib kuwɔ*.

These performance dimensions of motion, costume, and sound are

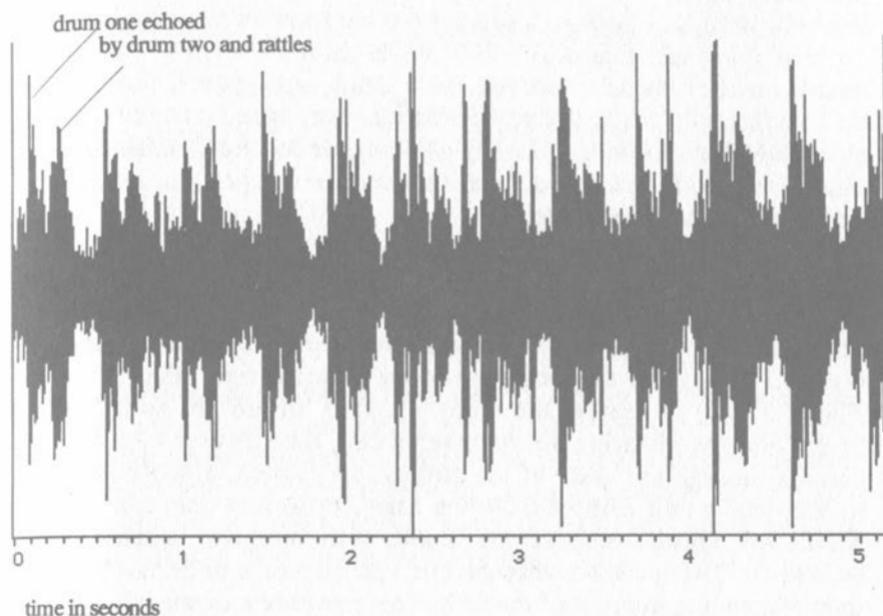


FIGURE 7  
Two drums and crayfish clawrattles

not just features of an abstract aesthetic; they are meant to enhance the purpose of drumming by drawing the audience into a nostalgic, sentimental, and reflective mood by filling the house with an intense continuous sound. Like the ceremonial songs to be sung later in the evening and which are aimed at making audience members so sad that they are moved to tears, drumming, while technically a 'warmup' to an evening ceremony, occasionally provokes people in the same way. Indeed, audience members can become so overwhelmed by the experience of *ilib kuwo* that they not only will be moved to tears, but will then thrust their way out onto the dance floor, sobbing loudly, and, brandishing a resin torch, strike and burn the drum whose sound moved them so deeply. This parallels the burning of the dancers that takes place in response to songs that are similarly evocative (see E.L. Schieffelin 1976, 1979).

Kaluli say that this process of evocation is dependent upon the 'hardening' of the drum sound in performance. Once the drummers 'harden' the sound and begin a long stretch of continuous pulsation, Kaluli are apt to remark, *dagano halaidesege, kalu yelimeib-ke!*, 'the voice having

hardened, people will really weep!’ ‘Hardening’ then is the locus of aesthetic tension. Concretely, it is the moment when the throbbing drum voice is no longer heard as a bird voice calling *tibo tibo*, but is now heard, on the ‘inside’ reflection, as a dead child calling *dowo dowo*, ‘father, father.’ This is the point when Kaluli listeners are completely absorbed by the sound, reflecting on its inner meaning rather than its outer form. It is this ‘hardening’ that moves listeners to thoughts of deceased children and to tears.

There is an acoustic reality to these sensations that takes us back to why it is essential to understand the actual physical patterns of drum sound. Figure 8 illustrates the overtone series of the drum. Recall the importance of the figure and ground shifts between the prominent octaves (C and c) and the second overtone which is their inner fifth (G). The sensation of hearing the voice of a bird ‘inside’ the sound of the drum, and then hearing a further reflection, the voice of a spirit child coming through the voice of the bird to call ‘father,’ relates powerfully to the octave and fifth shift. When asked to imitate the drum sound Kaluli will vocally produce the sound of the octaves, usually on the syllable ‘bo’; when asked what the bird spirit voice sounds like they will then whistle the interval of the fifth. This not only indicates that Kaluli are aware of the separation of the overtone series, but that they map this acoustic reality into their symbolic constructs, and further map their metalinguistic notions of outer and inner (or ‘reflection’) onto the spatial reality of acoustic form.

The metalinguistic prescription about ‘hardening’ in evocation also surrounds the process of talking about drumming. Drums must ‘talk’; a wobbly or punctuated non-resounding drum is said to be *towo motolan*, ‘not talking words’; it is *halaidoma*, ‘unhard.’ When it is ‘talking,’ *tolan*, it is saying *dowo*, ‘father,’ and the sound is ‘hard’ in both the linguistic and aesthetic senses of that metaphor. Similarly, aesthetic evaluation concentrates on the ‘hardness’ of the drum sound as it ‘carries,’ *ebelan*. This verb is usually used to describe water motion that is visually evident at one place but then flows out of sight. This carrying property extends to indicate continual auditory sensation and feeling beyond the production of a sound. Sound is ‘hard’ when it stays in your head and forces its presence on your feelings.

Like the construction of drum sound in its material and cultural senses, play and performance aim to crystallize a core set of Kaluli sensibilities about sound and persuasion. Substances are not only infused with meaning; an arena is created for those meanings to be actively performed and communally reconfirmed.

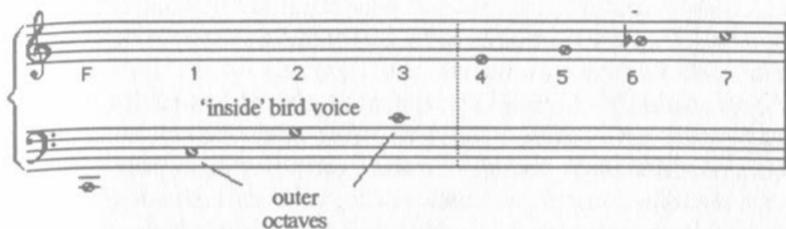


FIGURE 8  
Drum overtone series

### Adding the Metaphors

Claude Lévi-Strauss argues that one way to approach the complexities of human activity is to abstract key symbols from their experiential contexts and recast them onto a vertical, paradigmatic axis so that they can be observed like a cultural table of contents. Looking at the layers of the drum story, the links between sound and meaning can be initially addressed this way, as a constellation of basic Kaluli metaphors.

- 1 The drum is a body. The hard decorated outside covers the substantive living, resounding, breathing, inside. Sound must be formulated from head to voice before it can forcefully burst onto the scene.
- 2 The drum voice is a *tibodai* bird voice. The qualities of pulsing, throbbing, carrying, and continuous sound are those selected and arranged as meaningful. Starting from a punctual *bo ... bo ...* it swells into an intense *tibo tibo tibo tibo tibo*, with each sound, like the double-syllable name, overlapping the next.
- 3 The drum pulse is the heart of a bush dog. It pounds out the chase, intensifying until the catch is made.
- 4 The drum speaks like a child. Like Kaluli children, drums must be 'fed' prechewed food so that their language 'hardens' to a well-formed and grammatical pattern. Drum voices mature from the onomatopoeia of bird language to the 'hardness' of human words, ultimately saying *dowo dowo dowo dowo*, calling for 'father.'
- 5 The drum pulse must 'flow.' Like water, which can flow beyond perceptual immediacy but remain in a mental map, sound must 'stay with you' once it perceptually ends. Drum sound is forceful when it transcends the event and remains in your head, continuing to flow.
- 6 The drum pulse is not discrete. The sound carries in layers of canonic density, whether one drum or several are playing. There are no sound

breaks, and parts are not isolable segments that follow one behind the other. They are compact sounds which 'lift-up-over' each other and layer as figure and ground.

- 7 The drum sound is not what it appears to be. It has multiple reflections, insides and outsides. Like the whole world, which has a visible realm and a reflection realm, one the deeper reality of the other, the drum voice has an inside, which is the voice of a *tibodai* bird. But birds are also reflections of the dead, and inside the *tibodai* bird voice is the voice of a dead child, the voice of a reflected spirit gone from the visible. So too with the sound. Outside the strongest perceptual image, the octaves produced by the fundamental, first and third overtones, there is an inside sound, the musical fifth produced by the strong second overtone. Like the drum/bird/child figure-ground, the drum sound shifts focus so that its 'inside' can be heard.
- 8 The drum sound must 'harden.' A Kaluli origin myth tells how the world was once mushy and soft; *alin* the Goura Pigeon and *oden* the Scrub Turkey stamped on the ground to 'harden' it. Like the necessity for physical hardness, so too in social life: children, language, and evocative performance must 'harden.' Children avoid eating soft substances until their bodies and language 'harden.' A 'hard man' is one who is strong, assertive, and not a witch. A song that does not 'harden' – has no climaxing structure in the poetics and performance – will not move a person to tears. Like a body, a child, language, or song, drum sound must be shaped from substance to meaningful form (for fuller analysis of the metaphor of 'hardness' in Kaluli language and social life, see Feld and Schieffelin 1982).

The overlapping significances of these eight metaphoric constructs shape the grounds upon which drum sound can be said to have a situated meaning that is socially created and shared by those who understand – in part tacitly – its dimensions. Yet of all the ways these constructs can be grouped, one significant issue is the extent to which we are dealing with metaphors specific to drums, or interpretive constructs that Kaluli apply to *all* sounds and the grounds upon which they are meaningful. While images of the body, child, and bush dog heart are specific here, the notions of 'flow,' 'hardness,' 'inner' reflections from outer substances, and 'lift-up-over' density are general axioms that are essential to the interpretation of all communicative expression in the visual, verbal, musical, or choreographic modes for Kaluli. But in some ways the centre of it all, the single most important fact about the drum sound, and the single most important trope for all Kaluli aesthetic action, is bird mediation.

Had we started with the dance we would have been led to bird mediation in the up/down movement and the image of a *wokwele* at a waterfall. Had we concentrated on costuming, we would have been led to bird mediation in the symbolism of colour (Feld 1982: 66–71). Had we begun with the larger sonic setting for drum performances in audience cheering and response, we would have been led to bird mediation in the way women's cheering is inspired by and patterned after the calls of the superb bird of paradise. Had we begun with staging, we would have been led to bird mediation in the concept of lighting the longhouse so that light splashes through the hall like the forest, lighting the birds that come and go and perch on their travels. Each feature of performance, context, staging, and sound leads back to this central notion: through the mediating scheme of bird transformation, Kaluli expressive behaviours are metaphorically empowered to communicate social ethos and emotion. In other codes (weeping, poetics, speaking, song) this mediation is grounded in concrete models provided by myths. In this case, drum sound, the mediation is grounded in concrete action during construction – action whose efficacy is confirmed in magical spells.

Why birds? Precisely because their symbolic dualism creates imaginative possibilities for the mind, and their constant presence creates a continual reminder that Kaluli are part of a forest world that 'talks' to them. Since Kaluli dead reappear in the treetops as birds, all bird sound is at once indicative of both the avifauna and communication from those who have gone *cbε mise*, 'in the form of a bird.' Bird sound, like drum sound, is filled with an 'inside,' a deeper layer of meaning in sound. The voice of a child, dead and abandoned, inside a bird voice, inside a drum pulse, emerges as the inner reality of drumming, an emotional reality that resides not only on the inside of the sound but at the inside of what it means to be Kaluli and be moved by evocative performance.

### Analysis and Synthesis / Sound and Meaning

Electronic musicians and structural anthropologists seem to have two things in common: a powerful belief that the proof of analysis is in synthesis, and an understanding that coherences often demonstrate their existence through reversals, fractures, oppositions, and transformations (rather than linear form or action). Neither principle is foreign to Kaluli.

In a cycle of stories Kaluli celebrate the exploits of a fellow named Newelesu and his cross-cousin, Dosali. Newelesu is a klutz, a trickster, boisterous and immodest, with little control of his appetites. Dosali is the opposite: cool, collected, always in command of his energies. A

persistent theme in these stories is Newelesu's desire to take a wife, and the ways he consistently loses control, invokes wrong or inappropriate strategies, and is left panting on the sidelines, envying his cross-cousin's slick moves.

Once, at a ceremony, Newelesu is taken by the beauty of Dosali in full costume, drumming *ilib kuwo* to a cheering and enthusiastic crowd in the longhouse. He realizes that a potential consequence of such powerful evocation is at the centre of his own desires: causing a woman to lose her heart to a man, leading to elopement and marriage. The possibility is thrilling, and he decides to perform at the next ceremony. But he is carried away; in his fervour he gets confused and ends up cutting down the wrong tree. Finding it too difficult to hunt a *tibodai* he simply snares a kingfisher from his garden and sacrifices its voice. Being too tired to get up early to catch an anglehead lizard he decides that any old snake will do. And so on, down to the very last aspect of his costume and the painting for the drum. The result, predictably, is disastrous: his drum sounds *donk donk donk donk*, the pulse does not 'harden,' no one is the least bit moved, and the performance is a sham. Once again, no control, no evocative power, no woman.

While this story reconfirms the importance Kaluli attach to detail and to the ability to turn substance into communicative form, it also states something deeper about life: understanding how to make, listen to, and feel the force of drum sound runs right to the core of knowing how to be Kaluli. Newelesu, like a character straight out of Samuel Beckett, is both profoundly funny and sad because his mistakes are so obvious and the action of making them so existentially salient. In the end, when we come through analysis to synthesis, it is clear that drumming is not superfluous action in which Kaluli need make no emotional investment. Rather it is purposive action, for which Kaluli are called upon to engage personally. To participate is to interpret drum sound by animating the most basic Kaluli aesthetic strategies: find the 'inside' of the 'layers,' observe the 'hardening,' and feel the 'flow.'

Aside from the specific means Kaluli utilize to interpret the message of drumming, it seems there are other implications here for the study of musical meaning. What drummers make and what listeners hear is acoustic pattern; Kaluli attend to the sound of drumming to find, both aurally and socially, outer and inner layers of structure. But meaning is more than pattern alone, more than a mirror image of structure. For Kaluli, meaning resides in the knowledge that a sound is always more than it appears to be; that pattern is a clue to finding the 'inside,' or the 'inner reflection.'

Meaning then, in a communicative sense, is dependent on interpretive

action, action which is the alignment of cultural knowledge and epistemology with the experience of sound. Meaning does not reside 'in the notes' because the way the notes are formed, listened to, and interpreted derives from prior social imposition. Hearers of Kaluli sound share a logic for ordering their experiences. That logic says: hear sound as mediated, hear mediation as a bird, hear bird sound as a spirit voice. In its most general form that logic claims: all things have an inside and the inside is a reflection from the spirit realm. Such a logic is called into play every time Kaluli listen to or produce musical sound. What is essential, then, is not that we have a motivated and somewhat iconic correspondence between the character of *tibodai* sound and the character of drum sound. Rather, it is that Kaluli have invented an interpretive logic for hearing that correspondence and deciding what it is about once it is acoustically perceived. Sounds actively communicate and embody deeply felt sentiments for Kaluli because their listeners know they must be prepared to find the 'inside,' and because they know that 'reflections' are socially real.

### Note

This essay is based on field research undertaken in 1976–7, 1982, and 1984. For their concern that I properly understand the meaning of Kaluli drumming, I am deeply grateful to several Bosavi drummers and intellectuals: Gaima, Gigio, Seli, Sili, Gb, Ganigi, Jubi, Kulu, and especially Gaso. I am also grateful to the organizations that supported this research: the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Science Foundation, and the University of Pennsylvania Research Foundation.

## CHAPTER 7

# The Pulse as an Icon in Siddha Medicine

*E. Valentine Daniel*

Siddha, Ayurveda, and Yunani constitute the three formalized traditional medical systems of India. Practitioners of Siddha medicine claim that their system is not derived from Ayurveda but from the writings of the eighteen *cittar* who lived between the tenth and fifteenth centuries and composed cryptic verses in Tamil by means of which medical lore was preserved and transmitted down the ages (K. Zvelebil 1973: 218–36 and 1974: 54–7).

In Siddha medicine, as in Ayurveda, Yunani, and traditional Chinese medicines, the pulse is the sign *par excellence* for the diagnostician. Other signs, symptoms, and syndromes are ancillary to or corroborative of the significance of the pulse. In this essay,<sup>1</sup> following a brief description of the pulse-reading technique of the Siddha physician and an adumbration of the theory underlying it, I shall argue that a semiotic approach to the pulse (*nāṭi*) betrays a fundamental difference between the systems of thought in Siddha medicine and biomedicine.

In Siddha medicine, the basis of all pathology is to be located in an imbalance of the three humours, bile (*pittam*), wind (*vāyu*), and phlegm (*kapam*). Conversely, an equilibrated state of these humours in a human being indicates a state of good health. The particular nature of the imbalance in a patient's body is determined by the reading of his or her pulse. The Siddha physician is trained to distinguish six different pulses rather than the single, diastolic-systolic pulse that the biomedical health-practitioner is known to identify. Of the six pulses, three are read from the right wrist and three from the left.

The Siddha physician takes a hold of the patient's right wrist in his left hand and places his index finger nearest the base of the thumb, on

the inner side of the wrist, between the styloid process of the radius and the trapezium; his middle finger is placed next to the index finger, and the ring finger next to the middle finger. Each one of the three fingers senses or reads a different pulse. The index finger senses the pulse that indexes the wind humour, the middle finger, bile, and the ring finger, phlegm. These three pulses are held to pulsate at three distinguishably different rates. These rates are compared to the trotting of a chicken (wind), the leaping of a frog (bile), and the crawling of a snake (phlegm). The time intervals between pulsations are called *naṭai* (pace or walk).

The *naṭai* of a pulse are employed to identify the distinctiveness of the three humoral pulses. Once this has been done, the physician attempts to sense in his fingertips the differential pressures exerted by these three pulses. These distinguishable pressures are called *eṭai* (weights). By comparing the *eṭai* of the three humour-indicating pulses in a person's wrist, the physician is able to determine which humour predominates in a person's system and which is or are inadequate or recessive.

The two quatrains<sup>2</sup> extant in the Siddha medical lore which describe the *eṭai* and *naṭai* as they are determined in the humoral pulsations are the following:

illayē vātam eṭinaṭai kōriyāṃ  
ellaiyē pittam eṭumpum tavaḷai pōl  
ollaiyē aiyam ūrntiṭum pāmpupōl  
allaiyē kaṇṭinkarintavar cittarē

(Absent are the afflictions of wind when the chicken walks lightly,  
The bounds of bile are known by the leaping of the frog,  
And the crawling snake shies all quickness.  
He who discerns this is a true Siddhar.)

vaṅkiya vātam mātṭirai ontrākil  
taṅkiya pittam tanniḷ araivāci  
aṅku kapantān aṅkiyē kālōṭil  
viṅkiya civatrkup pisakontrum illaiyē  
(If wind is measured as one unit in its prominence  
And the amplitude of bile be half of that,  
With sluggish phlegm a crawling fourth,  
Then in whom these inhere is free of all care.)

To complicate matters further, the same operations of reading the *naṭai* and *eṭai* of the three humoral pulses are carried out on the other wrist of the patient as well, thereby giving the physician a total of six readings. Thus, for each humour there is a left aspect and a right aspect,

yielding a total of six sub-humours. Each of the six sub-humours governs or compels (*iyakkutaḥ*) a corresponding body tissue or body fluid (*tātu*) as shown below:

<i>nāti</i> (pulse)	<i>tātu</i> (body tissue)
Right wind	Blood
Right bile	Bone
Right phlegm	Flesh
Left wind	Fat/Marrow
Left bile	Nerve tissue/Skin
Left phlegm	Saliva

The only *tātu* (the seventh) that the pulse does not directly index is semen. In fact, semen being the carrier of the seed, and the seed the repository of all *tātus*, all six pulses collectively indicate the disposition of the seed or semen (see Daniel 1984).

Apart from these six readings made available to the physician by the pulse of the patient, there are three stages or phases to each act of pulse-reading. The first is called the *stūla nilai* (the grossly sensory stage). *Stūla* is a concept that is usually associated with the body, as in *stūla śarīram* (the gross body), which refers to the outermost body sheath in the theory of the five body sheaths (*pañcamayośa*). *Stūla* stands in complementary opposition to *sukṣma* or subtleness (from *sukṣma śarīram* or subtle body, the next outermost layer in the five body sheaths). Thus, *stūla* connotes something solid and tangible, in short, something objective. It is *objective* in the sense that it is *observable* (in this case by means of the sense of touch), and becomes as such because it presents itself as an *obstacle* to the smooth, unobjected flow of the senses in pure *potentia*. At this stage of the reading of the pulse, the apparently 'passive' fingertips of the physician *objects* and *objectifies* the dynamic and hitherto unresisted flow of blood in the radial artery.

The second stage in the reading of the pulse is called *uḥ nilai* (the inner stage). In this stage or phase in the act of reading the pulse of a patient, the digital extremities of the physician that are in contact with the wrist of the patient are no longer 'passive' or 'inert' resisters as in the first stage, but rather, come alive with their own pulsations. In other words, the physician becomes aware of the rhythmic undulations of his own pulses in addition to the ones felt in the patient's radial artery. This stage is only an intermediary one in which the distinctly different pulsations of the patient and the physician are set out in palpable relief by means of the contrapuntal juxtaposition they are united in.

In the third stage, the physician modulates the *etai* and *naṭai* of his own pulses so that they become confluent and concordant with the

pulses of the patient. This stage is called *cama nilai*, the state of equipoise. It is only at this stage that the Siddha physician believes that he 'knows' the humoral disorder of the patient. The ability to bring his pulse into confluence with that of his patient is a skill which takes years to cultivate and is made possible only through years of apprenticeship under a preceptor. It is only after the physician has, in this manner, experienced this phase or stage of 'shared' pulsations that he is ready to release the wrist of his patient and begin drawing from his knowledge of text and verse for a prescription and advice.

Before we examine the semiotic dimension of the Siddha art of pulse-reading I think it would be helpful if we briefly spelled out some of the major features of the semiotic sign which will have a direct bearing on our analysis. To this task I now turn.

### Structure of the Sign

Charles Sanders Peirce, the founder of modern semiotics, conceived the sign as being constituted of three irreducible correlates: the representamen, the object, and the interpretant. None of these correlates by itself constitutes the *meaning* of the sign but may be prescindend from each other and understood in terms of the different functional modes in which they enter into the triadic, meaningful, sign-relation: 'A sign, or representamen, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its object, as to be capable of determining a Third, called its interpretant, to assume the same triadic relation to its object in which it stands itself to the same Object' (Peirce 1934: 2.274).<sup>3</sup> A representamen in and of itself is not a full-fledged sign but is only a sign in *potentia*. It becomes a completed sign when it chooses to represent something other than itself to something or somebody in some respect or capacity. That for which the representamen stands is the object. The object need not be a material thing. Rather, as its Latin root indicates, it is that which is thrown before the mind. 'The Interpretant is another sign to which the represented object is addressed and by which its representation is interpreted. More generally, it is the locus of interpretation and that by which a sign is linked to its context' (Deacon 1978: 147).

This linking of correlates entails a 'leaping' or 'jumping' activity between the correlates. Uexkull (1979) calls it a *Bedeutungssprung* which Eugene Baer (1981) translates as 'a jump of meaning.' Uexkull illustrates the *Bedeutungssprung* by employing the example of the telephone wherein there exists a non-causal relationship between electromagnetic oscillations, the sounds, and the words and sentences uttered and heard. Baer

notes the obvious similarity between Uexkull's semiotic model and de Saussure's famous diagram illustrating the typical speech situation in which two interlocutors are involved. In the Saussurian scheme, non-causal but stable relations of meaning which presuppose a code that determines the system of meaning entail physical, psychological, and physiological systems of signs at the same time. 'Saussure's model ... presents meaning as a series of translations which, by way of coding, 'jump' from one universe of discourse to another' (Baer 1981: 170). What is true for different systems of signs or even different universes of discourse is also true of the internal structure of the sign wherein three correlates are linked by a *Bedeutungssprung*. This much is obvious insofar that a system of signs or a universe of discourse is in its own right a sign writ large.

One of Peirce's greatest contributions to semiotics is to be found in his two classifications of signs; the first, a system of nine signs and the second one of sixty-six signs (see Peirce 2: 235–41 and Peirce and Welby 1977: 160–6; Fitzgerald 1966; Weiss and Burks 1945). The value of these classifications is not to be found in the genius of his logic as an end in itself but in the fact that it provides us with a means of appreciating the multiple modes in which signs and correlates of signs are linked together and, furthermore, that it helps us understand the principles of the forces that motivate these links or *Bedeutungssprünge*.

In this essay I shall make but partial use of Peirce's first taxonomic classification of sign types to understand the semiosis of pulse-taking. In this classification Peirce postulates three principles that motivate or impel the bringing together of a representamen and its object. These principles may be called iconicity, indexicality, and symbolization. The terms icon, index, and symbol, respectively, stand for the objects thus motivated.

In iconicity, object and representamen have some quality in common; some characteristic quality of the object being literally re-presented in the representamen. This sharing may range from partial resemblance, as in a diagram or image, to a total identity with the object as in the case of an animal re-presenting the colour and texture of its natural environment in its body in the well-known phenomenon of protective coloration.

In indexicality, there is no intrinsic sharing of qualities but, instead, the object and representamen achieve their significant link by means of coincidence, contiguity, or co-occurrence. Indexes may range from instances in which the representamen embodies its own object directly, as in the case of a litmus paper turning red when dipped in an acidic solution, to conventionally determined contiguities such as the use of

certain pronominal indexes in some languages to indicate high or low status of the addressee. Such status indexes along with a whole panoply of verbal indexes have been magnificently analysed by Silverstein (1976).

In symbolization, convention (bereft of any significant resemblance of connection between object and representamen) is the principle that provides the motivating force for the *Bedeutungssprung*. And the defining feature of convention is its arbitrariness. The greater part of human languages is of the nature of symbols.

### The Sign and the Pulse

In the context of the reading of the pulse in Siddha medicine, all three motivating principles are implicated. The conventional corpus of Siddha medicine as a tradition, as a body of knowledge, constitutes one system of signs, or universe of discourse; a system in which the dominant mode of signification is symbolic. The patient's pulse is another, a largely indexical system. So is the pulse of the physician. The movement of humours constitutes yet another system. The translation of one system of signs into another, which is essentially what diagnosis (*gnosis* = knowledge, to know; *dia* = between, across) is all about, entails a *Be- deutungssprung*.

The three correlates that constitute the sign 'the patient'<sup>4</sup> are: an imbalance of humours (as representamen), suffering (as object), and an abnormal pulse (as interpretant). Likewise, the sign 'the physician' is constituted of balanced humours (as representamen), an absence of suffering (as object), and a normal pulse (as interpretant).<sup>5</sup> The latter in itself may be divided into two parts or stages: the first, the 'grossly sensory stage' when his own pulse is apparently inert, and the second, the 'inner stage' when the pulse in his fingertips becomes active. In both instances, the 'physician' as a sign remains outside of and opposed to the 'patient-sign.' It is this very opposition that precipitates these two as *existent facts*, the one establishing the presence of the other and making this presence felt. Their contiguity makes them into indexical signs. The two interpretants (the pulses) by their very contact index each other, one as normal (first latently and then manifestly) and the other as abnormal. In so doing, however, they also reflexively index themselves internally; the abnormal pulse construing a meaningful link between imbalanced humours and suffering, and the normal pulse imposing a link between a balanced humoral state and non-suffering.

During what I have called the 'gross sensory state,' when the patient's pulse actively throbs against the passive fingertips of the physician, the indexical relationship that binds the two together may be thought of as

being marked by a greater 'distance' than during the 'inner stage' when both physician's and patient's pulses pulsate contrapuntally. In the first stage the interdigitation is one between active effector and passive receptor. In the second stage indexical distance between the two signs is shortened. Even though the dominant signifying function remains indexical, a distinctly iconic component is seen to enter the sign relationship; both signs *share* the element of pulsation. Interdigitation turns into inosculation or anastomosis, so to speak. The clearly indexical sign is transformed into an indexical icon.

This leads into the next stage in which the two pulses do not pulsate contrapuntally but concurrently or confluently. The two signs become one; they become perfect icons of each other. At this moment of perfect iconicity, the physician may be said to have experienced in some sense the suffering as well as the humoral imbalance of the patient. It is the knowledge derived from this experience that makes him fit to return to his own symbolic tradition, the Siddha body of knowledge, to find therein the appropriate remedy to prescribe. In letting go of the wrist of the patient the physician's pulse is restored to its previous state. However, a trace of the experience remains in and informs his actions that follow.

The point I wish to stress here is that the epistemological if not empirical basis of pulse-reading in Siddha medicine provides for the possibility of neutralizing the great divide that separates physician from patient, even if only for a moment, at which time objectivity is replaced by consubjectivity.

### The Sign in Biomedicine

In the biomedical universe of discourse, as is well known, 'sign' is used, in the main, by way of contrast to 'symptom.' This use of the word 'sign' in a marked sense is different from the sense in which it is used in Peircean semiotics, a point which deserves to be noted in passing but one which will not play a crucial role in our present discussion. Symptoms are the expressed products of the patient's subjective experience, what he feels and at times what he thinks. The biomedical sign, on the other hand, is the objective indicator available to the physician's privileged 'gaze' (to borrow a concept from Foucault). And as Foucault has pointed out, at least since the eighteenth century, symptoms are worthy of attention only if they can either be reduced to and identified with disease, the *natural* object, or if they can be subsumed into the sign (1973: 93). The biomedical sign is the only sign worthy of being considered a sign. The zeal with which the medical profession carries this opinion masks the fact that the interpretative authority (the

interpretant) which decides that a certain sign is an index in a universe of discourse (biomedical discourse) is itself largely conventional and symbolic. Biomedical texts are revered as compilations of indexical signs which are intended to eliminate 'uncertainty.' Scholars such as René Fox (1980) and David Sudnow (1967) who are humble enough to accept the inevitability of medical uncertainty and devote their efforts to coping with it as much as to reducing or transforming it are the exception rather than the rule. Even as brilliant a student of symbology as Susan Sontag, in her rich little book on *Illness as Metaphor* (1977), commits herself to the positivist task of ridding illness of all metaphor and thereby 'liberating' it from all symbolic uncertainty. Her aim is to link illness or disease to its invariable and coincident indexical sign; no more, no less.

My criticism of biomedicine's unawareness of its symbolic (cultural and conventional) sources is no less applicable to traditional professional medical systems of India and elsewhere. One may even argue that scientific medicine's commitment to the empirical method, and Popperian principles of falsification make 'uncertainty' an integral part of its program. Paradoxically, however, in this very posture of scientific smugness lies the danger of not being able to admit to the existence of uncertainties outside one's own model, paradigm, or episteme. Foucault's monumental studies on insanity (1965), the clinic (1973), and the penal system (1979) speak to this point.

There are other implications that derive from the centrality and sole governance of biomedical discourse by indexicality. In Peirce's scheme, the index, more than the icon or the symbol, foregrounds the *object* and the facticity of the object. Along with biomedicine's commitment to increase the quantity and power of indexical signs in one's discourse goes its corollary, *objectification*. The quest to positively identify a disease as 'disease,' as a thing, distinguished from the more subjective 'illness' (see Hahn 1984), is an instance of indexing and objectifying. The act of objectification itself has been appropriated by the sense of sight. If the history of medicine in the West shows us anything, it is this process of objectification through sight. The narrative technique, so much a part of the pre- and early-seventeenth-century country doctor's skills, became increasingly subjugated to 'observation,' the observation of *things*, such as the outward appearance of the patient, his facial expression, posture, skin colour, manner of breathing, urine, stools, and blood. Sydenham's writings and journals cover the period of transition from a predominantly narration-dependent medicine to an observation-dependent one. Even though Sydenham combined disease history and observation, he loathed to go so far as to entertain autopsy.

Before observation, that is, before the 'gaze,' began to penetrate the body as a matter of course, Auenbrugger's digital percussion and Laennec's stethoscope had to prepare the way, and eventually, mediated auscultation established itself as a more successful auditory penetrant than percussion. In the move from narration to auscultation, verbal symbols were being replaced by non-verbal indexes. Auscultation, in fact, heralds in the objective physician in quite a dramatic way. No longer is it necessary for the physician to get snarled in and by the patient's experiences and symptoms; instead, he is able to isolate himself from the patient's 'noises' and listen to the sounds produced in the patient, sounds to which the patient has no access and over which he has little control.

With the invention of the ophthalmoscope and the laryngoscope, the penetration of the 'gaze' into the object (the patient) became so commonplace that very few physicians doubted the aphorism, 'To see is to believe.' Photography made the replication of a patient's lesions in hundreds of glossy medical textbooks a reality, further alienating the patient from his own body. The microscope followed and the X-ray brought the century to a close, yielding to the 'gaze' and its quest for indexical signs of disease a licence that knew no limits.

To repeat, Siddha and other traditional Indian medical systems are no more given to reflecting upon their *symbolic* roots than is biomedicine. I do hope that this will change. The current climate of ideological colonialism unleashed by an indexically more self-assured power – biomedicine – ought to make this the right time for these systems to critically re-evaluate their epistemic viability. There is evidence that such a process is going on. And again it is hoped that this process will not end in unexamined capitulation to the technologically superior newcomer. There is a more important moral, if you will, to be learned from Siddha and similar traditional systems of healing and thought. Indexicality has not appropriated as much power to itself in Siddha medicine as it has in biomedicine. Some of this power, the power to persuade and to heal, is shared through iconicity, as has been demonstrated in our study of the pulse.

It is this prevailing presence of iconicity that has immunized Siddha medicine from such dichotomies as illness vs. disease and body vs. mind and, by extension, has made it epistemologically unnecessary if not impossible to invent such deprecatory labels as 'crocks,' 'gomers,' 'malingerers,' and 'hypochondriacs' (see George and Dundes 1978; Lipsitt 1970). In the absence of a mind-body dichotomy, phenomena such as 'somatization' become meaningless and do not call for the kind of de-

fence biomedical psychiatry finds necessary to construct (see Katon et al. 1982).

Arguing against the unrelenting 'cartesianism' in biomedicine, Hahn and Kleinman (1981) propose that we would serve the cause of health far more effectively if we conceived the body as mindful and the mind as embodied. In Siddha thought, such a conception is so fundamental that smallpox is no more 'real' than a 'depressed heart,' even though one may well be a more serious condition than the other. The bottom line in Siddha medicine is 'suffering,' as Hahn (1984) defines it. And given the significant part that iconicity plays in Siddha thought in general and in the diagnostic process in particular, suffering, any suffering, is not hermetically sealable by objectification, nor can non-suffering be masqueraded as suffering, an art for which epithets such as malingering and hypochondriasis have been reserved. Suffering is something that can be shared and must be shared by someone else, especially the physician.

The use of iconicity in healing as found in Siddha, Ayurveda, or other homeopathic therapies is certainly not limited to these systems alone. The phenomenon is a widespread one. A considerable body of anthropological literature devoted to healing rituals has brought this to our attention, the best known among these being Victor Turner's (1967) study of Ndembu symbolism and Lévi-Strauss's (1963) essay on 'The Sorcerer and His Magic.' The use of metaphor in psychotherapy is yet another example of iconicity at work in healing (see Erikson 1980; Bandler and Grinder 1979, 1981; Haley 1973). This turn of events in Western medical thought is encouraging. And for those who would rather relegate these attempts to a Tylolean vestige of sympathetic magic I would like to leave you, for whatever it is worth, the following event, recorded by a contemporary psychotherapist.

The case concerns a patient who had been catatonic for several years and abandoned to vegetate in a mental hospital in California. Bandler describes what happened:

[He] had been sitting there for several years on the couch in the day room. The only communication he was offering me were his body position and his breathing rate. His eyes were open, pupils dilated. So I sat facing away from him at about a forty-five degree angle in a chair nearby, and I put myself in exactly the same body position, and I sat there for forty-five minutes breathing with him. At the end of forty minutes I had tried little variations in my breathing, and he would follow, so I knew I had rapport at that point. I

could have changed my breathing slowly over a period of time and brought him out that way. Instead I interrupted and shocked him. I shouted, 'Hey! Do you have a cigarette?' He jumped up off the couch and said 'God! Don't do that!' (1979: 80)

## Notes

- 1 Most of the data on which this essay is based were obtained from Dr R. Kannan of Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu. Fieldwork for this study was funded by the National Science Foundation and this is acknowledged with gratitude.
- 2 Kandasamy Mudaliyar (1973: 48, 49) ascribes these two quatrains to Tirumalar's *Tirumandiram*. However, I have not been able to locate these among the 3,000 odd quatrains in the *Tirumandiram* and believe that they either belong to one of the minor poets of the eighteen *cittar* or have been passed down via an oral tradition that lies outside the published corpus of the eighteen *cittar* compositions.
- 3 In keeping with the convention of citing from the *Collected Papers of C.S. Peirce*, the number to the left of the decimal point indicates the volume and that to the right indicates the paragraph.
- 4 That a patient is a sign may seem odd to those unfamiliar with Peirce's thought. For Peirce, man is essentially a sign. For an explication of this perspective in the context of anthropological theory see Milton Singer's essay, 'Signs of the Self: An Exploration in Semiotic Anthropology' (1980).
- 5 This is quite clearly a hypothetical assumption, made for convenience rather than out of necessity. The physician may well be suffering from quite a different humoral imbalance. In either case the point holds: the physician's suffering-humour-pulse sign complex will not be the same as that of the patient. This is an important point to be taken note of. In Siddha medical theory no two persons, sick or otherwise, are constitutionally identical.

## CHAPTER 8

# Matters of Taste in Weyéwa

*Joel C. Kuipers*

*Those ... from whom nature has withheld the legacy of taste, have long faces, and long eyes and noses, whatever their height there is something elongated in their proportions. Their hair is dark and unglossy, and they are never plump; it was they who invented trousers.*

Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste* (1971)

*de gustibus non est disputandum*

Anonymous

Looking through the ethnographic literature, it is easy to get the impression that matters of taste are very personal indeed. Why else would so few anthropologists have reported on this universal aspect of human experience? In one sample,<sup>1</sup> only four of over three thousand studies had anything to say about taste. A bibliography on folk classification (Conklin 1972) shows 388 entries on colour, but only two on taste, and these were published in 1903 and 1904 (Chamberlain 1903; Myers 1904). Clearly, there is very little anthropological 'disputing,' or any other type of discourse, on this important sense.

C.S. Myers, author of one of the last published comparative studies on taste words, expresses his dismay over the difficulty of getting objective statements about gustatory experience: 'In few senses as in taste do we find such feeble powers of subjective analysis, and such a close relation with emotional tone' (1904: 126). A member of the famous expedition to the Torres Straits, Myers found that the Melanesian 'natives' he tested with solutions of quinine, salt, hydrochloric acid, and

sucrose were unable to perform with accuracy the introspective task of labelling gustatory sensations, even though they clearly were capable of discrimination. Furthermore, he found that taste words often are 'confused' by the speakers and used to refer to non-gustatory sensations (e.g., a 'bitter experience').

Do tastes and the words that refer to them have a purely personal significance, lacking a shared, codelike structure? This paper argues that to answer this question, one must first distinguish between technical, scientific definitions of taste and taste vocabulary, and non-specialist, or 'folk' orderings of such categories and nomenclature. Second, one may separately consider the cultural significance of the taste stimuli, and the meanings and use of the taste vocabulary. Drawing on data collected while conducting ethnographic fieldwork among the Weyéwa of the western highlands of Sumba, an island in Eastern Indonesia, I show that taste substances are meaningfully ordered in the context of a 'social visit.' I argue that the words for representing taste experience are best understood not as mere tools for referring to discrete sensations, but as multifunctional signs which systematically fit into the social context of use. I will illustrate by describing taste-term usage in some Weyéwa 'ways of speaking' (Hymes 1974), including ritual speech, in which taste terms are used to characterize the ritual status of women, water-buffalo, and the major points of the agricultural year.

Myers's judgment about the 'feeble powers of subjective analysis' reveals important differences in the Western technical usage of taste words and the use of such vocabulary among 'untrained observers' (Robinson 1970). In scientific discourse, what taste words are viewed as describing are the private, internal states of individuals (see Lutz 1982: 113),<sup>2</sup> sensations mediated by the taste buds. Taste words, then, are tools for referring to those sensations. With training, a high degree of agreement in the use of taste terms can be reached among specialists (see Williams 1975).

For an ethnographer interested in linguistic variation and cultural usages among non-specialists, however, such referentially oriented definitions must be used with care, and attention must be paid to the range of linguistic and social contexts in which the terms are actually employed. As Silverstein (1976: 18) has pointed out, 'reference is one kind of linguistic performance among many': e.g., the statement 'I'm cold' may not simply refer to someone's internal state, it may be a request to shut the window.

Adrienne Lehrer's (1983) recent study of the use of wine terms can be seen as broadly confirming this last point. Utilizing questionnaires and systematic interviews, she found that among non-specialists, there

is very little agreement as to what the wine terms refer to. She argues that the terms can nonetheless be understood in relationship to their communicative functions (e.g., 'phatic communion' 1983: 174; cf. Malinowski 1953: 477).

But if the uses of words for taste are ordered by a given culture, so also are the sensations to which such words are supposed to refer. Certain kinds of sensations and experiences within a given culture may be classified as 'bitter,' others as 'sweet,' or 'sour,' etc. Such categories of taste sensation, however, often have highly context-specific meanings and are thus not readily generalizable by laymen. While the interpretation of an abstract<sup>3</sup> gustatory equivalent of the famous Berlin and Kay Munsell Color Chip technique (1969) would require knowledge not available in the culture of most informants (Robinson 1970; cf. also Williams 1975), in the context of specific, culturally defined situations, the meanings of taste sensations exhibit systematic, shared patterns of significance. For example, Douglas (1982) found that a central opposition organizing the order and meaning of working-class British dinners was savoury/sweet. Among the Weyéwa of Sumba, in the context of the social visit, particular foods are considered to be sweet, sour, salty, pungent, bland, or bitter. These categories not only follow a particular order in the progression of the event, but systematic violations of this order are charged with communicative import.

If taste is a personal matter, the meanings of the terms of 'dispute' are nonetheless to a certain degree organized by culture. I propose to explore some of the ways in which taste categories and the usage of taste terms are ordered in specific contexts in a particular community, the Weyéwa of highland Sumba. The 'social visit' will be described, followed by a discussion of the forms, uses, and extensions of the vocabulary which applies to it.

### The Ethnographic Setting

Located about two hundred and fifty miles east of Bali, in the dry 'outer arc' of the eastern Indonesian islands (Fox 1978), Sumba has experienced relatively few externally imposed changes to the traditional ways of life of its 400,000 or so inhabitants. Approximately 80 per cent of the members of the eight distinct, but closely related, language groups on the island have eschewed the Islamic and Christian religious influences to which they have been exposed since at least the middle nineteenth century. Neither the Dutch East Indies nor the present Indonesian government has considered Sumba's economic development as a regional priority, and the overwhelming majority of Sumbanese rely on

their own gardens and livestock for subsistence. Their diet appears to have undergone relatively few changes in the past century as a result of commercial developments, the most significant recent introductions to the island cuisine being coffee (which is now grown locally in the highland regions) and refined sugar (one of the few cash commodities on the island) (cf. Mintz 1979). The mainstays of the Sumbanese diet consist of root crops such as roasted or boiled taro, corn, dried fish, and seasonings such as salt and chili peppers. On ritual occasions, rice accompanied by boiled chicken, pork, or water-buffalo meat is served, sometimes seasoned with shallots, garlic, turmeric, and peppers.

### The Structure of Tastes in a Social Visit

In any Weyéwa social encounter between same-sex age-mates that lasts for more than a few seconds, small, shoulder-slung baskets of ingredients for a betel and areca nut chew are obligatorily exchanged, the first step in a discrete, marked event called a social visit, *pakúlla wékkina*. This masticatory is a mild stimulant recognized to have antiseptic and medicinal properties, but is chewed mostly for its taste. Quite often, such a transaction takes place on the veranda, *bángga*, of someone's house. In this setting, the hosts' provisions necessarily include a special, clean guests' pandanus mat, *téppe kúlla*, and a plate consisting of at least two long and slender betel fruits,<sup>4</sup> a small container of slaked lime, and either fresh green whole areca nuts, *wínno móro*, or else the brown, dried, and quartered slices of the husked areca nut, *wínno máte*. In addition to the plate, the host of the house will often provide an honoured guest with his own personal, carefully woven betel basket, *kaléku*, in which fresher, tastier, and hence more desirable ingredients are kept in the semi-secret interior folds, *ndáppeta*. The closer one's personal relationship to the host, the more likely one is to know, through long personal association, the location of the *ndáppeta* with the choice betel and areca.

The quality, size, freshness, quantity, and variety of the ingredients are factors in the evaluation of their taste. These properties reflect on the wealth and prestige of the giver, and also perhaps on the disposition of the host towards the guest. Some Weyéwa even say that one can judge the warmth of a welcome by the taste of the betel ingredients provided by the host.

The three main components of a betel chew are the areca nut, *wínno*, the fruit of the betel pepper or catkin, *útta* (hereafter glossed as betel), and slaked lime *katáwa* (cf. Conklin 1958). There are several varieties of ingredients, and the prestige and taste of each ingredient is evaluated

according to its source (e.g., the kind of tree it originated from), the season in which it was picked, and the mode of preparation.

For the areca palm, the berry areca, *winno tóro*, and dark areca, *winno kamia*, are considered to bear the most desirable kind of nut. Only in circumstances of extreme poverty, immediate need, or anger does one serve the harsh and tough-tasting fruit of the varieties known locally as *dáwara*, *nábba*, or the *maládi* tree (*Cyrtostachys lakka*, cf. Malay Pinang raja; Burkill 1966: 756). I heard a story of a presumptuous young man who was badly rebuffed by the father of the girl he was courting when, in a rather premature effort to establish his intimacy with the family, he reached for the innermost fold of the elder man's betel basket and popped into his mouth what turned out to be some very tough-tasting old *maládi*. Since the *ndáppeta* folds usually contain the choice ingredients, he soon realized the hostile significance of this clearly intentional sign.

The different ways of serving the areca nut communicate status in a more subtle fashion. When in season, the most desirable form is *winno kapókke*, green, ungerminated areca nut, the contents of which are *ndákke*, tender, ripe. If it is out of season, then perforce one serves the lower-grade dried areca *winno máte* (literally, dead areca) which may be sliced, dried, and chopped in quarters, *winno padári*. Better yet, it may be chopped finely (*winno karikita*, literally, areca gravel). If the areca is dried for too long, it loses its taste and is referred to as crusty areca, *winno kómala*. Alone, the taste of areca is tart or sour, *póláa*, a variety of the sour, *mawillura*, sensation.

While the leaves and roots of the betel vine, *utta*, are occasionally chewed as part of the quid, the locally preferred part of the plant is the fruit of the betel plant, *úwa útta*, or betel catkin. Available all year, betel fruit become limp and bitter if allowed to age, and betel in such condition are only chewed under extreme circumstances. Unlike areca, the taste of fresh *útta* is described as *ítta*, pungent.

Slaked lime, *katáwa*, made from the burnt, finely crushed coral on the coast is considered the best, while lime gathered from the upland coral outcroppings is said to lack the requisite intensity and is sometimes bitter as well.

Chewing the combined betel quid, *pamáma*,<sup>5</sup> involves balancing delicately the cool, tart *póláa* tastes of the areca and betel with the hot, pungent *ítta* and even burning *káta* taste of the lime. Alone, any one of these ingredients is unpleasant, and an overdosage of lime can even damage the gums. A lack of intensity or blandness, *kóba*, in an ingredient, particularly lime, is thoroughly disagreeable, since the intended effect of chewing betel is mild stimulation: it is supposed to feel *malérri*,

fresh or stimulating, on the tongue. No amount of balancing of ingredients, however, can make up for bitter elements in the quid. As previously mentioned, if served in a host-guest situation, these items are viewed as an unfavourable reflection on the relationship.

After the obligatory betel- and areca-chewing stage of a social visit, in which the dominant tastes are tart and pungent, the encounter, if it proceeds, requires the provision of something sweet, *manggólo*. After enjoying a chew of betel together, guest and host sip hot, heavily sugared coffee from tin mugs or glasses. Fresh coconut juice, *wé'e nú'u*, may also be drunk directly from the shell. In addition, small, sweet, finger-size bananas are often served on a plate, or in the more acculturated families, some store-bought biscuits, *biskwí*, may be offered. Again, unsugared coffee is a reflection on the host-guest relationship.

Guests staying for dinner are typically invited to move from the veranda into the house for the main meal after drinking coffee. Minimally the food consists of one of a number of starch staples constituting the essential core of the meal, *pangá'a*, and a number of condiments, *pangá'a wai* (literally, to eat with). While these two categories constitute constant elements of any Weyéwa meal, what actually fills these categories varies according to the resources of the family, and the formality of the social occasion.

The dominant and distinctive taste distinguishing a meal from a betel exchange or a casual snack is saltiness, *méina*. Placed on the side of one's bowl or in a separate dish are crushed chilis, *nggánga*, and salt (obtained from sea water), which are taken between the thumb and forefinger and sprinkled liberally over all staples. Combined with a starch, salt satisfies hunger, *karémba*, not just the appetite, *mbéi*.<sup>6</sup> Salt, like a staple, is an essential component of a Weyéwa meal. Chilis, *nggánga*, also very common at Weyéwa meals, consist of crushed peppers which are supposed to yield an extremely pungent taste. Blandness, *kóba*, in either one of these items is cause for comment in private after the meal.

As the social situation for a meal becomes increasingly special or formal, sweet, *manggólo*, tastes, in the form of special coconut sauces, become more prominent. Blandness, *kóba*, is desirable only in the mouth-rinsing water customarily provided before and after the meal. Within the meal itself, blandness usually is a derogatory description of the age or improper preparation of the coastally produced sea salt. Sour, *ma-willura*, *pólla*, or bitter, *póddu*, tastes have no place in most Weyéwa meals. The bitter-tasting leaves of the papaya tree, for example, are made sweet and pungent with coconut milk and chilis before serving, and these are only eaten on relatively informal occasions.

At the risk of overformalizing the relationships between tastes, it is

possible to present a sequence of dominant tastes as they occur in the context of a social visit.<sup>7</sup> Each stage is characterized in terms of the possible positive (+) gustatory attributes of that stage and the negative possibilities (-). The sequence of tastes in a social visit is:

1. Betel chewing  
(+) sour/pungent : (-) bitter/bland
2. Coffee and fruits  
(+) sweet : (-) bitter/bland
3. Mouth-rinse  
(+) bland : (-) bitter
4. Meal  
(+) salty/pungent : (-) bitter/bland
5. Mouthrinse  
(+) bland : (-) bitter
6. Betel chewing  
(+) sour/pungent : (-) bitter

Bitter tastes stand outside of this sequence, but threaten at every step. A bitter taste in betel quid, coffee, water, or salt is a serious deficiency in the fare. Furthermore, a bland taste in step 1, 2, 4, or 6 can be interpreted negatively.

### The Vocabulary of Taste

Taste substances are systematically ordered by a given culture, sometimes in ways that actually transmit messages. But the most complex means of ordering communication about tastes is through language. In the Western tradition, the problem of determining the primary or basic descriptors of sensory experience has a long history. Systematic efforts to provide a set of basic taste terms date back at least to the third century BC when Aristotle listed sweet, sour, bitter, salty, astringent, pungent, and harsh as basic qualities. The number, range, and motivation of these categories have varied according to the researcher, but there seems to be a consensus among modern psychophysicists for the existence of certain of what Lévi-Strauss (1966) might call 'natural discontinuities' in the nature of taste receptors, stimuli, and subjective experience (McBurney 1978), yielding a 'basic four': sweet, sour, bitter, and salty; there remains, however, considerable dispute as to where to draw the lines (Bartoshuk 1978), and there have been no published efforts to utilize cultural and linguistic data for this enterprise.

Attempts to determine 'basic taste terms' employing methodology developed for the colour domain (Berlin and Kay 1969) are probably

as ill-fated in anthropology as similar attempts at expropriation have been in psychophysics (for a history of such attempts, see Bartoshuk 1978). In the colour domain, basic terms are: 'The highest level, most commonly used, superordinate color categories which are assumed ideally to be non-overlapping, coordinately contrastive and exhaustive in that the categories labelled by other non-basic color names will be included in them. Non-basic terms, again ideally, will then be either synonyms or hyponyms of basic terms' (Conklin 1973: 936).

One problem that emerges is that the taste vocabulary is not exhaustive. In the Weyéwa case, for example, there are always certain parts of the gustatory experience left undescribed by an abstract label. There are a number of tastes which fall into the interstices, which are labelled by narrowly defined, non-lexemic, object-bound terms, terms which nonetheless cannot be included in any of the so-called basic terms. My assistants found the flavour of the mint plant very difficult to place within any particular category. They described the sensation with a descriptive phrase, not a single lexeme, which roughly translates as 'it has the taste of the mint plant.'

Taste terms also frequently do not exhibit clear contrast. Certain fruits, e.g., mango, *úppo*, are spoken of as tasting sweet and sour at the same time.

But a more fundamental problem in utilizing the basic colour term methodology for taste investigation is that it assumes that there is a way of investigating pure sensory experiences, torn free from their context, by using, for example, a Munsell chip technique, or in the case of taste, solutions of sodium chloride, sucrose, hydrogen chloride, and quinine (for colour cf. Evans 1948: 216; and Conklin 1973: 933). For one thing, taste is a richly multimodal experience (cf. Rozin 1982), in which many other sensory modalities besides taste buds are involved (see Table 1).

Given this multiplicity of stimuli involved in taste experiences, what criteria can be employed to derive the basic terms? In taste, there may not be any single criterion for deciding on basic or non-basic status in Weyéwa taste terminology. However, there are a number of cultural factors in favour of the following list of basic Weyéwa tastes: sour (*ma-willura*), sweet (*mangóollo*), salty (*méina*), bitter (*póddu*), tart (*pólla*), bland (*kóba*), and pungent (*íta*).

1. They are monolexic, non-object bound terms (cf. Conklin 1972), rather than descriptive circumlocutions.

2. Unlike non-basic terms, they are all considered to have a sensate focus in the mouth (see Table 2).

TABLE 1  
Weyêwa food terms and appropriate references

Weyêwa		Appropriate reference
<i>Texture</i>		
ndákke	<i>tender, ripe</i>	meat, fruits
kátto	<i>tough</i>	meat, fruits, tubers
kalówita	<i>thick, viscous</i>	rice, porridge
kadákila	<i>sticky, glutinous</i>	rice
mabéka	<i>tender</i>	meat
dóndo	<i>soggy, damp</i>	vegetables, leaves
lálaka	<i>oily</i>	fruits, especially coconuts
méweta	<i>greasy</i>	meat
malérri	<i>beady, fresh</i>	liquids, betel quid
<i>Temperature</i>		
mútta dáta	<i>lukewarm</i>	rice, liquids
múttu	<i>hot</i>	liquids, solids
maringi	<i>cool</i>	liquids
lénngi	<i>tepid</i>	liquids
<i>Smell</i>		
báu	<i>strong smell</i>	spoiled food
káttuka	<i>pungent odour</i>	spices (ginger, garlic)
wángi	<i>fragrant</i>	flavour of cooking food
<i>Sound</i>		
kabórruka	<i>crispy</i>	roasted corn

It is interesting to note that these localizations are not on the whole inconsistent with the distribution of quality-specific (sensitive) taste buds in the mouth (McBurney 1978).

3. Unlike non-basic terms, these words describe experiences which are recurring and often obligatory components of the most common situated taste experiences.

### Taste Words and Discourse

In the end, attempts to determine basic taste terms on cultural grounds alone may end in little agreement (cf. Lehrer 1983). But more important for this discussion is to stress how unusual it is, in ordinary discourse, to use taste words at all. Perhaps because so much of the human experience of the world is mediated by the visual and auditory channels, especially in adult life (cf. Bruner 1964), it is especially likely that when

TABLE 2

Weyéwa taste terms and the locations of the sensations associated with them

Taste term		Location of the sensation	
mawillura	<i>sour</i>	ngúndu	<i>teeth</i>
manggóllo	<i>sweet</i>	rówi, lómma	<i>lips, tongue</i>
méina	<i>salty</i>	rówi, lómma	<i>lips, tongue</i>
póddu	<i>bitter</i>	lómma, búku	<i>tongue, throat</i>
pólla	<i>tart</i>	ngúndu, ngánda	<i>teeth, mouth</i>
ítta	<i>pungent</i>	rówi, lómma	<i>lips, tongue</i>
kóba	<i>bland</i>	rówi, lómma	<i>lips, tongue</i>

taste experiences become a subject of attention, they are situationally and linguistically 'marked' (Greenberg 1966; Waugh 1982). As Waugh points out, marked phenomena are not only seen as having something 'extra,' but 'the marked term necessarily conveys a more narrowly specified and delimited conceptual item than the unmarked' (1982: 301). This accords well with the relatively specific and limited character of taste in human experience. Whatever the reason for it, the evidence for markedness occurs on several levels in the data I collected.

### *Morphological Marking*

While it is not uncommon in Weyéwa to describe phenomena (including food) in terms of visual attributes such as colour or shape, or in terms of its sound (Weyéwa possesses a rich array of onomatopoeic words), characterizations of experience in terms of taste are typically accompanied by the addition of some lexical or morphological device. Using the adjective red, *rára*, to characterize a horse, or rustling, *sásso*, for the sound of someone walking through the jungle, seems, by itself, to adequately describe the experience; but when speaking of tastes, Weyéwa almost always add an (often emotionally charged) intensifier to the taste adjective (see Table 3).

In examining recordings of discussions in which discussions of tastes occur, I was struck with how rare it was for a taste word to be used without some kind of intensifier, reflecting the marked character of its use.

### *Situational Marking of Taste Terms*

Another kind of marking of taste words is situational. As should be clear from the preceding discussion, the social visit is an event in which food evaluation is at issue, and there is heightened awareness of tastes.

TABLE 3  
Weyéwa adjectives and intensifiers

na mawillura póngu	<i>it is too sour</i>
na mawillura tákka	<i>it is really sour</i>
na mawillura tákka pónguwe	<i>it is really too sour</i>
na mawillura káinawe	<i>it is rather sour</i>
na mawillurapo	<i>it is more sour</i>
nda na mawillurakip	<i>it is not sour enough</i>

However, Weyéwa do not actually use the labels in such events. Indeed, it is not customary or polite to elicit descriptions or to comment on the specific taste qualities of foods. It is appropriate and flattering to murmur that the food is delicious, *minnaka*, or that the meat is greasy, *méweta*, but beyond that, further evaluation in a meal context is highly marked. It is impolite and may cause offence. During an important meal in which a land dispute between two families was settled, one young man I know discussed the taste of the food with his brothers in order to get the attention of one of the cooks, a girl in whom he was interested. She showed signs of being acutely embarrassed by it, and evidently her parents, the hosts, were not pleased. When betel and areca ingredients were served before the end of the meal, the boy was served such a tough betel pepper that he spit it out before chewing it.

It is only after the meal, out of the earshot of the host, in other less marked discourse situations – just talking, *panéwe do áwa* – that this kind of discussion may occur.

#### *Ritual Uses of Taste Vocabulary*

While taste vocabulary, whenever it appears in discourse, is relatively marked, in the context of ritual speech, *panéwe tēnda*, taste words appear to possess yet another mark: ritual speech usages are marked in relation to colloquial speech ones. Required in all ceremonial events among the Weyéwa, ritual speech consists of approximately 1,500 richly metaphorical couplets, which are memorized by a spokesman who links them together spontaneously to form a discourse in rites of divination, placation, marriage, and prohibition. It is marked stylistically by formal restrictions of rhythm, syntax, content, participants, and context of usage (Kuipers 1982; cf. Frake 1975; Irvine 1979).

In non-ceremonial communication situations, a relatively wide range of taste terms may be used. But in Eastern Indonesia, as Fox points out, 'it is a linguistic convention ... that social wisdom and indeed significant knowledge of a ritual sort must be expressed in dual terms

– in a binary or dyadic form' (J. Fox 1980: 16). Thus, in Weyéwa ritual speech, other taste terms disappear, and one single binary opposition exhausts the domain: bitter versus bland.

The range of application of this opposition is also restricted. Bitter and bland, in this sense, refer not to actual gustatory sensations, but ritual statuses of prohibition and permission. Thus, ritually 'consumable' objects such as rice fields, women, and water-buffalo may be prohibited or permitted by declaring them ceremonially bitter, *póddu*, or bland, *kóba*. That is, the gustatory senses of the terms are suspended, and the metaphorical senses of the term come to life, acting as the criteria for the appropriate application and use of the terms (Scheffler and Lounsbury 1971: 10; Basso 1976). Metaphorical uses of taste terms appear in other contexts as well, but the little laughs that accompany them when used out of place indicate that the most appropriate context for their usage is in a ritual event or discussing matters of ritual import.

A girl may be declared *póddu* if her father, in his great joy at begetting a daughter, promises a spectacular feast in gratitude to the ancestors, and then later reneges on his commitment. The girl is considered *póddu* (bitter, prohibited) until her father makes good his promise. No one would dare to marry such a prohibited girl. Since marriage in Weyéwa vulgar slang is likened to the act of eating, marrying a girl of this category is referred to as eating forbidden leaves, *ngá'a ró'o póddu*. Before she may be married, a ritual must first be performed in which she is declared *kóba* (bland, edible, permitted).

For reasons of gratitude, penitence, or fear, Weyéwa occasionally decide to fatten a water-buffalo, pig, or cow for slaughter at a feast in honour of the ancestors. When a man commits an animal, he performs a small ceremony declaring the beast prohibited. On pain of severe retribution from the spirits, the animals must not be slaughtered and eaten until another brief ceremony is performed in which it is declared ceremonially *kóba*.

These taste words also correspond to certain points of the agricultural year. Weyéwa speak of two seasons of the year – a binary division of the calendar – consisting of a wet season, *riwuta*, and a dry season, *mára tána* (cf. Forth 1983).<sup>8</sup> The wet season is the time of planting, when most people migrate to live in scattered agricultural settlements near their fields. The dry season is usually the time of harvest and plenty, when the people frequently return to live for a time in or near their large, sacred, fortified, hilltop ancestral villages. This oscillating migratory pattern corresponds to states of ritual prohibition and permission. At the beginning of the wet season, certain rice fields may be ritually

declared *póddu*, while the dry season begins with a ceremony proclaiming them *kóba*.

For the Weyéwa, when they perform a *póddu* ceremony, it means that for a certain period of time, particular activities are curtailed. An elder of each clan segment is supposed to conduct a ceremony on his own land accompanied by the loud beating of gongs. This publicly announces his recognition of the *póddu* season, and proclaims to all that he intends to plant rice. He plants a few seeds of a sacred species of rice, then slaughters a seven-month-old goat, a seven-month-old pig, a seven-day-old chick, and sets up a bamboo stake with seven branches on it, one for each of the spirits inhabiting the soil. He prays to the spirits to protect his field from blight, grasshoppers, and other calamities, and declares the field *póddu*, meaning that no one may wear white clothes in the field, and no loud noises, no gong beating, no bloodshed, no fighting, and no giving birth may take place near the rice fields until the crop is harvested. Everyone in the garden village must work together in a spirit of co-operation, *patúlu wékkina*, and rank differences are suppressed by a rule against extravagant slaughter of cattle or the reciting of genealogies.

At the beginning of the dry season when the fields are harvested and proclaimed ritually bland or permitted, the rice is carried up to large, fortified hilltop ancestral villages where pageantry, spectacle, and magnificent display of wealth are highly valued. The ban on gong beating is released, and people begin to negotiate and contract marriages. Food is in abundance, and wealth is ostentatiously revealed in ceremonial contexts. The emphasis is on potlatch-style conspicuous consumption (cf. Onvlee 1980). There is no restriction on the generational depth in the recitation of genealogies, and expert orators take delight in revealing the connection between certain lineages and the earliest ancestors, in a lively status rivalry.

What are we to make of this association between the gustatory sensations of bitter and bland, and prohibitions associated with women, rice fields, and water-buffalo? In order to understand, it is important to examine the cultural logic guiding the analogy between gustatory and moral evaluation. Just as foods with bitter tastes are inappropriate for consumption and if inadvertently consumed, can transmit, in the context of a social visit, antisocial messages, in a similar way, women, water-buffalo, and rice are rendered inappropriate for consumption by labelling them bitter. Violation of this restriction on edibility has similarly antisocial and unpleasant implications.

The structure of relationships linking bland and permitted as senses



erality in taste-term reference among non-specialists have met with (interesting) failures (Robinson 1970; cf. Lehrer 1983). One of the negative implications of this finding would seem to be that efforts to develop a valid gustatory equivalent of the Berlin and Kay basic colour term study (1969) would meet with a similar fate, since there is no reliable Munsell chip test for taste (at least for untrained observers). But this need not mean that folk taste categories themselves are purely personal, ordered only by individual preferences. In Weyéwa, as we have seen, there are specific culturally defined contexts in which experiences are consistently structured in terms of shared taste categories, e.g., the social visit.

In conclusion, I wish to disclaim all responsibility for inventing trousers (see Brillat-Savarin, above), and urge others to appreciate our enduring legacy of taste in comparative perspective. Students of folk classification familiar with colour-term literature, for instance, will no doubt find taste-term usage unusual in several respects. First, the localization of taste terms to specific but differentiated areas of the sensory anatomy appears to be unique to the gustatory domain. An interesting topic for future research would be folk beliefs about the location and function of other sensory receptors. Second, taste experience is, to a remarkable degree, bound up with other sensory processes: particularly olfaction, but also touch, pain, audition, and vision. Variation in the relationships within and between culturally defined sensory domains could be a useful direction for comparative research. Third, the marked character of taste-term usage in discourse reflects the emotionally charged character of the experience. More research is needed on the representation of affect in language and discourse.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the context specificity of taste and taste terms reflects an intimate semantic association with particular objects and events. It remains an interesting comparative question to what degree pure, abstracted, context-free referential relations characterize linguistic representations of sensory experience.

## Notes

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- 1 The Human Relations Area Files
- 2 Although many psychologists define taste scientifically as 'those sensations mediated by the taste buds' (McBurney 1978: 125) and accessible through introspection, the first recorded usage of the verb taste in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (c. 1290) does not refer specifically to gustatory experience at all, but rather to the tactual senses. This multisensory character to taste is reflected in the following entry: *St. Michael 312* in *S. Eng. Leg.* 1.308: 'With pat finguer he wole hit tasti sif it is a-riht i-wrought' (free translation: with that finger he would taste it [to see] if it is rightly made). Defining words 'scientifically' recalls Bloomfield's attempt to define the 'meaning' of the word salt as sodium chloride (cf. Bloomfield 1933: 139; and cf. Leech 1974: 3).
- 3 It is also perhaps relevant to bring up here the recent comment by Miller and Johnson-Laird (1976: 600–1) as to the conceptual impoverishment of tastes and smells. Citing a report by Caplan (1973), they note that while verbs of vision, hearing, and feeling can be used in abstract senses (e.g., 'he felt that the project should be approved'), English verbs for tastes and smells are more restricted, and cannot take abstract interpretations (e.g., 'he smelled that the Dow Jones index had fallen').
- 4 To provide only one betel catkin is to allude disparagingly to the penis of a male guest, which is taken as a grave insult.
- 5 *pamamá* = *pa-* verbal nominalizer + *máma* to chew.
- 6 I was reminded of the distinction between 'appetite' and 'hunger' at a talk given at the Yale University Department of Anthropology in the spring of 1982 by Mme Nicole Revel-MacDonald on the ethnocuisine of the Palawan of Palawan Island in the Philippines. Also relevant here is her 1978 publication.
- 7 For an analysis of the British pattern of tastes in a meal, see Mary Douglas (1982).
- 8 When pressed, Weyéwa will provide descriptive phrases for the months of the year roughly similar to the polylexemic phrases that Forth (1983) attributes to the Rindi system of classifying the year. However, such phrases are rarely used among Weyéwa, and do not figure importantly in any ceremonial patterns.
- 9 It is tempting to look at the ritual speech taste-term usage as exhibiting markedness in yet a third way: a marked/unmarked relation between bitter and bland. I do not believe there is much evidence for this, however, since bland is not assumed to be the normal or usual state of affairs, just the acceptable one. Tubers, women, and rice fields have to go through a kind of cultural processing before they can be considered bland.
- 10 Another clue to the culturally shared emotional associations with taste vocabulary may be seen in this ritual pairing of bitter and bland into what

Malkiel (1959) has called an 'irreversible binomial.' Although many systems of taste vocabulary appear to conceive of tastes as opposites (e.g., in English, the opposite of bitter is sweet), the order in which the opposed elements are listed appears not to be random, but fixed by cultural convention. Thus, one may say in Weyéwa bitter and bland, but not bland and bitter. The conventional priority of bitter in this linguistic context may indicate something about the psychological and cultural salience of this category.

## CHAPTER 9

# Olfaction and Transition

*David Howes*

*The sense of smell comes into play most when the other senses are in suspense, at moments, one could say, of materialisation and dematerialisation ...*

Alfred Gell, 'Magic, Perfume, Dream ...' (1977)

This essay is a study in the phenomenology of olfaction modelled after Rodney Needham's well-known paper on 'Percussion and Transition' (1967). In that paper, Needham pointed to the apparently universal association between (1) the use of percussive noise-makers and (2) situations involving a passage from one state or condition to another. Examples include the use of bells at a wedding ceremony, firecrackers at a New Year's celebration, or drums at a séance with the spirits. However, recognition of the connection between percussion and transition confronts one with an intractable problem, according to Needham, since there is 'certainly no intrinsic relationship between the two phenomena'; namely, '(1) the affective impact of percussion, (2) the logical structure of category-change. According to common notions, these components pertain to two quite disparate modes of apprehension: emotion and reason. Yet empirically there seems to be a significant connection between the two' (1967: 611, 612).

### **Perceiving a Connection**

My argument in this paper is that there is an equally universal association between olfaction and transition. This connection was, perhaps,

first and most explicitly stated by Michel de Montaigne in his *Essais* of 1580: 'I have often noticed that [scents] cause changes in me, and act on my spirits according to their qualities; which make me agree with the theory that the introduction of incense and perfume into churches, so ancient and widespread a practice among all nations and religions, was for the purpose of raising our spirits, and of exciting and purifying our senses, the better to fit us for contemplation' (1965: 229).

In illustration of de Montaigne's thesis, let us consider two cases: first, the moment of transubstantiation in the traditional Roman Catholic Mass, and second, the conclusion of Sabbath in the Jewish rite of *Havdalah*. The idea of transubstantiation (that is, the notion that upon consecration the bread and wine *become* the body and blood of Christ) is an especially good example of a situation involving 'category change.' In this case, the transition is from the category of the profane to that of the sacred. The moment of transubstantiation is customarily marked by tintinnabulation and the censuring of the 'elements' (i.e., the bread and wine) with burning balsam.

*Havdalah* (literally, 'division') entrains a passage in the opposite direction: from the sacred to the profane. It involves reciting the following prayer over a cup of wine, a lit candle, and an assortment of fragrant spices: 'Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast made a distinction between the sacred and the profane, between light and darkness, between Israel and the other nations, between the seventh day and the six working days.' With these words the Sabbath comes to a close. According to Jewish lore, 'the symbolic use of fragrant spices during the recital ... is to cheer the soul which is saddened at the departure of the Sabbath' (Birnbaum 1977: 551).

In the first example, olfactory and auditory stimuli are used to evoke the transition. In the second example, olfactory, gustatory, and visual sensations are conjoined. Both rites thus produce a kind of synaesthetic effect in their observers. Our concern, however, is above all with the olfactory dimension of ritual communication, since this has traditionally been the most neglected (Sperber 1975: 117-18). There exist many fine studies which seek to decipher a meal (Douglas 1975), decode body decoration (Faris 1972), analyse incantations (Bloch 1975), and even make a typology of touching (Montagu 1978). But as for smell symbolism, anthropologists have remained peculiarly silent (Howes 1986).

One exception to what could be called 'the rule of olfactive silence' (Corbin 1986) in anthropological discourse is Michael Lambek's *Human Spirits* (1981). This book includes a discussion of the olfaction-transition connection among the Malagasy speakers of the Isle of Mayotte in the Comoro Archipelago, Madagascar. Lambek records that before boys are

circumcised and before virgin girls consummate their marriages, they are forced to inhale the smoke emanating from a pot of burning seaweed, lemon and kapok seeds, coconut oil, and other substances, while remaining under a blanket. This fumigation, which is understood locally to protect the initiates against epileptic seizures, may also be seen as effecting a transition from boyhood to manhood and girlhood to womanhood respectively. Analogously, cologne is sprinkled on the body on all major calendrical holidays (signalling a transition in social time) and on the participants at the completion of a wedding ceremony (marking the achievement of a new status), and cologne is also imbibed by a host at the onset of being possessed by a spirit (thus expressing the transition from an ordinary to an altered state of consciousness) (Lambek 1981: 119–23).

The connection between olfaction and transition has thus been the subject of considerable elaboration in Mayotte. This would seem to be typical of Indo-Pacific societies (Leenhardt 1979: 48). For example, in the Tanimbar Islands, Eastern Indonesia, a newborn child is literally ‘smoked’ over the household fire for the first few weeks of life (Forbes 1885: 315). In the same islands, at the other end of a person’s life (not death as we know it, but that stage in the decomposition of a corpse when only the bones remain, and the skull finally falls away from the rest of the skeleton) it is said that a whiff of cadaverous odour may be detected in the house. It is by virtue of this odour that the defunct ‘make themselves known’ for the last time as human beings (Drabbe 1940: 403–4); henceforth they are treated as gods (Howes 1988: 101–4).

Another interesting illustration of the olfaction-transition connection is the case of magic. The whole purpose of magic is, of course, to effect a change in the condition of the person on whom it is practised. How is this change effected? In the Trobriand Islands, ‘the sense of smell is the most important factor in the laying of [love or sorcery] spells on people; magic, in order to achieve its greatest potency, must enter through the nose’ (Malinowski 1929: 449). Similarly, as far away as the Andaman Islands, and at numerous places in between, the plants that are used as remedies for sickness are ‘possessed of strong and characteristic odours, and the natives think that it is through the odour that they effect a cure’ (Radcliffe-Brown 1964: 311; Drabbe 1940: 366; Gell 1977: 26).

Perhaps the most common example of the connection, and the one with which Indologists, biblical scholars, Egyptologists, and Classicists would all be equally familiar, is the use of odoriferous substances to communicate with the gods (Moncrieff 1967: 14–15; Rothkrug 1981: 97–8; Gibbons 1986: 328). As Detienne (1977: 38) records, ‘one of the most ancient terms used in the Homeric epic to refer to offerings to the

gods, namely *thúos* ... originally had the sense of “substance burned in order to obtain a fragrant smoke”.’ The most wondrous example of the connection is found among the Dakota of the Western Plains of North America: ‘To enhance relatedness, to pierce deeper into the mystery of universal oneness and experience the ultimate unity of all, a Dakota had to go through one or more rites [of purification], approaching the ultimate in absolute humility and complete abandonment of self ... The fragrance of the sweet grass they burned during the rite was to “make the four-leggeds, the wingeds, the star peoples of the heavens and all things as relatives”’ (Lee 1959: 63). The Dakota example concerns a transformation in consciousness more comprehensive than any we have considered so far. The vision which follows the introjection of the odorous particles of the sweet grass is one of unity. Where there is unity, there are no longer any categories (such as self/other, human being/animal, mortal/immortal). Hence, though the Dakota rite can be said to involve category-change, it also involves something more. Indeed, it entrains so complete a transformation of awareness that all categories, all discontinuities, dissolve into the continuum of the fragrant smoke of sweet grass, which is the vehicle for the sense of ‘the ultimate unity of all.’

### Explaining the Connection

If it is allowed, on the strength of the above examples, that there is indeed some sort of connection between olfaction and transition, how is that connection to be explained? This question can be approached on a number of different levels: logical, psychological, and sociological.

First, at the logical level, in contrast to sound, there would seem to be an intrinsic relationship between olfaction and transition. For example, it is at the threshold of a room (bedroom, attic, cellar) that one most notices its odour. After a few moments inside, the smell disappears. The nature of this experience is due to what is called the process of adaptation (Geldard 1972: 462). As a second example, consider the phenomenological and epistemological effects of the smell of something cooking: ‘The smell of something cooking or the tang of an aperitif mark a transition from concept, expectation, to fact – a notional meal to the actual one ... A mere aroma, in its very lack of substance, is more *like* a concept than it is like a ‘thing’ in the usual sense, and it is really quite appropriate that the olfactory sense *should play its greatest role at junctures* when it is precisely this attribute of a meal (meal-concept or meal-fact) which is in the balance’ (Gell 1977: 28, emphasis mine). As Gell’s analysis suggests, the sense of smell is the liminal sense *par excellence*,

constitutive of and at the same time operative across all of the boundaries we draw between different realms and categories of experience.

At the psychological level, as de Montaigne noted, scents 'cause changes' in us. One has only to think of the effect of a familiar smell on the memory to be convinced of this. Recognizing the scent, we are at once 'transported' – as the poet (Baudelaire 1975: 42) would say – back to the event with which it is originally associated, and 'we live the moment over again with the full cord of its emotions vibrating our soul and startling our consciousness' (McKenzie 1923: 48). Somehow, the intervening time disappears.

The explanation for this always emotional, and sometimes quite mystical, experience lies in the anatomy of smell. Olfactory signals are transmitted directly via the tiny hairlike cilia at the ends of the olfactory neurons into the limbic region of the brain, the core of emotions and memory. The limbic system, by virtue of its control over the hypothalamus, activates the endocrine (hormone) and autonomic nervous systems (Gibbons 1986: 332–7; Pelletier 1977: 40–81). As Barbara Lex (1977: 330) points out, intense stimulation of the autonomic nervous system 'retards or prohibits logical reasoning.' Such stimulation may, therefore, make us ripe for the suggestion that a transition is taking place.

Most of the anthropological research on this subject has focused on the effects of percussion. (Sonic bursts are, of course, stressors of the same order as strong smells.) Knauff (1979: 189–90), for example, has argued that 'the key feature of percussion in ritual is that it not only *reports* category change but *motivates* it in a deeply experiential manner,' because drumming, bell-ringing, handclapping and so on 'entrain *activity* rather than thought' (see also Tuzin 1984). Thus, according to Knauff, while reason and discourse (the functions of the neocortex) keep social categories apart, percussion provides the spark which precipitates movement from one category to another as a result of the way it triggers intense emotional and physiological changes (all controlled by the limbic system).

If what Knauff says is indeed the case with bells, an even stronger case can be made for smells. Odours also tend to obstruct discursive reason, as the following example, which concerns how Americans differ in their delineation of 'personal space' from Arabs, attests: 'Bathing the other person in one's breath is a common practice in Arab countries. The American is taught not to breathe on people. He experiences difficulty when he is within olfactory range of another person [such as an Arab taxi-driver] with whom he is not on close terms, particularly in public settings. He finds the intensity and sensuality overwhelming and

has trouble paying attention to what is being said and at the same time coping with his feelings' (Hall 1969: 49; see also Siegel 1983). The mutual exclusivity of verbal and olfactory communication is also reflected in our experience of most odours as 'untranslatable'; i.e., impossible to describe or categorize. They either repel or attract us, but they are not susceptible to rational classification the way colours or tastes are, for example (Howes 1986).

To return to the subject of passage ritual, we are now in a position to advance a theory concerning the ritual use of smells, which is similar in outline to the percussion theory discussed above: in rites of passage the 'primal sensory/emotive experience' of smell is used to 'fill in the gaps of logical/semantic structures,' and thus instigate transition between social categories (Knauff 1979: 189).

One possible objection to this theory is that our responses to smells are so idiosyncratic that rather than entraining passage in one direction, the same smell may summon up very different associations in different people. As Sperber (1975: 118) has noted, odours bypass all forms of coded communication: 'it is in the area of individual symbolism, in their ability to evoke recollections and sentiments that are withheld from social communication, that ... olfactive impressions take on all their force.'

However, Sperber's objection can be countered. For, as Needham (1967: 610) has shown in connection with percussion, 'society itself defines and organises feelings, and conditions its members to respond to certain sounds rather than to others – in one society the effect will be produced by the drum, in another by the gong, and in another by clapping – but practically everywhere it is found that percussion is resorted to in order to communicate with the other world' (see also McKenzie 1923: 57). Thus, to extend Needham's line of reasoning, while mint is used in the Trobriands (Malinowski 1929: 448–9), ginger among the Umeda (Gell 1977: 25), and balsam among Roman Catholics, practically everywhere odoriferous substances are employed to communicate with the gods. Moreover, the very diversity in the array of substances used indicates that olfactory communication is 'coded,' at least in certain contexts, which is all that is being asserted here. In fact, Sperber would not object to this assertion, for he likewise regards the ritual use of incense as an exception to the otherwise idiosyncratic effect of smells on the emotions and memory (Sperber 1975: 118).

Finally, at the sociological level, it will be recalled that de Montaigne saw the purpose behind the use of incense and perfume in churches as being to 'fit us for contemplation,' presumably of God. The Durkheimian would read 'society' in place of 'God,' but that interpretation remains

just as fitting. For, as Largey and Watson (1972: 1032) have argued, the burning of incense creates an 'intersubjective we-feeling' among the participants in a rite as each is forced to introject particles of the odour. One cannot not participate in the effervescence (or fellow-feeling) of the situation, because it participates in *you*. What is more, the use of incense 'provides for the senses a symbolic representation of the invisible action (communion) that is taking place' (Boulogne cited in Largey and Watson 1972: 1031), that is, it supplements a deficiency in the way we see things.

McKenzie (1923) has also remarked upon the synchronizing effects of smell in ritual contexts. Learning from Havelock Ellis 'that during religious excitement a real (and pleasant) odour is sometimes perceptible in the atmosphere around the faithful,' and noting that 'an odour can induce ... emotional changes without attracting attention to itself,' he concludes that 'the suggestion is not, after all, so very far-fetched that an emanation proceeding from the worshippers at the moment of the elevation of the Host in a Roman Catholic church may be transmitted to the bystanders through the olfactory [apparatus] to induce in them an emotion similar to that felt by the initiated' (McKenzie 1923: 96). McKenzie's suggestion is supported by the American and British experiments which have shown that when young women begin living together as room-mates in a college dormitory, they often discover that their menstrual cycles synchronize: 'The signal is apparently in the odour, however faint, of their sweat' (Gibbons 1986: 333; Winter 1978: 59-60).

We may conclude that what Knauft (1979: 190) regards as the 'unique capacity' of percussion to 'entrain collective activity (e.g., marching, clapping, dancing),' and hence, 'to manage social transitions and foster collective solidarity,' is not so unique after all, since this is very much a feature of olfaction as well.

Thus far we have focused on the dynamic aspects of smell symbolism in passage rites, that is, on how smell motivates category-change. In what follows, we shall be concerned with the more static, enduring aspects of the connection between olfaction and transition; in particular, how smells lend themselves to expressing the transitional (or liminal) *state* of the subjects of passage ritual. But first, a few words are in order regarding the avowedly functionalist bias of the preceding analysis.

Most right-thinking semioticians would undoubtedly be offended by the emphasis we have placed on the 'function' of smells in ritual. They would argue that we ought rather to focus on their 'meaning.' But there is a category-error at the heart of this objection. That error results from the semiotician's 'craving for generality,' as Needham (1972: 112-13) would say, a craving which in the instant case finds expression in the attempt to analyse all signs on the model of the linguistic sign (see, e.g.,

Lévi-Strauss 1981: 691). Smell signs simply do not have the same logical/semantic structure as linguistic signs (Howes 1986; Schiffman 1974). That is because smells are 'traces which unlike words only partially detach themselves from the world of objects to which they refer'; i.e., they occupy a space somewhere 'in between the stimulus and the sign, the substance and the idea' (Gell 1977: 26). It is for this reason that matter and meaning become, in a sense, 'miscible fluids' insofar as smells are concerned, which is an abomination from the perspective of the (always detached) semiotician. However, it is precisely the irrelevance of the distinction between metaphor and metonymy, or sense and reference (or whatever other dichotomy the semiotician might seek to impose), which, in the case of smells, makes them so *useful* to, for example, the Trobriand magician: 'In the second stage ... of sorcery, the object or compound over which black magic has been done is burned, and the smoke enters through the nostrils into the body against which it is directed and causes disease (*silami*). For this reason, houses are never built on piles in the Trobriands, as it would greatly facilitate this stage in the sorcerer's work. Thus the idea of magical infection through the nose exercises a considerable influence on the culture of the natives' (Malinowski 1929: 449).

### Smell and Liminality

Although not as well attested in the literature, a further connection may be traced between smell and the 'liminal period' in rites of passage. The liminal period is the transitional phase which intervenes between the 'separation' of the individual from his or her previous position in society and the 'aggregation' of the individual to his or her new position (van Gennep 1960).

As a preliminary illustration of the association between odour and liminality (and to anticipate the following discussion somewhat), consider the example of the neophyte in a male puberty rite. It is frequently the case that the neophyte is forced 'to go filthy and identified with the earth' (Turner 1967: 96). Why this emphasis on smelling dirty? It is to be noted that the neophyte's social status is unclear, for he has already been separated from his former position in society, but not yet incorporated into his new one. Indeed, throughout the liminal period, he 'cannot be defined in static terms,' as either boy or man (Turner 1967: 97-8). Rather, he 'wavers on the boundary or margin between two positions ... [and] may be viewed as being either out of position entirely or in both positions simultaneously' (McDonnell 1979: 111).

Now it is also characteristic of smells (because of the way they diffuse

themselves in the atmosphere) that they can appear to be in two places at once. In other words, odours are never 'in place' because they always escape from their objects. Smells are further characterized by their 'indefinability' (Gell 1977: 27). It is thus entirely appropriate that the neophyte makes himself smell dirty, for he likewise is 'placeless,' 'indefinable' (Douglas 1966: 95). 'The unclear is the unclean' (Turner 1967: 97).

The above example provides a useful introduction to the thesis to be considered in the present section, but it is not the best. It is in the rites and representations which attach to the events of birth and death that the connection between smell and liminality emerges most clearly.

To begin with death, as Robert Hertz (1960) long ago pointed out, in societies other than our own, death, far from being an instantaneous event, is a process which is not complete until the corpse has reached a skeletal condition. Thus, throughout Indonesia and Melanesia the practice has prevailed of exposing the body of the deceased to the elements in some isolated space, or interring it temporarily, or enclosing it in a coffin and storing it in the house until the flesh has completely decomposed. Once the bones are dry, they are either scattered, or dug up, cleaned, and reinterred, or deposited in a collective ossuary, united with the bones of other ancestors.

To recast what has just been said in van Gennep's terminology: whereas Hertz refers to the period of waiting between the 'temporary' and the 'secondary burial' of the corpse as the 'intermediary period,' van Gennep would regard temporary disposal as the 'separation phase,' the intermediary period as the 'liminal phase,' and secondary disposal as the 'aggregation phase' of mortuary passage rites. Let us now consider three case studies which illustrate Hertz's thesis.

Among the Olo Ngaju of southeastern Borneo, the body of a chief is stored in a coffin in the house awaiting secondary burial. Whatever cracks there may be in the coffin are carefully sealed shut with a pitch of resinous substances (thus symbolically isolating the deceased), and a hole is bored in the base to drain off the liquids produced by the decomposition. Hertz explains:

This is not a matter of hygiene (as we understand the word) nor even, exclusively, a concern to ward off foul smells: we must not attribute to these peoples feelings and scruples about smell which are foreign to them ... The reason they consider it so highly desirable that the putrefaction should take place in a sealed container is that the evil power which resides in the corpse and which is linked with the smells must not be allowed to escape and strike the living. On the other hand they do not want the putrid matter to remain inside

the coffin, because as the dessication of his bones progresses so the deceased himself must be gradually freed from the mortuary infection. (1960: 35)

The 'mortuary infection' which emanates from the corpse is also, in some places, thought to remain attached to the soul of the deceased, even though the soul will have already departed for the 'land of the dead.' For example, among the Alfuru of central Sulawesi, while the soul is thought to go to the underworld immediately after death, it cannot 'enter the communal home of souls at once; it must live outside it, in a separate house till the celebration of the *tengke* [the final funerary rites] ... The reason for this temporary exclusion is explicitly stated: "Lamoa (God) cannot stand the stench of corpses." ... [i.e.] it is only when the decomposition of the corpse is completed that the newcomer among the dead is thought to be rid of his impurity and deemed worthy of admittance to the company of his ancestors' (Hertz 1960: 35).

Similarly, in the Tanimbar Islands, the soul of a dead person is said to travel first to the Isle of Selu. This island is famous for its many wells. After bathing and purifying itself in one of the wells, the soul is thought to 'leap over' to Nus'Nitu, 'Isle of Spirits' (Drabbe 1940: 405–6). It would seem that the amount of time the 'corpse god,' to use Leenhardt's (1979) expression, spends on Selu corresponds to the amount of time it takes for the body (which lies in a coffin suspended between two stakes in the mortuary grounds on the outskirts of the village) to disintegrate (Howes 1988: 102). The leap to Nus'Nitu is thus a kind of apotheosis: the defunct becomes a god, having finally divested himself of his corpse. The deceased's spouse will then go to the mortuary grounds to recover the cervical vertebrae and scatter the rest of the bones (Hertz's 'secondary disposal'). The vertebrae are immediately distributed to the descendants. The latter will use them to call upon the deceased's spirit for assistance in such things as gardening, hunting, and public oratory (Drabbe 1940: 146–7, 256–9, 403, 406).

To sum up, the above sources have allowed us to see 'a kind of symmetry or parallelism between the condition of the body, which has to wait a certain time before it can enter its final tomb, and the condition of the soul, which will be properly admitted into the land of the dead only when the last funeral rites are accomplished' (Hertz 1960: 45). We could even speak of a direct link between the condition of the body and that of the soul (a possibility which Hertz himself entertains but unduly dismisses), since both participate in the same odour and are frequently referred to by the same name throughout the intermediary period (Howes 1988: 95).

The survivors also participate in the odour of death. For example, in Madagascar, the Trobriand Islands, Tanimbar, and elsewhere, the nearest relatives of the deceased, 'especially the widow, are compelled either daily or at fixed dates, to collect the liquid produced by the decomposition of the flesh, in order to smear it on their own body or to mix it into their food' (Hertz 1960: 51, 33; Malinowski 1929: 444). Those in mourning are, accordingly, shunned by the other members of society; they are polluted by the death of their relative.

Among the Olo Ngaju, this 'funerary contagion,' as Hertz styles it, is thought to take the form of an 'impure cloud.' The cloud surrounds the deceased, polluting 'everything it touches; i.e., not only the people and objects that have been in physical contact with the corpse, but also 'everything that is intimately connected, in the minds of the survivors, with the image of the deceased' (Hertz 1960: 38; see also Malinowski 1929: 450). The cloud dissipates only with the performance of the final funeral rites, which involve (1) consigning the exhumed and cleansed remains of the deceased to the collective ossuary, (2) aggregating the deceased's soul into the company of the ancestors, and (3) putting an end to the state of social deficiency enjoined on the survivors since the death. 'Rise,' the priestesses who preside over these rites call out to the spirits, 'squeeze the body of this man here to drive misfortune from him, remove the stench that petrifies like the thunderbolt, dispel the impure cloud of the deceased, repel the fate that degrades and that causes life to retreat ...' (Hertz 1960: 62).

Hertz is quite explicit concerning how we ought to regard the intermediary period. It is a social phenomenon, for there is nothing in the physical event of death itself that requires months, or even years, to complete (as the example of our own society attests). Rather, the root cause of the period of waiting enjoined on the corpse, the soul, and the survivors appears to be that:

There is too deep an opposition between the persisting image of a familiar person who is like ourselves and the image of an ancestor, who is sometimes worshipped and always distant, for this second image to replace the former immediately ... [A] certain period is necessary to banish the deceased from the land of the living ... because society, disturbed by the shock, must gradually regain its balance; and because the double mental process of disintegration and of synthesis that the integration of an individual into a new world [the world of the ancestors] supposes ... requires time. (Hertz 1960: 83)

Thus, the physical processes (involving the natural disintegration of

the body) which follow death do not determine the collective representations; rather, collective thought seizes the changes taking place in the corpse and finds in them 'a degree of material support' for its representations (Hertz 1960: 83). Hence the importance attached to the reduction of the corpse to a skeletal condition: once the body is similar to those of its ancestors, there seems to be no longer any obstacle to the soul's entering their community. And the bones, rather than inspiring horror (like the decaying corpse), are actively sought out, either because a 'beneficial influence' is thought to emanate from them (Hertz 1960: 56–7), or, as we saw in the case of Tanimbar, because they are a means of communicating with the ancestor's spirit and thus of securing the latter's assistance. As Hertz (1960: 83) aptly remarks, 'the reduction of the corpse to bones, which are more or less unchangeable and upon which death will have no further hold, seems to be the condition and the sign of the final deliverance' – the end of the deceased's irregular status. The point here is that it is the work of 'disintegration and of synthesis,' the double mental process by which the image of a familiar person is refashioned into that of a distant ancestor, that is primary. 'Society projects its own ways of thinking and feeling on to the world that surrounds it; and the world, in turn, fixes them, regulates them, and assigns them limits in time' (Hertz 1960: 83).

But why is the smell of the corpse thought to be contagious of death? It is not for hygienic reasons, as we know from Hertz. Rather, it is because death is dirty business. As Mary Douglas (1975: 51) states, 'dirt' is a kind of 'compendium category for all events [or objects] which blur, smudge, contradict or otherwise confuse accepted classifications. The underlying feeling is that a system of values which is habitually expressed in a given arrangement of things has been violated.' The 'corpse god' contradicts the classification of human beings as belonging either to the society of the living or to that of the ancestors, for it is neither living nor dead. Its fate, for the duration of the intermediary period, is to 'live, as it were, marginally in the two worlds: if it ventures into the afterworld, it is treated there like an intruder; here on earth it is an importunate guest whose proximity is dreaded' (Hertz 1960: 36). The reasons expressed for this kind of double exclusion are: first, its danger to the living, and second, its offensive smell.

### Phenomenology of Smell

A moment's reflection on the phenomenology of smells will enable us to see why smell is seized on by the collective imagination as *the* marker of the transitional state of the defunct, and why smell and the idea of

danger go together: 'A colour always remains the prisoner of an enclosing form; by contrast, the smell of an object always *escapes* ... But if a further contrast is drawn between smell and sound – another quality which shares the ability to escape from the object – smell is distinguished by formlessness, indefinability and lack of clear articulation' (Gell 1977: 27). With regard to Gell's first point, the effusiveness of smells, consider the following passage: 'Whatever the odour, it is remarkable how it clings to me, and how prone my skin is to absorb it. He who reproaches nature for failing to furnish man with the means of bringing smells to his nose is wrong, for they bring themselves' (de Montaigne 1965: 228). Smells are thus ideally suited to expressing the notion of contagion or action at a distance. And the reason for this, as noted previously, is that they are always 'out of place,' forever emerging from things, that is, crossing boundaries. In this respect, smells are much like the subjects of passage ritual: they cannot be defined in static terms (see Turner 1967: 97–8).

This brings us to Gell's second point, the indefinability of smells. To be sure, many attempts have been made to arrive at an objective, scientific, systematic classification of odours. But from Amoore's sevenfold classification to Zwaardemaker's ninefold classification (not to mention Rimmel's, with its eighteen classes) not one has met with general acceptance (Moncrieff 1967: 371–83; Lévi-Strauss 1981: 691–2; Schiffman 1974). Related to this is the fact that smell is the least articulate of the senses. That is, whereas we have names for various colours and tastes, we 'never name an odour; we only say it has a "smell like" something or another' (McKenzie 1923: 59–64; Doty 1972: 147).

The fact that smells are formless, that they so resist all attempts at classification or articulation, is what accounts for their so often being taboo, and for the anxiety which they provoke. It is instructive to consider Edmund Leach's (1972) theory of language and taboo in this connection. If, following Leach (1972: 210–11), we assume that our uninhibited (untrained) perception recognizes a continuum; that we are taught to impose upon this continuum a kind of 'discriminating grid' which serves to distinguish the world as being composed of 'a large number of separate things, each labelled with a name'; and, if we assume that it is the function of taboo to suppress recognition of 'those parts of the continuum which separate the things' (the unnamed non-things which fall between the named things), then, we can readily understand why 'smell is speechless' (Howes 1986). The reason is that *smell is continuous*. Odour (like dirt) is 'that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained' (Douglas 1966: 40).

However, it is the very continuity of smells that motivates us to link social categories to one another, as we saw earlier. In a like manner, it

is the smell of a corpse that provides the vehicle for the transformation of the image of a familiar person into that of a distant ancestor, the 'double mental process' of 'disintegration' and of 'synthesis' of which Hertz wrote. Once the cadaverous odour has dissipated, the category muddle generated by having a corpse god in the community's midsts also vanishes.

### Category Confusion and Stench

According to the Bribri of Costa Rica, 'the most impure thing (after the body of a woman pregnant for the first time) is a corpse' (Hertz 1960: 50, n. 131). The close relationship that exists between the representation of birth and the representation of death in otherwise widely differing societies has often been noticed. The transition into life is, accordingly, also frequently accompanied by olfactory symbolism. The representation of birth among the Inuit is a case in point. Rasmussen (1930) records that among the Iglulik a woman who feels the birth pangs coming on must retire to a separate snow hut or tent, depending on the season, deliver her child on her own, and then remain in virtual isolation for three to four months afterwards. The reason for this is that:

She is regarded as so unclean, so dangerous to her surroundings that her impurity is supposed to issue forth in an actual, albeit invisible, smoke or vapour, which drives away all the game. Shamans who have been up to the moon have seen from there how these emanations arise from women in childbed and during menstruation. Should they during such times break their taboo [by for example having connection with their husbands], all this foul smoke collects in the form of filth in the hair of the Mother of the Seabeasts, who in disgust, shuts up all the game in [her house at the bottom of the sea], leaving mankind to starve. (Rasmussen 1930: 173)

If we follow Mary Douglas once again, what this ritual circumscription of new mothers (and menstruating women) suggests is that the bodily processes involved in birth (or menstruation) are judged to be 'unclean' because they blur or smudge certain cherished category distinctions. As McDonnell relates, 'One is led to suppose that this judgment follows from an Inuit experience of something being out of place. The "thing" in this case is blood released from their own bodies. If any were to get on their clothes it was not cleaned off; the offending spot was actually cut away with a knife. Conversely, blood from animals killed is not "matter out of place"; it is food' (1979: 112). Thus, the aversion of Rasmussen's informants with respect to new mothers and menstruating

women, or rather, the sight or smell of their blood, may be interpreted as but a further reflection of the by now familiar maxim that 'the unclear is the unclean' (Turner 1967: 97).

However, it should be noted that women are not the only source of the miasmas which so offend the Mother of the Seabeasts. For example, if a hunter copulates with the carcass of a seal or caribou (a confusion of species), he pollutes the atmosphere (Rasmussen 1930: 98). Similarly, a 'foul smoke' is thought to envelope anyone who infringes the rule that marine creatures and land animals 'must not be allowed to come into contact one with another' (Rasmussen 1930: 183). This rule is at the origin of the numerous taboos the Inuit must observe, such as the prohibition on eating seal and caribou meat on the same day, or sewing caribou skins while people are camped out on the sea-ice. Evidently, what these various taboos are meant to do is enforce a distinction between those activities which must take place on land during the summer months (such as sewing caribou skins) and those activities which are to be performed on the sea-ice during the winter season. The entire natural and moral order of the Inuit universe is predicated on this distinction, as Mauss (1950) long ago pointed out. To infringe this *règle de base* would be to defile the progenitress of the universe, as well as to befool oneself.

When an infringement occurs and game consequently becomes scarce, a shaman must descend to the house of the Mother of the Seabeasts and attempt to appease her. She sits with all 'the foul emanations from the sins of mankind nearly suffocating her,' her hair 'a tangled, untidy mass' (Rasmussen 1930: 127). The shaman combs her hair, her disposition changes, the animals are released, and the shaman returns home to extract a confession from the person who violated the taboo.

The shaman's purification of the Mother of the Seabeasts may be regarded as the first stage in 'a process of tidying up, ensuring that the order in external physical events conforms to the structure of ideas' (Douglas 1975: 53). It is significant that the public confession, the return to discursive reason, comes only after the shaman's journey is over, for as we noted earlier, olfactory and verbal communication tend to preclude each other. 'Words will arise,' the shaman says (Rasmussen 1930: 128), and they do so precisely because the logical/semantic structure of the Inuit cosmos has been restored, all of its discontinuities (such as winter/summer, sea/land) intact.

### **Reviewing the Connection**

To conclude, *there is a connection between olfaction and transition*. Interpreting transition as meaning 'category-change,' we have seen that

there is an intrinsic relationship between smell and cognitive transformation the logical level (smells are most noticeable at boundaries), the psychological level (given the effect of odours on memory and discursive reason), and the sociological level (smells synchronize the emotional and physical states of the members of a congregation).

Pushing the analysis further, we found that there is also a connection between smell and liminality, the transitional phase of life-crisis rites. The reason for this is that smells are peculiarly apt to express the experience of category muddle, hence the ambiguous status of the subject of passage ritual, because the experience of smell is so intimately related to the experience of 'matter out of place.' Viewed from a more positive angle: 'Just as there is a need for categories to have definable boundaries (Douglas 1966), there is also a need to keep the crossing of categorical boundaries a bit blurry so that the discrepancies will not be too apparent' (Knauft 1979: 190). This explains the recourse to smell symbolism – the 'impure cloud' of the deceased, the 'foul smoke' of the new mother – at the critical junctures in the logical/semantic structures different societies seek to impose upon the universe.<sup>1</sup>

It is significant that the subjects of passage ritual are normally secluded, that is, made invisible and inaudible (the corpse in its coffin, the pregnant woman in a separate hut). This enables the double mental process of disintegration and of synthesis to proceed. The odours, real or alleged, which accompany the transformation are what the collective imagination seizes upon. Why? Because the 'sense of smell comes into play most when the other senses are in suspense, at moments, one could say, of *materialisation* and *dematerialisation*, the coming into being and the passing away of things' (Gell 1977: 28). Smell is the liminal sense *par excellence*.

As we have seen, it is in the rites and representations which attach to the events of birth and death that the connection between smell and liminality emerges most clearly. It was Robert Hertz who enabled us to see this connection, as well as the further connection (or better, homology) between the events of birth and death themselves. Death, according to Hertz (1960: 48), is 'not a mere destruction but a transition; as it progresses so does the rebirth,' meaning the rebirth of the soul of the deceased into the invisible society of the ancestors. Nor do matters end there, for many peoples hold that after passing through a series of existences in the other world, the soul is reincarnated in this one, and the cycle repeats itself. 'Death, for these people, is therefore not a singular event occurring only once in the history of an individual: it is an episode that repeats itself endlessly and that merely marks the passage from one existence to another' (Hertz 1960: 61).

The imagery of death and rebirth is frequently encountered in initiation rites (Turner 1967). That is, the neophyte dies only to be reborn into his or her new status (hence the importance attached to the initiand smelling dirty for the duration of the liminal period). Hertz also commented on this phenomenon. In our civilization, he claimed, 'the successive stages of our social life are weakly marked and constantly allow the continuous thread of the individual life to be discerned,' whereas other societies 'conceive the life of a man as a succession of heterogeneous and well-defined phases, to each of which corresponds a more or less organised social class. Consequently, each promotion of the individual implies the passage from one group to another: an exclusion, i.e. a death, and a new integration, i.e. a rebirth ... To the social consciousness, death is only a particular instance of a general phenomenon' (Hertz 1960: 81). The 'general phenomenon' in question is, of course, transition.

### The Olfactory Decline of the West

Finally, a few remarks are in order concerning the alleged universality of the connection between olfaction and transition. What about our own society with its regime of 'olfactive silence' (Corbin 1986)? To be sure, we are not unique (see Petit-Skinner 1981: 93–104). But consider the following remarks of E.T. Hall: 'The extensive use of deodorants and the suppression of odour in public places results in a land of olfactory blandness and sameness that would be difficult to duplicate anywhere else in the world. This blandness makes for undifferentiated spaces and deprives us of richness and variety in our life' (1969: 45).

One could explain this blandness as resulting from a growing recognition of the importance of public and personal hygiene, and such an explanation would be consonant with the thought of the public health administrators who were behind the 'olfactive revolution' (see Kern 1974). However, this explanation cannot account for the *range* of odorizing and deodorizing rituals that we observe today, and it also reeks of 'medical materialism.' As Douglas (1966: 29) warns, 'it is one thing to point out the side benefits of ritual actions, and another thing to be content with using the by-products as a sufficient explanation.'

In order to arrive at a more satisfactory explanation of our odour-denying attitude, it is necessary to consider its history. Both Elias (1982: 129–43) and Corbin (1986) have documented how this attitude originated among the upper classes of European society in the mid-eighteenth century, was soon taken over by the emerging middle class, and then, from the nineteenth century onward, was enforced by the bourgeoisie

among their social inferiors, the labouring class.<sup>2</sup> The background against which this 'new sensibility' crystallized is best described by Süsskind:

In the period of which we speak [the mid-eighteenth century], there reigned in the cities a stench barely conceivable to us modern men and women. The streets stank of manure, the courtyards of urine, the stairwells stank of mouldering wood and rat droppings, ... the unaired parlours stank of stale dust, the bedrooms of greasy sheets ... People stank of sweat and unwashed clothes; from their mouths came the stench of rotting teeth ... and from their bodies came the stench of rancid cheese and sour milk and tumorous disease. (1986: 3)

It is understandable in view of the above that the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) excluded the sense of smell from his aesthetics (see Rourdnitska 1977; Le Guéer 1988: 263–7). Kant also did something else: he gave us the category of the self. 'It is only with Kant that it [i.e., the modern notion of the person as an individual conscience] took on precise form' (Mauss 1979a: 89). This connection between the emergence of the notion of the person and the sudden lowering of the threshold of olfactory tolerance, which was first noticed by Corbin (1986: 61), brings us back to the work of Hertz. Could it be that the reason we moderns are, on the whole, so intolerant of odours has to do with our preoccupation with what Hertz called 'the continuous thread of the individual life,' our denial of transition – in short, our elevation of the notion of the self to a position unprecedented in human history?<sup>3</sup>

All that can be said in this connection is that we are extremely 'self-conscious' about our own body odours, and often quick to take offence at the 'smell of the other.' In this way we both assert and maintain our respective individualities. There is, therefore, a sense in which our deodorizing rituals ensure 'that the order in external physical events conforms to the structure of ideas' (Douglas 1975: 53). They do so by effectively negating any mediation between your self and my self at the olfactory level. Only in this way are we able to *appear* to each other as separate (and discreet) individuals.

That the spectrum of odours to which we moderns are exposed has been drastically reduced as a result of the 'olfactive revolution' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is unquestionable (see Howes 1986). We are a society bent on the elimination of odour (Winter 1978: 93–109). By contrast, for the Dassanetch of Southwest Ethiopia (Almagor 1987), or the Andaman Islanders, the world is full of odours, each one pregnant with significance. 'In the jungles of the Andamans it is possible to recognise a distinct succession of odours during a considerable part of the

year as one after another the commoner trees and lianas come into flower .... The Andamanese have therefore adopted an original method of marking the different periods of the year by means of the different odoriferous flowers that are in bloom at different times. Their calendar is a calendar of scents' (Radcliffe-Brown 1964: 311–12). Are the Andaman Islanders so very original, or is it simply that anthropologists have tended, on the whole, to overlook the significance attached to olfactory communication in traditions other than our own? In this time when, following Needham (1972: xiii), we must question whether, for example, 'a capacity for belief constitutes a natural resemblance among men such as must form part of any account of human powers,' we must also pay attention to those powers, such as smell, which are at once so intimate and so obvious that we cannot imagine them to be less developed in some human beings (ourselves) than in others.

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### Notes

1 Procreation also involves forming a connecting link between social categories. Thus, among the Yaka of Zaire, the mediation of the sexes which is implied in the act of procreation is 'symbolised and concretised ... as "smelling one another"; sexual partners "induce each other to secrete smell and to take in each other's smell" ... In other words, smelling constructs a liminal process between the procreators: it provides a bodily matrix for a reciprocal interaction in which the poles (inner/outer, self/other, giver/receiver) are joined' (Devisch 1985: 596). As Devisch goes on to describe, fecundation is 'seen as a partial death of the procreator followed by fermentation and boiling of the male semen and the female blood in the womb, which is analogous to the Yaka view of digestion.' Analogously, genital body odour is regarded as a form of 'vital force' (*m-mooyi*) and organic energy that links death and regeneration. The intimate association between smelling, eating, making love, and dying, which these representations bring out, can be explained as resulting from the Yaka perception of

these diverse bodily functions as *processes of transformation* (see further Verdier 1976; Lévi-Strauss 1969: 269–71).

- 2 In other societies such extreme olfactory sensitivity is characteristic only of the gods (see Rasmussen 1930: 81; Howes 1988).
- 3 The 'denial of death' in contemporary Western society, which Ariès (1975) has so well documented, is a logical corollary of what is here called the denial of transition.

## CHAPTER 10

### On Safari:

# The Visual Politics of a Tourist Representation

*Kenneth Little*

One of the most memorable things about the film *Out of Africa*, released in 1985, was the cinematography. Reviewers and spectators raved about the beauty and pageantry of the Kenyan landscape, the grandeur of the wildlife, and the natural elegance of the tribesmen. The other merits of the film notwithstanding, many thought that it was worth sitting through simply because the African scenery was so beautifully portrayed. The film derived much of its power from the visual images it produced. Nature never looked so good.

The film itself was a hit and it made Kenya an even more appealing place to visit. Kenyan tourism prospered as a direct result of the film and a number of tour operators immediately put together *Out of Africa* safari packages that were still being sold in 1988 when I arrived in Kenya. The romance of East Africa – the quest for the experience of an adventure into nature, the wilderness – never looked so attractive.

When I was in Kenya dreamy-eyed and romantic tourists sat for tea on the veranda of the Norfolk Hotel and talked about the film, anticipating the experience of their upcoming safaris or savouring the ones they had just completed. The excitement was palpable. Isak Dinesen's, or Karen Blixen's, books were hot items in bookstores everywhere in Kenya, available for those who had not brought them along on the trip. Her home in the White Highlands, 'at the foot of the Ngong Hills,' had become a pilgrimage site. The house itself is a museum. One of its rooms contains *Out of Africa* curios, clothes, and music – piped through loudspeakers placed around the grounds and house – as well as the usual variety of postcards, glossy nature photo-journals, great white hunter biographies, ethnographies of the 'tribes' of Kenya, and the like.

The *Out of Africa* phenomenon neatly introduces the point I want to discuss in this essay – namely, that the tourist discourse, set up by tour operators and tourist entrepreneurs, fashions itself as a mass-mediated visualization. Tourist productions of all sorts ‘focus’ on what the tourist sees. So, in order to talk about the tourist experience of Kenya I will have to talk about the act of looking, the tourist gaze, and how it is organized as a cultural representation.

My primary task will be to analyse a specific cultural performance, the safari. But rather than write a global analysis of the political economy of ‘international’ tourism or a reflexive analysis of a tourist event as a symbolic expression and display of capitalist society, I want to examine the localized tourist production of the safari as a cultural performance. I argue that through the analysis of such cultural productions we may be better able to understand the larger discourse of which it is a part. I call this discourse the ‘tourist perspective.’

My analysis of the tourist perspective has to do with the cultural production of the tourist gaze. I am interested in the role of the gaze in organizing the safari as a genre of cultural performance and how the safari is constructed to give the aura of authenticity and the appearance of realism and spontaneity to the production. I begin with a description of how tourist realism (the tourist perspective or vantage point) is achieved and discuss the characteristics of this perspective. I end with a discussion of the politics of the tourist gaze. The primary target of the Kenyan tourist industry is the imagination and the struggle over cultural representations. My point is that mass tourism colonizes the imagination through the construction of the tourist perspective and that the consequences of tourist colonialism are no less deep-seated or penetrating than the more familiar economic and political expression of colonialism.

### **The Tourist Perspective**

Kenya safari tours are local adaptations aimed to satisfy the larger demands of international tourism. They are designed for North American, European, and Japanese tourists – people from the developed capitalist democracies who can afford the cost and have the leisure time to take such vacations. The safari has its roots in and is a product of late-capitalist consciousness, and while the tourist discourse says much about contemporary Kenyan realities I am more interested in what it says about those who produce and consume tourist performances. The tourist industry is highly competitive in Kenya. As one tour operator and travel

agent put it to me, tourism is popularly recognized as the third largest industry just behind coffee and tea production. Tour operators and agents are sensitive to the world-wide demand for possible tourist dreamlands and they have learned to produce and sell safari tours as highly selected and elaborated images of East African nature that are attractive and romantic stories of 'wild adventure into a savage land.' Kirschenblatt-Gimblett and Bruner argue that most tourist productions for sale in Kenya play on this thematic image of Africa as an exotic wilderness in which wildlife, landscape, and native peoples form a single category and are rendered up as timeless, unchanging, and primitive entities.<sup>1</sup> These are exotic images of otherness manufactured as objectified pictures or spectacles that are sold to tourists.<sup>2</sup>

What the tourist industry sells to tourists on safari, however, is spectacles and performances they already know and recognize. The safari is not a new story, nor are safari images new images. The highly selective set of images tourists experience is not indigenous at all but has been manufactured for the most part in the West as media productions seen on television (e.g., 'National Geographic,' 'Nature,' 'Wild Kingdom,' 'Daktari'), in the movies (e.g., *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, *Tarzan the Ape-Man*, *Born Free*), and in the print media (e.g., *National Geographic*, *Conde Nast Traveller*, travel sections of newspapers). The safari simply repeats these themes and images of wild Africa – they mythologize (after Roland Barthes 1973) or metaphorize the place and its inhabitants. In other words, images of the wild are framed as prepackaged 'already mades,' rather than 'ready mades' (Solomon-Godeau 1984: 86), en-framed performances that provide a perspective, mould interpretations, and encourage particular experiences while on safari.

As I have said, all Kenyan tourist safaris are thematically framed and domestically produced as stories about the wild and civilized and it is this metaphor that is enacted within the tourist perspective. No matter how much any one safari varies from another this metaphor of Kenyan tourism informs every safari production. While this metaphor is powerful, it is encompassed within the larger metaphor of seeing – the tourist gaze – which enframes and valorizes the 'wild' and the 'civilized' as elements of visual production. The metaphor of the gaze generates the tourist perspective. Tourist productions centre on tourists 'seeing' the animals, 'exploring' the landscapes, and 'observing' the peoples, and while there is a wide selection of ways that tourists can experience the things they see and photograph, their experience is organized in terms of a visualist metaphor. So the Kenyan tourist experience, as I will go on to demonstrate, is at once both a description of the wilderness, a statement of what Kenya has to offer tourists, and a basis for the in-

vention and construction of tourist sights/sites, designed specifically to fit this master trope or mythology of the tourist perspective.

As an example, consider the following excerpt from a four-page tourist brochure produced and distributed by Thorn Tree Safari Limited of Nairobi.

Mystical Maralal. Nestling on the edge of the cedar forests of the Karisia Hills; sentinel of the Great Rift Valley and Lake Turkana beyond; crossroads of culture; wilderness of wildlife ... Here is Africa – the vastness of space, the breathtaking vistas of plains and sky, and wildlife as it has always been – roaming, seeking and often intermingled with the lifestyle of the noble Samburu people and their stock ...

Maralal ... the very name calls to mind images of wildlife, exotic animals, awesomely beautiful landforms, bold explorers, proud ancestral tribes ... and above all, safaris. Safari is a Swahili word that means 'journey.'

... On a Thorn Tree Safari you abandon civilization and all of its discontents and journey across miles of natural wilderness, travelling millions of years back in time. As a species, man began and evolved on the endless, grassy African savannah, under the blazing tropical sun. Here in Kenya it is still possible to view the world as our primitive ancestors saw it, in its natural state, without the influences of modern civilization.

On safari you will see nature unfold as it always has. Fierce predators ... lions, cheetahs, leopards, and hyenas, stalk their prey as the hunted ... teeming herds of wildebeest, zebra, buffalo, and antelope keep a wary guard.

After a day on safari return to The Lodge. The gardens team with blossoms of local plants and shrubs. Have a drink by the pool, visit the curio shop or simply relax on the game-viewing verandah ... The cuisine and service are excellent. Both the dining room and lounge have unrestricted views over the man-made waterhole and meals take on a new dimension when eaten with wildlife less than ten meters away.

A Thorn Tree Safari is an enjoyable adventure that combines wild nature with civilized luxury. Come join us for an unforgettable African safari experience. When you set foot in Africa you will be changed forever.

In examining this discourse, notice first that the tourist's African experience is fashioned as a variety of highly selected and stereotyped

images of the 'wild kingdom.' It is not hard to 'get the tourist picture' here. Africa is 'exotic,' 'ancestral,' 'primitive,' 'natural,' 'fierce,' and, even 'awesomely beautiful,' as well as an 'unforgettable ... experience.' As the word 'safari' suggests, tourists will experience an exciting journey into the distant past. It is a journey out of the modern civilized world with all of its discontents into the unchanging and, as the advertisement goes on to claim, 'limitless wilderness of the savannah alive with wildlife [that] coexists with primitive tribes.'

This experience is guaranteed to transform the tourist. For them the safari is a therapeutic experience of self-fulfilment, a release from the constraints of the fast-paced, modern, and urban world. The brochure attends to what the tourist has always known and understood – that nature, the wild, is powerful and 'awesome.' It is the antithesis of civilization, unchanged, unhurried, ruled by nature's dictates, not human ones.

Again, notice what is basic to the tourist's experience of the wild. It is a categorical lumping together of wildlife, landscape, and 'primitive' people. There is no distinction between lions, the Rift Valley, and the natives (here the Samburu). Indigenous cultures become part of the natural landscape, objects in the unfolding yet familiar story about the forever present 'wild kingdom.' They are equated as objects in tourist discourse, 'already made' spectacles for tourist consumption, simulacra, if you like, where the tourist narrative is more exciting than the contemporary ethnic narrative.

In the tourist discourse, for example, there is a striking objectification of indigenous people that is a focal part of the production of tourist spectacles like the safari. Tourists on safari never meet indigenous people within a contemporary social context. Rather, the 'tribal natives' of the sort in the tourist text remain categorized as 'native,' 'tribal,' 'pre-historic,' and 'primitive.' In this discourse, for instance, informed by the consciousness that created such a film as *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, the 'natives' continue to live unchanged by time, frozen in the tourist mythology of the mass-produced wild kingdom. The tourist never meets a Samburu individual that is not already packaged, already 'natural.' Tourists are presented with adjectival natives like 'fearless Samburu warriors' or 'proud, nomadic Samburu.' Fixed and immobilized as 'other' in a timeless present that is reinforced by the metaphor of the wild and civilized, indigenous people become objects of tourist manipulation. Their worlds become the dreamscapes for tourists' fantasies. It is on their ground that Western tourists are provided with the discursive space to enact those fantasies. In other words, in the tourist discourse there are never contemporary, individual Samburu, there are only 'proud'

Samburu, framed and pictured as objects of interest by Western tourist discourse and caught in what Renato Rosaldo (1989: 68–87) calls ‘imperialist nostalgia.’ It is this ‘traditional,’ read ‘primitive,’ culture that tourists come to see, and because it does not exist it is made for them.

In this sense the Samburu and other visible ethnic groups become symbols that stand for themselves (after Wagner 1986); they are exotic signs of themselves, representations of otherness, marked categories, labelled and framed by mechanical media forms such as film, tape, and print through which tourists have their African experience. The obvious point is that this discursive invention of natural wilderness is a highly valorized category, structured and reinforced by our taken-for-granted notions of ‘nature’ and ‘wild’ that are industrially manufactured as commercial, romantic, media visual images in the West. As a category of a romantic wilderness, African peoples are marked objectifications, highly visible signs of nature along with the jungle, Mount Kilimanjaro, sunsets, and lordly lions.

Second, tourist advertisements explain that the purpose of the journey is to let tourists ‘experience the wilderness that is Africa,’ but not in a way that leaves them stranded or unprotected. Tourists travel into the wilderness parks (a neat oxymoron in itself) to experience the wild, but only after checking into a safari lodge, ‘your last bastion of civilization in the untouched wilderness.’ The tour is meant to be an experience of the wild and primitive, but it also is meant to be a safe and luxurious journey.

If the safari is understood paradigmatically as a series of juxtapositions of the civilized and the wild, these juxtapositions are experienced syntagmatically, as a series of highly stimulating viewing events. It begins in the civilized luxury of the first-class safari lodge from which tourists journey out in guide-driven minivans, seating four to eight passengers. They go out as many as three times a day, always returning to the familiar comforts of the lodge.

To the tourist this production of Africa is ‘natural’ and makes logical sense. What is never recognized, of course, is how their experience is mediated by the vantage point of civilization. Tourists are never left without a place from which to look and record. They are always provided with a vantage point that places them above or at least beyond the objects of their scrutiny. For example, the minivan is a protective platform, a familiar and civilized place. National park rules prohibit tourists from leaving the confines and comfort of their vans, nor would anyone want to abandon such safety for, as the driver-guides insist, it is dangerous and confusing in the wild. Even professionals can get hurt ‘out there.’<sup>3</sup> For most tourists it is sufficient just to look at the scenery

from a van and capture the wild behind the viewfinder of their cameras and video-cameras. The vans make gazing and recording easy and safe.

Back at the safari lodge the same thing takes place. The lodge is a comfortable encompassing shell that usually looks out onto a stage set, literally. The watering holes and salt-licks on which many of these lodges are built are man-made performance stages, 'natural' theatres if you like, constructed to attract wildlife that usually arrive at dusk and dawn to water and feed. From the safety of the lodge balconies, many of which are private, some of which function as bars and restaurants, or from the underground foxholes with viewing areas, tourists gaze at the animals and record their movements on camera. Later, of course, after dark and the evening meal, tourists are often entertained by native dancers or craftspeople.

In other words, the minivan and lodge provide stable vantage points from which a perspective for viewing is achieved. Such constructed stagings are informed by the logic of the perspectival gaze – focused and all-consuming. The tourists do what they came to do – to look in safety and with authority and to 'take pictures'; that is to say, have the experience of their lives. This paradigm of the gaze separates the gazing subject and the looked-upon objects rendering the first transcendental and the second inert and so subtending capitalist logic. Here looking is reduced to the 'positioned point of view' of the subject-observer gazing upon the wild, that is, a framed and staged object. It is a model picture that tourists see. Tourist experience is fashioned out of the pleasure of this visual practice. It is the ubiquity of a fashioned vantage point that produces framed pictures filtered through the cognitive apparatus of the positioned autonomous individual. This is what Martin Jay (1988) calls the scopic regime of perspectival control. It is a gaze that may be called the 'tourist perspective.'

Before I go on to my third point let me quickly sum up what I have been saying. Kenyan tourism is an embedded set of visual practices, basic to the tourist industry and to Western discourse of which the tourist industry is a product and a producer, the focal practice of which is looking and enframing the other as spectacle or picture. So Kenya becomes a tourist's dreamland – a set of highly selected images reinforced in the tourist's experience as they gaze upon a mythologized wild nature. Media representations saturate the Western imagination with the mythology of Africa as a wild and primitive place that it is still possible for Westerners to experience.

The third and last consideration of this section is to examine the significance of the mechanical modes of image production and reproduction as the tourist's means of 'capturing nature' while on safari.

On tour, cameras and video recorders are omnipresent. There is a double mediation involved in the tourist's use of these mechanical devices. As Malek Alloula (1986), Roland Barthes (1981), and Sander Gilman (1985) have pointed out, many visual representations of Africa produced by Westerners are idealized images of eroticized and exotic objects. These professional, Western image productions, the ones that most likely stimulate tourists' interests in Africa in the first place, the ones found in the form of postcards, tourist brochures, slick coffee table photo-journals, films, television shows, paintings, etchings, and the print media – industrial strength images – serve as the models for 'capturing' an 'authentic nature' that tourists use in 'capturing' their own images of the wild.

Implicit in this structured gaze (the 'trained eye/I') upon the wild and the exotic is an associated erotica. To explain this more adequately, let me turn to some signs of tourist pleasure that forcefully direct the spectator's gaze to the spectacle of 'nature.' These are found in photo-journals, picture postcards and calendars, and tourist brochures. This material is available everywhere – at lodges, game parks, hotels, and tour offices. It contains scenes of nature, of natives in traditional dress, or often of both natives and nature together. Representations of proud 'primitives' in the wild kingdom, images of naked, native bodies contextualized in their natural habitats, searching out a living among the wild plants and animals, are ubiquitous. The meaning of the pictures is clear enough, but often reiterated with some kind of written text that stresses noble savagery in relation to nature and nakedness. These are the models that tourists use to take their pictures. Once when entering the Amboseli Game Reserve I noticed a young male tourist standing in the pop-up section of a safari van excitedly whistling the 'National Geographic' theme song while taking pictures of a Masai woman dressed in traditional clothing.

Tourists take pictures to make a record of their trip and to show others back home that 'they were really there.' But there is more to the process and the experience of taking pictures than this. Here some of what Malek Alloula (1986), Donna Haraway (1989), and Laura Mulvey (1989) have to say about the process may come in handy. Alloula and Mulvey associate taking pictures with scopophilia – with 'looking at' as a source of erotic pleasure. Taking pictures of other people means turning them into objects by subjecting them to the controlling and curious gaze of the photographer. The focal term here is 'controlling.' The tourists control the other by taking pictures and capturing images of this simulated wild Africa. They become voyeurs.

By a mechanical means of reproduction of images (that are already

framed in the tourist's imagination by earlier reproductions), tourists doubly assure their control of the 'other' by extending the source of pleasure involved in their looking. Remember, the tourists' vantage point is a given; it is a prepared performance staging of an 'already made' scene that is available for 'shooting.' It might be said that tourists derive their pleasure in taking pictures as a libidinous excitement because it is organized around the capture, control, and extension of their gaze upon the exotic other. The camera substitutes for the gun and tourists 'shoot' their pictures and 'capture' images in order to make their photo-albums into trophies. The best pictures are blownup and hung on the walls along with the artefacts. Such practices become a means of domination, a consumption of the other through the use of a powerful metaphor that is supported and reinforced by 'official' modes of mechanical reproduction. This is an obvious gloss of Dennis O'Rourke's notion of 'cannibal tourism' in the film *Cannibal Tours* (1987).

Two points need to be considered here: the shooting and capturing metaphor and the photograph as a collectable. As Donna Haraway (1989) makes clear, guns have been transformed into cameras in the late-capitalist safari. Nature no longer is recognized as what people need protection from. Nature as 'the wild' is tamed, endangered, and mortal, and it needs protection from people. Quoting Susan Sontag, Haraway (1989: 42) suggests that 'When we are afraid, we shoot, but when we are nostalgic, we take pictures.' Here the eye/I is infinitely more potent than the gun.

The other point is made by Susan Stewart (1984) and more generally by Grant McCracken (1988) in his discussion of the significance and mystery embedded in objects of consumption, and it has to do with the collection of images. Photographs as objects along with other souvenirs of the trip are powerful because they personalize the tourist's experience of the exotic. It does not matter whether the photographs are like the ones they idealize as they take pictures. In the final analysis, the photographs are personal signs that come associated with a story that serves as a mnemonic for the experience. This, finally, gives the photographs much of their power, while it empowers the photographer-tourist as the hero of his hunt.

### **The Politics of Authenticity**

The operational mode of tourist experience, as I have said, is visual. Tourists come to Africa with a perspective and a story in mind and they try to find scenes that resemble these prior images that evoke

recognition and an easy sense of familiarity. Tourists look in a highly elaborate way and they record their looking mechanically and by so doing incorporate the experience of the mass-mediated and objectified 'wild' with their powerful, scopophilic gaze.

This process of objectification, this creation of 'tourist realism,' is part of a larger story of making the exotic world of nature into an exhibition, the 'natural' world recognizable as spectacle. In his book *Colonising Egypt*, Timothy Mitchell (1988) describes this cognitive manoeuvre of visualization as a process by which the world of the exotic (and the domestic) is conceived and understood as though it were an exhibition or a spectacle. He argues that turn-of-the-century tourists and colonial officials experienced the exotic by trying to grasp the 'real thing,' the 'other,' as a picture. Thus, the manufacturing of endless spectacles, the framing of exotic reality as picture, became the technique of rendering late-nineteenth-century European imperial truth and cultural difference in 'objective' form. Rendering the world as object, as a framed picture or spectacle, was the means of producing a certainty about and control over representations of the 'other.' Having an experience of the exotic other was, and is, a matter of controlling the otherwise heterogeneous world 'out there' by gaining a vantage point and forming a perspective in order to make authoritative sense of what one sees. It was, and is, a matter of 'standing back' to take a look and to extend and control the length of the gaze that today produces a technical kind of certainty as reliable already-made spectacle.

There is a paradox involved in this practice, however. For rendering the world as object or spectacle as a means of control means that it is always a representation of something else, something that is not a simulation, not a copy of an original. But because the world is always being constructed as a representation, as an 'object lesson,' arranged before an observing subject as a system of signification, signifiers of something else, it becomes impossible to find the authentic reality for which modern individuals so ardently look. Instead, the world becomes a proliferation of reality-effects and the modern individual becomes one who forever seeks certainty in those reality-effects. But I will come back to this point later.

The safari, as a representation of reality, is an exhibit set up for an observer in its midst. It is a simple and apparently accurate picture of an exotic and cacophonous world, a remarkable display of the exotic wilderness of Africa that tourists can almost touch. Yet, to the observing eye of the tourist, surrounded by the display, but excluded from it by the status of visitor, the safari remains a mere representation, a carefully ordered picture of some further reality. The more the safari as perfor-

mance spectacle draws in and encompasses the tourist, the more the gaze is set apart from it, as the mind (in our Cartesian imagery) is said to be set apart from the material world it observes, even while participating in it.

Let me put all of this in another way and by doing so say something more about the production of an experience of an authentic Kenya. And here I am widening the discussion to include others who are in the business of producing and consuming cultural representations of Africa and Africans and who share in the perspectival logic of the spectacle through which the practice of making such representations is understood. For instance, as ethnographers we know that we are not the only ones producing such representations, but, believing our perspective to be the correct one, we often fail to acknowledge that there is an ongoing struggle between alternative discourses as representations. Not only the tourist industry, but government and development agencies, politicians, artists, journalists, and other scholars promote their own 'pictured' version or model of East African 'reality' through their particular narratives of the real. These discourses often conflict, confront, juxtapose, and sometimes even converge with each other in a struggle for dominance. But finding an authoritative position, i.e., a privileged vantage point, is, I want to argue, part of what we should be studying; it should not be assumed in advance that any such vantage point exists. Let me explain what I mean with an example.

A Montreal couple in their mid-50s returned from a photo-safari in Kenya with their images of the 'wild kingdom' and the snows of Kilimanjaro, with 'glossy' Samburu, wild animals, and landscapes framed according to the tourist perspective. One night their daughter, an anthropology major at a well-known city university, who is especially interested in Africa, joined them and some friends for a slide show called 'An Evening in Africa.' The family sat down to supper, saving the special African specialties prepared from one of the recipe books the parents bought in Kenya for the evening's show. They ate seated around the television set as North Americans are apt to do (consuming images and food simultaneously) to watch the six o'clock news that had reports of starvation in Ethiopia, the war in Eritrea, and apartheid protests in Johannesburg. Soon after, the company arrived and 'An Evening in Africa' began.

Here we have a heterogeneous merging of discourses that seem to subvert each other as they merge. While the tourist-parents are eager to share their experience of a dreamland of play and fantasy among the animals and natives, the journalists' discourse is an international media-based proliferation of reports of today's exotic and shocking disasters

as transmittable and sellable images. On television and in the international print media national governments proclaim the human rights of blacks in South Africa by supporting or not supporting sanctions against that country, for the 'viewpoint' some of them say is debatable. Meanwhile, ethnographers write up their 'findings' as ethnographic pictures of others, development and medical agencies do the same, and they each have their own story to tell.

My point is that these conflicting narratives coexist in the same Western discourse because they share the same visual 'episteme,' the power/knowledge system centred on a logic of cultural 'spectacularization.' So the issue is this: What are the relations of power in the tourists' (and by implication, reporters', government officials', or ethnographers') gaze? Again, the point of the question is not to reveal the authentic discourse that will be the 'platform' or 'staging' from which we can gain a proper or final perspective on which discourse is the legitimate one. Such actions are what Foucault (1979) calls working from within the truth (of cultural objectification and the spectacle) rather than analysing that truth. Finding the foundation or seeking the reality behind the representation keeps one within the scopic regime of perspectival control. This is the same regime that produces tourist spectacles.

To put this matter yet another way, consider the way anthropologists strive to distinguish ethnography from tourism and colonialism. The latter two are judged by the former to be an assault on the privileged perspective controlled by the specialists, the anthropologists. In fact, Crick (1985, 1989) and Graburn (1983) have described many of the similarities and historical affinities between ethnography, colonialism, and tourism. They explain how these three are located at different, but overlapping, historical periods and arise from the same capitalist social formation. As such, colonialism, ethnography, and tourism are forms of intervention and expansion that inhabit the space cleared by the reach of Western power. And as much as ethnographers would like to place considerable distance between their practices and those of the other two, the way the 'Other' is used to fashion an understanding of foreigners indicates very little difference in their activities. All three are foreign, wealthy, and powerful, even if each has its particular necessities and demands. But more to the point, as Mitchell (1988) argues, the practices of all three emerge as expressions of the same visual episteme, the same scopic regime of 'perspectivalism.' In an important way they are variations on the same powerful interventionist practices of objectification and 'spectacularization.'

Let me put this issue of the scopic regime back into the context of tourist discourse. What are the political consequences of tourist pro-

ductions – productions which appear to be, on the surface, harmless and politically neutral?

Tourist productions are not found out there in the everyday world of Kenya, they are constructed here at home. Tour operators stage 'nature' and the 'wild' based on the Western mass-mediated world as spectacle – as objective pictures. Such inventions are selected, adapted, and reworked aspects of various representations of nature and natives. Because tourists want their performance to be authentic (spontaneous, natural), Kenyan tour operators become skilled at being able to produce 'the bold Samburu' or 'the scenic Serengeti,' while masking the process of construction. Again, this is what I mean by saying that 'tourist realism is the tourists' perspective.' The prime target of mass tourism is to enact the scopic regime of perspectivalism, or what Mitchell (1988) calls 'creating the world-as-exhibition.'

MacCannell (1976) calls such tourist productions and the logic that informs them 'staged authenticity.' However, the problem with this concept and the way MacCannell uses it is that it assumes that there is a particular performance out there to which tourist productions can be compared, some 'natural' reality just behind the cultural performance that is taken as the reference point. Thinking that there is such an original product, some final reality – a controlled, systematized, and structured picture – should be the subject of analysis (as an aspect of our own imaginations) rather than taken as an aspect of anything really 'out there.'

The point is that we should be analysing the production of these cultural performances as spectacles of the 'wild' and the 'primitive' and not comparing given performances, even tourist ones, with the intention of naming an ethnographic natural as the vantage point from which we may determine what is authentic or not. Denigrating tourist productions as inferior and inauthentic originals seems not to be a very useful thing to do. Rather, we should be discussing the poetics and politics of how authenticity as a category is produced and used in tourist, colonial, and ethnographic discourses. We should be studying the production and performance of the 'authentic' as the creation of natural, objectified pictures of certainty. How are tourist and other productions and performances constructed, how are such productions talked about and used, and what mechanisms give them an aura of authenticity and the appearance of realism and spontaneity?

## Conclusion

What we have been investigating is a late-capitalist imaginative form.

We have seen that tourist representations are a powerful form of cultural domination. Our analysis of the safari demonstrates not only how meaning is encoded in the construction of tourist performance sites and events, but also how the cultural process of representation is organized according to the scopic regime of the tourist perspective. This is a cultural logic of objectification that renders up the world as authentic spectacle.

This world-as-spectacle makes a powerful claim to certainty. First, it is a certainty which orders and organizes Africa as an unambiguous portrait of the exotic encompassed within the mythology of the wild and the civilized. This mythology organizes the tourist perspective as a portrait or picture of life that is thought to be politically neutral. Second, there is a paradoxical nature to the tourist perspective; its certainty is thought to exist as authentic, but there are a variety of authentic 'African' discourses that challenge its originality and by doing so undercut all claims to an authentic and original reality. The 'real' 'Kenya,' 'Africa,' or 'Samburu' outside the tourist perspective turns out to be just another representation of that 'reality.' Third, there is what might be called a colonial nature to the world-as-spectacle, for it is caught up in the age of the world economy and global power in which we live, an economic power that is organized according to the objectifying logic of the commodity. What is made available as reality are commodified objectifications, renderings of African peoples, landscapes, and wildlife as metaphorical portraits of one sort or another and available for consumption.

Finally, in claiming that 'Africa' is not a place, and the 'Samburu' are not a people, but representations organized by the logic of objectification, I am not saying that Western representations create a distorted image of the real Africa or Samburu; nor am I saying that an authentic Africa or Samburu does not exist, and that there are no realities but only representations and simulations. Rather, I am stating that both of these statements take for granted the powerful way in which the colonizing West has come to understand the 'other,' as though the world were divided into two – a realm of mere representation and an external, authentic reality. It is the poetics and politics of this belief as an aspect of cultural domination that I have tried to draw attention to in order to demonstrate that it is part of a logic of spectacularization and a method of order and truth peculiar to the modern world.

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## Notes

- 1 The suggestion that the wild vs. civilized or nature vs. culture dyad is an East African tourist category worth analysing was first made in a paper by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Edward M. Bruner, delivered at the Annual Meetings of the American Anthropology Association, 1984, Washington, DC, in a session on 'Performance and Anthropology.'
- 2 The wild and civilized dyad is only one of the tourist metaphors worth exploring. Another of the ways the tourists that I accompanied on safari described their experience was according to a personal repertoire of scenes, experiential or media mediated, to which they constantly made reference. For instance, travelling into Nairobi in a minivan one tourist exclaimed how he had an uncanny feeling that he had been in Nairobi before. On further reflection, he concluded that the feeling was really the result of having spent time in Moscow and Mexico City. Somehow he 'saw' (his words) Nairobi as a combination of these two cities. On another occasion, on our way to Amboseli National Park and Game Reserve we stopped at a small town and travelled down its main street to the gas station. It had been raining and the streets were muddy. The town sidewalks were built as boardwalks that obviously saved people from constantly trudging through the mud. There were cattle in the streets, along with herdsmen, and we were stopped by them for a few minutes just outside a tavern and hotel where locals sat on chairs and stools and stared back at us gawking at them. One of the tourists described this scene as 'a surreal time warp ... as if we were driving into Dodge City in the 1850s now inhabited by Africans.' Clearly, the village scene conjured up images from 'Gunsmoke.' Another tourist asked the rest of us where we thought we might find the African Matt Dillon. This brought on a series of 'wild, wild west' jokes that were highly entertaining to the van occupants. Other kinds of scene com-

parisons were elicited, but these mostly had to do with landscapes. It was not uncommon to hear things like: 'This looks just like Texas.' or 'If I didn't know any better I'd swear we were in Montana.' I have plans to analyse this kind of describing behaviour in more detail in a paper on such tourist practices and the idea of controlled comparison in order to explore more deeply the issue of visual politics and comparative methods in tourist and ethnographic discourse.

- 3 These categories of the wild outside and the civilized and protected inside are keenly felt. Once, for example, my spouse and I, along with members of her family, decided to take a 'do it yourself safari.' We rented a Land Rover in Nairobi and headed for the Tsavo National Park and Game Reserve on our own. This action was considered dangerous by some not only because of our inexperience with off-road travel in Kenya, but because the area in which we were headed had been the site of recent poaching activities. Poachers had been unofficially accused of the murder of a British woman a few weeks earlier, albeit in another park. It was commonly understood that if tourists were caught by poachers they too would be killed and their bodies scattered across miles of reserve land. Clearly this was a dangerous adventure. One of our daily excursions, without a guide or an experienced local to direct us, was along the Tsavo River where we came upon some hippopotami. Everyone was excited and wanted to get to a place where they could get the best photographic shot. Some of us, climbing through the open viewing section of the roof, scrambled up onto the roof of the Rover. A couple in the party decided to leave the Rover altogether. This made the rest of us very nervous. Just how far would they venture? How would the hippos react? What would they do? What is their social organization? Maybe there were hippopotami standing in the dense thickets surrounding the river. Immediately, we called to our two adventurers to get back to the Rover. None of us knew what was in store for us. We were novices and it was just plain irresponsible to go venturing out into the wild like that. But what I remember most of the experience is the panic and thrill of our run-in with 'real' nature, an unknown nature with its own rules.



▼PART III  
SENSORIAL INVESTIGATIONS



## CHAPTER 11

# Sensorial Anthropology

*David Howes*

*It would seem that the extension of one or another of our senses by mechanical means, such as the phonetic script [an extension of the eye], can act as a sort of twist for the kaleidoscope of the entire sensorium. A new combination or ratio of the existing components occurs, and a new mosaic of possible forms presents itself.*

Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962)

The purpose of this chapter is to articulate a new sub-field of anthropology, which may be called the 'anthropology of the senses,' by elaborating upon some of the theoretical implications of the chapters in parts I and II. This chapter will also introduce the essays which make up the balance of this book, all of which exemplify the new paradigm in their insistence upon approaching other cultures through their own 'sense ratios.'

In what follows, the sensorium, which may be defined as 'the entire sensory apparatus as an operational complex' (Ong, ch. 1), is pictured as a combinatory, or, to use McLuhan's metaphor, a 'kaleidoscope' (1962: 55). This image agrees with the fact that it is through a combination of the five senses that human beings perceive the world. Take the case of tasting a meal. It is the *correlation* of gustatory and olfactory (and tactile and visual) sensations that gives a meal its flavour. For this reason, if one's sense of smell is impaired because of a head cold, the meal will not taste the same as on other occasions.

The image of a combinatory can also be taken to suggest that the way in which the senses are combined in one individual, or society, may

not be the same as in the next. Donald Lowe (1982: 7) gives the example of a musician, who would have a better ear than most, as opposed to a chef, whose taste buds and nose would be better than others'. It will be appreciated how the differing combination of the five senses in these two individuals would result in their each enjoying a somewhat different experience of reality.

Lowe's example underlines a point made by Edmund Carpenter (1972: 20): 'Any sensory experience is partly a skill and any skill can be cultivated.' Musicians exercise their ears, chefs cultivate their palates, and the effect of this is that their 'sensory profiles' (to use Carpenter's expression) or 'sense ratios' (to use McLuhan's) diverge proportionately. It must be emphasized, however, that this essay is not concerned with individual differences in sensory mixes. Differences among individuals (by age, sex, occupation, or temperament) only take on meaning against the background of the culture to which they belong. It is the sense in which *whole* societies can be classified as more tasteful than others (for example, French society compared with British), or more aurally than visually minded (for example, cultures without writing are to some extent bound to rely more on the ear than the eye for purposes of communication), that is of primary interest to the 'anthropology of the senses.'

One way to conceptualize what is meant by this idea of 'sensory profile' or 'sense ratio' is on the analogy of Wilder Penfield's famous 'sensory homunculus' (Penfield and Rasmussen 1950). The sensory homunculus is a map of the body as it appears on the surface of the cerebral cortex (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> It will be observed that the brain's map of the body is not drawn to scale. Some areas on the skin are represented over a much wider area of the brain than others, and not at all in proportion to their size. For example, the face, especially the mouth, is allocated much more space than the leg; and the hand, especially the thumb, seems grossly overrepresented compared with the trunk. As Jonathan Miller observes, the brain's map of the body is 'like an electoral map as opposed to a geographical one' (1978: 21). Basically, what is represented on this map is the functional importance of the hand and the mouth relative to the leg or the trunk as far as the body *as a whole* is concerned. It is because of their functional significance to the human organism that the former have so many more sensors per square centimetre than the latter, and are represented in the brain accordingly.

It is this idea of function, and of sensory functions in particular, with which the anthropology of the senses is most centrally concerned. In approaching other cultures, what we want to find out is: What *is* the relative importance and meaning of the different senses to the members

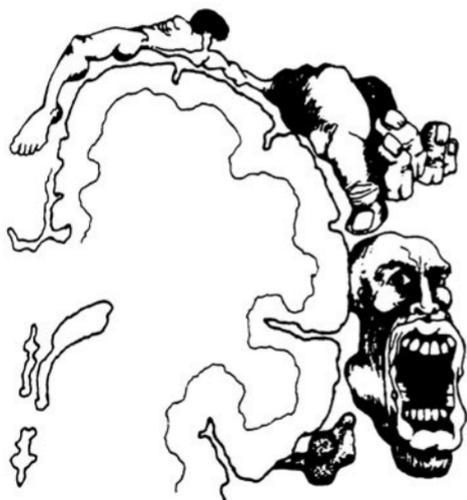


FIGURE 1  
The sensory homunculus (after Penfield and Rasmussen 1950)

of that culture? How does their culture's map of the senses differ from ours? These questions do not admit of easy answers, and themselves raise further questions, such as: What would reliable evidence that one sense is considered more 'important' or trustworthy than some other consist in?

As a preliminary indication, consider Alan Dundes's analysis of everyday English in 'Seeing Is Believing' (1980). According to Dundes, such expressions as 'I see' when what one means is 'I understand,' or 'seeing is believing,' constitute pretty strong evidence of a visual bias among English speakers, particularly when one considers that the latter phrase used to read 'seeing is believing, but touching's the truth.' The proportional representation of the visual and tactile modalities in the English-speaker's 'cultural map' of the senses has thus changed substantially over time. This inversion of the truth value of the senses of touch and sight underlines the dynamic, ever-shifting character of the relationship between the modalities (Ong, ch. 1).

Linguistic expressions like 'seeing is believing' are best regarded as evidence of the body and senses 'in the mind' (Johnson 1987), or how 'what is done with the body [and senses] is the ground of what is thought and said' (Jackson 1989: 131). This way of interpreting these expressions accords with the interactive, instrumental view of metaphor which has emerged in recent years. To dismiss such metaphors as mere 'figures of

speech' would be to recur to a theory of mind/body dualism which is no longer tenable (Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1987). At the same time, in our attempts to arrive at a definition and understanding of a society's sensory profile, we must extend our attention beyond language, and seek to quadrate the evidence of as many cultural domains as possible. The most salient domains for this purpose, as the chapters in this part will show, include: a society's technology of communications, modes of body decoration, child-rearing practices, art, architecture, folk-tales and proverbs, myths of creation, techniques of divination, and above all, ritual life. All of these domains have something (and sometimes different things) to tell us about how the senses are used in practice. They also tell us about how the senses are imagined to operate, which is equally relevant to our understanding of their praxis – that is, of their function in an 'operational complex' that is both constituted by and constitutive of culture.

In this chapter, I shall be concentrating on the first three domains, beginning with a re-examination of Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong's theory of how communications media shape the sensorium, then turning to consider a paper by Anthony Seeger which suggests that body decoration represents another site at which a society both expresses and enforces its particular sensory order. In the third section, I extend Mauss' notion of 'body techniques' into a general theory of the 'techniques of perception,' and illustrate this by means of a study of Wolof child-rearing practices.

### **Technology of Communications**

One of McLuhan and Ong's most basic insights is that different communications media 'distort' our experience of the world in the very process of making such experience possible because of the differential way they call the senses into action. Thus, the newspaper extends the range and sensitivity of the eye, but suppresses other sensory functions; the African talking drum extends the normal range of functioning of the ear (and the voice) but at the expense of sight (Ong 1977: 102–4). Rather controversially, McLuhan sought to explain all of human history, as well as the differences in social organization between the West and the 'tribal' societies of Africa and the Orient, in terms of transformations in the 'ratio of the senses' brought on by changes in the technology of communications. Let me sketch this theory, according to which cultures can be understood as differential extensions of the senses and classified as belonging to one of four kinds or stages (oral-aural, chirographic,

typographic, electronic) before critiquing it. I shall focus on McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*.

In the oral stage of Western civilization (as in 'tribal Africa' as understood by McLuhan), speech was *the* mass medium and there was an 'audile-tactile bias' to collective thought. Speech confers a disproportionate emphasis upon the sense of hearing, hence the heightened audile component. Persons must be present to each other to communicate verbally, hence the tactile component. And, because of this forced proximity, various non-verbal channels of communication (facial expression, gestures, the smell of one's interlocutor) also figure prominently in verbal intercourse, making communication 'synaesthetic.'

This unity or orchestration of the senses began to come undone in the succeeding chirographic stage. The immediate cause of this split or rupture was the substitution of visual signs for spoken words: 'the phonetic alphabet makes a break between eye and ear, between semantic meaning and visual code' (McLuhan 1962: 26–8). But this split had to await the invention of the printing press to be fully consummated, because for a long time after the invention of writing books continued to be read aloud: 'with print [however] the eye speeded up and the voice quieted down' (1962: 42–4).

The printing press made the process of acquiring knowledge an experience at once more available, private, and visual than any experience that had gone before. The printing press also increased the reliability of visual information in direct proportion to the number of copies of a text or diagram printed (that is, typographic standardization put an end to the problem of chirographic corruption). And it was the printing press, according to McLuhan, that was responsible for the bias in favour of explicit or objective, causal or sequential, logical thinking so characteristic of Western culture from the Renaissance on. The reason for this: hearing is omnidirectional, synthetic, and sounds always have an emotional impact; sight is unidirectional, analytic, and distancing. As Ong (1982: 72) puts it, sound surrounds and penetrates the listener, sight situates the viewer outside what he sees.

The electric age, which was heralded by the invention of the telegraph and culminated in the invention of television and the computer, altered the balance of the senses once again by rupturing the silence which had been imposed by print, and making communication instantaneous again. McLuhan saw the youth of the 1960s, with their emphasis on being 'involved' or 'in touch' rather than detached, as the first to live out the logic of the electric age. The new media undermined the hegemony of the visual and sensitized people to the auditory and tactile dimensions of experience (again). Thus, in the 1960s, 'Dance and dress, music and

hair styles must not only have a “look”; they must also have a “sound” and above all a “touch”. They must appeal to all the senses simultaneously. It is not only that youth wants experience; it wants experience that unifies rather than dissociates the senses’ (Carey 1969: 288). This reunion of the senses made possible a new awareness of human interconnectedness, or the ‘retribalization of man,’ this time on a global scale – the ‘global village.’

By way of summing up, let me quote McLuhan at length:

Any culture is an order of sensory preferences, and in the tribal world, the senses of touch, taste, hearing and smell were developed, for very practical reasons, to a much higher level than the strictly visual. Into this world, the phonetic alphabet fell like a bombshell, installing sight at the head of the hierarchy of senses. Literacy propelled man from the tribe, gave him an eye for an ear and replaced his integral, in-depth communal interplay with visual linear values and fragmented consciousness. As an intensification and amplification of the visual function, the phonetic alphabet diminished the role of the senses of hearing and touch and taste and smell, permeating the discontinuous culture of tribal man and translating its organic harmony and complex synaesthesia into the uniform, connected and visual mode that we still consider the norm of ‘rational’ existence. (*Playboy* 1989: 109)

The logic of the industrial assembly line may be cited in illustration of what McLuhan meant by thought in the uniform, connected, and visual mode.

McLuhan’s work has attracted a great deal of criticism (e.g., Stearn 1967; Hymes 1974a; Finkelstein 1968), much of which is invalid because it is based on a superficial reading.<sup>2</sup> Before turning to consider some of the more valid criticisms, one thing I must say in favour of his approach is that all of the chapters in this sourcebook show that he was right to suggest that cross-cultural understanding can be enhanced greatly by attending to the sensory dimensions of other people’s experience with the same order of preferences and intensity they do. By contrast, scholars like Berlin and Kay (1969), who focus exclusively on the comparison of colour terminologies, never thinking to compare odour or taste vocabularies, have plainly failed to transcend our culture’s sensory biases. The same could be said of the expanding field of ‘visual anthropology’ (Bellman and Jules-Rosette 1977), which colonizes the sensory orders of other cultures at the same time it reifies our own.

One of the respects in which McLuhan’s theory is open to criticism

has to do with his imputation of a 'primitive' or non-logical mentality to 'oral man.' Recent research in cross-cultural psychology has discredited the suggestion that the cognitive operations of non-literate people differ in any substantial way from those of literate people (Scribner and Cole 1981). But while the 'great divide' theory has to be abandoned, there are many littler divides that persist, such as Wober's finding that African subjects perform better on tasks involving proprioceptive discrimination but poorer on tasks entailing visual skills than do Western subjects, and vice versa (Wober, ch. 2). These seemingly minor differences in what Wober calls 'perceptual style' could have major cognitive implications since, according to the latest research in cognitive neuropsychology, it appears that knowledge of the world is coded in a *modality-specific* rather than unitary fashion (McCarthy and Warrington 1988; Marshall 1988). It follows that insofar as different cultures emphasize the development of different modalities, their ways of thinking will also differ (see Marsella and Quijano 1974; Jocano 1976: 106-9; Shizuru and Marsella 1981; Luria 1976).

Many have also objected to the lineal evolutionary schema in terms of which McLuhan interprets the cultural history of the West and other societies, although McLuhan himself short-circuits this objection by arguing that 'electronic man' has in fact come full circle (i.e., that the course of history is cyclical). Nevertheless, most contemporary anthropologists would regard the differences in social organization and cosmology McLuhan discusses as due to a variety of factors (such as history, economics, environment, value differences) rather than the unfolding of some universal, technologically driven developmental process (see Feld 1986).

The most serious objection to McLuhan's theory, it seems to me, is that while he gives us the idea of cultures as constituted and differentiated by contrasting 'sensory ratios,' most of his writing on this subject revolves around the conflict between the ear and the eye. The other senses receive but scant attention (exceptions include McLuhan 1964: 135-8 and 1967, ch. 18). As a result, all of the oral cultures he discusses end up sounding identical, while the literate ones he treats all come to look much the same. There should be more to the notion of 'sensory ratio' than meets the eye or reverberates in the ear.

The peril of simply assuming that all 'tribal' cultures will display the same 'overwhelming tyranny of the ear over the eye' (McLuhan 1962: 28) can be illustrated by considering the example of the Chewong, an aboriginal people who live deep in the rain forest of the Malay Peninsula. 'The spoken word is the main medium of Chewong art. They make no

sculpture and no painting' (Howell 1982: xiv). Chewong society may thus be classified as 'oral-aural.' Hence, if one follows McLuhan, one would expect the Chewong to place special emphasis on the ear.

But instead, the Chewong have evolved a highly complex doctrine of seeing as knowing. Each level or species of being (animal, human, and superhuman) is credited with eyes different from those of every other species, and their behaviour is explained accordingly. For example, at one level, monkeys see nuts and leaves not as what they are but as 'meat'; at the next level, 'when the Chewong see monkeys, they only think of eating them' – that is, they see monkeys as 'meat' (Howell 1984: 161); at a third level, *bas*, a class of spirits with eyes at the back of the head who often cause harm to human beings, do so precisely because they do not see human beings as such, but only as 'meat' (1984: 104–6). Thus, every species of being inhabits a different visual world. Only the *putao* or shaman, whose eyes are 'cool,' is able to see the actual or true state of affairs in all these different worlds at once; for example, the *putao* can see that the true cause of a patient's suffering is that he or she walked into an invisible (to the patient) trap set by the *bas*.

The Chewong recognize another class of spirits, the beautiful female *bi hali* or 'leaf people,' who live in fragrant-smelling flowers and leaves, dance and sing a great deal, and love to attend the singing séances held in their honour. Howell writes: 'When many different *bi hali* are present [at a séance], the house is filled with a fragrance, and often the women cry because it is so beautiful' (1984: 96). But while everybody can smell the *bi hali*, only the shaman whose eyes have been 'cooled' by a special smoke can see them and report back on their beauty.

Other facts which point to the centrality of sight in the Chewong sensorium include: the belief that the eyes of the foetus are the first parts to develop (1984: 52); the way madness is represented by a phrase meaning 'to see the world upside down' (1984: 165–6); and the many references to men and women being attracted to each other by their physical appearance in Chewong myth – in only one case is it the beauty of a man's voice that exerts attraction (Howell 1982: 28). At the same time, it is apparent that the Chewong enjoy a far more balanced sensorium than we do. Chewong technology simply does not permit one or two of the senses to be extended at the expense of all the rest the way such practices as reading a book or 'watching TV' do. As Lowe (1982: 9) observes, film and television, by the extension and extrapolation of seeing and hearing, have 'created a "reality" ... without reference to the other three senses.' It is significant in this regard that a Chewong shaman's eyes must be ritually 'cooled' with aromatic smoke for him to be able to see in other worlds, and that a constant drumming

must be kept up during the *séance* in order for his soul to be able to find its way back (Howell 1984: 158–9).

What the Chewong case alerts us to is the importance of studying ‘how people think they perceive’ (Seeger 1981: 80) *in addition to* whatever their technology enables them to see or hear or touch, etc. Within the limits imposed by its technologies of communication, a society yet remains free to vary the emphasis it places on the different sense organs. In terms of McLuhan’s framework, these variations are necessarily slight, but they can loom large when all of the societies one is studying are of the so-called ‘oral-aural’ type.

### Body Decoration

In illustration of the last point, consider the situation among the Gê-speaking peoples of central Brazil as described by Anthony Seeger (1975) in a fascinating article on the meaning of body decorations. Seeger found that in the Mato Grosso the ornamentation of a body part (eye, ear, nose, penis, etc.) is normally related to the symbolic meaning of the related faculty. Thus, Suya men pride themselves on their ear-discs, lip-discs, and distinctive singing style. These elements make one ‘fully human’ (*me*). The Kayapo, by contrast, are very conscious of their penis sheaths. Adult Kayapo do not wear ear-discs (only strings of beads), and while they do wear lip-discs, these are not very ornate. Interestingly, among the Kayapo a boy’s puberty is marked by the bestowal of a penis-sheath, while among the Suya it is signalled by an ear-piercing ceremony. The purpose of the latter ceremony is to make the youth ‘hear well.’ Suya thus try to control sexuality (read: tactile experience) indirectly, through the ear, while the Kayapo control it directly. Indeed, Suya say that ‘sexual intercourse is “bad for the hearing” of young men’ (Seeger 1975: 220).

It could be said that Suya emphasize hearing and obeying at the expense of ‘feeling up.’ The economy of their sensorium is exactly the reverse of that of the Kayapo insofar as touch and hearing are concerned (see Table 1). It would be interesting to know whether Kayapo men, having invested less symbolic energy in their ears and more in other organs, enjoy a more balanced sex life than the latter. They certainly seem to have a more ‘tactile culture’ than the Suya do (see Montagu 1978: 231–316).

Just as a certain contrapuntal pattern emerges when one compares the overall shape of the Suya sensorium with that of the Kayapo – Suya enlarge their ears, Kayapo their penises – so a quite definite pattern emerges when one examines the balance of the senses within Suya cul-

TABLE 1  
Comparison of Suyu and Kayapo sensory profiles

	Suyu	Kayapo
Ear-disc	+	-
Lip-disc	+	+
Penis-sheath	-	+

ture itself. The reason the Suyu wear lip-discs and ear-discs has to do with the faculties of speech and hearing being 'highly elaborated and positively valued in Suyu society' (Seeger 1975: 215). For example, the Suyu word for hearing, *ku-mba*, means not only 'to hear (a sound)' but also 'to know' and 'to understand.' Hence, when 'the Suyu have learned something – even something visual such as a weaving pattern – they say, "It is in my ear"' (Seeger 1975: 214). The ear is therefore the primary organ through which the world is cognized and, as noted previously, the human subject socialized: a person who is fully social, that is, one who conforms fully to the norms of the tribe, 'hears, understands and knows clearly' (Seeger 1975: 214).

Among the Kayapo, active knowledge of how to 'make and do things' is associated with 'seeing' and only passive knowledge, such as understanding social codes, is associated with 'hearing' (Turner 1980: 120). The latter association is perhaps reflected in the unmarked (or unremarkable, by Suyu standards) character of Kayapo ear ornaments, while the former association is marked by the Kayapo custom of painting the eyes (as well as the hands and feet) bright red so as to 'intensify' or 'accentuate' their contact with the external world (1980: 123). The positive value the Kayapo attach to seeing is also manifest in their 'bird's-eye' conception of beauty: 'Birds fly, and "can scan" the *whole* world,' Kayapo say (1980: 131). To be able to perceive the wholeness of the world is the very essence of aesthetic experience, by Kayapo standards.

By Suyu standards, however, such extraordinary vision is *the* defining characteristic of a witch: 'A person becomes a witch when an invisible witch thing enters his or her eye. Certain species of birds all have such witch things in their eyes ... The "thing" in the person's eye allows him literally to "see everything" ... the village of the dead in the sky ... the fires of the people under the earth ... enemy Indians in their own villages far away' (Seeger 1975: 215). The association of extraordinary powers of sight with being a witch is motivated, according to Seeger, by the prior association of being 'fully human' (*me*) with 'hearing clearly.' It bears underlining that the 'witch-thing' is neither inherited nor congenital: it only enters the eyes of people who do not *heed* what they are

told by their elders or chiefs (i.e., who behave immorally). Thus, extraordinary vision is an 'antisocial faculty' – it is only attained by those who transgress the moral (acoustic) bounds of society.

Seeger (1975: 216–18) states that Suya witches are also distinguished by their perverted or 'bad speech' in contrast to the 'plaza speech' or 'everybody listen talk' of the chiefs. Thus, another pattern emerges, which complements the one we discerned earlier when we compared the Suya and Kayapo sensory orders as wholes. In effect, the sensory profile of the Suya witch is the *reverse* of the sensory order exemplified and upheld by the chiefs. What is more, the two balance out: *just as the witch's poor hearing and bad speech is compensated for by extraordinary vision, so the chief's ordinary vision is compensated for by a good ear and a loud mouth.*

To complete our picture of the Suya economy of the senses, there are certain facts about smell which should be considered. Only certain highly dangerous and elusive game animals are credited with a keen sense of smell, as well as 'strong eyes' (1975: 216). Related to this is the fact that adult men are thought to be 'bland smelling' while adult women, who participate more in nature than in society, are said to be 'strong smelling' (Seeger 1981: 111). Thus, vision and olfaction are 'antisocial faculties,' or animal-like characteristics, by Suya standards. This negative valorization explains why the nose and especially 'the eyes are not ornamented, tattooed or specially painted' (Seeger 1975: 216), while the positive valuation of speaking and hearing is reflected in the elaborate attention paid to adorning the ears and lips.

The Suya case is of interest for a number of reasons. First, it reveals the arbitrariness of the association between vision and cognition implied in the English phrase 'I see' as a substitute for 'I understand.' Second, it reveals the arbitrariness of the way in which Western discourse divides up the sensorium into the 'intellectual' or distance senses (sight and hearing) and the 'affective' or proximity senses (smell, taste, and touch); the Suya 'social/antisocial' dichotomy cross-sections the conventional Western way of grouping the modalities. Third, it suggests that there may be a connection between aurality and sociability, on the one hand, and visuality and individuality (or an 'asocial' disposition), on the other. All Westerners would be witches by Suya standards, because they 'see' but do not 'hear.' We shall come back to this point, but a fourth point demands our more immediate attention, and that is how *sexist*, or gender-biased, the Suya sensory order is.

Those familiar with feminist critiques of the 'male gaze' and the phallocracy that gaze institutes (see Irigaray 1980; Jordanova 1989; Mulvey 1989) may, like myself, have cherished the idea that in more ear-, less

eye-minded societies, like that of the Suya, women's senses would not be as suppressed. But the Suya case dashes that expectation. In place of the 'male gaze' there is the 'male voice': 'plaza speech' – the most valued form of oratory – is only spoken by fully adult men (Seeger 1975: 214). Moreover, 'the major role of women in Suya ceremonies is as audience and suppliers of food rather than as singers' (1975: 215). Then is taste valued by Suya men? Apparently not: 'the faculties of taste, touch, and other types of feeling are far less important symbolically and are used to describe many fewer semantic areas' (1975: 216). Suya women are thus restricted to expressing themselves through smell (body odour) and taste (food) – the first of which is definitely 'antisocial,' and the second simply treated with indifference. In short, there is a *politics* to the Suya sensory order, and a markedly sexual politics at that (on which more in the concluding part of this essay).

To return to the connection between aurality and sociability, and visuality and individuality, posited earlier, this connection can be re-phrased as a law of sorts: the more a society emphasizes the eye, the less communal it will be; the more it emphasizes the ear, the less individualistic it will be. In principle, this 'law' should serve to enucleate not only the difference in tone between North American culture and Suya culture, but that between any visually minded society and Suya society. Consider the Chewong case again. Significantly, Howell states that she found a marked lack of co-operation among the Chewong: 'Although they do not compete, they do not help each other either,' and they are 'unusually reserved' in their dealings with each other (1984: 1, 38). The minimalism of Chewong society – 'no lineages, no alliances, no social hierarchies' (1984: 1) – agrees with the heightened visualism of Chewong cosmology. By the same token, the synaesthetic tendencies of Chewong thought, particularly its olfactory bias, clearly differentiate it from Western thought.

Fifthly and finally, the Suya example is helpful because it suggests a way of studying how the senses are ordered in societies which do not possess elaborate technologies of communication: one should look to how the sense organs are decorated. It will be appreciated that this directive for research represents a refinement of McLuhan's theory rather than standing in contradiction to it. The implication of Seeger's work is that body decoration, like communications media, can be analysed as 'extensions of the senses' (to use McLuhan's phrase), and that the effect on cognition is similar: they *freeze* attention in a particular combination of modalities, and in this way serve not only to express a society's map of the senses but also to 'embody' that schema in the perceiving subject.

Can Seeger's approach be generalized? The Highlands of Papua New Guinea offer an exceptionally rich terrain for testing his hypothesis. Body decoration there is a complex affair, beautifully described and pictured by Marilyn and Andrew Strathern in their book on *Self-decoration in Mount Hagen* (1971). The sense organs that appear to receive the most emphasis, judging from the photographs in that book, are the nose (typically emphasized by inserting a curved pig-tusk or shell-ornament through the septum) and the ears (frequently adorned with shells or tufts of marsupial fur). Many people also encircle the eyes with daubs of paint (Strathern and Strathern 1971: 108), but let us begin with smell.

In Seeger's terms, if the nose is decorated it follows that olfaction must be considered a 'social faculty.' It is perhaps somewhat difficult for North Americans to imagine how the nose could have a social function, since this organ is so little used in our society (Howes 1988: 93-4). But in the Highlands the nose does have a social vocation. For example, among the Ommura, 'It is said that the adequacy with which a man fulfills his exchange obligations to his affines may affect the shape of his nose. Failure to keep up to date with payments, and the resulting acrimony, may cause his nose to swell out painfully. There is a pervasive association between "correct" circulation of blood in the body and "correct" circulation of "blood" [read: pigs and other bridewealth articles - symbolic blood] between affines' (Mayer 1982: 243). The idea here is that a blockage in the flow of 'blood' to a man's affines causes the blood in his body to stagnate as well, and accumulate in his nose. The explanation for this is that the Ommura do not dissociate the body from society (or the psyche) to the same extent most Westerners do. The state of a man's nose is therefore a barometer of the state of his social relations. But the nose is more than this as well: Ommura also make inferences as to a person's character or personality based on its shape, and have an elaborate vocabulary with which to do so. Thus, in summing up a man's character, they may say 'I know his nose. It is of such and such a type' (aquiline, broad, flat) much the way we say 'That man has shifty eyes' or 'piggy eyes' or 'starry eyes' and so on (Mayer 1982: 243). It is not the eyes that are the 'windows of the soul' for the Ommura, but the nose.

The nose plays a prominent role in other domains of the cultures of Papua New Guinea. For example, the Gnau divine the cause of a person's illness by 'smelling out' the identity of the afflicting spirit (Lewis 1975: 170, 268); among the Umeda, a man sleeps within olfactory range of a bundle containing scented herbs - the aroma of these herbs is supposed to guide his dreams, and acting out these dreams ensures a successful hunt (Gell 1977).<sup>3</sup> Again, the contrast with North American

society is quite striking: to orient and find our way about in space we tend to rely on maps and road signs – not scented dreams. To diagnose the cause of an illness we rely on X-rays or brain scans, etc. (Daniel, ch. 7); indeed, Western physicians used to be quite proficient at diagnosing illnesses by odour, but this ability has declined steadily since the turn of the century (Howes 1987).

While olfaction is an important way of knowing, it remains subordinate to hearing. Hearing is *the* medium of intelligence in New Guinea, as the following quotation, which also concerns the Ommura, attests:

It was stressed to me that one cannot 'see' the motives, thoughts or intentions of another. They are 'inside the ear.' As elsewhere in Papua New Guinea, intellectual processes, knowledge and memory are associated with the ear. The same verb '*iero*' is used to mean 'to hear' (a sound) and 'to know' or 'to understand' ... [Mayer's] habit of asking questions such as 'Why did he do that?' or 'Does she like these?' was generally regarded as rather pointless. Such questions are not treated as matters for overt speculation or analytic discourse, and the typical retort was 'Why ask me? I cannot see inside his ear.' (Mayer 1982: 246)

Two things stand out about this passage. The first is the assimilation of knowing to hearing implied in the verb *iero*, which helps to explain why the ear receives special emphasis in the context of body decoration.<sup>4</sup> The second is the blunting of sight implied in the retort: 'Why ask me? I cannot see inside his ear.'

What the latter response suggests is that seeing has not been 'symbolically elaborated' (to use Seeger's phrase) to the same extent as hearing. For the Ommura, sight can reveal only surfaces. It may be for this reason that they, like the Hageners, attach so much significance to appearances: 'In Hagen thought, material success and physical health are alike expressed in a man's bodily condition. A person should be well filled-out, with a gleaming skin, and oiling the body contributes to it a desired, glossy appearance' (Strathern and Strathern 1971: 134; Mayer 1982). But precisely because of this focus on appearances, there is no elaboration of the power of sight beyond the visibly manifest, no 'mind's eye.' Compare, for example, the English phrase 'I see how you feel,' which uses a visual idiom to express the idea of apprehending another person's inner state. This idiom would make no sense in the Highlands (see Mayer 1982: 246).

In view of this limitation, it is tempting to suggest that in the Highlands generally, if to varying degrees, people are ultimately more attentive to the non-visual than the visual aspects of things.<sup>5</sup> Significantly,

among the Kaluli, whom we encountered earlier (Feld, ch. 6), animals are not described by their appearance but rather by the sounds they make (Schieffelin 1976: 95). 'When presented with pictures or specimens out of context, Kaluli tend first to think of and imitate the sound, then to say the name of the bird' (Feld 1982: 72). Similarly, one of the most important rituals of Kaluli ceremonial life, the *gisalo*, is sung and danced by brilliantly attired men only at night, in the darkness of the longhouse. The staging is meant to evoke the image of a bird at a waterfall in the darkness of the forest: 'In the dark house, as in the forest, it is hearing, not vision that is the dominant sensory mode. While the audience is aware of the motion, colour and demeanour of the dancer, the nuances of meaning lie in the texts of the songs and the sounds of the voice, the instrumental pulse and the bodily motion' (Feld 1982: 180).

Taken together, what this heterogeneous array of facts suggests is that sight *is* a 'social faculty' but that it is muted relative to hearing, and may even be of less cultural importance than smell. If so, the reader may well wonder, why are the eyes still decorated? And why do the people of this region nevertheless strike us as among the most colourful people in the world?

The answer to the last question should be obvious. Most of our general knowledge of these peoples comes from the colour plates and descriptions of books like (if nowhere near as excellent as) Strathern and Strathern's *Self-decoration in Mount Hagen* (e.g., Kirk 1981). As McLuhan would be quick to note, the textual-photographic mode of presentation distorts the fundamentally *multimodal* or 'synaesthetic' form that communication takes in its native context. A careful reading of the Stratherns' book confirms this point. The Hageners are not interested in mere visual display. Many of the substances they use for decorative purposes are in fact 'synaesthetic': for example, red ochre is valued for its brightness, which is said to be 'attractive' (or able to 'pull in' wealth and women) but it is also fragrant, and therefore doubly attractive (Strathern and Strathern 1971: 26, 92); pigs' tails are valued because they are bright and connote prosperity, but no less important is the swishing sound they make when worn as an apron (1971: 94). The implication here, as I have insisted before, is that anthropologists who study only the 'colour symbolism' of a culture, without examining how the colour system relates to the smell or sound systems, are approaching the culture 'through Western eyes,' and are unlikely to do justice to the *total* system of communication in place (see Howes 1990a).

As for why the eyes are decorated, no one in the Mount Hagen vicinity was able to say, and the Stratherns could only phrase their conclusions on this subject in negative terms: Hageners 'do *not* say, for example,

that they encircle the eyes to enhance the attractiveness of these' (1971: 108, n. 3). The very fact that the Hageners could give no reason for why they decorate the eyes points, I think, to the deeper, the ultimate meaning of self-decoration on ceremonial occasions in Mount Hagen. Paradoxically, this is *not to see or be seen*. As the Stratherns remark of one of the main cult dances, the men 'staring out unseeingly at the crowd of spectators ... concentrate on their posture' (1971: 50) – that is, the men are more *proprioceptively* than visually aware of what they are doing. At the same time, their elaborate wigs and charcoaled beards, which throw their faces into shadow, are meant to make them 'harder to recognize as individuals' by the audience. Indeed, the highest compliment a performance can elicit from an audience is for the latter to say: 'Their ancestors have come on to their faces and they are dark in appearance' – *unrecognizable* (1971: 137). Since the success of a performance, as well as the strength and prosperity of a clan, is entirely dependent on 'ancestral approbation' (1971: 134), it is only fitting that there should be this *blurring of the visible and the invisible*, the living and the ancestors, which eclipses anything that can be captured in a photograph. According to Western notions, 'the camera never lies,' but it does by Hagen standards, insofar as no photograph could render sensible the 'invisible presence' of the ancestors.

### Techniques of Perception

Thus far we have focused on two sorts of cultural instruments, or techniques, for the regulation of perception: communications media and body decorations. But as Marcel Mauss long ago pointed out, it is false to think that there is technique only when there is an instrument: the ways in which from society to society people know how to use their bodies (how to run, swim, lift things) may also be spoken of as technical. Indeed, the body is 'man's first and most natural instrument' or, better, 'technical means,' and the training of this instrument begins in infancy: '[the weaned child] can eat and drink; it is taught to walk; it is trained in vision, hearing, in a sense of rhythm and form and movement, often for dancing and music' (Mauss 1979b: 104, 111). The education of the senses was thus an integral part of the field of study Mauss hoped to open up when he urged us to pay close attention to cultural differences in the elaboration and transmission of 'body techniques.'

Perhaps the most in-depth study of what Michael Jackson, following Mauss, has called 'the social regulation of the senses' (Jackson 1977: 209) – that is, how people learn to use and control their senses – is Jacqueline Rabain's *L'Enfant du lignage* (1979). Rabain's book concerns

the Wolof of Senegal. I would like to discuss it at some length by way of showing how it is possible, through the study of how a given people use the senses, and teach their children to do likewise, to arrive at a statement of how the senses are evaluated in that culture. My argument is that in Wolof society the distance senses, as well as taste, are tabooed or restricted in various ways so as to favour tactile communication. If this analysis is correct, then the Wolof sensory order is the reverse of the occidental hierarchy of sensing, for it is commonly supposed that it is the proximity senses which have had to be suppressed in the interests of 'Western civilization' (Montagu 1978: 249).<sup>6</sup> At the same time, in Western society, a refined sense of taste is commonly regarded as the epitome of social sophistication.

Part of the interest of Rabain's analysis lies in the way she dissects Wolof culture into a series of 'modalities of exchange' or 'sensory registers of communication' (tactile, alimentary, verbal, visual), and then proceeds to describe how the child grows into them. It is by learning the rules which govern exchanges in each of these modalities that the child, eventually, emerges as a full member of society.<sup>7</sup>

One of the things the weaned child quickly learns is that food is not so much for purposes of consumption (or delectation) as for purposes of exchange. The child who responds to the gift of a candy with an expression like 'May God give you a child!' or 'I will give you a sheep!' has mastered both the alimentary and the verbal registers of communication; the child who responds with 'Yummy!' has not. 'Verbal exchanges concerning food consumed or to be consumed never insist on the quality, the taste, in short on the attributes of the food as object, but on its position in the circuit of exchange: gift received, gift to be given, etc.' (Rabain 1979: 67). We may conclude that taste per se is a relatively 'asocial faculty' by Wolof standards, not subject to much 'symbolic elaboration.'

Another rule the weaned child must learn is that one should not speak to, and above all never look at, people while they are eating (Gamble 1967: 75). The rationale behind this rule is complex. It has to do with the assumption that anyone may be a witch (that is, may harbour malevolent intentions), and that the witch 'devours by his gaze.' The person eating is vulnerable to such 'visual aggression' because of the principle of the 'reciprocity of positions' (that of the aggressor and that of the victim) which governs witchcraft relations. In other words, the eater risks being 'eaten' because he eats (see Rabain 1979: 45). The best way not to get trapped in this vicious circle is never to enter it – that is, to avoid eye contact. In this way, the potential for aggression is neutralized.

Talk is prophylactic, because speech is automatically 'protective as

long as it is not ensorcelling' (Rabain 1979: 45), but speech is restricted during the meal. Indeed, it is the absence of speech while eating that is the principal reason for everyone being so vulnerable. This leads us to conclude that sight is the least social of the faculties, being so intimately associated with witchcraft, while speaking is more sociable than looking, but not as sociable as touch.

The evidence for the last point, concerning touch, comes from Rabain's account of how visitors are received in the family compound. Apparently, when a visitor arrives, male or female, often before any word is exchanged, he or she is handed a baby. This gesture is intended to 'mediate' the relation between adults. Rabain explains: 'It is important to emphasize the special valence of physical exchanges as regards two other registers of relationship. While speaking at a distance and looking at a child are subject to restrictive rules (don't stare, don't make direct compliments), and are sometimes bearers of evil intentions, tactile contact is regarded as "disarming." Better yet, it neutralizes the menacing exteriority of the gaze, and paves the way for the free-flow of verbal exchanges' (1979: 86). We may conclude that it is words spoken at a distance that are most dangerous. When spoken up close they do not provoke the same anxiety. Rabain (1979: 144) states that speech is 'the social exchange par excellence,' but the fact remains that speech is regarded more ambivalently than touch. Touch is *the* medium of social solidarity: 'Close physical proximity, prolonged bodily contact – as in the squeezing of hands in greeting, or lying stretched out side by side during times of repose – are not only tolerated but sought out by persons of the same sex' (1979: 79). Indeed, such proximity 'constitutes throughout the individual's life the most comfortable register of exchange' (1979: 116). By contrast, the person who withdraws from the 'field of co-presence' is regarded as positively antisocial.

One way to sum up the preceding account would be to plot the faculties we have been discussing on a continuum ranging from the most social to the least social. For the Wolof, then, that continuum would look like this:

touch – speech – taste – sight

This schema has a variety of implications for the analysis of other domains of Wolof culture. The first is that given the pre-eminence of touch in the Wolof sensorium, one would expect them to excel in what could be called 'bodily intelligence' (Gardner 1983). Significantly, as Gamble records of the Wolof he knew, wrestling is the favourite sport, and: 'More than any other Senegambian peoples one finds in the Wolof

a marked sense of rhythm which constantly pervades their actions' (1967: 76), from pounding grain to dancing.

A second implication is that the Wolof will tend to combine or associate the senses differently from Westerners – namely, they will associate touch with speech, and taste with sight. We have already considered one example of the latter association (taste-sight): the witch 'devours by his gaze.' An example of the other association (touch-speech) would be the tendency to evoke bodily motion by means of onomatopoeic sounds so characteristic of Wolof oral narratives. For example, in one of the tales recorded by Emil Magel in Gambia, there is a line which goes: '[The old man] walked very slowly and stiffly POROK-POROK-POROK-POROK until he reached the entrance to the mosque' (Magel 1984: 83).

A third implication is that as far as relations between the faculties are concerned, in any given pairing (touch/speech, speech/taste, taste/sight) the more social faculty will exert a constraining influence or power over the less social faculty, (because power is, after all, a social creation). We have already seen how physical proximity controls speech, obviating the latter's potential dangerousness. An example of the domination of speech over taste is found in one of the many narratives involving Hare and Hyena. In this tale, Hare uses 'musical suggestion' (playing a flute and singing) to control Hyena's consuming passion for meat. Significantly, Hare's song tricks Hyena into sharing his meat with him, and thus observing the social code (Magel 1984: 61). As for taste prevailing over vision, the best example of this relation of sensory domination is the notion that the witch 'devours by his gaze.'

These examples could be multiplied, but perhaps they will suffice to show that Walter Ong does indeed have a point when he writes: 'Given sufficient knowledge of the sensorium exploited within a specific culture, one could probably define the culture as a whole in virtually all its aspects' (Ong, ch. 1).

### **On the Chapters of Part III**

This chapter has attempted to show something of the importance of approaching other cultures through their own sensory ratios, instead of analysing them through the Western order of sensory preferences, with its visual bias and passion for measurement. The main conclusion to be drawn from the cases considered is that we must *stop* 'Seeing the World as a Colour Chart' (Bousfield 1979), and start learning how to see, hear, touch, taste, and smell beyond (or beneath) our normal range of powers – depending on the position and meaning of the ocular mo-

dality, the auditory modality, the olfactory modality, etc. in the sensorium of the culture under study. Only by developing the capacity to dilate (or contract) our sensory modalities consciously and indefinitely, and to combine them in new ways (in accordance with the preferences of our interlocutors) can we hope to really 'make sense' of how life is experienced in other cultures.

The chapters which follow exemplify what I have just said in the attention they pay to the relations *between* the senses. This focus on inter-sensory relations – that is, on patterns of sensory dominance, substitution, and interpenetration – is quite unique. Western philosophers and psychologists have tended to treat the senses individually, ignoring the fact that they always act in concert (Gonzalez-Crussi 1989: 26–30). Other notions which the following chapters develop include the idea that the senses have a history; that they are never value-neutral; and, that how people think they perceive can influence what they perceive. This is in contrast to the discipline of 'sensory psychology' or 'psychophysics' (Mueller 1965; Goldstein 1984), which presumes that one can take the measure of the senses without inquiring into their history or value, as if perception were a purely physical process.

As the following chapters represent a new departure in anthropological as well as psychological theory, a few words are in order concerning the circumstances of their production. All of the authors have participated in the 'Concordia Sensoria Research Group,' an interdisciplinary research team that was founded in the spring of 1988 to inquire into 'the varieties of sensory experience.' Most have first-hand experience of the cultures they analyse – Classen as a folklorist in the Andes, Ritchie as a teacher in a College of Education in Nigeria, Griffin in the course of her many visits to her Moroccan in-laws, and Pinard as a result of a sojourn in Benares. However, their aim is to show what can be gleaned from a critical 'sensory interpretation' of the pertinent ethnographic literature, and whatever intuitions the authors picked up during their travels and work have all been grounded in this way (i.e., in the literature).

The chapters were first presented in the form of talks at our seminars and lecture series, then as papers at the 1989 meeting of the Canadian Anthropological Society, and now as essays. They were written in response to the questions and commentaries in the 'Paradigm for Sensing' part of the Conclusion ('Sounding Sensory Profiles'), and have also helped to expand those questions and commentaries from a bare skeleton into, as it were, a sensory homunculus. As announced in the Introduction, the following chapters are intended to serve as model examples of (and for) the exercise proposed in the third part of the

Conclusion – namely, writing a paper for an advanced undergraduate or graduate course in anthropology, religion, communications studies, and perhaps even psychology.

For all their scholarship, these chapters remain preliminary explorations or ‘probes’ of what the ethnographic record has to offer when analysed for data on the senses. They are suggestive rather than conclusive, meant to open debate not close it. The chapters have been laid out ‘geographically’ – that is, in an arc which extends from Africa via India to South America. I shall say only a few brief words about each one here, because they really should be discussed topically rather than individually, as is, in fact, done in the Conclusion. Indeed, the reader would be well-advised to read the Conclusion before proceeding, as I have suggested once before.

In chapter 12, Ian Ritchie enlarges upon Wober’s ‘sensotype hypothesis’ (ch. 2) through a study of the folk-tales and proverbs of the Hausa of Nigeria. He notes that the Hausa have a more action-based than visually oriented conception of beauty. He also observes that hearing and eating or tasting seem to loom larger as metaphors for the organization of experience in Hausa discourse than in North American discourse. Of particular interest is the way he relates both this foregrounding of the sense(s) of hearing and taste, and the action-based conception of beauty, to the manner in which the Hausa divide the sensorium into two as opposed to five parts or functions.

It could be said that when you go to see a doctor what he or she sees in you is a corpse, in that ever since the invention of the ‘anatomical method’ (c. 1800) it is the image of the dissected corpse that has informed the medical ‘gaze’ (Foucault 1973; Howes 1987; Romanynshyn 1989: 114–42). In the Ndembu ‘system of medical perception’ the gaze also figures prominently, but it is tempered in a variety of ways by the other senses, as Lisa Andermann brings out in chapter 13. Andermann also discusses the possibility that there has been a shift in the Ndembu hierarchy of sensing, which is reflected in the way sight-based modes of divination have come to take precedence over more touch-based ones. This raises an important issue: a society may be ‘without history’ (in the sense of written records) but that does not mean its sensory order is static. The balance of the senses is always shifting (Ong, ch. 1).

In chapter 14, Kit Griffin approaches the Moroccan sensorium through the analysis of a particular ritual, engaged in only by women. Gradually, she extends the scope of her study to incorporate the elements of other rituals, and concludes with a statement of the structure of the Moroccan sensory order. In the process, she demonstrates how the prominence of

a given sensory channel in some rituals, and its repression in others, can be related to the 'social' or 'asocial' meaning the sense has in Moroccan culture.

In chapter 15, Sylvain Pinard examines Diana Eck's (1985) thesis that India is a 'visual culture' which must be 'seen to be known,' and concludes that India should also be tasted to be known. His analysis is exemplary of the kind of critique that could be directed at any work that reduces a culture to a single sense, instead of carefully weighing how each of the senses contributes to the overall shape of experience.

Chapter 16, which is also by Andermann, takes us to Mexico. Here she seeks to determine the sensory underpinnings of Zinacanteco society. Her analysis focuses on how the sensory qualifications and characteristics of the Zinacanteco shaman fit him for his position at the apex of the social hierarchy. Her account establishes very clearly that perception is not simply a physical process (as students of psychophysics have taught us to believe), but more in the order of a cultural and moral *act*, the paradigm for which is provided by ritual.

Finally, we come to Constance Classen's intricate analysis of the contrasts between the sensory models of the cultures of the central Andean highlands and the Desana of the Amazonian lowlands. Her study comprehends more cultural domains than the other studies in this part, and partly for this reason arrives at a more nuanced interpretation of the two sensory orders. Interestingly, she finds that the sensory priorities revealed through a study of the two cultures' cosmogonies, or creation myths, are at variance with what people expressly state to be the most important of the senses. Classen's study thus raises another important point: sensory models are not reducible to the conscious models people have of the perceptual process. Rather, they must be constructed by the analyst, using what people say as a preliminary guide, but always contextualizing this in terms of what they do.

As Classen also brings out, with particular reference to the Desana, the sensory order of women need not be the same as that of men. The male sensory order, which is treated as normative, is characterized by an emphasis on transcendent sight (induced by the ingestion of narcotic substances). Desana women are not allowed to take narcotics, and their sensory order would appear to emphasize other senses than sight, in particular touch, in consequence. This finding recalls our discussion of how Suya women participate in but are also in some ways oppressed by the Suya sensory order, which raises a third essential point: there are varieties of sensory experience within as well as between cultures.

The last point will be discussed further in the section on 'Alternative Sensory Modes' in the Conclusion, but to avoid any misunderstanding

by certain critics, let me expand on it a bit more here. All of the following chapters seek to construct general sensory models for the cultures they cover. The reader, seizing on the fact of internal diversity alluded to above, might ask: Why postulate *one* general sensory model per culture? Why not say that sensory hierarchies vary within a society according to the individuals and situations concerned?

My response is that one must work out the general sensory model first, and only then proceed to the analysis of individual differences in specific contexts because (1) such differences only have meaning in relation to the whole, and (2) they may even be said to be generated by that whole. Consider the following example. It has been argued – convincingly, I think – that women in Western society do not come by their femininity naturally, for ‘femininity’ is not an essence, but a way of acting. Women find this way of acting difficult to resist because virtually all of the images that surround them make them ‘do to themselves what men do to them ... [that is,] survey, like men, their own femininity’ (Berger 1972: 63).

Sexual dominance is thus intimately related to visual dominance. This observation helps to explain why men in Western society generally devalue and avoid touch while women ‘prefer touch’ (Irigaray 1980: 101). The opposition between the sexes is, therefore, partly expressed and partly constituted by an opposition between the senses. It follows that for women to come into their own (i.e., for gender equality to become a fact), there would have to be an overthrow of the Western hierarchy of the senses, which privileges sight. Women in Suya society, however, would be faced with a different struggle, since it is not the male gaze that oppresses them but the male voice. These remarks should suffice to disabuse the reader of the notion that the ways in which the senses are used depends on context and individual preference.

### Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Constance Classen and the members of the Concordia Sensoria Research Group for the many useful debates we have had over earlier versions of this paper.

### Notes

- 1 The sensory and motor areas of the brain were charted at the Montreal Neurological Institute in the 1940s in the course of surgical operations on patients with brain tumours. The mapping procedure involved opening the skull while the patient was under local anaesthetic, electrically stimulating

the surface of the brain, and having the patient report in what area of the body (finger, face, foot, etc.) he experienced a tingling or prickly sensation (Penfield and Rasmussen 1950). My thanks to A. Laflèche for the drawing on page 169.

- 2 Many of the recent 're-appropriations' of McLuhan suffer from a similar shallowness, according to Heyer (1989) and Jeffrey (1989).
- 3 See further Lewis (1975: 46–7) and Schieffelin (1976: 95) on the limitations of sight and the salience of smell and sound with respect to orienting oneself in the forest.
- 4 Of related significance is the fact that in many parts of New Guinea the word for madness is 'shut ears' (Lewis 1975: 208; Herdt 1986; but see Mayer 1982: 257). By contrast, among the more eye-minded Chewong, madness is denoted by a phrase meaning 'to see the world upside down' (Howell 1984: 165–6). Thus, in both cases, mental disorder is conceptualized in terms of a perceptual disorder, and the modality affected is the most prominent modality in terms of the culture's sensory profile.
- 5 In the particular case of the Melpa-speakers of Mount Hagen, it could be said that the bluntness or straightness of vision is compensated for by the elaboration of a form of speech, called *ik ek*, which is highly convoluted. *Ik ek* means 'talk which is bent over or folded ... in other words, one cannot "see" all sides to it' (Strathern 1975: 189). As Strathern goes on to explain, it is vital to a big man's success that he be a master of this metaphorical form of speech, as well as a good *metteur-en-scène*. It should be noted that my interpretation of Melpa ideas of knowledge is at variance with Strathern's own analysis. Elsewhere, he states that the Melpa distinguish three primary ways of apprehending things: seeing (direct knowledge), hearing (education), and doing or experiencing (cult participation), and rank them in that order (Strathern 1989: 301–3).
- 6 It is the Freudians who are primarily responsible for the notion that touch and the other proximity senses have had to be sublimated or repressed in the interests of 'civilization.' The fact that this pattern is reversed in the case of Wolof society (where it is the distance senses that have had to be restricted) suggests to me that the whole edifice of Freudian psychology will have to be rethought in the light of the anthropology of the senses. A promising start in this direction has been made by Alfred Margulies (1985), who criticizes Freudian dream theory for its obsession with the latent content, and neglect of the sensory content, of dream experience.
- 7 A few words are in order concerning the process of child development, its trajectory, among the Wolof. On one plane, the process involves the child growing out of touch (with the mother), and into speech. On another plane, it involves the child (in its capacity as the reincarnation of some ancestor) growing out of visual contact with the dead and the spirits, and

into speech. The latter contact is had in dreams; it is manifested by the 'nocturnal cries and groans, [as well as] the more or less intelligible words [the child] utters ... following his visions of the dead and the ancestors. This gift [of clairvoyance] disappears progressively as of the age the child begins to know how to speak' (Rabain 1979: 179). Should this 'gift' not disappear, and should the child persist in showing wisdom beyond its years or prophesying (something the community finds profoundly disturbing), a ritual called 'shut the mouth, cover the eyes' is performed (1979: 204–6, 209–10). This ritual both gives expression to what the Wolof consider to be the ideal sensory ratio (hearing over seeing, always guarding one's mouth) and enforces it. (On speech control see Magel 1984: 18–20.)

## CHAPTER 12

### Fusion of the Faculties:

# A Study of the Language of the Senses in Hausaland

*Ian Ritchie*

In the ground-breaking article 'Sensotypes,' Mallory Wober (1966) advances the thesis that different cultures manifest different degrees of 'analytic ability' in different sensory modalities, and that these differences may be related to differences in the prevailing mode of communication – oral, chirographic, or typographic. In an oral society, one would expect people to be able to make fine discriminations in the auditory field, while in a chirographic and especially in a typographic society it makes sense that greater emphasis would be placed on differentiation in the visual field.

One of the kinds of evidence Wober considers in support of the 'sensotype hypothesis' is language. He notes that to be conversant in the Ibo or Edo languages of Nigeria, which are both tonal languages, one must develop a finely tuned ear. Failure to remark upon a shift in tone direction can lead to confusion. In these cultures, then, the auditory field would seem to be the subject of more 'elaborated attention' than in Western cultures. He also notes that some African languages lack words for several geometric shapes, such as 'square,' 'hexagon,' or 'diagonal,' which are easily visually differentiated and are labelled in Western languages. In view of these facts, Wober (1966: 188) states: 'Research remains to show in what directions such African languages are more highly elaborated, and hence wherein men's abilities have opportunity to become differentiated. Thus while Western languages may be shown to make use of a great number of metaphors referring to the sense of vision, perhaps in excess of other sensory metaphors, it remains to be seen (or heard) with which senses African languages prefer to illustrate

(or sing) of their experience.' Wober's implicit suggestion is that auditory metaphors will abound in African languages.

There are certain obvious problems with the sensotype hypothesis. For one, the contrasts Wober posits between 'Africa' and 'the West' are too simplistic: not all African languages are tonal, some Western languages contain almost as many tactile metaphors as visual metaphors for referring to cognitive processes, and so on. Other weaknesses include the fact that his test sample was made up exclusively of men. In addition to neglecting women, Wober's paradigm has nothing to say about the chemical senses (olfaction and gustation).

Nevertheless, the results he obtained are statistically significant. Wober's hypothesis therefore warrants further investigation. The weaknesses of his approach can be overcome, at least in part, by concentrating on a *particular* language and culture; by attending to *all* the senses; and, by trying to be equally sensitive to men's *and* women's experience.

In this essay, I shall be responding to Wober's call for further research on West African 'sensotypes' through a study of how the senses are represented in a particular language, that of the Hausa of Nigeria. This linguistic analysis will be augmented by a consideration of Hausa ritual practices where appropriate in an effort to determine the modes of sense perception which underlie and inform Hausa styles of linguistic expression. The main point I wish to make is that while visual metaphors figure prominently in Hausa discourse, the non-visual senses – particularly hearing and smell – appear to have been subjected to equal if not greater symbolic elaboration.

The Hausa people traditionally inhabited the seven Hausa city-states in northern central Nigeria called the Hausa Bakwai, the largest of which is Kano. Their environment is relatively flat Savannah belt with dry grassland vegetation and a short rainy season in July and August, providing enough precipitation to grow the staple crops Guinea corn and millet. In the far north of their territory, which extends to the Sahelian Niger Republic as far as Agadez (an important trading centre on the trans-Saharan caravan route), the land becomes even drier, eventually turning into semi-desert.

Hausaland was first exposed to Islam in the thirteenth century, and the society as well as the language has been thoroughly islamized. However, traditional or non-Islamic religious beliefs and practices, such as the *bori* cult (a spirit possession cult), and various practitioners of folk medicine, continue to flourish on the fringes of the society (Besmer 1983; Wall 1988). Still, the most respected and sought after religious

personage for purposes of preserving or recovering one's health and/or augmenting one's 'fortune' (*azziki*), is the *malam*. A *malam* is one skilled in the recitation and transcription of the Qur'an (Darrah 1985: 11–12). By 'peering into' his books he divines the causes and remedies for illness (Wall 1988: 293).

The presence of the *malam*, whose power is dependent on being able to read (or in any case memorize) and write out verses of the Qur'an, poses problems for the classification of Hausa society according to Wober's types (oral, chirographic, and typographic). Does the centrality of the *malam*'s role qualify Hausa society as chirographic even though many of the Hausa who make use of his services are not literate? Since I do not think that a society's sensotype can be deduced from an examination of its dominant mode of communication anyway (media of communication being only one of the domains on the base of which a society's sensory profile should be constructed), it is not necessary for me to decide this question. Suffice it to say that I consider the terms 'oral' and 'quasi-chirographic' equally applicable.

The Hausa language is spoken by over ten million people. Two facts stand out about this language. One is that it is a tonal language, with all the implications that entails in terms of Wober's paradigm. The other is that Hausa has only one verb for all the non-visual senses. Thus, the functions of hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching are all designated by the word *ji*. The verb *ji* also means to 'feel' things in an intuitive or emotional sense (as in 'I feel rotten today' or 'I have a strange feeling about this place') and to 'know' things in a cognitive or intellectual sense. In Hausa, when one says that one knows a language, one says that one 'hears' (*ji*) that language. If one understands the point another person is making in an argument, one says *Na ji ka*, 'I hear you.'

The Hausa word *gani* means 'to see.' One of the points about which my Hausa teacher, Mallam Garba Adamu, was insistent is that this word only means 'to see.' It is never used in the sense of understanding what a person means. Indeed, one of the things that struck me during my five years of teaching in Nigeria is how infrequently *gani* is used at all.

It is an intriguing question why the Hausa have one word for hearing, smelling, tasting and touching, understanding, and emotional feeling, as if all these functions formed part of a single whole, and a separate word for sight. One of the implications of this fusion of the faculties is that the Hausa do not conceive of thinking and feeling as operating independently of each other the way most North Americans do (Lutz 1988: 55–62), although it should be noted that they do have separate words for 'brain' (*kwanya*) and 'heart' (*zuciya*) and these organs are

vested with many of the same symbolic attributes we ascribe to them (Wall 1988: 179).

Another implication is that the Hausa recognize only two senses compared with our five – that is, a multimodal sense (the *ji*-complex) and a monomodal one (sight), and that it is in terms of the former that the Hausa ‘prefer to illustrate (or sing) of their experience,’ to use Wober’s words. Of course, it is normally possible to tell from the context as well as the rest of a sentence in what sense *ji* is being used (i.e., which sense organ is doing the perceiving). Nevertheless, the fact that the Hausa group all these senses together calls for further investigation.

One way for us to try to fathom the reason for and implications of the fusion of the non-visual faculties in Hausa thought is through the study of their proverbs. The proverbs can tell us how the senses are evaluated. It bears noting that the proverb is the standard mode of organizing and storing knowledge in oral (or residually oral, being quasi-chirographic) societies like Hausa, since in the absence of writing ‘You know what you can recall’ and that is all (Ong 1982: 33). As Wall (1988: 107) observes, the Hausa conceive of wisdom as attained ‘by memorization of proverbs which will come to mind in a moment of need.’ However, this should not be taken to mean that thought in Hausa society is purely formulaic, non-reflexive or non-analytical, as Ong (1982) is sometimes guilty of implying of oral societies generally. For as Darrah’s *A Hermeneutic Approach to Hausa Therapeutics* (1985) attests, Hausa love hermeneutics. The Hausa term for proverb is *karin magana*, which means ‘object folded to hide its contents.’ Like a wallet, a proverb is only clear when it has been ‘unfolded’ (Darrah 1985: 9).

There exist a number of very good collections of Hausa proverbs, such as Kirk-Greene’s *Hausa Ba Dabo Ba Ne* (hereinafter HBD) and Whitting’s *Hausa and Fulani Proverbs* (hereinafter HFP). However, certain problems arise when one tries to analyse these proverbs in English. The biggest problem is preserving their flavour. For example, the proverb *A yi hankali, kada a sha ruwa da haki*, literally ‘Be sensible, don’t drink water with grass’ (HBD, 1), is analogous to the English ‘Look before you leap,’ as Kirk-Greene (1966: 1) suggests, but the transposition of modalities robs the proverb of part of its sense. Similarly, the Hausa proverb ‘We are surfeited with meat and notice the smell’ (HFP, 77) can be rendered into English as ‘bored with happiness, she can’t stand the sight of her husband,’ as Whitting (1940: 77) proposes, but this rendition distorts the possibly modality-specific meaning of the original. Nor is it necessarily the visual which always comes to take precedence over the savoury when an English analogue for a Hausa proverb is sought. For example, smell is sacrificed to touch in the case of the Hausa proverb

'Whoever eats an onion, his mouth will smell' (HBD, 13) being equated with the English expression 'You can't touch pitch without being defiled' (Kirk-Greene 1966: 13). These examples serve to highlight how the preferred modalities for expressing certain notions in Hausa differ from those of the English speaker, and thus how 'making sense' (in both senses) of the other's meaning often involves more than a simple translation of words, since it sometimes entails a transposition of modalities as well.

For all that has just been said, the impression one gets from surveying the Kirk-Greene and Whitting collections is that visual metaphors do figure prominently in Hausa thought; for example, "'Let's go and see" is the remedy for a liar' (HBD, 16). Indeed, Darrah (1985: 121) even goes so far as to say: 'The Hausa subscribe to the notion that seeing is believing and have proverbs of their own expressing the superiority of ocular evidence: *Gani ya fi ji* (Seeing is better than hearing), *Gani ya kori ji* (Sight drives away hearing), and *Labari bai zama kama abin da ka gani da idanka ba* (News is not the same as something you have seen).'

While these proverbs taken in isolation might seem to indicate the priority of sight, they are best understood in the context of their normal usage. In fact, their usage is limited to situations where hearsay must be proved right or wrong through personally witnessing evidence of the rumoured event. Certainly, sight in and of itself is not taken as ultimate in Hausa thought, as the following proverb attests: '*Ganin Dala be shiga birni ba ne.* = Seeing Dala [a suburb of Kano] is not entering the city [Kano], i.e. seeing your goal is not the same as reaching it' (HFP, 60).

Even more significant is a commonly heard proverb which appears to point to a more definitive mode of proof: *Gani ba ci ba* or 'Seeing is not eating' (HFP, 52). In this case, it would appear that eating is taken as the most trustworthy way of testing reality, for it goes beyond seeing, revealing the inner nature of a thing, its flavour. In another proverb, truth and falsehood are spoken of in terms of contrasting savours (bitter and sweet respectively): 'One will be able to distinguish between the bitter gourd and the sweet' (i.e., one will be able to distinguish between true men and false) (HFP, 12). Gustation is also the idiom in terms of which the idea of gauging a man's character is expressed, as in the proverb 'A man is like pepper, until you chew him you do not know how hot he can be' (HBD, 17).

Of course, these proverbs implicating the sense of taste should no more be treated in isolation than the ones considered earlier involving sight, and in actual practice the Hausa can be said to rely heavily on visual discrimination: 'The visual appearance of the body is a primary

indicator of a person's *azziki* [fortune], for it shows wealth through display and health through the presence or absence of symptoms related to colour and morphology' (Darrah 1985: 122). Nevertheless, we have detected something of a gustatory bias to Hausa thought, and this point deserves further investigation.

One fact of considerable significance is that the gustatory bias apparent in Hausa proverbs recurs in Hausa folk-tales, the vast majority of which centre around eating or tasting something (Ritchie 1990). In a signal tale recorded by Rattray (1913), the 'Tale of Daudawar Batso,' all the characters in the drama are tastes. In this story, Salt, Pepper, Nari (a savoury sauce made from peanut), Onion Leaves, and Daudawar Batso (a special sauce with a pungent smell) transform themselves into young maidens and go out to look for a certain young man who is not described visually, but is called 'beautiful.' They force Daudawar Batso to stay behind, however, because she has such a stench that she is not considered presentable. She remains behind but follows them at a distance. Salt, Pepper, Nari, and Onion Leaves meet an old woman at a stream who asks them to rub her back but they refuse and go along their way. When Daudawar Batso meets her, however, she agrees to rub the old woman's back. As a reward for her patience the old woman tells her the name of the young man the girls are searching for (who is actually her son).

Eventually, Salt, Pepper, Nari, and Onion Leaves reach the house where the young man is staying and greet him from outside. Each of them takes a turn trying to gain admittance to the house, but the young man asks if they know his name and, of course, they all fail because they do not know it. When at last Daudawar Batso arrives she tries her luck at the door, and the young man's name turns out to be just as the old woman had said – Daskandarini. The young man marries Daudawar Batso because she knows his name, and Salt, Pepper, Nari, and Onion Leaves end up being her servants. According to Rattray (1913: 272), the moral of this story is: 'If you see a man is poor don't despise him; you do not know but that some day he may be better than you.'

'Unfolding' (or reflecting upon) this story can provide us with many insights not only into the Hausa sensory order, but also into their moral order, and by way of contrast, our own. First, it will be observed that the moral of the story lies in the visual realm – namely, that one should not judge a person by his looks, whereas the idiom in which the story communicates its message is predominantly gustatory or olfactory. The story is indeed about appearances, as we shall see, so Rattray is saved from the reproach of 'mixing modalities.' Just the same, this transposition of modalities (only partly intended by the story itself) should not

be allowed to distract our attention from its gustatory dimensions, to which we shall return presently, and even more basic oral-aural bias.

The auditory bias is implicit in the fact that the key to enter into the young man's house, and subsequently into marriage with him, is not in the visual realm at all: it is to *speak* his name. This is indicative of a culture in which oral wisdom is of primary importance, as innumerable Hausa proverbs attest: 'Anyone who refuses to understand [*ji*] will not refuse to see [*gani*]' (HFP, 54), 'If the ear had heard, the body would have escaped' (HBD, 5), 'The ear goes back beyond your grandfather' (HBD, 14). The last proverb underlines the time-honoured, and always timely, character of the oral tradition (here signified by 'the ear'), while the first signals the importance of heeding that tradition.

Daudawar Batso is attentive to this tradition in ways that the other girls, who know what they are looking for (a beautiful young man) but do not know his name (because of their impatience with the old woman), do not. Daudawar Batso is in fact the epitome of 'the good person' (*mitumin kirkii*) in Hausa culture: 'motivated by generosity, patient,' her every action inspired by 'a sense of the proprieties and translated into faultless manners,' and always inclined to treat others 'with due respect for their feelings' (Kirk-Greene 1974: 10). She is thus the embodiment of another Hausa proverb: '*Muni da kyaun hali ya fi kekyawa*. = ugliness with a good character is better than (ill conditioned) beauty' (HFP, 63).

In brief, the other girls might be more presentable, but they lack the requisite character to triumph. This idea, 'that in order to determine what constitutes *kyau* [beauty], it is necessary to look not only at the physical attributes of an individual but also at his or her behaviour, since for the Hausa it is the latter that provides the key to the inner dispositions' (Ryan 1976: 136), is also found in the oral traditions of other West African societies (Chernoff 1979: 168; Jackson 1982: 253). The two normally conform.

A remark of Kirk-Greene serves to bring home the point of the preceding discussion: 'Exhortations to improve one's character in Hausa life,' usually delivered by means of proverbs and/or folk-tales, 'assume the repetitiveness of advertisements in Western society urging one to buy this or that' (1974: 22). Of course, the ratio of Coca-Cola signs to people on the streets of Kano is now pretty equal to the same ratio on the streets of New York. And North American advertisers have learned to use muzak and catch-phrases with as much effectiveness as glossy magazine ads and flashing billboards (i.e. visual cues) to get their message across. Nevertheless, there is a difference between being exhorted to improve one's character and being urged to enhance one's appearance

or 'style.' In the former case, personal identity is not equated with the consumption of images whereas in the latter case (the North American case), it is, as Ewen (1988) and Mulongo (1988) have shown.

The 'Tale of Daudawar Batso' not only illustrates the importance of oral wisdom to the Hausa, it also exemplifies their belief in the power of knowing a person's name, which is in turn connected to the idea that words in themselves have dynamic power. Harm, as well as happy endings, can result from speech, and it is interesting to note how much more elaborate Hausa beliefs are concerning the capacity of the mouth to wound than, say, the eye: '*Baki* (mouth) is the power of the spoken word to affect animate objects adversely. In its broadest sense it is a belief that *bakin duniya* (mouth of the world) – i.e. the praise and comments of the public – is an impersonal force that causes misfortunes to individuals ... People who are constantly in the public eye and those who are momentarily elevated – most notably those marked by ritual, such as infants and brides – require *magani* [magic] to protect themselves against *baki*' (Darrah 1985: 62–3). As Darrah (1985: 118–20) goes on to say,

Belief in the evil eye is widespread among Moslem people to the north of Hausaland but, among the Hausa, notions about the eyes having the capacity to inflict harm are not so ubiquitous or so cohesive as the belief in witchcraft or evil mouth ... [Repeated] questions as to whether the eyes could project harmful powers obtained assertions of ignorance in such matters, qualified by the admission of the plausibility of such a notion. Witches have powers which resemble the evil eye, but their ability to see into the body is receptive rather than a projected bolt of power.

I have quoted Darrah at length because it is rare for anthropologists to display his degree of acumen in investigating the differing extent to which the senses are symbolically elaborated in a culture. What is more, his discussion confirms our impression of the auditory field having been a more productive source of metaphors than the visual for the Hausa.

Again, this is not to say that the Hausa neglect sight: certain occult practices involve the use of reflective surfaces, such as water or mirrors (Wall 1988: 195; Darrah 1985: 121), a foetus will copy the deformities viewed by a pregnant mother (Darrah 1985: 12), and so on. Of particular interest is the manner in which the Hausa associate light with public recognition. For example, they liken a panegyrist (hired to sing praises of his patron's accomplishments) to a blacksmith, 'because he uses his mouth as a bellows to intensify the light (recognition) and heat (emotions) which accompany an achievement' (Darrah 1985: 216). The pa-

iron literally glows as a result of the panegyrist's lyrics. A related example of the association between light and prosperity or recognition is the manner in which the 'luminescent effects' of both pregnancy and a good meal are noted in the proverb *Annurin fuska, kaurin hanji*, or 'Glowing face, full belly' (Darrah 1985: 215).

Both the panegyrist-blacksmith analogy and the 'Glowing face, full belly' proverb seem to point to the metaphorical significance of light and hence of sight in the Hausa economy of the senses. But it is important to look at how this light is produced: it is words in the first case, and food in the second, which effect the transformation in visual appearance. Thus, the visual is but a register of changes produced via other sensory channels.

This brings us to a consideration of what is possibly the field of the most 'elaborated attention,' as Wober would say, in Hausaland, the field of taste. As will be recalled, the 'Tale of Daudawar Batso' is couched entirely in the language of tastes. This makes it difficult for the North American with a strong visual bias to connect with the story: trying to visualize the characters is impossible. By contrast, the Hausa have no difficulty conceiving of persons as distinguishable by taste. For example, children are said to be saltless (Darrah 1985: 296), while men are associated with hot-tasting things. There is a thermal as well as gustatory dimension to men's spiciness: 'In symbolic terms, women are classified as cold (*sanyi*) while men are hot (*zafi*). Hot, spicy foods (*yaji*) are therefore used by men as aphrodisiacs to increase their own sexual heat, which is drained off into the coldness of women' (Wall 1988: 52).

Women are otherwise distinguished by the degree of 'sweetness' (*zaki*) appropriate to their stage in the life-cycle. For example, a recently deflowered girl will be given a highly sweet, as well as hot and spicy, reddish substance called *nakinya* as alms. By contrast, a pregnant woman must not eat sweet things, and following delivery she is given an only mildly sweetened, unspiced, white substance called *gumba* as alms (Darrah 1985: 267). The disparity in sweetness reflects the behavioural norms incumbent upon these persons: the new bride should be full of sexual desire (metaphorically equated with sugar), the nursing mother should avoid sexual intercourse or her milk will become 'too sweet,' causing her child to sicken. Thus, amount of sweetness signifies the 'extent of desire' required of the initiate into the statuses of newly wed and new mother respectively (Darrah 1985: 41).

Lying behind this classification of persons by taste is the association the Hausa make between eating and sexual intercourse, both of which are in fact designated by the same verb, *ci*. This association is probably found in all cultures, but the Hausa have elaborated it to a greater extent

than most: for example, the symbolic equation between the vagina and the mouth provides the basis for the practice of 'applying sweet substances to the genitals to make intercourse more enjoyable' (Darrah 1985: 132). In a like vein, a groom is warned to refrain from eating honey, 'for it would be bad for him to eat two sweet things (honey and the bride) concurrently' (Darrah 1985: 264).<sup>1</sup>

Gustatory metaphors thus provide the Hausa with a framework for conceptualizing relations between the sexes. But they do more than this as well, for as we saw earlier, they are also the idiom in terms of which ideas about temperament, proof, and truth-telling are expressed. Interestingly, 'It is said that the person who does not eat salt tells lies, while the person who eats salt tells the truth. This is why some people take an oath that they have eaten salt when they wish to assure someone they are telling the truth' (Darrah 1985: 295). Taste may thus be said to control speech among the Hausa.<sup>2</sup>

To this it should be added that the Hausa understand various illnesses to be due to a disproportion of the qualities of sweet, sour, bitter, and salt in a person's diet. In particular, sweetness and sourness are thought to cause various kinds of gastro-intestinal distress. As Lewis Wall (1988: 299) quite plausibly suggests, this is 'no doubt because it is much easier and more pleasant to eat sweet or sour foods than those which are bitter or excessively salty.' Gastro-intestinal disturbances are treated by infusions of bitter or salty substances. This system of ideas may well be Gallenic in origin, reflecting as it does certain aspects of the widespread humoral theory of disease. If so, it is significant that the Hausa seem to have retained the idea of balanced tastes from that theory, but not its doctrine of the four elements.

The sense of taste thus regulates diverse aspects of Hausa life, from desire to truth-telling, and from distinguishing between people to treating gastro-intestinal distress. Probing still more deeply, we find that ideas about time and continuity are expressed in a gastronomic idiom: for example, *ci gaba*, which literally means 'to eat ahead,' is the Hausa phrase for 'to continue,' and *ci gaba* has also taken on the meaning of 'progress' in the modern English sense of the word. We are thus compelled to agree with Darrah (1985: 35) when he proposes that the idea of *ci* be recognized as one of the 'root allegories' of Hausa thought.

To sum up the results of the preceding investigations, we have found that the Hausa tend to use auditory, gustatory (including thermal), and visual metaphors to speak of their experience, with relatively more emphasis on the fields of hearing and taste than sight. Thus, whereas in English one says 'The grass is always greener the other side of the fence,' Hausa say 'The porridge lusted for is the sweetest' (HFP, 79). Or again,

whereas English-speakers say 'Seeing is believing,' the Hausa, even though they have some sympathy for this idea, would be quick to add that 'Seeing is not eating.' What is more, they seem to set the greatest store by that which cannot be seen, the 'inner disposition' of the 'good person,' which is revealed only by his or her actions. Finally, the Hausa regard the wisdom contained in the proverbs handed down to them by their ancestors as the epitome of knowledge. All this is consistent with the fact that in the Hausa language 'understanding' is associated with the processes of hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling, and distinguished from sight.

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I was introduced to Mallory Wober's article by David Howes, whom I wish to thank both for that eye-opener, and for his many insightful comments on earlier versions of this paper. I also wish to thank Mallam Garba Adamu, my Hausa teacher. My account of the Hausa language and sensory order is based partly on my experience as an instructor at the College of Education, Akwanga, Plateau State, Nigeria, from 1980 to 1985, and partly on a review of the pertinent ethnographic literature. This essay lays some of the groundwork for my doctoral dissertation in religious studies, which seeks to locate West African oral theology in its cultural context.

### **Notes**

- 1 Somehow, the English concept of the 'honeymoon' seems bland, or at best a pale reflection, of the sensory richness of Hausa representations of relations between the sexes.
- 2 This invites comparison with the finding that among the Wolof of Senegal speech controls taste, as Howes points out in chapter 11.

## CHAPTER 13

### ‘To Render Visible’:

### Making Sense among the Ndembu

*Lisa Andermann*

*[The diviner's] role falls between that of a judge and that of a ritual expert. But whereas a judge enquires into conscious motives, a diviner often seeks to discover unconscious impulses behind anti-social behaviour. To discover these he uses intuition as much as reason. He 'feels after' the stresses and sore points in relationships, using his configurations of symbolic objects to help him concentrate on detecting the difficulties in configurations of real persons and relationships.*

Victor Turner, *Ndembu Divination* (1969)

This essay concerns how the Ndembu of Zambia make sense of sickness and death. It is based on *Ndembu Divination: Its Symbolism and Techniques* (hereinafter ND), by Victor Turner (1969).

The Ndembu medical system differs from the Western ‘biomedical’ system in two important respects. First, affliction, for the Ndembu, is never simply the result of microbial infection or some hereditary defect in a person’s constitution; there is always human agency involved, be the agent a witch, a sorcerer, or an ancestral spirit. As Michael Taussig (1981) would say, the Ndembu ‘socialize’ rather than ‘reify’ disease. Second, the Ndembu do not go to see their doctors individually: it is invariably a group of kin wanting to find out which particular ancestor, sorcerer, or witch is causing the sickness (or caused the death) of their relative that go to consult the *chitaha* or diviner. A complex process ensues which basically involves ‘making known and visible’ (*ku-solola*) the unknown and invisible agent(s) of affliction. In the case of an ancestral spirit, begrudged as a result of his or her ‘name’ having been forgotten, a cure may be effected ‘through representing the spirit in some

kind of material form, either as a figurine, named after it, or as a contraction of branches' (ND, 3). The spirit, heretofore concealed in the patient's body, now finally represented in symbolic form, is believed to be reconciled with the patient and his or her kin group as a result of this action, and so quits the former's body.

In this essay, I would like to focus on how the Ndembu diviner goes about ascertaining the identity of the afflicting agent, my ulterior purpose being to arrive at some preliminary conclusions as to how the senses are structured in Ndembu culture. To this end, I have chosen one of Victor Turner's earlier works: namely, *Ndembu Divination*, which centres on the ritual of basket divination. This rite is regarded as the most 'accurate' kind of divination (ND, 19), and may therefore give us some insight into which of the senses the Ndembu rely upon the most to establish 'the truth about things.' As we shall see, sight ranks supreme in the Ndembu system of medical perception, much as it does in the episteme of biomedicine (Daniel, ch. 7). However, among the Ndembu sight is tinged with touch and sound, which renders the diviner's gaze altogether different from that of the Western physician.

Basket divination (*ng'ombu yakusekela*) is performed using a collection of twenty or thirty symbolic objects (*tuponya*) that come in a variety of shapes, colours and sizes. While some *tuponya* represent human beings, others symbolize forces such as motives, desires, or feelings, as well as aspects of the social organization, such as the rule of matriliney, and diverse customs. The diviner shakes the *tuponya* in a round, flat open basket, similar to the kind used by women winnowing millet, then examines the top three or four objects in the heap, and in this way formulates answers to the questions that he asks before each toss. If the same object or combination surfaces three successive times, then the diviner is well on his way to ascertaining the cause of misfortune for his clients, the relatives of the afflicted person.

Vision is obviously the dominant sense in the context of this ritual: it is the visual configurations of symbols that respond to the diviner's verbal interrogatories. A visual bias is also shown in the way the diviner will rub various 'medicines' between his hands, prior to shaking the basket. These 'medicines' include *nsomu*, a piece of nerve from inside an elephant's tusk. Turner was told that the reason *nsomu* is used is to enable the diviner: 'to see secret things that happen to occur just on that occasion, just as a hunter when he goes hunting expects to see animals by chance, they just turn up, suddenly they are seen. *Nsomu* is like a torch at night, by its aid the diviners can see witches openly and clearly. This is because *nsomu* is a secret thing that has been brought into the open [i.e. extracted from the base of an elephant's tusk]' (ND,

39). Another such 'medicine' is the hair of an albino: 'This to see everything clearly. For an albino is "white" or "clear" ' (ND, 40).

The salience ascribed to vision in the context of basket divination is further underscored by the various food restrictions the diviner must observe prior to the rite. For example, he must avoid eating bush-buck or zebra, because of their spotted and striped hides respectively. Should he divine after consuming either of these kinds of meat 'he will find that he is getting astray from the main points of the divination. Just as the spots [or stripes] are divided so he will stray from the point' (ND, 47). Similarly, he must abstain from eating certain leaf relishes on account of the 'slipperiness' of the leaves in question, which would cause the *tuponya* objects to slip down from their position in the heap rather than remaining in place until they can be properly examined (ND, 27). What is significant here is that the diviner is barred from experiencing certain tastes because of the possibility of these foods interfering with his visual powers. In other words, the gustatory modality must be suppressed so that the visual modality can function to its full potential. Sight and taste would therefore seem to be at opposite ends of the Ndembu sensorium, although it should be noted that copious quantities of beer and cassava are consumed by the clients during the night leading up to the divination, and that the diviner himself ingests certain leaf-medicines prior to divining (ND, 38-9).

We have seen that many of the symbols used in basket divination either emphasize or are meant to augment the diviner's power of sight. The diviner must also be 'sharp like a needle, cutting like a knife' (ND, 34). This is brought out by other symbols, which stand for 'sharpness': 'These include needles and razors, the former being embedded in the hearts of a sacrificed cock and goat. When the diviner trembles and breathes heavily he is said to be feeling the pricking of the needle, which itself symbolizes the *Kayong'u* spirit, in his heart, lungs and liver' (ND, 5). It should be explained that *Kayong'u* is the spirit of one of the diviner's ancestors (himself a diviner), and that the diviner must have been afflicted by *Kayong'u* (following which he becomes a member of the latter's cult) to attain his current status. In fact, it is the *Kayong'u* spirit repossessing him in the course of the divination that causes the diviner to tremble, and thus to shake the basket.

The Ndembu speak of 'points of divination' the same way in English one speaks of the 'point of an argument,' but whereas the English-speaker sees the latter, the Ndembu diviner both sees *and* feels a 'point of divination' (read: the answer to a question). Divining is quite literally a pain. 'In the lungs you feel a pricking of needles,' one informant said: 'This [pricking] is what tells him to look closely at the symbolic objects

(*tuponya*) in his divining basket when he is divining' (ND, 32, 34). The tactile, physical character of the 'point of divination' is perhaps best illustrated in the rite of divination by pounding pole (*mwishi*). *Mwishi* involves the diviner cutting marks on the back of his wrist, rubbing in medicine, and invoking an ancestor to come on to his wrist to 'catch points of divination [*nyidimbu*] with it.' *Nyidimbu* means 'the point at which the [pounding pole] as it is rubbed along the ground by the diviner, suddenly stops during an interrogation. The diviner's hand at this "point" presses down so that the underside of his wrist touches the ground,' and he has his answer (ND, 73).

It will be observed that divination by pounding pole has no real visual dimension to it: the response to the diviner's question is registered in the wrist, kinaesthetically rather than visually. This may have to do with divination by pounding pole being more archaic or 'senior,' as the Ndembu say, than basket divination. The latter technique, which involves the diviner both feeling (viscerally) and seeing the 'point of divination,' is said to have been 'brought in from the Luvale,' a people to the north (ND, 72). As noted previously, the basket method, in addition to being more recent, is also considered more 'accurate.' This suggests that there has been a shift in the structure of the Ndembu sensorium: where formerly the sensation of pressure on the wrist served as the arbiter of 'the truth of things,' now sight infused by the feeling of pain in the chest and quivering throughout the body has become the touchstone of truth.

Just as certain tactile sensations serve to heighten the diviner's visual acuity, so too do various auditory stimuli help to focus his awareness. Turner writes that: 'At divinations, the physiological stimuli provided by drumming and singing, the use of archaic formulae in questions and responses, these, together with the concentration demanded by the divining technique, take [the diviner] out of his everyday self and heighten his intuitive awareness' (ND, 14). Drumming and singing are, of course, an integral component of almost every Ndembu rite. Indeed, Ndembu refer to a performance of ritual by a word meaning 'drum,' and there are 'few kinds of ritual that do not possess their own especial drum rhythm' (ND, 13).

In the context of basket divination, the drumming and singing starts the moment the diviner (dramatically striped in red and white clay) re-enters the clearing where the clients have spent the night. It keeps up for the duration of the rite. Other auditory aspects of the ritual include the loud '*Wo-o*' and handclap with which the diviner punctuates each of the questions he puts to those assembled, and which they echo. As the session proceeds, the diviner seeks to establish, first, the incidents

surrounding the death or sickness of their relative, then the latter's name, and their relationship to him. Finally, by staring at the configuration of symbols in his basket, and visualizing all the information he has gathered aurally, the diviner is able to discern the identity of the witch, sorcerer, or ancestor, as well as the specific grudge the latter held against the victim, and, if there is still time, the appropriate curing ritual (ND, 41–7).

We have seen that the tactile and auditory senses contribute substantially to the diviner's 'insight' into the cause of a person's suffering or death. Although the olfactory sense is mentioned the least number of times in Turner's account, this is not sufficient grounds for dismissing it from the hierarchy of senses used in divination. In fact, Turner explicitly states that 'The diviner rubs his *malembu* medicines [*nsomu*, the hair of an albino, etc.] between his hands and smells them,' and only then starts to ask questions of his clients or the *tuponya* (ND, 41). Similarly, as one of Turner's informants observed with regard to the technique known as duiker-horn divination: 'We speak of such a *ng'ombu* [the duiker horn] as "following the scent" (*ku-pepa*). It is like a leopard which follows the scent of a duiker, kills it, eats its meat, then leaves its bones and horns. The *ng'ombu* must be like a beast of prey which follows the scent of wicked people who cause illness' (ND, 81). The horn, suspended on a string, spins round rapidly at a 'point of divination.' Duiker-horn divination, like divination by pounding pole (*mwishi*), is both more 'senior' and less 'accurate' than basket divination. It also differs from basket divination by virtue of the way it is the instrument, the duiker-horn, that does the smelling.

The only other instance in which any of Turner's informants mention smell is in connection with divination by pounding pole. *Lweng'i*, which is one of the medicines the diviner rubs into the cuts on his wrist in preparation for *mwishi*, is said to be used 'on account of its strong smell, this makes a person well understood – the diviner will be smelt by many people and will be well understood' (ND, 73). Here smell does not assist in the divinatory process itself, it merely serves to enhance the reception of the diviner's spoken message. It seems therefore that smell is not as important to the discovery of the truth of things for the Ndembu as sight or touch or hearing (in that order). Certainly, smell is not as central to their divinatory epistemology as it is to, say, the Yaka of Zaire (Devisch 1985). Among the Yaka, 'hyper-smell' (together with 'supervision') is the defining characteristic of the diviner: 'Metaphorically connected with the dog, smelling (*fimbu*) constitutes the memory and the intensified insight into and perception of tracks, i.e. of hidden relationships. A keen sense of smell enables the hunter and the diviner

to detect and understand signs that pass unnoticed to ordinary people' (Devisch 1985: 609). Among the Ndembu, it is not a keen sense of smell but rather a hyper-acute sense of touch, as well as extraordinary vision, that distinguishes the diviner.

We discussed earlier how the diviner must restrict the range of foods he eats in order to see things clearly. This curbing of taste is diametrically opposed to the heightened tactile sensitivity and receptivity to sounds he must display, both of which contribute to rather than detract from his 'insight' into the causes of misfortune. Further evidence of the subordinate role of taste in the revelatory process can be found in the rite of divination by pounding pole. One of the other medicines the diviner rubs into his wrist is *ibanda* salt (made from the ashes of burnt river grass). It was explained to Turner that '*Ibanda* salt is used because it is tasty (*ku-towala* – this term is applied equally to salty substances, like blood and salt, and to sweet things, like honey and sugar); this means that everyone should know that here is a man who knows how to divine properly – a diviner who has eminence (*kutiyahana*, literally, "who should be listened to"), for salt is important (*dalema*)' (ND, 73). Thus, gustatory symbolism, like olfactory symbolism, merely serves to underscore the diviner's spoken message.

Having established a rudimentary hierarchy of senses used in divination, consisting of the visual, tactile, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory modalities in order of importance, it is now time to reflect on the validity of the preceding analysis. The most pressing question is whether this schema represents the sensory biases of Ndembu culture, or simply Turner's own. Being of Western origin, one would expect him to give the expressions of Ndembu collective thought a visual twist.

However, as emerges from a consideration of the Ndembu term for 'symbol,' the culture itself is visually oriented. The word for 'symbol,' *chinjikijilu*, comes from a term meaning 'to blaze a trail' in the bush by, for example, cutting marks on tree trunks. It is by means of these marks that Ndembu hunters find their way back from the unknown and unpredictable realm of the forest to the known and familiar realm of the village. In Turner's words, 'Ritual symbols have a similar function, for they give a visible form to unknown things, they express in concrete terms what is hidden and unpredictable' (ND, 4). Thus, when Ndembu think symbolically, they tend to think visually.

But the visual bias of Ndembu thought does not lead them to dissociate the senses. For sight to reveal 'the truth about things,' it must be tinged by acute pain and the sound of drumming and singing. The visual acuity of the diviner is also dependent, though to a lesser extent, on smelling certain substances and not tasting others. Westerners do

not generally conceive of sight to be *conditioned* by the other senses to anything like this degree. In the West, visual evidence may be corroborated by evidence supplied by the other senses, but the idea of seeing *infused* by the other senses is quite foreign. To illustrate, when you go to a medical clinic you do not expect to encounter a doctor who trembles, orders attendants to sing and beat drums, sniffs his or her fingers repeatedly, chews and spits out medicines, because like other patients you are accustomed to the 'examination room' being a stark, sterile environment – in short, a sensorially neutral rather than a multisensorial space.

It might be controversial that I have ranked the sense of touch prior to the sense of hearing in the sketch of an Ndembu hierarchy of the senses presented earlier. However, there are certain psychological considerations which militate in favour of this ordering. As Turner remarks in connection with the statement that the diviner must be 'sharp like a needle, cutting like a knife' (nowhere is any analogous statement made regarding hearing): 'It is indeed an interesting association that Ndembu make between sharp pain and sharp wits. It would be tempting to speculate about the psychological requirements and conflicts of diviners, who have the dangerous and unpleasant task of bringing to light and announcing in public the secret undercurrents of hostility and envy between close kin. Such a task must cause the diviners almost as much pain as they know they will bring upon others' (ND, 34–5). The significant point here is that the Ndembu associate intelligence with 'sharpness,' rather than, for example, 'speaking' or 'hearing' (see Devereux, ch. 3). Moreover, this association is motivated by facts that are sociological, psychological, and physical in origin. Thus, the sensory order of the diviner condenses the tensions and conflicts of the culture as a whole in its structure. The diviner's eye is trained to see feelingly, in contrast to the 'speaking eye' of the Western physician, which 'states and teaches' (Foucault 1973: 114).

### Acknowledgments

This essay seeks to complement Michel Foucault's (1973) 'archeology' of Western medical perception in *The Birth of the Clinic* (see especially the chapters on 'Seeing and Knowing' and 'The Visible Invisible') by examining how the senses are ordered, and their power utilized, in one particularly well-documented non-Western system of medical perception, that of the Ndembu. This essay is part of a larger study of the varieties of medical knowledge in Africa and the Americas, undertaken in association with David Howes, whom I wish to thank for his guidance.

## CHAPTER 14

# The Ritual of Silent Wishes: Notes on the Moroccan Sensorium

*Kit Griffin*

*It is to the edge of this pond, in fact, that young girls desiring marriage would go. They would come at night, carrying an oil lamp and censer containing the seven perfumes that they placed in silence at the edge of the black water listening to the croaking of the frogs. In silence, they burned the seven perfumes, lit the clay lamp and made their wishes mentally. Then, still in silence and without looking back they returned home. If, during the trip home they happened inadvertently to utter a single word or to look back over their shoulder, they knew that their wish would not be granted. However, if they respected the rule of silence, they were assured of finding a husband in the following weeks.*

Jemma, *Les Tanneurs de Marrakech* (1971)

The ritual described above by Jemma (1971: 18), involving a cluster of girls making their silent wishes by the side of a dark pool of water at night, seems simple, innocent enough. Let us call it the ritual of silent wishes. Yet while the ritual may seem simple, it is filled with meaning not only for the young women but also for the student interested in the cultural construction of the senses, and at a deeper level the sensory construction of reality, in Morocco.

In this essay, I would like to use the ritual of silent wishes as a way in to the analysis of the Moroccan sensory universe, weaving back and forth between the sensory components of the ritual and their counterparts in other domains of Moroccan culture, particularly the rituals surrounding childbirth. For my data base, I will be relying principally on Westermarck's (1968) classic two-volume study *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (hereinafter RBM I and II), as well as other works and my own

personal experience of Morocco. Although emphasis is given to rituals involving women in this study, I feel that my analysis of 'male' rituals such as those of religious brotherhoods and the tanners, as well as rituals performed at funerals, demonstrates that the sensory order I describe encompasses and gives meaning to the experience of both women and men.

The ritual of silent wishes raises many questions. Why is sight muted (the ritual space being illuminated only by the small flame from a clay lamp)? What is the meaning of the rule of silence? Why does the rite centre around the burning of seven kinds of incense? It is not my aim to provide definitive answers to these questions, but merely to suggest certain ways in which these and other uses of the senses make sense in the Moroccan context. I shall distinguish between 'social' and 'asocial' uses of the senses (following Seeger 1975; see Howes, ch. 11), that is, between those uses of the senses and sensory qualities which are appropriate to human interaction and those which have more to do with communication with the spirits or *jinn*.

Scent and thus the sense of smell is the most prominent feature of the ritual of silent wishes. Let us therefore begin our exploration of the Moroccan sensorium by examining the significance of incense. In the ethnographic corpus, there is frequent mention of various resins, woods, and minerals that are burned as incense. They are not all necessarily pleasant odours, however. For instance, sulphur when burned gives off sulphur dioxide gas which smells like rotten eggs and can cause difficulty in breathing, while white benzoin has a strong camphor-like smell. Other substances are noted for their more fragrant aroma and are often used in perfumes. The most commonly used substances are listed in Table 1.

Although beliefs vary from one area of Morocco to another, it would seem generally that strong-smelling substances are burned when one wants to keep the *jinn* or spirits away and sweet-smelling ones when one wants to please them. For instance, just before the birth of a child the midwife will fumigate the area between the mother-to-be's legs with the acrid smoke from Sudanese pepper (RBM II: 371). Likewise before and after the birth the room is fumigated with benzoin, gum ammoniac, and gum lemon (RBM II: 380). Throughout the first week of life, the infant is often fumigated with alum and gum sandarac (RBM II: 382).

At the feast celebrating the naming of the child, a censer with burning agalwood is carried around for the guests to inhale the smoke and fumigate their clothes while they are also sprinkled with rose-water (RBM II: 387). I would suggest that the reason a sweet-smelling substance is used in this context is that the celebrants want to please the *jinn* because

TABLE I  
Table of odours

Strong odour	Sweet odour
Gum ammoniac	Mastic
Garlic	Sandalwood
White benzoin	Agalwood (eaglewood)
Sulphur	Rue
Alum	Black benzoin
Pepper	Yellow benzoin (benzaldehyde)
Gum lemon	Harmel
Tar	Hasalban
Gum sandarac	

the mother and child have made it through the most difficult and dangerous time – the birth and first week of the child's life – and, as will be seen later on, there are other precautions taken during this feast, for their continued protection.

Certain named *jinn* are known for their preferences for certain scents. For example, Aisha Qandisha is said to like black benzoin, Lalla Malika prefers eau de cologne and sandalwood, while Lalla Mira's scent is yellow benzoin (Crapanzano 1973: 147). We may conclude that in Morocco odoriferous substances are not thought of simply as pleasing or displeasing to the nose: they are first of all channels of communication. They carry messages, and different scents have meaning for different spirits. This enables us to better understand why smell plays such a prominent part in the ritual with which we began: the young women's wishes waft over the dark water and croaking frogs on the various scents, there to find their addressees – that is, the powers that can make them come true.

Having arrived at a preliminary understanding of the role of smell in this rite, let us now turn to study the use of sight. We want to know, first of all, what meanings the eye has in Morocco, whether vision is a social or asocial sense, who communicates visually and how, and what the connection might be between the visual and the olfactory dimensions of ritual communication.

To begin, beliefs about the evil eye are quite prevalent in Morocco. A glance or a look has the power to cause harm and sometimes even death. It has been said that 'one half of mankind dies from the evil eye' (RBM I: 414).<sup>1</sup> Someone who is thought to have the evil eye is shunned and 'not allowed to take part in feasts or gatherings' (RBM I: 423). There are many things that can protect one from its harmful effects, however. Mirrors are used to attract and immediately reflect the first glance (RBM

1: 445). Similarly, a silver ring around the little finger of the right hand can protect against both the evil eye and the *jinn* (RBM 1: 440).

Second, both Jemma and Westermarck refer to a link between sight, or rather extraordinary sight, and the *jinn*. The porcupine is considered to be one of the domestic animals of the *jinn* (RBM 1: 277) and its power of sight is said to be supernatural. Because the porcupine can see 'in the shadows' it is supposed to be able to 'see the Invisible' (Jemma 1971: 81). Certain human beings are also credited with extraordinary powers of sight, for instance the tanners of Marrakech. The tanners of Marrakech were until recently known as the best hunters of the region. Theirs was a ritual hunt which took place on summer and autumn nights across the fields that lay in fallow. Their task was to rid the fields of such menaces as hedgehogs and hares – both of which, like the porcupine, are considered to be domestic animals of the *jinn*. The hunt was reputed to be very dangerous – not so much because of the animals themselves but because of the danger posed by the invisible spirits that they represented, and of course because it took place at night (Jemma 1971: 80, 81).

Now, one might ask why the tanners would excel in such a task. It seems that in some ways they were situated on the fringes, the margins, of society. This can be seen as partly due to the nature of their work; that is, the amount of time they spent in pits of water and lime which were considered to be haunted (Jemma 1971: 74), not to mention the stench of the tanning process itself. Westermarck links bad odours with beliefs about *jinn*. He tells the story of how once when his dog 'misbehaved,' his Moroccan secretary closed both his nostrils and his ears in order to shut out the evil influences in the smell (RBM 1: 281).

Perhaps more significant, many tanners are also adepts of the Hamadsha or Gnawa brotherhoods (possession cults). The Gnawa, in particular, are 'regarded as masters of the spirits of the underworld, the air, the water and the earth' (Jemma 1971: 94). Given their contact with the spirit world, it is understandable that the tanners should be renowned for their nocturnal hunting skills. Who better to face the Invisible in the night than someone with the ability to 'see'?

Perhaps it is because vision is thus already linked with the spirits, and therefore has an *asocial* significance, that sight is restricted during the women's return home from the ritual by the pond. This is not for fear of the *jinn* but because a glance over the shoulder would have the power to destroy any positive effects the ritual may have produced. For as we have seen, there is a link between seeing in the dark and the spirits, and that link must be severed upon return to more human surroundings.

It is significant in this connection that the perfumes that are burned to establish contact with the spirits can also be categorized visually. All the substances previously mentioned for their odour (as well as other objects which are worn or carried for protection from the evil eye and *jinn*) can be grouped by colour (see Table 2).

While substances in the yellow, black, and red groups vary in their effects – sometimes repelling, sometimes pleasing the *jinn* – it seems that all those in the white group are used purely for protection by shunning evil. It is true there is a group of ‘Muhammedan’ *jinn* whose colour and odour preference is white, but these are not considered dangerous spirits; their names may even be included in charms for keeping away evil (RBM I: 211).

White objects and silver jewelry are often worn or carried in amulets as protective charms (RBM I: 306). For example, when my daughter had her first hair-cutting ceremony, the keeper of the shrine gave me a tiny white shell to keep with her lock of hair. Traditionally, this would be included in an amulet worn by the child. In the same vein, it should be an entirely white ram that is sacrificed on a child’s naming day (RBM II: 388). White is worn at all special occasions, such as marriages, circumcisions, and funerals. Milk is offered to the bride and groom at the wedding to make their future ‘white’ (RBM II: 19, 295). White is thus without a doubt the most ‘social’ colour. In stark contrast to this, another name for the devil is ‘the vari-coloured one’ (RBM I: 407).

Westermarck explains that the world of the *jinn* resembles the human world in certain ways. They live in towns and villages and belong to tribes, just as humans do. However, the *jinn* have multiple births and are therefore much more numerous than people (RBM I: 264). Each tribe of *jinn* has its favourite colour which is used when one wants to communicate with them. However, when one is not dealing with a particular *jinn* whose colour is known but a variety of *jinn*, one must use a variety of colours. It is on an analogous principle that the seven different perfumes are used in the ritual of silent wishes.

Red is considered the most dangerous or ‘asocial’ colour. Thus, the Ulad bel la-Hmar, the tribe of *jinn* whose colour is red, are the most wicked of all *jinn*. They live in a red place underground and rise in the red sky at dusk. They are extremely fond of blood. It is for this reason that murderers and butchers (people who shed blood) are considered to be haunted by them. The Ulad bel la-Hmar are also thought to be responsible for such illnesses as epileptic fits, rheumatic pain, and epidemics (RBM I: 271, 277). Other tribes of *jinn* also have their preferred colour – for example, the *jinn* sultans Sidi Meimun and Sidi Musa

TABLE 2  
Table of colours

White (colourless)	Yellow/green	Black	Red
Alum	Gum sandarac	Pepper	Sandalwood
Garlic	Sulphur	Tar	
White benzoin	Coriander seed	Harmel	
Gum ammoniac	Yellow benzoin	Black benzoin	
Mastic	Rosemary	Hasalban	
Agalwood	Rue		
Salt	Saffron	Charcoal	Coral
Silver	Amber	Kohl	Cornelian
Iron	Olive oil	Black cloth	Henna stain
Flour	Yellow leather		Walnut bark
Milk	Henna paste		
Shells	Butter		
Mother of pearl			

l-Bahri have black and blue as their respective colours (RBM I: 344) – although these spirits are not usually considered as dangerous.

Both Westermarck and Crapanzano mention the *jinniya* named Lalla Mira, whose colour is yellow and whose incense is yellow benzoin. Lalla Mira is greatly feared: she will attack anyone who laughs or cries a lot (RBM I: 344; Crapanzano 1973: 148). The strongly 'asocial' connotations of the colour yellow (so dear to Lalla Mira) were impressed on me when, some ten years ago, I bought a number of dresses to take with me as gifts for female relatives and friends in Morocco. One of the dresses was pale yellow, and I was warned that it was not suitable, as yellow is not normally worn. I took the dress with me anyway and one friend did wear it, although I don't know if she chose it in particular, or simply because of her 'luck of the draw.' It is also possible, however, that she accepted it through a sense of closeness to the spirits, since today she is a spirit medium.

Even the most dangerous or 'asocial' colours, however, can also be used for protection. For example, black kohl is applied to the eyes, red henna to the hands and feet, and walnut bark reddens the lips and gums – all for purposes of protection. The tanneries of Marrakech traditionally produced only yellow leather (Jemma 1971: 44), which was made into the quite common yellow babouches worn by men. Yellow is considered an extremely effective charm against the evil eye. 'Hence a person who wears clean yellow slippers has little to fear from other people's glances' (RBM I: 443).

Next to white, green is the only colour that seems to have some 'social' significance. It is the colour of vegetation, and therefore associated with bounty and blessing (RBM II: 21). When henna paste (of powdered leaves) is applied each day to the hands and feet of the new mother it is green – only the stain it leaves is red. Also, a green candle or a fir twig is lit close to a newborn infant while it is rubbed with oil and henna to prevent its catching cold and to make the child 'good' (RBM II: 383, 384).

To return once again to the women burning their perfumes in the night, we are now better positioned to grasp the significance of the pond being a 'black water' pool. Although *jinn* do not drink water, they do inhabit places where there is water (RBM I: 264), especially stagnant water, and they are thought to be particularly active at night. For example, it is believed that the tanning pits are inhabited by spirits who tan leather all night long (Jemma 1971: 74). Likewise, a mother and newborn infant are not washed with water until at least the end of the first week after the birth. When the infant is washed the water is thrown into the garden, which is green, rather than down the drains, which are black, and therefore haunted by *jinn* (RBM II: 388). Westermarck also mentions that after the birth of a child a candle is kept burning, especially at night, as a safeguard against *jinn*. This causes the angels to remain in the vicinity; if it were dark, the *jinn* would take their place (RBM II: 385). It is thus of some significance that the women in the ritual of silent wishes only burn a clay lamp. The small yellowish flame of such a lamp would not be so bright as to scare off the *jinn*.

The third modality to be dealt with here is hearing. Speech is forbidden throughout the ritual of silent wishes. Silence must be observed even during the return home. We can begin to penetrate the meaning of this silence by examining its opposite, loud noise. In his account of the tanners of Marrakech, Jemma explains that 'to chase away the *jinn*, the workers, when coming into the tannery in the morning bang the door, speak loud and make as much noise as they can: the *jinn* thus think that they are dealing with strong determined guys and they leave without doing them any harm' (Jemma 1971: 74). Words and loud noises are thus used to chase off *jinn*. As a further example of this, Westermarck records that the *zgarit* ululation is trilled by women at births, during the sacrifice of an animal, at weddings, and at funerals when the deceased is taken from his home (RBM II: 374, 387, 538). However, silence can also protect by not drawing the attention of the *jinn* in the first place. Thus, the bride and groom at a wedding ceremony, who are considered very susceptible to evil, are supposed to keep silent (RBM I: 314).

While words and confident noise belong to the human world, 'odd'

sounds such as whistling and humming are thought to be the talk of *jinn* (RBM I: 269–70). This helps to explain why tanners working in a pit or workshop make a hissing whistle to disperse any spirits who may still be there (Jemma 1971: 75). Likewise, as mentioned above, the *jinniya*, Lalla Mira, attacks those who laugh or cry a lot. This suggests that noises which demonstrate a person's loss of control involve the world of the *jinn*. Westermarck also writes that toads and frogs are thought to be *jinn* (RBM I: 268, 269). This helps us to understand the significance of the fact that in the ritual of silent wishes the only sound the women hear is the croaking of frogs: this would indicate to them the presence of *jinn*.

The last two modalities, touch and taste, are notable for their absence from the ritual of silent wishes. In the case of touch it is possible that it was simply omitted from Jemma's description. It seems doubtful that the young women would not cling to each other, partly out of fear, and partly out of excitement, as they walk to and from the pond, or while they are burning incense. Granted, it is possible that touch does not play an important role in this particular ritual. We can, however, look at other rituals to see if it is the subject of more elaborate symbolization in other contexts.

One particularly striking example of intensive use being made of touch is in the rituals surrounding an infant's first week of life: the baby is never left alone, for it is feared that were there an absence of physical contact a *jinniya* would take the child and replace it with her own (RBM II: 398, 399). At the moment of birth itself, women gather in the room to help the midwife and offer good wishes to the new mother (RBM II: 375). Each day, the mother, who is thought to be in a very delicate condition, has henna, walnut bark, and kohl applied to her body and hair. The child is also rubbed daily with various mixtures, such as butter and henna, or henna, sugar, alum, marjoram, mint, mastic, water, and oil (RBM I: 383). Finally, charms are tied to the woman's ankle and belt as well as the child's wrist and clothes, and whenever it cries it is held over the smoke of burning incense (RBM I: 382). Thus, throughout the week there is frequent touching with protective hands of both the mother and the infant, to help them through a critical period.

At the opposite extreme, Crapanzano gives a description of how a Hamadsha devotee feels when in trance. His body becomes 'tight', he feels 'hot,' his head itches, and he sweats a lot (Crapanzano 1973: 199). At the highest point of the trance he may 'stimulate his genitals with his hands or by rubbing himself against another dancer of the same sex. He may scratch his head, and occasionally he will ask for a pocket knife and slash at his head with it until his face and shoulders are drenched

in blood' (1973: 200). The itching sensation felt by the devotee is likened to 'a wasp under the skin'. Crapanzano goes on to note that compared with urban ceremonies, the shanty town possession rites are 'more dramatic and often involve massaging, spitting, treading on or knocking the head of the person over whom the prayer is said' (1973: 211).

Although the sensations of touch vary from ritual to ritual they are important and should not be overlooked. If one were to compare these two examples of the use of touch – the one with its delicate applications of mixtures and charms to the mother and newborn infant, and the other with its sweating, itching, stomping, and knocking about – I would suggest that we have here the tactile equivalent to the acoustic complex of speech and the *zgarit* as opposed to hissing and whistling. The first use of sound pertains to the 'social' domain, the second to interactions with spirits, for we know that the wasp which causes the itching, like the croaking frog, is considered to be a *jinn* (Crapanzano 1973: 138).

Finally, I believe that taste, rather than being omitted, is intentionally excluded from the ritual by the pond. Taste is largely a 'social' sense. Like speech and loud noise it belongs to human gatherings – not to gatherings with the *jinn*. For example, immediately after the birth of a child, the midwife and mother eat *binssis*, a preparation of powdered roast durra and wheat with salt, butter, or oil (RBM II: 376). The *binssis* is then shared with all the women present. Sometimes raisins are added, since sweet things are considered to bring luck. Similarly, a date is often included in the amulet tied to an infant's right wrist 'to make it sweet and pleasant in its speech' (RBM II: 381). Furthermore, it is said that if a schoolboy eats something sour he will become stupid, but if he eats raisins every morning for forty days he will be able to learn a year's lessons in six months. Bitter tastes, by contrast, bring evil, and it is thought that too much absinthe in tea can cause quarrels (RBM II: 22, 23).

It is considered dangerous to eat in front of someone without at least offering some food, which suggests that a socialized person is always hospitable; this point is further underlined by the notion that 'only insane people eat in the street' (RBM I: 426). Whenever one is offered milk it is necessary to accept it or at least dip a finger into the cup and bring the finger to one's mouth or forehead. Thus, a well-socialized person always accepts hospitality, even if tokenly. Significantly, whenever food is served at a ceremony involving the *jinn*, salt, 'the most indispensable of all seasonings' (RBM II: 23), is left out. The food of the spirits may thus be said to be tasteless. For example, someone who is possessed by *jinn* will throw loaves of saltless bread into a certain spring, watch the tortoises (*jinn*) eat the bread, then sprinkle himself with the

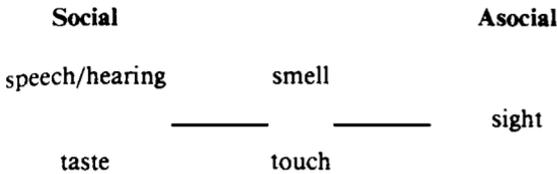


FIGURE 1  
The Moroccan sensory order

water to rid himself of his complaint (RBM I: 292). Taste thus has both a 'social' and an 'asocial' dimension, which consists of sweet and salty flavours in the first case, and the bitter and saltless taste of evil in the second. Nor does one show the usual hospitality when the *jinn* are involved. Jemma cites the case of '*l'arbi*,' the insane wanderer who goes from one tannery to another. It is said that he was attacked by *jinn*. No one would dare refuse him a cup of tea if he asked for it, but no one would ever offer one either (Jemma 1971: 75).

In summary, it seems from the material presented here that each sense has its 'social' and 'asocial' aspects. However, I feel that hearing and taste are the most 'social' of the senses. Although they have their asocial aspects (unusual sounds such as whistling; lack of flavour in food), their social aspects (speech and flavourful dishes) are what predominate. Sight, in contrast, given all the beliefs about the evil eye and emphasis on the devil as the 'vari-coloured one,' seems to lean more toward the asocial, particularly when one considers that white, the most 'social' colour, is actually colourless. Smell and touch seem to figure as mediators between the 'social' and the 'asocial.' We have seen how odours are used as communication links with the spirits – either to scare them away with strong scents, or to please and thus gain some control over them with aromatic ones. Likewise, touch can be used by humans to apply substances that protect against *jinn*, as we saw in the context of the rituals surrounding birth, or it can be used by *jinn* to take possession of a person, as in the heating and itching of a person in trance.

A diagrammatic representation of the Moroccan sensory order is presented in Figure 1. Confirmation of the order summarized in this figure can be found in the brief analysis of how the senses are engaged in the context of mortuary ritual, which I would like to offer by way of closing. Funerals are eminently *social occasions*. Hence, the mourners must not adorn themselves with kohl, henna, or perfume (RBM II: 506–7, 522). For the most part, white clothing is worn. The guests are served bread and honey (RBM II: 469), and sweet-tasting figs are normally given to

those assembled at the grave site (RBM II: 461). A funeral dirge and the words of the Qur'an are chanted continuously (RBM II: 450, 526–8), and although wailing and lamentation (unruly sounds) do take place, they are usually restricted to certain times and otherwise frowned upon (RBM II: 436, 438, 441). The body is meticulously washed by candlelight (RBM II: 444–6) and finally the room is fumigated and sometimes sprinkled with salt following the removal of the corpse (RBM II: 444, 526). It will be observed that asocial use of the senses is kept to the absolute minimum while their social uses are emphasized (no colours or perfumes are allowed, many words are spoken, sweet tastes predominate in the meals that are served). A funeral is not a time for communicating with the spirits. By contrast, the ritual with which we began our sensory odyssey stresses the olfactory modality above all else: the women venture into the dark territory of the 'croaking *jinn*' with the chief purpose of pleasing them with the fragrance of their seven coloured perfumes – so as to be granted their wishes.

### Acknowledgments

This essay is part of an ongoing study of the Moroccan sensory universe, to which I was first introduced in 1973. I wish to thank my husband, Ali Aerkoukou, who has responded to innumerable questions during our trips to Morocco and verified even more details during my research and writing while at home in Montreal. I am especially indebted to my in-laws and friends – too numerous to be named here – in Agadir, Aidi Afni, and Agvuni, Ait Ba'Amran who welcomed me into their homes.

### Note

- 1 Belief in the withering power of the evil eye exerted a profound influence over spouse selection in traditional Moroccan society. Virgins were kept so secluded from view that even the mother of a groom (as the person responsible for searching out a wife for him) 'found her daughter-in-law chiefly through hearsay, not by eye but by ear' (Dwyer 1978: 132). Girls now enjoy more mobility, even frequenting the public baths, which provoked one of Daisy Dwyer's male informants to comment: 'They have become like the meat which hangs in the butcher shop. Passersby view it. How, then, can it match the meat that one can buy privately from the herder; how can it taste so sweet?' (1978: 132). The ranking of taste over sight in this quotation provides further confirmation of the diagrammatic representation of the Moroccan sensory order presented in Figure 1.

## CHAPTER 15

### A Taste of India:

# On the Role of Gustation in the Hindu Sensorium

*Sylvain Pinard*

*In India's own terms, seeing is knowing. And India must be seen to be known.*

Diana Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (1985)

In a seminal little book, Diana Eck (1985) approaches India through the mode which, according to her, allows for the most comprehensive understanding of its culture – the visual mode. Her argument in *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (hereinafter DS) is that India is a ‘visual and visionary culture,’ and she proceeds to demonstrate this by invoking example after example of visual and eye motifs in Indian mythology, theology, art, architecture, urban design, and religious worship. Moreover, she claims that as teachers and students of ‘a culture as visually oriented as that of India, we too must become “seers” ’ (DS, 1). To this end, she advocates the use of films, slides, and photographs, not as mere ‘visual aids’ or ‘illustrations’ of what can already be learned from a study of India’s textual traditions, but as primary documents – ‘visual texts’ which call for a ‘reading’ as well as a viewing. ‘Since India has “written” prolifically in its images, learning to read its mythology and iconography is a primary task for the student of Hinduism’ (DS, 12).

Eck’s account derives support from the work of other scholars, who have also pointed to the ‘special importance of the eye and eyesight’ in the Hindu tradition (Gonda 1969: 8; Babb 1981). But even if her conclusion may be correct, I do not think this justifies the visual reductionism of her method. What I mean by ‘visual reductionism’ is Eck’s tendency to mistake medium for reality, as when she writes: ‘Photo-

graphic images enable us to employ the senses in the process of learning' (DS, 13). Here, Eck commits the same type of 'category-error' as the restaurant-goer who eats the menu in place of the meal (Bateson 1973: 153–8): she overlooks the fact that photographs have no taste or smell or sound. The same oversight is apparent in her characterization of Hindu pilgrims as 'sacred sightseers' (DS, 5). Such a characterization highlights the spectacular aspects of pilgrimage, while ignoring the importance the pilgrims themselves attach to the gustatory dimension of their experience of the sacred, as will be discussed further below.

In short, Eck constitutes India as a 'spectacle' (Little, ch. 10), but India is not a 'feast for the eyes' alone. As an antidote to Eck's visual anthropology of India, this essay presents a gastronomic anthropology of the culture, my argument being that India should also be tasted to be known. There are many reasons for supposing that gustation plays a more prominent role in the Hindu sensorium than it does in, say, the North American sensorium. For example, whereas the English taste vocabulary consists of just four terms, the Sanskrit and contemporary Hindi vocabulary is made up of six: in addition to 'sweet' (*madhura*), 'sour' (*amla*), 'salt' (*lavaṇa*) and 'bitter' (*tikta*), a substance may be classified as 'pungent' (*kaṭuka*) or 'astringent' (*kashāya*) (Monier-Williams 1964: 869). Moreover, according to Ayurvedic medical theory the six original 'tastes' (*rasa*) are transformed into the six 'post-digestive tastes' (*vipāka*) as they pass through the various stages of the digestive process, which is itself thought to consist of two processes (called *avas-thapākā* and *niṣṭhāpāka* respectively) instead of just one (Meulenbeld 1987: 5–11).

Further examples of the expanded role of taste will be given below, but first let us explore what a visual approach to Hindu culture can tell us about its structure. After summarizing Eck's treatise, I shall focus on three points where her concern with developing a 'hermeneutics of the visible' seems to have caused her to gloss over the semiotic function of food in Hindu ritual. The essay will conclude with an analysis of the role of taste and its medium (food) in the articulation of Hindu social and cosmological relations. One point I would like to emphasize is that I doubt whether any one perspective or model could account for the whole of Hindu culture (Pinard 1990; Leavitt and Hart 1990), which is all the more reason for multiplying the modalities through which we approach it.

*Darśan* means 'seeing,' and can also be translated as 'auspicious sight.' One goes to see the image of a deity to 'take *darśan*' from that deity, and in like manner the divine image is said to 'give *darśan*' to the worshipper. Everything centres around effecting this exchange of vision: 'Beholding the image is an act of worship, and through one's eyes one

gains the blessings of the divine' (DS, 3). But while the gaze is reciprocal, it is also hierarchized: the divine gaze is so powerful that it can kill. Thus, special precautions must be taken when the eyes of an image are 'opened' (by pricking with a golden needle) for the first time: 'The gaze which falls from the newly opened eyes of the deity is said to be so powerful that it must first fall upon some pleasing offering, such as sweets, or upon a mirror where it may see its own reflection. More than once has the tale been told of that powerful gaze falling upon some innocent bystander, who died instantly of its force' (DS, 7). Other instances of 'eye-power' include the third eye of Siva and the multitude of eyes strewn over the body of Brahma, which signify omnipotence and omniscience respectively.

*Darśan* is not only an activity of the eye; it is also associated with knowing. Thus, the sages of the Vedic period were referred to as 'seers.' *Darśan* is also the name given to the six great systems of Indian philosophy. Here it means something like 'point of view' or 'perspective.' Each system has its own starting point and its own methods for arriving at the truth. But despite these divergences all of the systems are regarded as orthodox, and all are supposed to converge on the same end-point – 'liberation' (*mokṣa*).

The perspectivalism or polycentrism of Indian philosophy is met with again in the realm of theology. In the Hindu pantheon, we are told that: 'Each of the great gods may serve as a lens through which the whole of reality is clearly seen,' as if they were but different facets of a single crystal (DS, 26). Eck perceives the same polycentric tendency at work in the social sphere, with its diversity of interlocking and interdependent caste groups. 'At times, the ordering of the diverse parts of the whole seems best described as hierarchical; yet it is also true that the parts of the whole are knotted together in interactions that seem more like a web than a ladder' (DS, 25). The implication of this discussion is that philosophy, theology, and society can all be visualized and explained on the same basic model – that is, in terms of the image of a multifaceted crystal.

Turning to architecture, Eck discusses how the notion of seeing the whole in and through each of its parts is concretized in the ground-plans (*maṇḍala*) of India's many temples. The *maṇḍala* is a 'geometric map of the cosmos' (DS, 59): each temple therefore offers a condensed view of the universe. In some cases, whole cities are arranged visually so as to mirror the cosmic order. The most famous of these is Vārāṇasī, the 'City of Light,' which is particularly associated with Lord Siva, whose *linga* stands at its centre. But Vārāṇasī also encompasses all of India's other deities and the most sacred points of its geography (the River Ganges, the Himalayas) in the form of the shrines, temples, and natural

features which dot its ten-mile radius. What provides the basis for each of these reconstructions of the universe (i.e., the temples and cities as microcosms), and what accounts for their sanctity as embodiments of divinity, is the idea that the universe itself was created out of the partition of the body of Puruṣa, the cosmic person, in the original sacrifice: his head became the sky, his feet the earth, his eye the sun, etc. (DS, 28, 60).

The greater part of Eck's book is taken up with the analysis of the aniconic and iconic manifestations of the divine in the form of the myriad images which provide the focus for Hindu devotional practices. As long as an image is made in accordance with the canon, or rules of proportion, laid down in the special religious treatises intended for artists (*śilpaśāstras*), it *presents* (rather than represents) a form of the Supreme Lord, and on account of this incarnate aspect 'makes possible the deepest outpouring of emotions in worship' (DS, 46). In addition to evoking emotion, the images 'narrate' various events in the god's life, and reveal aspects of their nature by means of the commonly understood poses, gestures, and emblems they hold. For example, the fearsome Lord Siva is usually depicted dancing at the centre of a flaming circle (which signifies the cycle of creation and destruction, birth and death); he holds the drum of creation in one hand, the fire of destruction in another, has a snake coiled around his third arm (which is also raised in the 'fear-not' gesture), crushes a demon under one foot, etc. In effect, such images are 'visual theologies': 'In any image, it is the combination and juxtaposition of these gestures and emblems which expresses the ambiguities, the tensions, and the paradoxes which Hindus have seen in the deity' (DS, 41). This is what makes it so necessary to overcome 'the deep-rooted Western antagonism to imagining the divine' (DS, 18) and begin to develop what Eck calls a 'hermeneutics of the visible.'

That brings us to the end of our summary of Eck's treatise. The evidence she has amassed of the power and importance of the visual in India is overwhelming. However, as noted previously, there are points in her narrative where the other senses, particularly taste, receive short shrift. It is to those points that we now turn.

The first point I wish to raise concerns the motivation of the gods. Is it simply the desire to be 'seen' (i.e., worshipped) by their devotees that attracts them to the images the latter make of them? In point of fact, the pricking of the eyes of a new icon always comes *after* the smearing of the image with various ritually pure and delectable substances, such as honey and clarified butter (DS, 52). Thus, the deities are attracted to their images as much by the food offerings as by their

proportions or the adoring eyes of their devotees. Indeed, as Arjun Appadurai (1981: 505) remarks, temple deities are 'the foci of an extremely varied sacred cuisine ... [they are] seen as veritable *gourmands*, who have special culinary likes and dislikes, which are catered to assiduously by their worshippers and servants.'

The second point concerns whether the 'taking of *darśan*' is the *only* reason for the annual displacement of masses of people to distant holy places and temples, or simply to the end of the village to catch a glimpse of an itinerate 'holy man' (*sādhu*) or 'renouncer' (*sannyāsin*). Significantly, as Eck herself notes, when villagers rush to see a holy man on the edge of town, they are 'eager for the *darśan* of such a person, approaching him with reverence and giving him food and hospitality' (DS, 6). Thus, the villagers go to see and be seen by the holy man, but they are also concerned to offer him food – that is, to initiate a gustatory exchange.

We catch another glimpse of the significance attached to gustatory exchange in Eck's account of the 'impulse' behind going to worship in a temple or off on a pilgrimage: 'The same impulse for the *darśan* of the image which is at the centre of the temple cultus also provides the impetus for pilgrimage. People go to "take the *darśan*" of the place and its deities, and to receive the *prasād* from its temples' (DS, 63). *Prasād* refers to the offerings of cooked food which are made to, and symbolically 'eaten' by, the temple deities, and then redistributed among the people. Thus, once again, the 'impulse' of which Eck speaks is as much gustatory as visual.

Probing more deeply, we discover that the dynamics of gustatory exchange in the relation between gods and humans has the same structure as *darśan* – namely, it is a reciprocal but hierarchized transaction. This emerges from a consideration of Lawrence Babb's 'The Food of the Gods in Chhattisgarh' (1970). In this article, Babb analyses three quite different rituals and finds that while their elements vary, their structure, particularly insofar as transactions involving food are concerned, always remains the same. That is, the foods are invariably offered first to the deities, and then taken back and distributed to be consumed by the devotees as *prasād*. By making the offering, the devotees pay the deities for favours rendered or to come. By accepting *prasād* back, the worshippers both *abase* themselves and procure the grace infused into the foodstuffs, which of course *elevates* them. The abasement consists in the fact that the gods 'eat' the food placed upon the altar (or symbolically pollute it with their saliva). Hence, all that is retrieved from the altar are the 'leftovers' (*jutah*) of the divine meal.

To eat someone's leftovers is to perform the most profound kind of homage, for it 'implies the greatest hierarchical distance' between giver and receiver (Babb 1970: 295–6 and 1983: 305).

One very interesting fact is that in the context of the festival in honour of Ganesha (the elephant-headed god) in Chhattisgarh, to receive *prasād* is obligatory while to take *darśan* is not considered essential: 'As it is not always convenient for everyone to be physically present at the *pujas* which occur every night in conjunction with the festival, boys are sent to carry *prasād* to each house. It was explained that even if one is not present at the ritual itself, *prasād* should be taken' (Babb 1970: 298). Nothing in Eck's account prepared us for this fact. Plainly, establishing visual contact is not the only means to acquire a bit of the divine energy, or even the primary means, if in the festival in question it is secondary to receiving *prasād*, and may even be left out.

Appadurai makes a remark in 'Gastro-politics in Hindu South Asia' (1981) which it is helpful to ponder at this juncture. He says: 'In a very real sense, in Hindu thought, food, in its physical and moral forms, *is* the cosmos' (1981: 496). What he is referring to is the way human beings ensure the co-operation of the gods in the agricultural cycle by feeding the gods (which induces them to provide the necessary rainfall and favourable ecological conditions) and eating their leftovers.<sup>1</sup> There is a further sense in which 'food *is* the cosmos' in Hindu thought. This is found in the notion that the individual attains liberation by making him- or herself both eater and eaten. For to achieve *mokṣa*, the individual 'soul' or *ātman*, which is called 'food' in the Upanishads, must be sacrificed to Brahma, himself conceived of as food (see Babb 1983: 307). In his discussion of attaining this state of 'perfect union' (i.e., *mokṣa*), Sudhir Kakar (1978: 16) quotes the following passage from the Upanishads: 'just as the person, who in the embrace of his beloved has no consciousness of what is outside or inside, so in the experience [of *mokṣa*] nothing remains as a pointer to inside or outside. It is the entry into *brahman*, a merging with *brahman*, eating of *brahman*, breathing of *brahman*'s spirit. It is the unity of the self and the world.'

If visual revelation is not the only route to liberation, since *mokṣa* can also be achieved through the ingestion of Brahma, this forces us to rethink the alleged centrality of sight in the Hindu tradition. Thus, it is certainly the case that developing a 'basic iconographic vocabulary' can help us 'read' India's 'visual theology' as Eck claims (DS, 17), but it is equally true that the nature of the gods is not revealed by their visual forms alone. Hindu gods also have taste preferences. For example, in South India, the pantheon is divided into vegetarian and carnivorous gods, and as Dumont (1975) has shown, the study of dietary differences

can tell us a great deal about a particular being's rank in the divine hierarchy. Nor is rank the only aspect of being that is revealed through the study of dietary differences, for in India 'you are what you eat' in a very profound psychological as well as sociological sense. This 'gustatory psychology,' as it were, is well brought out in Kakar's account of how taste preferences are regarded as indicators and shapers of differing personality types:

A person whose *manas* [mind] is dominated by inertia, for instance, prefers stale, smelly, half-cooked food and food devoid of its natural juices. Laziness, dullness and mental unsteadiness mark his personality. An 'active' *rajasic manas*, on the other hand, prefers spicy, sour and bitter foods: pride, impatience, sensuality and anger are his chief psychological characteristics. The person dominated by the purity of *sattva* [the more luminous of the three mental qualities] prefers sweet and agreeable-tasting food that 'brightens the intellect and spirit.' The list of *sattvic* traits is a long one – purity, devotion to truth, self-control, freedom from anger, conceit, greed, infatuation, envy, etc. (Kakar 1982: 248–9)

Given the popularity of this 'gustatory psychology' (particularly among Brāhmins), the idea of a 'gustatory theology' should not seem so far-fetched, and would complement Eck's 'visual theology' nicely, making possible a more refined appreciation of the nature of diverse gods.

The predominantly visual sense of space one gets from Eck's account also stands in need of relativization, for the Hindu universe is not simply visualized on the model of the body – it is also understood to be composed of different flavours (see Zimmermann 1982). For example, according to a Tamil myth, the soil was clearly differentiated according to the six flavours when it was first made by God, and God placed the plants and first castes on soil that was suited to their respective dispositions (Brāhmins on sweet soil, Kṣatriyas on astringent soil, etc.). The chaos of the present era is said to be a result of people transplanting seed from one region to another, and marrying outside of their own caste. It is because people are believed to transmit their qualities both to each other through sexual intercourse, and to the soil on which they dwell, that the inter-caste marriages are thought to have diluted the flavours that were originally pure (Daniel 1984: 84–6, 123).

This idea of the transmissibility of personal substance is one of the key factors differentiating Hindu from Western notions of the person. In Hindu thought, persons are not fixed, bounded entities but rather 'permeable, composite, partly divisible, and transmissible. Processes internal to the person are ... continuous with processes of exchange

between and among persons' (Marriott 1976a: 194). In illustration of Marriott's last point, consider the following exegesis of the Indian conception of digestion: 'In India the cooking process is seen as the beginning of ingestion, and therefore cooking is susceptible to pollution, in the same way as eating ... It is almost as if, before being "internally absorbed" by the individual, food was, by cooking, collectively predigested. One cannot share the food prepared by people without sharing in their nature' (Douglas 1966: 126). Thus, a process which one might think of as *internal* to the person, that of digestion, is externalized in Hindu thought, and imagined to encompass processes of production and exchange *between* persons.

What Appadurai (1981: 507) has called 'this biophysical propensity of food to homogenize the human beings who transact through it' is of course at the root of the elaborate rules concerning the preparation of food, and all the strategies of selective commensalism, which the castes employ to preserve their heterogeneity, their rank in the hierarchy. Eck would have us visualize this complex system as a crystal. But that image, in addition to having no taste, is too static. A more appropriate image, if an image is needed, would be the dynamic one of society and cosmos as a huge digestive system.

We have already discussed how the groups that transact through food are imagined to collectively 'predigest' it. At a more cosmic level, the 'universe "lives" through a universal process of alimentation in which subtle material is discriminated from coarse' (Babb 1983: 302). Babb arrives at this conclusion on the basis of his study of the 'physiocosmology' of the Radhasoami sect, but this idea is by no means unique to that sect (see Marriott 1976b). In the following passage, Babb describes the role of the Radhasoami guru in the redemptive process, but one could read 'icon' or 'image' in place of 'guru' and his conclusions would remain just as fitting:

there is a strong implication that offerings made to the guru (that is, to the Supreme Being in the guru's person) are, in a sense 'digested' by him, with the transformed results being made available – as flow [as *prasād*] – to the devotees. In the body, and in the universe at large (the body of the Supreme Being), there occurs a continuing process of discrimination, separation, retention, and downward discharge. The guru is the Supreme Being, and this means that he is the universal alimentary actor, the 'eater of all' and the ultimate separator of fine from coarse and good from bad. He is, in other words, the most transformative of all beings. (Babb 1983: 306)

In this gustatory view of the universe, the separation of the coarse from the fine in the digestive system of the Supreme Being corresponds to the continuing separation of the castes from each other in the social system (according to the degree of purity of their respective cuisines).

But what does all this talk about digestion have to do with taste? Here it is important to remember that 'taste' (*rasa*) is not a function of the palate alone in the Hindu imagination. Rather, it is continuous (or coterminous) with the whole digestive process in that the 'post-digestive tastes' (*vipāka*) are not released until that process is complete. Nor is the meaning of *rasa* entirely captured by its translation as 'savour,' for it also signifies 'essence' or finest portion. Thus, milk products and sweets have the greatest concentration of *rasa* because they are the purest of foods.

Similarly, the Vedic sacrifices were designed to nourish the gods by transmitting *rasa* to them by means of the sacrificial smoke; as *soma* it invigorated and provoked the visions of the Vedic sages; Ayurvedic medicine has extended the term to apply to all the nourishing essences in circulation in the universe. The lotus, that most sacred flower, ought to be apprehended tastefully rather than visually in that 'the lotus is *rasa*, is identical with the magic substance drawn from the waters which is virtually one with natural life itself,' as F.D.K. Bosch (1960: 82) shows in his classic study of Indian iconography. Finally, the aim of all the arts in India, both verbal and visual, is to produce and communicate *rasa*. Kakar (1978: 30–1) explains:

From cave paintings to temple sculpture, from Sanskrit drama to classical dance and music, Indian art was traditionally dominated by the goal of creating (by the artist), evoking (in the audience), and absorption (by both) of *rasa*. *Rasa* ... is the aesthetic counterpart of *moksha*. *Rasa* consists first in the creation of one of the eight emotional states – love, laughter, sorrow, anger, high spirits, fear, disgust and astonishment – in the theme or subject of a work of art. Second, it implies the evocation of the same emotional state in the spectator, listener or reader. And finally, it summons the complete mutual absorption of the audience and the artist in the emotional state that has been so created.

In short, it is difficult to imagine any culture where 'matters of taste' have played a more central role in the elaboration of culture itself.

To return to Eck's claim that India is a 'visual and visionary culture,' I trust I have demonstrated, by means of the examples cited, that India should *also* be tasted to be known. I express my own thesis in a sup-

plementary fashion, because my primary aim has been the deconstructive one of decentring Eck's visualist reading of the culture. In point of fact, she does this quite well herself when she quotes from Stella Kramrisch (1976) as follows: 'Seeing, according to Indian notions, is a going forth of the sight towards the object. Sight touches it and acquires its form. Touch is the ultimate connection by which the visible yields to being grasped. While the eye touches the object, the vitality that pulsates in it is communicated ...' (DS, 6). Given that sight is conceived on the analogy of touch, as a prolongation of touch, how can Eck maintain that the culture of India is a 'visual' one?

What led Eck to overlook the evidence of her senses and even the texts she cites? As suggested earlier, the visual reductionism of her method seems to have been what led her into error; in particular, her emphasis on the use of visual media (films, photographs), and her reliance on a singularly inappropriate model for the interpretation of Hindu images – that of hermeneutics. The hermeneutic approach led her to conceive of India as having '“written” in its images' and the response which that called for was, of course, one of 'reading' (see Howes 1990c). Reading is a visual activity. This helps to explain why Eck was so sensitive to the role of visual exchange (*darsan*) in Hindu worship, but failed to grasp the functional significance of taste and touch. It is important to be cautious of the means and metaphors we use to study other cultures, since if we are not, we can end up mistaking the map for the territory, or eating the menu in place of the meal.

### Acknowledgments

I wish to thank David Howes both for translating the final version of this essay into English, and for his many helpful comments on earlier drafts.

### Note

- 1 Related to this is the way in which *the* function of the Brāhmin or priest is to 'cook the world' (including its people) and thereby perfect it – i.e., make it palatable for the gods (Malamoud 1989).

## CHAPTER 16

### ‘The Great Seeing’:

### The Senses in Zinacanteco Ritual Life

*Lisa Andermann*

*If a Zinacanteco talks well, sees clearly, embraces others, has sufficient heat, then he is bankilal, and has achieved a valued status within his society. Those who are young, talk less well, see less clearly, are embraced, have less heat, are 'iz'inal.*

Evon Vogt, *Tortillas for the Gods* (1976)

In the book *Tortillas for the Gods*, Evon Vogt (1976) examines the variety of rituals and ceremonies celebrated over the course of the year by the Tzotzil-speaking people of Zinacantan, Mexico. These include rituals of the life cycle pertaining to birth and death; house and field rituals giving thanks to the gods for healthy crops or a reliable supply of water; rituals of affliction to mend social relations; and Christmas and New Year's celebrations which, although they follow the liturgy of the Catholic church, are celebrated in a uniquely Zinacanteco manner. Vogt describes each of these events in exacting detail: the costumes, the food and drink, music and drums, plants and candles, colours, smells, and temperature. *Tortillas for the Gods* [hereinafter TG] is thus unusually rich in the sorts of details one would want in order to construct a model of a people's sensory profile. The purpose of this essay is, accordingly, to describe the hierarchy of the senses involved in Zinacanteco ritual.

Five major symbolic themes which recur throughout Zinacanteco ritual life are identified by Vogt, including: talking, seeing, embracing, heat, and time. Each of these themes either pertains to the regulation of the senses, or plays an important role as a guiding principle of the Zinacanteco cosmos. To begin with 'talking,' Vogt says that 'the Zinacantecos are a highly verbal people' (TG, 204).<sup>1</sup> 'A very high premium

is placed on those with the ability to say the correct things at the right time. For without proper talking, communication among men, and between men and the gods, falters, and the whole social system creaks as it lacks effective intermediaries to mediate between the oppositions' (TG, 205). It is for this reason that the shaman is so highly valued for his assistance in interceding or 'talking' with the gods. Aural communication is also an important part of the ceremonies insofar as music is concerned. Violins, guitars, harps, flutes, brass bands, church bells, and fireworks, as well as singing and the recital of hymns, all figure prominently in processions through the town (TG, 43).

Sound is used as one of the main ways to differentiate between two types of ritual; the *k'in* rituals, which involve a public rite of passage usually based on the calendar, such as the biannual water-hole rite, and non-*k'in* rituals, private rites based on the events of an individual life cycle, such as birth or death. Vogt writes that during the *k'in* rituals, 'the progress of time itself is beaten out' (TG, 115), emphasizing the public character of the ceremony, during which drummers play and fireworks are set off, signifying that a transition is taking place. The absence of percussion in non-*k'in* rituals is explained by the need for individuals to 'drop out of calendrical and public time' (TG, 115). This is made possible by a rite that creates 'a hole in time' by not using drums and other noises so that the individuals involved can 'avoid time' long enough to give birth, or arrange a healing ceremony, a funeral, or a wedding.

The sense of sight plays an especially dominant role in Zinacanteco ritual life, even more prominent than speaking or hearing. For instance, a shaman is called a *h'ilol*, literally a 'seer.' Vogt writes that 'Zinacantecos believe that in mythological times all men could "see" into the mountains and observe their ancestral gods directly; today only the shamans possess this ability' (TG, 27). This myth explains the reliance on the shaman as a mediator between the gods and humans, and also brings out the significance of seeing as a metaphor for knowing or insight. Indeed, education is described as 'learning to see' (TG, 205), or rather coming to understand and interpret the world as an adult in Zinacantan should.

Zinacanteco rituals are filled with a multitude of visual symbols. There is perhaps no better case to use as an example than *muk'ta 'ilel* or the 'Great Seeing' ceremony – the most complex of the Zinacanteco rituals of affliction. Consisting of about twenty steps, this ceremony is named for the number of mountain shrines that must be visited and ancestral deities that must be 'seen' or witnessed (TG, 62). It is also called the 'Great Flower' because of the number of plants used during the ritual.

Nevertheless, vision is not by any means the only sense encountered during this multisensory curing ceremony.

The ritual begins with a session of divination by pulsing done by the shaman, which is known as *pik c'ic* or 'touch blood.' The shaman feels the patient's pulse at the wrists and inside of the elbows: 'It is believed that the blood "talks," and furnishes messages which the shaman can understand and interpret' (TG, 62). The pulsing determines the cause of the illness, which could result from soul-loss brought on by the demons, the Earth Lord, witchcraft, or the release of a companion animal from its corral. Each person has an animal counterpart living with the gods, and if displeased, they can release it into the wild to cause misfortune for that person. Preparations for the ritual involve washing the patient's clothing in a salty water-hole, believed to lock the soul in the body (TG, 63), cooking and collecting water and special plants, and buying candles, incense, coffee, wheat-flour rolls, and two black chickens of the same sex as the patient.

Dressed in a black robe, the shaman examines the ritual plants, some of which will be used for the patient's aromatic bath while others will be used to decorate the cross shrines and the corral-bed where the patient will lie during the ceremony. Several of these plants have a distinctly pungent odour when crushed (TG, 66), blending in with the incense burner that the shaman brings along with him. After the bath, the patient's clothes are smoked over a censer. Men wear black ceremonial robes, while women wear a poncho with narrow, white stripes (TG, 74). Crosses are drawn from chicken blood on the patient's forehead and forearms using a red geranium.

At the mountain shrines the shaman divines further, using grains from four ears of highland maize, thirteen each of white, yellow, red, and black (TG, 79). These yield more information concerning the loss of the soul. Vogt notes that by this time counting has become difficult because everyone is 'in an advanced stage of inebriation,' having drunk large quantities of potent cane liquor. Back at the house, the shaman sucks on the patient's arms with salt water in his mouth 'to call the blood to receive the soul' (TG, 80). After a final ritual meal, the patient must stay in ritual seclusion for two weeks, until the performance of a post-ceremonial sweat bath, to restore the 'heat' he or she lost during treatment.

Visual symbols are mostly found in the decoration of crosses, shrines, costumes, and the patient's bed in the context of the 'Great Seeing' ritual. Many of these decorations are made up of flowers and plants, such as red geraniums and pine branches. Red geraniums are particularly significant as they are cultivated by the Zinacanteco, and symbolize the domain of 'culture' (TG, 6). In contrast, pine tree tops and pine

needles are used to represent 'nature.' Geraniums are always placed facing inward, towards culture, while pines are placed facing outward, towards nature.

The Zinacanteco attribute many other values to plants. Vogt writes: 'Not only is each plant classified as wild or domesticated and highland or lowland but each also possesses an innate soul, defined as "hot or cold" and "active or quiet". Further, each soul has a colour which, not surprisingly, comes from one of the five basic Zinacanteco colours of red, black, white, yellow and blue-green. Ordinarily, the innate soul colour does not correspond to the colour of the blossom, leaves or needles' (TG, 6). Each colour also has a directional association; red with east, black with west, white with north, yellow with south, and blue-green with the centre of the world.

The sense of touch has already been encountered in our discussion of the pulsing technique used by the shaman. However, touch has a much more focal position in Zinacanteco life than that. Embracing is a symbolic action performed by parents and godparents in caring for a child so that it does not lose its soul (TG, 206). During a curing ritual, a shaman will embrace the patient to help him recover the missing parts of his soul. The act of embracing helps to define boundaries within society and keep out forces of disorder, such as the demons that inhabit the wild areas outside 'culture.' The cross shrines act as markers, separating nature from culture, while at the same time joining them in a symbolic embrace.

The tactile sense is also associated with what is perhaps *the* guiding principle of Zinacanteco life, the principle of 'heat.'<sup>2</sup> Everything in the Zinacanteco universe contains a fixed amount of heat and is considered to be either 'hot' or 'cold,' except for humans who can have variable quantities (TG, 23). Vogt observes that:

Beginning their lives with virtually no heat, Zinacantecos accumulate it throughout their lives, then, at the moment of death, become cold again, like a fetus. Illness is often explained as a temporary disequilibrium in the amount of heat appropriate to a person of a certain age and social accomplishment ... The maximum amount of heat acquired by a Zinacanteco during the course of a lifetime comes from serving his society in an exemplary fashion: the man who is very old, a high-ranking shaman and a veteran of all levels of the cargo system [the official religious hierarchy], possesses the greatest heat possible for a human being. (TG, 24)

This quotation, coupled with what we have already learned about the characteristics of the shaman, enables us to piece together a picture of

his sensory profile: the shaman possesses exceptional powers of sight (being able to 'see' into the mountains and observe the gods directly); he excels in hearing (being able to hear his patient's blood 'talk') and in speaking (through his eloquence he is able to control other human beings, as well as converse with the gods); and he possesses the greatest amount of heat. His elevated social status is thus both a reflection of, and contingent upon, his specialized abilities in each of these three senses.

The sense of taste also plays an important, if less fundamental, role than heat or sight or speech in Zinacanteco ceremonials. There are ritual meals, consisting of tortillas and chicken, and the ever-present cane liquor. Vogt writes that: 'Although beer or even Coca-Cola may be served in a drinking ritual, *pox* [cane liquor] referred to as "dew drops of the gods", is preferred, and must accompany any kind of crucial transaction' (TG, 35). Cane liquor (*pox*) and medicine (*poxil*) are supposed to have the same internal effects, curing illness and repairing social relations.

Social relations are also determined by the eating of maize tortillas. A refusal to eat is a sign of wilful seclusion, and indicates that the person will never be fully socialized and speak the 'real word,' the Tzotzil language (TG, 50). During house rituals, chicken broth and cane liquor are poured on the beams and rafters to 'feed' the house, and enlist the help and support of the gods (TG, 52). Another ritual meal includes the eating of squash, a potent sexual symbol, during the nine-day ceremony of *mixatik* held before Christmas. These end-of-the-year ceremonies are one of the few times when sex and fertility are symbolically represented, and this plays a major role in the proceedings (TG, 144): men dress as women, and there is a lot of sexual horseplay and humour.

Providing food for the gods is one of the major elements of Zinacanteco ritual life. Vogt emphasizes that 'Men eat what the gods eat ... When Zinacantecos light white candles at their mountain shrines, they say they are offering "tortillas" to their ancestral gods who live inside the mountains. They provide "cigarettes" from burning copal incense. Cane liquor, poured on the ground, completes the meal' (TG, 1). As the candles burn, white candles symbolizing tortillas and tallow candles representing beef, they are believed to be consumed by the gods.

There is more at stake here than simple sustenance, however. Vogt states that the preparation of the candles (involving prayer and censuring), the ritual drinking, and partaking of the ritual meal express the Zinacanteco social order in microcosm: 'Since candles symbolize not only "tortillas" but also the essence of a "standing-up Zinacanteco" (a healthy and respect-worthy Zinacanteco) when offered to the gods at shrines, the prayers and censuring are "civilizing agents", symbolically converting

the candles into tortillas, into perfectly socialized persons' (TG, 115). Thus, both sound (in the form of prayer) and smell (in the form of incense) are involved in the civilizing process. In addition to sound and smell there is the element of heat involved in cooking the tortillas, producing cane liquor, burning incense, and growing flowers. The application of heat creates socially acceptable (or 'cultural') objects, just as a Zinacanteco with greater 'heat' has a greater level of socialization.

Vogt remarks that candles have several properties in Zinacanteco thought. Along with representing food for the gods, the candles are valued because they have the properties of 'heat' and 'light.' As such, the flame of the candle combines two of the most sought after forms of power in Zinacanteco society, for 'heat' is associated with 'health, strength, authority,' while 'light' (representing 'sight') signifies the ability to communicate with the gods (TG, 207). This ranking of power is reflected in the way the senses are utilized during the various Zinacanteco rituals, with the visual sense being of primary importance, followed by the thermo-tactile, auditory, gustatory, and olfactory senses in descending order.

It is instructive to reflect further upon the symbolism of the candle in Zinacanteco ritual, since this symbol brings out some of the differences between the Zinacanteco and North American sensory orders. Both of the sensory orders in question would seem to be dominated by sight, but the meaning of the candle is not bound up with light and hence with sight alone in the Zinacanteco case. For the Zinacanteco it is equally important, symbolically speaking, that the candle represents heat (as in the candles lit after a death to provide sufficient heat for the soul to make the journey to join the ancestors). Furthermore, the candle represents food (tortillas and beef), as well as a perfectly socialized member of society (as an extension of the symbolism of the tortilla).

In Zinacantan, the candle is a 'multivocal symbol,' as Victor Turner (1967) would say. It has both a 'sensory' and a 'normative' pole of meaning. Or perhaps 'multisensory' would be a more accurate way to describe the first pole of its meaning, for the candle appeals not only to the modality of sight (as the image of the 'lamp of reason' or Christ as 'the Light' do in the Western tradition), but also to the thermo-tactile and gustatory modalities. The multisensoriality of the symbol of the candle is consistent with the generally higher level of engagement of the senses in Zinacanteco ritual. In Zinacantan, the senses are stimulated all at once and from every direction: the ritual meals, the cane liquor, the musicians and the fireworks, the crosses and arches decorated with pines and flowers, the black robes of the shaman, and designs drawn

with chicken blood, as well as the ritual plants with their pungent odours, the aromatic baths, and the smoking censers.

The ways in which the senses are engaged in Zinacanteco ritual life serve as a model for how they should be utilized in everyday life: 'If a Zinacanteco talks well, sees clearly, embraces others, has sufficient heat, then he is *bankilal*, and has achieved a valued status within his society' (TG, 208).<sup>3</sup> *Bankilal* means 'senior' as opposed to 'junior' (*'iz'inal*). Thus, by exercising one's senses in the prescribed manner, and thereby internalizing the Zinacanteco sensory order, a person rises in the moral order and comes to enjoy all of the prerogatives that pertain to the holder of high office.

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### Notes

- 1 The salience of sound organized as speech for the Zinacanteco is otherwise expressed in their belief that the Tzotzil language is 'the true language,' and the extensive taxonomy of speech genres they, like their neighbours the Chamula, have evolved (see Haviland 1977: 183–91; Gossen 1974: 46–55). What is more, Zinacantecos keep on talking, even in their sleep: 'an outstanding feature of dreams in Zinacantan is that they are filled with dialogue. Characters in dreams always talk to one another' (Haviland 1977: 228, n. 5; Karasik 1988).
- 2 In the Tzotzil language, words for time have to do with heat: 'in the mid-morning,' for example, is expressed as 'the heat is rising now.' Words for the cardinal directions also refer to heat: east and west are called 'emergent heat' and 'waning heat' respectively. These facts have led Gary Gossen to conclude that 'the sun and its life-giving heat determine the basic categories of temporal and spatial order' (1974: 31), at least in Chamula. Vogt is not so emphatic concerning the primacy of heat in the neighbouring municipio of Zinacantan, perhaps because he is mostly concerned to show how time is sounded.
- 3 'His society' should be underlined, for women are regarded as innately 'colder' than men, and so can never attain the same 'valued status' as the latter (see TG, 32–3). Instead of generating heat, women are understood to be controlled by heat, the heat of the sun, which (together with the men) is

responsible for upholding moral order and stability: 'Half of the day, from midnight to noon [the time of the sun's increasing heat] ... is believed to be the time of the sun's influence over the female principle, thus causing women to behave properly and morally during those hours. From noon to midnight (the times of waning heat), women are believed to be more prone to commit adultery and to commit evil in general' (Gossen 1974: 42). It would be interesting to know what sorts of sensory specializations women develop by way of compensation for their 'lack of heat,' but the sources are silent on this point.

## CHAPTER 17

# Creation by Sound / Creation by Light: A Sensory Analysis of Two South American Cosmologies

*Constance Classen*

The terms 'cosmology' and 'world-view' are often used interchangeably by anthropologists and other scholars. Is a cosmology, however, a 'view'? Is it a landscape of beliefs which can be accurately mapped out by someone with the correct vantage point? Or does the visualist model entailed in the use of this metaphor not gloss over the sensory and symbolic complexities inherent in any cosmology, as well as assume that all cultures assign the same priority to sight as does the West (Ong 1969)? What different perceptual models are disclosed when one approaches a cosmology not as a 'world-view,' but as a way of 'sensing the world'?

In this essay I will compare the cosmologies of two contrasting South American regions, the Amazonian lowlands and the Central Andean highlands, to see what each one can reveal about the sensory model of the cultures concerned. The Amazonian cosmology comes from the Desana (a subgroup of the Tukano Indians) of the Colombian North-western Amazon. The Andean cosmology is taken from the central Andean highlands, the inhabitants of which share a fundamental body of beliefs and practices. The data on the Desana are drawn from the work of the sensorially minded ethnographer Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, while the Andean material is taken from both modern ethnographies and the richly detailed corpus of Inca traditions recorded after the Spanish Conquest in the sixteenth century. The juxtaposition of the Inca and modern Andean data reveals that, although present-day Andeans have to contend with the impact of the dominant Western sensory order (whereas the Desana are, as yet, comparatively unacculturated), in the

more traditional communities of the Andes the senses are ordered in a manner similar to that of Inca times.

### **An Andean Cosmology**

Cosmogonies, or creation myths, can vary significantly in the imagery they use to evoke the creative process. In one, the world may be moulded into existence, in another, spoken into existence, in another it may arise from pure thought, and so on. The method(s) of creation manifested by the cosmogony of a particular culture is therefore often revealing not only of that culture's symbolic order, but also of its sensory order, the relative importance it assigns to the various senses.

The Andean cosmogony presented here was first recorded at the time of the Spanish Conquest in the sixteenth century. It was popular throughout the Central Andes and appropriated by the Incas who established an empire in the region. It still survives in various forms, interpenetrated with Christianity, in the Andes today. In this cosmogony, sound is the medium of creation: the world is called into being and animated by the voice of Viracocha, the creator:

Viracocha ... sculpted and drew on some large stones all the nations he thought to create. This done, he ordered his two servants to commit to memory the names he told them of the peoples he had painted and of the valleys and provinces and places from where they would emerge, which were those of all the earth. He ordered each of them to take a different route and call the aforementioned peoples and order them to come out, procreate and swell the earth.

The servants, obeying Viracocha's command, set themselves to the task. One went along the sierra of the coast by the Southern sea, and the other along the sierra of the ... Andes, to the east of that sea. Along these sierras they walked, calling out: 'O peoples and nations! Hear and obey the commandment of [Viracocha] who orders you to come out, multiply and swell the earth.' And Viracocha himself did the same along the lands in between those of his two servants ... On hearing their calls, every place obeyed, and some people came out of lakes, others out of springs, valleys, caves, trees, caverns, rocks and mountains, and swelled the earth and multiplied into the nations which are in Peru today. (Sarmiento de Gambóia 1965: 207-10)

Touch, sight, and hearing are intimately related in this cosmogony. The human prototypes are sculpted, painted, then named; in other words, given a tactile, visual, and aural identity. Of these three senses, hearing

plays the dominant role. Human beings are called into life and purpose by the divine word. As an Inca prayer puts it: 'O Viracocha who ... said let this be a man and let this be a woman, and by so saying, made, formed and gave them being' (Molina of Cuzco 1943: 20).

Viracocha, above all, is the one who speaks. He knows all languages better than the natives do (Pachacuti Yamqui 1950: 215). He names all the plants and animals (Molina of Cuzco 1943: 14). With his word alone he is able to make the corn grow (Cobo 1964: 150). The first order given to humans in the cosmogony is to 'hear and obey' the command of Viracocha. The transgressions listed further on in the cosmogony result from a refusal to hear and obey the creator.

The profound religious significance of the sense of hearing is brought out by an Inca myth in which the Inca, who is suffering from an earache caused by the piercing of his ears, prays for a river for the Inca capital, Cuzco. As he is praying he hears a clap of thunder and falls down with fright, putting his ear to the ground. Suddenly he hears the sound of running water under the earth. The Inca orders the spot dug up until a spring is found and then builds a canal to carry the water to Cuzco (Cieza de León 1985: 118–19).

The Inca's earache can be understood as caused by a lack of sacred aural communication – symbolic fluidity. This metaphorical 'drought' is relieved by the thunderclap which comes in response to the Inca's prayer. With his newly pierced ears the Inca hears both the sacred thunderclap, signalling the presence of water, and the water itself running underground. The result is that Cuzco is provided with an irrigation canal and the Inca establishes a channel of oral communication between himself and the deities. Sound, like water, vivifies the cosmos.

Many Andeans today look back nostalgically on the Inca period as a golden aural/oral age when the world was animated by sound. An Andean from the town of Pinchimuro, Peru, comments: 'The people of old used to help Ausangate [a mountain deity] quite a bit. They respected him very much. In those days they didn't go to mass and they weren't baptized. They simply spoke with Ausangate' (Condori and Gow, 1982: 56). Andean myths on the whole are dominated by orality. Not only does speech animate the cosmos, mythological characters reveal themselves through dialogue: the Earth tells people how they should act towards her, animals have conversations with humans, the Sun speaks when it rises, and so on (Condori and Gow 1982).

The emphasis on orality manifested by Andean mythology pervades Andean religion. The primary characteristic of the Andean diviner is his ability to make anything talk, that is, to establish communication with anything in this world, the upper world, or the under world. The

diviner then reports the information gained in this way to the people. The Inca high priest, in fact, was called *Villac Umu*, 'the one who tells.'

Andean holy objects, *huacas*, from rocks to mummies to mountains, are oracles which above all speak to their worshippers (see Figure 1). At the time of the Conquest an Inca leader urged his people to forsake the false religion of the Spanish, declaring that '[the Christian God] is a painted cloth ... the *huacas* speak to us' (Titu Cusi Yupanqui 1985: 2). In this proclamation we find a rejection not only of the religion of the Spanish, but also of their visual, surface-oriented culture.

Modern Andeans continue to resist the extreme visualism of the West. A good example of this is provided by the Andean writer José María Arguedas in his novel *Yawar Fiesta*. When the Peruvian government decrees that professional bullfighters must be hired for the traditional local bullfights, the Andeans protest, 'And what's the bullfight going to be like? Aren't the Indians going to do anything but watch it? ... Is the bullfight just going to be held in silence?' (Arguedas 1985: 45).

In his article 'The Coherence of Social Style and Musical Creation among the Aymara in Southern Peru,' Thomas Turino describes how the Andean social ideal of group solidarity is expressed musically through integrated ensemble performance, so that 'the sonic result of musical performance becomes an iconic reproduction of the unified nature of the community' (1989: 29). Andean life, in fact, has been described as a musical composition. Thérèse Bouysse Cassagne (1987: 171) writes of the Aymara of the Andes: 'The sung word marked and continues to mark the highpoint of Aymara social life. They sang to glorify the victor or bury the dead. Hunters enhanced their hunts with their songs ... Each activity and each sex expressed itself according to a specific rhythm, and music had distinct movements according to the rhythm of the seasons, so that each song had a particular meaning and place within the ritual cycle.'

Into this musical composition, Western culture with its industrial din introduces discordant notes. Some Andeans consider the sounds produced by industry to mimic those produced by a mythical monster, the Pishtaco, when he crushes his human victims and sucks out their fat (Sullivan 1986: 15–16). The relentless whining of industrial machinery represents an endless process of death for the Andeans. The sounds of Andean culture sustain life, the sounds of Western culture destroy it.

The visual parallel of the destructive noise of industrialism for the Andeans is writing. The following account of the Andean experience of writing, given by a contemporary Peruvian Andean, expresses the violent impact of this medium on the oral culture of the Andes:



FIGURE 1

An Inca talking with the *Huacas* (after Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, *El Primer Nueva Coronica y Buen Gobierno*, edited by J. Murra and R. Adorno, 3 vols. [Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno 1980 (1613)], vol. 1: 235)

God had two sons: the Inca and Jesus Christ. The Inca said to us 'Speak' and we learned to speak. From that time on we teach our children to speak ... The Inca visited our Mother Earth. He conversed with her and took her gifts and asked her for favours for us. The Inca married Mother Earth. He had two children ...

When they were born it made Jesus Christ very angry and un-

happy ... The moon took pity on him. 'I can help you,' she said and sent him a paper with writing. Jesus thought: 'This will certainly frighten the Inca.' He showed him the paper in a dark field. The Inca was frightened because he didn't understand the writing ... He ran far away ... He slowly died of hunger.

When the Inca was no longer able to do anything, Jesus Christ struck Mother Earth and cut her neck. Then he had churches built on her. (Ortiz Rescaniere 1973: 239–43)

The conflict of European literacy and Andean orality is presented here as a conflict between cosmologies. Implied in this presentation is the association of orality and hearing with exchange, and writing and sight with unilateral domination. Thus, dialogue with the Earth is transformed into exploitation of the Earth after the introduction of writing. Life is brought to the Earth through sound and taken from her through sight.<sup>1</sup>

While Andeans find the extreme visualism of the West foreign to their way of life, sight nonetheless plays a fundamental role in their cosmology. In the cosmogony the original world is dark and chaotic. The creation of humans and a structured world takes place only after light (and thereby sight) has been created by Viracocha calling the luminaries out of a lake (Sarmiento de Gambóia 1965: 208).

Light and sight were particularly important to the Incas because the patron deity of their state was the Sun. One Inca myth relates, in fact, how the Incas controlled the orality of the *huacas* through the power of their sight (Pachacuti Yamqui 1950: 230): 'The Inca Capac Yupanqui wanted to see how the *huacas* spoke with their followers. The ministers of a *huaca* took him into a dark hut and called on their *huaca* to speak to them. The spirit of the *huaca* entered with the sound of the wind, leaving everyone afraid. The Inca then ordered that the door be opened so that he could see the *huaca*. When the door was opened the *huaca* hid his face. The Inca asked him why, if he was so powerful, was he afraid to raise his eyes? The figure, who was repulsive, then shouted like thunder and rushed out' (condensed from Pachacuti Yamqui 1950: 229–30). The *huaca*, who is evidently a thunder god, intimidated his ministers through sound, but the Inca is able to control him through sight. The Inca's purpose, however, was not to negate the power of sound and hearing, but to control it. Later on in the myth we learn that after Capac Yupanqui defeated the *huaca*, the Incas obliged all of the *huacas* of their empire to respond to their queries in the name of 'the one with strong eyes' (Pachacuti Yamqui 1950: 229–30).

Many of the Inca *huacas* were situated along sight lines radiating out

from the central Inca temple, which may have been one way in which the Incas controlled the *huacas* through sight. These sight lines, called *ceques*, also served to order Inca social structure, for different Inca kin groups were associated with different lines.<sup>2</sup> Another way in which Inca society was structured through sight was through visually perceived distinctions, such as land boundaries, and regional differences in dress. Oral traditions were visually structured through the use of the *quipu*, a mnemonic device consisting of a main cord from which different coloured threads with knots were hung. Finally, through observation of the stars, sight was used by the Incas to structure time. In its role in enabling the recognition and establishment of categories, so essential to Inca cosmology, and in its dominance over hearing, sight would seem to have been the most important sense for the Incas.

Modern Andeans do not claim the reputed power of the Incas to dominate the *huacas* through sight. In the present-day Andes, communication between *huacas* and their followers generally takes place in the dark, much as described in the Inca account given above. Compare that account, for example, with the following account of a modern Andean curing ritual: 'The brujo [sorcerer] darkens the room and calls on his tutelary Auki [mountain spirit]. The door is closed, the brujo whistles three times, and the Auki responds by entering through the roof ... Then, by the aid of ventriloquism, a conversation is held between the brujo and the Auki in which the Auki reveals the cause of the illness and advises a remedy. Moving his wings, the Auki leaves again by way of the roof' (Mishkin 1946: 469–70). No strong-eyed Inca appears here to stare down the voluble spirit. Modern Andeans, in fact, are afraid to see spirits, as they believe that to do so would hurt their eyes (Tschopik 1951: 191). Superior visual power would now seem to belong to the westernized literate elite in the Andes.

Nonetheless, although the Inca emphasis on visual dominance and on light is no longer evidenced in modern Andean culture (and the Sun is no longer the most prominent deity), sight continues to be used in similar ways – creating sight lines, establishing categories, structuring time, etc. – to those of Inca times.

Data exist which suggest that the Andeans of today continue to consider sight to be the highest sense. In a study of indigenous medicine in the Ecuadorian Andes, the eyes were ranked above the ears (and below the stomach, brain, and heart) in the hierarchy of body parts presented by one informant (Balladelli 1988: 28). Billie Jean Isbell (1978: 139) reports that in the Peruvian Andean community she studied, the term for eye, *ñauí*, also means 'first' and 'best.' Regina Harrison (1982: 85), in an examination of Andean epistemology, suggests that sight is

the sense most closely linked to knowledge among both the Incas and present-day Andeans.

The Andeans, however, are attentive to all the senses, not simply hearing and sight. In a dictionary published in Peru in 1613 we find terms in Quechua, the language of the Incas and many modern Andeans, for 'to see subtly,' 'to hear subtly,' 'to smell subtly,' 'to taste subtly,' 'to touch subtly,' and 'to understand subtly' (suggesting that reason was considered a sense). A *ccazcaruna*, in Quechua, was 'one who used all his senses sharply and subtly' (González Holguín 1952: 63–4).

Inca ritual customarily engaged all of the senses, for example, through pageantry, song and dance, food and drink, and incense. Charlene and Ralph Bolton (1976) have examined how modern Andean rituals also make use of all the senses. They find that a ritual intended to please and attract employs agreeable sensory perceptions, sweet flavours, pleasant odours, etc., while one intended to harm and repel employs disagreeable perceptions, bitter flavours, foul odours, etc.

Given that the proximity senses of touch and, particularly, taste and smell are not well represented in Andean myth, why are they so well brought out in Andean ritual? This may be because in ritual it is considered necessary for all the senses to be engaged for the ceremony to be completely effective. The use of the proximity senses in ritual, however, usually serves to underscore the message conveyed through the dominant media of hearing and sight; for example, a prayer offered to a deity may be accompanied by incense.

In the creation myth sensory perceptions are found to overlap in several ways. In one version of the myth, for example, Viracocha's oral teachings are said to be embodied in a staff which he hands down to his followers (Pachacuti Yamqui 1950: 211), a merging of hearing and touch. Such sensory overlap also occurs in ritual. In the Inca male puberty rite the elders whipped and lectured the initiates at the same time, possibly in the belief that their words would thereby physically penetrate the boys' bodies (Molina 'of Cuzco' 1943: 51). Similarly, in another rite, after an oath of allegiance to the Inca was sworn, food symbolizing the oath would be eaten by the participants (Molina 'of Cuzco' 1943: 37).

An interesting example of sensory overlap, or synaesthesia, in the modern Andes is that of the *kisa*. The Aymara-speaking residents of the Chilean Andes use this term, which means the concentrated sweetness of dried fruit and also pleasant speech and a soft tactile sensation, to refer to a rainbow effect in weaving. (This penetrating 'sweetness' of the rainbow, along with the transgression of categorical boundaries it manifests in its gradations of colour, may be why the Incas believed

that looking at a rainbow caused one's teeth to decay [Garcilaso de la Vega 1945: 175].) The rainbow is such a powerful image that it automatically stimulates all the senses. An Andean healer can make use of the rainbow's power by creating a rainbow out of wool in order to diffuse a patient's illness through the gradual transformation of colours and sensory perceptions (Cereceda 1987: 200–4).

Synaesthesia in Andean ritual is perhaps best illustrated by an Inca harvest rite in which hearing was united with sight. In this rite the Incas would go before dawn to a plain outside Cuzco. As the Sun began to rise they would start to sing in chorus. The higher the Sun rose, the louder they sang. When the Sun set they sang more and more softly, stopping when it disappeared from sight (Molina 'el Almagrista' 1968: 82).

A similar interrelationship of the visual and the auditory is manifested in the version of the cosmogony recorded in the seventeenth century by Pachacuti Yamqui, a native Andean. After describing how Viracocha burnt a mountain he comments: 'up to the present day there remain signs of that terrifying miracle, never before heard in the world' (Pachacuti Yamqui 1950: 212). Orality was ultimately so basic to Andean culture that even visual manifestations (such as the rising sun or a burnt mountain) had to be made oral.

### An Amazonian Cosmology

Whereas in the Andean cosmogony the world is created by sound and the creator *speaks* with his creation, in the cosmogony of the Desana Indians of the Colombian Amazon, the world is created by light, and the creator *watches over* his creation.

The Sun created the Universe with the power of his yellow light ... While the dwelling place of the Sun has a yellow color, the color of the power of the Sun, the dwelling place of men and animals is of a red color, the color of fecundity and of the blood of living beings ... [The] world below is called *Ahpikondia*, Paradise. Its color is green ...

Seen from below, from *Ahpikondia*, our earth looks like a large cobweb. It is transparent, and the Sun shines through it. The threads of this web are like the rules that men should live by, and they are guided by these threads, seeking to live well, and the Sun sees them.

Above our earth, the Sun created the Milky Way ... Strong winds rush through the Milky Way, and it is blue in color. It is the intermediate region between the yellow power of the Sun and the red color of the earth ...

The Sun created all of this when he had the yellow intention – when he caused the power of his yellow light to penetrate, in order to form the world from it. (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971: 24–5)

The cosmogony goes on to tell how night is created when one of the men made by the Sun lets a swarm of black ants out of a bag (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971: 26). Thus, while in the Andean cosmogony the world is originally dark and chaotic, and order is possible only after the creation of light, in the Desana cosmogony the world is originally light and structured, and disorder is introduced with the creation of darkness. Similarly, while in the Andean cosmogony light arises from sound – Viracocha calls the luminaries out of a lake – in the Desana cosmogony, sound arises from light – the Sun endows the jaguar with a voice like thunder (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971: 28).

The emphasis on light and colour manifested in the cosmogony of the Desana is elaborated in their cosmology. The Desana believe that the light of the Sun contains different colour energies with different properties. All people receive an equal amount of colour energies at birth, and at death these colours return to the Sun. Animals and plants also contain chromatic energies with one or two colours predominating. These colours are both actual – the external colouring of an animal – and imagined – the symbolic colours attributed to it. The whole process of the distribution, procreation, and growth of people, animals, and plants is seen as a chromatic energy flow which has to be carefully watched over and controlled by shamans (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978b: 246–71).

The Desana shaman is characterized by his penetrating gaze with which he is able to discern the occult. The shaman observes the world at large by looking within a rock crystal which functions as a microcosm. His task is to blend and balance the different colours of the spectrum within the crystal to maintain an equilibrium of forces without. Similarly, the shaman can detect colour imbalances in a person who is ill by looking at the patient through this crystal. He then uses the chromatic energies contained within the crystal to restore the proper balance of colours and cure the patient (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978b: 265–8; 1979).

This stress on vision does not preclude the elaboration of the other senses. Colours constitute a primary set of energies, a secondary set is formed by odour, temperature, and flavour. While there are few references to this secondary set of sensory perceptions in the cosmogony, the Desana apparently understand it to be a by-product of the primary colour energies.

Odour is thought to be the result of the combination of colour and temperature. The Desana classify people, animals, and plants according to their odours. Human odours are separated as follows: the natural odour of a person, odour one acquires through the food one eats, odours caused by emotions, and periodic odours produced by bodily changes, for example, menstruation (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978b: 257, 271–4; 1985b: 124–5).

Flavour, thought to arise from odour, is less important than the latter but still culturally elaborated. The Desana recognize five major flavour categories: sweet, bitter, acid, astringent, and spice. Different flavours are assigned to different kin groups and used to regulate marriage. Compatible marriage partners are those with opposite flavours (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978b: 274–5).

The senses are evoked by Desana ritual in a variety of ways. Pre-pubescent boys, for instance, must take a purificatory bath every morning in the river. Before bathing they eat chili in order to make their skin oily and facilitate face painting. In the river they vomit several times to cleanse themselves. While the boys bathe they drum on the surface of the water, producing a 'male' sound, and blow through their cupped hands, producing a 'female' sound. At intervals they play a tune on a flute. 'The odor of the tune is said to be male, the color is red, and the temperature is hot; the tune evokes youthful happiness and the taste of a fleshy fruit of a certain tree. The vibrations carry an erotic message to a particular girl' (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1981: 91). After bathing the boys paint their faces and place bundles of fragrant herbs under their belts (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971: 141–2).<sup>3</sup>

The importance the Desana assign to light and colour, and the ways in which they interrelate the senses, undoubtedly derive in large part from their experience with hallucinogenic drugs. The narcotic used by the Desana, *Banisteriopsis caapi*, commonly known as *ayahuasca* or *yage*, produces hallucinations which are characterized by colourful imagery and a synaesthetic mingling of sensory perceptions. According to the Desana, the narcotic vine was born when the Sun impregnated a woman through the eye with his light. The child – the narcotic – was made of light and overwhelmed men with its brilliance. 'Everything happened through the eye,' the myth proclaims (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978a: 4).

Narcotics are taken by Desana men on almost all ritual occasions. Desana women are not allowed to take hallucinogens and experience narcotic visions. They may possibly compensate for this by emphasizing other senses than sight, such as touch. Significantly, Desana women

take the taboos surrounding sexual activity much less seriously than the men do, often making humorous reference to the men's fears (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1985a: 4–5).

The visions produced by the narcotics are believed to provide glimpses of the creation of the universe and the iconic images which embody original ideals. At the same time they are thought to induce states of consciousness which will lead an individual to act in accordance with social norms. The senses primarily involved in this process are sight, hearing, and smell. Through the use of hallucinogens and a controlled sensory environment shamans attempt to induce the following four processes: 'to make one see, and act accordingly,' 'to make one hear, and act accordingly,' 'to make one smell, and act accordingly,' and 'to make one dream, and act accordingly' (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1981: 76–7, 95).

The complexity of Desana sensory codes is revealed in the ways the Desana conceptualize the human brain:

In [one] image the brain is formed by a bundle of pencil-shaped hexagonal tourmaline crystals standing closely packed side by side; each crystal contains a sequence of colors which, from bottom to top, express a range of sensibilities. In another image a brain consists of layers of innumerable hexagonal honeycombs; the entire brain is one huge humming beehive ... Each tiny hexagonal container holds honey of a different color, flavor, odor, or texture, or it houses a different stage of insect larval development ... A brain can be seen as a bouquet of flowers, a fluttering cluster of butterflies, a glistening swarm of tiny tropical fish, or a quivering mass of multicolored frogs. (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1981: 82–3)

All of these different characteristics are, of course, associated with cultural values: 'One of the informants pointed rapidly to different areas on an outline of the brain he had drawn and said: "*Here it is prohibited to eat fish; here it is allowed; here one learns to dance ...*"' (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1981: 84).

The Desana believe that the universe consists of two parts, the material world of the senses and the divine world of pure, abstract ideals. The two halves of the brain are conceived of in a similar fashion, the right hemisphere, called 'existential-first,' is concerned with practical affairs and biological processes, while the left hemisphere, called 'abstract-first,' is the seat of moral law. The function of the right hemisphere is basically to put the ideals of the left hemisphere into practice. The Desana help the right hemisphere do this by coding virtually all sensory

impressions to serve as reminders of the original ideals (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1981: 86–93).<sup>4</sup>

According to the Desana, the two cerebral hemispheres are co-ordinated by a process called ‘to hear–to act,’ whereby the right side listens to what the left side demands and puts it into practice (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1981: 86–8). Hearing is considered to be the most cultural of the senses. For this reason menstruating women, who are said to be outside culture, are told that they cannot hear (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978b: 274).

The most natural or anticultural of the senses is touch. Sexual touching in particular is severely repressed and the subject of deep anxiety among the Desana (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971: 19–20). Touch, at least in its sexual dimension, would therefore seem to be the symbolic opposite of hearing for the Desana. As an example of this opposition, if a person is not paying attention to the shaman’s speech, the shaman may rebuke him by telling him he is ‘listening like a penis’ (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1981: 89, n. 19).

The emphasis the Desana place on light and colour might lead one to conclude that sight is the most important sense for the Desana. Nevertheless, as the preceding discussion reveals, a greater cultural value is in fact given to hearing. The Desana say that sight recognizes categories while hearing leads to an understanding of categories; to see is to perceive, to hear is to conceive. According to this paradigm, everything has an ‘echo’ and ‘only by being able to “hear the echo” can one truly know what is being seen and what it symbolizes’ (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978a: 152). A Desana term similar to ‘free will’ is *pe mahsiri yiri*, which literally means ‘to hear–to know–to act.’ The opposite of this is *inya mahsibiri*, ‘to see–to know not’ (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1981: 94).

This association between hearing and knowledge explains why the original creation of the cosmos by light is ordered in Desana ritual by sound: the shaman orally directs and explains the narcotic visions which reveal divine reality and uses spoken incantations to control the colour energies which animate the cosmos (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978a: 152). Light creates the cosmos, but it is through sound and hearing that the Desana give meaning to that creation.

### **Andean and Desana Sensory Orders Compared**

We have seen that both the Andeans and the Desana make symbolic use of all the senses in their cosmologies. The Desana, however, elaborate the proximity senses to a far greater extent than do the Andeans. How is this fundamental difference in emphasis to be explained?

It may be that the Andeans believed the proximity senses to be too

close to the 'savage sensuality' they considered alien to their culture to merit much symbolic elaboration.<sup>5</sup> Another possibility is that the environment may have had an influence on this distinction. In the barren Andean highlands touch is dulled by the cold and by layers of clothing, odours are poorly diffused through the thin atmosphere, and the range of foods is limited. Hearing, however, is heightened by the acoustics of the mountains and sight is engaged by the open sky and the vista of mountain peaks. In the tropical entanglement of the Amazonian rain forest, however, odours, tastes, and textures abound. Hearing is continually engaged by the myriad sounds of the forest, but vision is limited by the forest's closeness and darkness.

The Desana's use of vision-enhancing hallucinogens (not used by the Andeans) may, in part, be a way of compensating for the reduced visibility of the environment. In the same vein, the emphasis the Andeans place on sound may be a way of compensating for the silence and vast empty spaces of the highlands. The environment, therefore, must be considered as a factor, although not a determining one, in the development of different sensory orders in the Andes and the Amazon.

As we have seen, both the Desana and the Andeans place sight and hearing above the other senses. While the Desana emphasize sight in their cosmogony and the Andeans hearing, however, the Desana, in fact, hold hearing to be the highest sense, and the Andeans, sight. With respect to the Andeans, this duality may occur because, while sight is considered more powerful than hearing, sound and hearing are thought to be of more use in uniting people, land, and gods, and animating the cosmos. As regards the Desana, the reason for the distinction may be that, while hearing is considered superior because it produces understanding, only sight can perceive the colours and designs which provide the basic categories of the universe.

Significantly, sound is used to animate the cosmos in the Andean cosmogony, in which it is the primary medium of creation, and light, which plays the primary creative role in the Desana cosmogony, is used to structure the cosmos in that cosmogony. This distinction may well reveal the fundamental symbolic concern of each society: in the case of the Andeans – animation and integration – and in the case of the Desana – structure.

Nevertheless, sight and hearing are often so closely interrelated in both cultures that it is difficult to separate the functions of one from those of the other or determine which is more important. We have seen how sight and hearing were united in Andean myth and ritual. The Desana, for their part, merge the two senses in terms such as *penyóri*, which means 'to hear' and 'to feel the effects of a penetrating glance'

(Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971: 138), and *pēsirō*, which means 'to hear' and 'to illuminate' (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1981: 94, n. 33). When an individual consults with a shaman, hearing – also meaning understanding – and sight – also meaning insight – play off each other until the individual is temporarily transported to Paradise. The term for this altered state, *pepíri*, is based on the verb 'to hear.' However, when asked to describe the experience, an informant simply said, 'one sees, one is there' (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971: 138).

From this comparison of two indigenous South American cosmologies it can be seen that non-literate societies, while often grouped indiscriminately together as oral/aural cultures by scholars concerned with the cultural and cognitive effects of literacy (i.e., Ong 1982; Goody, 1977), can indeed have a wide variety of sensory orders. Thus, the fact that a culture is not literate does not necessarily mean that it will be 'ear-minded' rather than 'eye-minded.'

Furthermore, one cannot assume, as Walter Ong does, that certain cultural effects will follow from a particular sensory order. While each sensory modality may have specific inherent properties – i.e., sight is unidirectional, hearing is multidirectional (Ong 1967: 117–18; Lowe 1982: 5–7) – cultures remain free to emphasize certain of these properties and imbue them with their own values. The visualism of the West, with its emphasis on surfaces and detached observation (Ong 1967: 128–9; Foucault 1973: 107–9), for example, is quite different from the visualism of the Desana, with its emphasis on dynamic colour energies.<sup>6</sup> While it may be possible to make certain general statements about the character of visual or auditory societies, for example, it would not seem possible to constitute any definitive typology of cultures according to their sensory orders.

To conclude, sensory perception is a cultural as well as a physical act, insofar as certain cultural values are ascribed to different sensory perceptions. These values are directed, but not determined, by the inherent characteristics of the different modalities. The senses, consequently, can be thought of as both shapers and bearers of culture.

In light of this, the question can be asked: By what means and to what ends is sensory perception 'socially regulated' (Jackson 1977: 209)? We tend to think of perception as an objective means for gathering information about the world. In the cultures of the Andes and the Amazon examined here, perception would appear to be governed by the same principles which govern society and the cosmos.

Thus, the Incas justified their dominant social status in part by attributing to themselves greater powers of sight and hearing than were possessed by their subjects. In the modern Andes superior sight (i.e.,

literacy) is one of the characteristics of the westernized elite. Desana men maintain their dominant status within their society by claiming transcendent vision and denying women the hallucinogens which are the means of attaining sensory and cultural superiority. In short, the sensory models of the Andeans and the Desana would seem to be involved in an interactive relationship with their cultures of origin, both expressing and affecting the paradigms and conflicts manifested by the latter.

Finally, to return to the question posed at the start of this essay, as the data from the two South American cultures examined here amply demonstrate, a cosmology is not a detached 'view' of the world. Although the Andean and Amazonian cosmologies both emphasize sight in different ways, it is within a multisensory context. Nor are cosmologies the dry constructions of moral, spatial, and temporal structures that they are often made out to be in studies written by Western academics. Cosmologies are wet and warm, fragrant and foul, full of sound, colour, and feeling. The visualist abstractions which mark the conception of the universe in the modern West would in fact seem to be the exception, rather than the rule, among the diverse cosmologies of the world. By approaching the cosmologies of other cultures on their own sensory terms, we discover very different ways of making sense of the world.

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### Notes

- 1 I expand on the Andean perception of literacy as 'anticulture' in Classen (1991).
- 2 For further information on *ceque* symbolism see Zuidema (1964).
- 3 Music also plays a more direct role in ordering the Desana cosmos as it is believed essential to the germination of plants: 'The Desana ... say that different sound waves will produce different effects upon pollen and successful pollination can be produced only by a complex orchestration of the sounds from different pairs of trumpets' (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1985b: 114).
- 4 Comprehensive as the Desana system seems, the Desana do not pretend to understand everything in the cosmos. Of the left hemisphere of the brain it

is said, for instance, that it *'contains colors we don't even know the names of,'* and of the sound waves believed to be produced by the energy contained in a prism: *'the sounds want to activate something, but we don't know what it is'* (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1981: 83).

- 5 Evidence of the aversion of the Andeans to what they deemed the 'savagery' of the Indians of the jungle can be found in both Inca and modern times; see, for instance, Cieza de León (1985: 184–5) and Bastien (1978: 97).
- 6 To pursue this point a bit further: although sight is held to be limited to mere appearance in the West, it is used as a metaphor for understanding, while among the Desana, only hearing is believed capable of comprehending the principles revealed by sight. In one sense it could be said, therefore, that in the West sight is thought to understand what it does not perceive, while among the Desana sight is thought to perceive what it does not understand.



## CONCLUSION

# Sounding Sensory Profiles

*David Howes and Constance Classen*

The purpose of this final chapter is to present a paradigm for sensing and making sense of other cultures. We want to emphasize the practical and open-ended nature of the discussion that follows. It sums up some of the main points of the preceding chapters, but is equally concerned to open up new directions and questions for research.

The chapter begins with a discussion of some general considerations, or first principles, which ought to be borne in mind when studying the sensorium. The next two parts are concerned with field research and library research respectively. They offer practical advice on, among other things, how best to clear one's senses for purposes of sensory analysis, and how to read between the lines of an ethnography for information on a culture's sensory profile. The fourth part is called 'A Paradigm for Sensing.' It is divided into ten sections. The sections are entitled: 1) language, 2) artefacts and aesthetics, 3) body decoration, 4) childrearing practices, 5) alternative sensory modes, 6) media of communication, 7) natural and built environment, 8) rituals, 9) mythology, and 10) cosmology. These headings refer to those cultural domains which, in our experience, have proved the most informative with regard to eliciting a given culture's 'sensory profile' or way of 'sensing the world.'

### **Some General Considerations**

*Other cultures do not necessarily divide the sensorium as we do. The Hausa recognize two senses (Ritchie, ch. 12); 'the Javanese have five senses (seeing, hearing, talking, smelling and feeling), which do not*

coincide exactly with our five' (Dundes 1980: 92). In short, there may be any number of 'senses,' including what we would classify as extra-sensory perception – the 'sixth sense.'<sup>1</sup> According to the Peruvian curer interviewed by Douglas Sharon in *Wizard of the Four Winds*, for example, a sixth clairvoyant sense opens up when all five other senses have been stimulated through the use of hallucinogens and other ritual elements (1978: 117). Eduardo, the curer, describes this sixth sense as 'a "vision" much more remote ... in the sense that one can look at things that go far beyond the ordinary or that have happened in the past or can happen in the future' (Sharon 1978: 115).

*The senses interact with each other first, before they give us access to the world; hence, the first step, the indispensable starting point, is to discover what sorts of relations between the senses a culture considers proper.* One commonly finds that when a particular sense is emphasized by a culture, some other sense emerges as its opposite, and becomes the target of repression. It is also quite common to find one sense substituting for another, more dangerous, sense. For example, Desana men, who manifest a high degree of anxiety regarding sexual contact, would appear to use sight as a substitute for touch when they relive birth and other sexually related experiences through the visual imagery of hallucinations (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1972, 1985a: 4). In Islamic society, the repression of sight which results from the prohibition on the visual representation of God or creation, and the fear of being accused of casting the 'evil eye,' would seem to be designed to emphasize hearing (and obeying or 'submitting' to) the *word* of God.

*Senses which are important for practical purposes may not be important culturally or symbolically.* For instance, while sight is greatly valued by the Inuit for hunting and other activities, it does not have the symbolic importance of hearing and sound, which are associated with creation. Language, in fact, is likened by the Inuit to the knife of the carver which creates form out of formlessness. Sight can thus be said to be of practical value for the Inuit because it perceives form, but sound has cultural priority because it *creates* form (Carpenter 1973: 33, 43). An analogous profile is presented by the Suya of Brazil who, as will be recalled from an earlier discussion, privilege speech and hearing:

In discussion of Suya ideas about vision, the ability to see must be distinguished from the symbolic meaning of the eyes. Good everyday sight, in the sense of accurate reception of visual stimuli, is apparently unrelated to the other modes [i.e., speaking and hearing] because it is not symbolically elaborated. The Suya prize a good hunter who can accurately shoot fish and game. It is not his sight

that is stressed but the accuracy of his shooting. Hunting medicines are applied to the forearm to make a man a good shot, not to his eyes. (Seeger 1975: 215)

*Sensory orders are not static: they develop and change over time, just as cultures do.* Some of the sensory expressions of a society, manifested in its language, rituals, and myths, may be relics or survivals from an earlier sensory order. This is particularly evident in societies 'with history' (i.e., where records of earlier ways of life are extant). For example, Mackenzie Brown (1986) gives a fascinating account of how visuality came to dominate aurality in the history of the Hindu tradition, based on a reading of India's sacred texts.<sup>2</sup> As another example, the Latin-based word 'sagacious,' which now means only 'wise,' originally, at a more olfactory-conscious period, meant 'keen-scented' as well. In societies 'without history' (i.e., those for which earlier records do not exist), this kind of sensory layering is more difficult to discern, but not impossible. In *Do Kamo*, Maurice Leenhardt (1979) was able to trace the origin of certain olfactory and visual representations of the body to different stages of Melanesian civilization by relating the representations in question to evolving concepts of space (see further Howes 1988). In such cases, the contemporary relevance of a given sensory expression can only be determined by relating it to the *total sensory dynamic* of the culture.

*There may be different sensory orders for different groups within a society*, for example, women and men, children and adults, leaders and workers, people in different professions, as will be discussed below in the section on alternative sensory modes.

## **Doing Field Research**

If one's research involves participant observation, then the question to be addressed is this: *Which senses are emphasized or repressed, and by what means and to which ends?* This complex question can be broken down into a variety of subsidiary questions, which range from the particular to the general. Particular questions would include: Is there a lot of touching or very little? Is there much concern over body odours? What is the range of tastes in foods and where do the preferences tend to centre? At a more general level: Does the repression of a particular sense or sensory expression correspond to the repression of a particular group within society? Finally, how does the sensory order relate to the social and symbolic order?

Every culture strikes its own balance among the senses. While some cultures tend toward an equality of the senses, most cultures manifest some bias or other, either privileging a particular sense, or some cluster of senses. In order successfully to fathom the sensory biases of another culture, it is essential for the researcher to overcome, to the extent possible, his or her own sensory biases. The first and most crucial step in this process is to discover one's personal biases.<sup>3</sup> The second step involves training oneself to be sensitive to a multiplicity of sensory expressions. This kind of awareness can be cultivated by taking some object in one's environment and disengaging one's attention from the object itself so as to focus on how each of its sensory properties would impinge on one's consciousness were they not filtered in any way (see Merleau-Ponty 1962; Rawlinson 1981). The third step involves developing the capacity to be 'of two sensoria' about things (Howes 1990c), which means being able to operate with complete awareness in two perceptual systems or sensory orders simultaneously (the sensory order of one's own culture and that of the culture studied), and constantly comparing notes.

The procedure sketched above may be illustrated by taking the example of blood. Blood has a variety of sensory properties: it is warm, viscous, red, salty and odorous. The salience of these properties, however, depends on the sensory order within which they are perceived. Thus, North Americans tend to think of blood in terms of its visual appearance, its redness. In South India, practitioners of Siddha medicine give priority to the tactile dimension of blood; the pulse it produces within the body (Daniel, ch. 7). This holds true in Guatemala as well, although there the pulse is said to be the 'voice' of blood, suggesting an audio-tactile perceptual framework (Tedlock 1982: 53, 134). Among the Ainu of Japan, it is the odour of blood that is most salient, as the smell of blood is thought to repel spirits (Ohnuki-Tierney 1981: 97). In the myth of the Wauwalak sisters as told in northern Australia, there is reference to both the smell of blood and to 'blood containing sound' (Berndt 1951: 44), which implies an audio-olfactory bias. As this brief survey illustrates, a single substance or object may figure very differently in different sensory imaginaries. But by using one's imagination judiciously, which is to say multi-modally, it is possible to bracket or suspend one's 'natural' way of perceiving the world, and allow these other ways of sensing, with their own biases, to inform one's consciousness. That is the essence of 'being of two sensoria' about things. One thing we must say is that developing such a capacity can be a source of many delights, as well as insights into how other cultures construct the world.

### Doing Library Research

If one's research is to be based on textual sources, the best method is to select an ethnography, or other piece of literature (e.g., an African novel, a life history), or even a film, and proceed as follows:

- a) Extract all the references to the senses or sensory phenomena from the source in question.
- b) Divide the references into intra-modal sets, and analyse the data pertaining to each modality individually after the manner of the essays by Feld, Daniel, and Kuipers in part II of this book.
- c) Analyse the relations between the modalities with regard to how each sense contributes to the meaning of experience in the culture, using the questions in 'A Paradigm for Sensing' (see the following part) as a guide.
- d) Conclude with a statement of the hierarchy or order of the senses for the culture. Andermann's reading of Evon Vogt's *Tortillas for the Gods* (ch. 16) is exemplary in all of these respects. Note especially how the sketch of the Zinacanteco sensory order with which she concludes her piece allows for comparison with other sources on the Zinacanteco, as well as other cultures.

If one is relying on a text, there is always the problem of how the ethnographer's own sensory biases may have influenced the selection and presentation of the material. Such biases are, at times, evident in the particular focus of the ethnography; for example, it may be on linguistics, or music, or the visual arts. At other times, one can see that the ethnographer has emphasized certain of the culture's sensory expressions and excluded others according to the sensory model of his or her own culture. In such cases one will only be able to analyse the role of those senses which were brought out by the ethnographer. Such a problem can sometimes be resolved by examining other ethnographies on the same culture, as Pinard (ch. 15) does in his critical reading of Eck's book *Darśan*. Note: This section provides a good framework for a research paper assignment, and has been so used in courses in anthropology and religion at both Concordia and McGill. It helps if students are presented with a list of sensory-minded ethnographies to choose from, such as Boddy (1989), Katz (1982), Reichard (1974), and Roseman (1991). Also, it facilitates marking if students are asked to incorporate all four stages of the research (i.e., steps a) to d) above) into their final presentations.

## A Paradigm for Sensing

In this part, each section will begin with a series of questions which introduce the sorts of considerations one would want to bear in mind in turning to examine a given cultural domain, such as language, body decoration, or the built environment, for information on a culture's sensory profile. The questions are followed by commentaries which elaborate on some of the ways in which the facts revealed in the course of a sensory analysis of a culture might be interpreted.

### 1. Language

- *What words exist for the different senses?*
- *Which sensory perceptions have the greatest vocabulary allotted them (sounds, colours, odours)?*
- *How are the senses used in metaphors and expressions?*

The way the senses are used in the language of a culture can reveal a good deal about that culture's sensory model. In the following discussion, we shall focus on the similarities and differences between Quechua, the language spoken in the central Andes, and English. (The Quechua material is derived from González Holguín [1952].)

The level of onomatopoeia in a language may indicate the relative importance of aurality. In some cases the onomatopoeia is obvious, for example, *achini* in Quechua, 'to sneeze,' while in other cases it is more difficult to determine: Is the word *otoronco*, Quechua for jaguar, meant to imitate the jaguar's roar? In any event, it appears customary in most languages for words which represent sounds to imitate those sounds, as in 'crack' or 'thud.' When an object or action which is multisensory, however, such as an animal, is represented by a word which mimics the sound it makes, this would seem to point to an auditory bias in that culture. Similarly, if things are usually named according to their visual appearance this indicates a visual bias, and so on. In Western languages words for objects are usually not based on any of their sensory qualities, or if they originally were, they no longer evoke these qualities for us. Perhaps this indicates a 'de-sensualizing' and 'abstracting' of the environment in order to render it more accessible to detached manipulation.

Some words imitate the sound supposedly produced by a certain sensation, for example, 'ugh' and 'ugly.' In many cases this may be cross-cultural. For instance, the word 'aha' is used to express a sudden experience of enlightenment in Quechua and in Western languages. Other words try to convey certain kinetic sensations, such as 'slip.' Visual qualities can also be indicated; for example, the word 'glossy' is probably

meant to convey the impression of a shiny surface. In *The Unity of the Senses*, Lawrence Marks (1982) refers to studies which show that people associate certain vowel sounds with 'brightness' and others with 'dullness.' It is difficult to find examples of this happening with tastes or smells. Does 'sweet' have a sweet sound? Most examples of this kind of synaesthesia in English apparently occur with words referring to tactile sensations: 'prickly,' 'smooth,' 'mush.' This suggests that tactile and aural sensations have a certain closeness for English-speakers. Finally, certain sounds may be used to express value judgments. In English, for instance, many words starting with 'sl' have the sense of a metaphorical slippage, as in 'slut' and 'sly.'

The importance of a sensory organ can be revealed in part by the number of words used to describe it. In Quechua there are separate terms for outer ear, inner ear, upper ear, and lower ear; outer and inner mouth and upper and inner lip; etc. The spaces between the sensory organs – that is, the space between the nose and the mouth and the space between the eyes – also have their own terms. This may simply express a preoccupation with spatial divisions; however, it likely affects the understanding of the senses as well. The concern for in-between spaces in Quechua, for example, suggests a parallel concern for how the senses relate to each other, rather than an emphasis on sensory organs as independent entities.

Terms which are used for the different senses provide the most basic source of knowledge on how the senses are understood through language. In Quechua there is a special word to indicate one who uses his senses sharply, and verbs to express the subtle use of all of the senses: *ccazcachini mallini*, 'to taste subtly'; *ccazcachini uyarini*, 'to hear subtly'; etc. Undoubtedly, keen sensory ability is of importance in this culture. There are also words to express the loss of each of the senses through old age.

The number of terms for each of the senses is an indicator of the relative importance of that sense, or else of the different ways in which it is understood to operate. In Quechua there are verbs meaning 'to smell any smell,' 'to smell a good smell,' 'to smell a bad smell,' 'to give a bad smell to others,' 'to smell naturally bad,' 'to leave a good smell,' 'to come across the remains of a smell,' 'to let oneself be smelled,' etc. This implies that smell is highly important for Quechua speakers. However, the virtual absence of reference to smell in Andean myths indicates that, while smell may be important on a practical or popular level, it is less so at the level of symbols.

Metaphors for the senses provide further information on how they are perceived and valued. In Quechua these metaphors generally follow

those in Western languages; for example, 'to smell' can mean 'to discover.' Of particular importance in this regard is to determine which sense is most associated with knowledge and understanding.

The structure of the verbs used for the different senses can also be informative. Does each sense have a separate single word? Are compound words used for some of the senses? Finally, it can be useful to look at related words. In Quechua, for instance, the verb 'to see,' *ricuni*, is very close to the verb 'to go,' *riccuni*. This perhaps expresses the distance involved in sight, or that seeing is a kind of vicarious going. As always, sensory metaphors must be understood within the cultural context. An association between 'hearing' and 'obeying,' for example, might indicate a positive valuation of hearing in a culture in which obedience is highly valued, but a negative valuation in one in which individual initiative is stressed.

## 2. *Artefacts and Aesthetics*

- *What do a culture's aesthetic ideals suggest about the value it attaches to the different senses?*
- *How are the senses represented and evoked in or by a culture's artefacts?*
- *How may other senses be involved in the coding, or essential to the decoding, of representations that appear primarily visual or auditory?*
- *What does putting a non-Western artefact 'on display' in a museum do to its sense(s)? How should such artefacts be presented?*

In the West, aesthetic ideals are primarily visual: beauty is first and foremost beauty of appearance (Synnott 1989, 1990). In other cultures the concept of beauty may involve various senses. For the Shipibo-Conibo of Eastern Peru, for instance, an aesthetic experience, denoted by the term *quiquin* which means both 'aesthetic' and 'appropriate,' involves pleasant auditory, olfactory, or visual sensations (Gebhart-Sayer 1985).

Although all cultures would seem to have some concept of beauty, most non-Western cultures have no term for 'art,' nor do they privilege the attitude of detached contemplation once thought so essential to the 'aesthetic experience' by Western art critics. 'Art' is used rather than viewed, and the conception of beauty which goes along with this is dynamic rather than static (Witherspoon 1977). Navajo sand paintings are a case in point. Photographs of these paintings taken by tourists or art collectors capture the whole of the design from above. The Navajo, however, never see the paintings from that perspective. They situate

themselves *within* the painting. When a sand painting is used in a healing ritual, the person to be healed, or 're-created' as the Navajo say, actually sits in the painting. Sand is taken from the bodies of the holy people represented in the drawing and pressed on the body of the ill person (Gill 1987: 37–40). Thus, while outside observers see the sand paintings as visual objects, for the Navajo their tactile dimension is, in fact, more important.

The idea of sensing a painting 'from within it, being surrounded by it' (Gill 1987: 39), as the Navajo do, is foreign to conventional Western aesthetic sensibilities. Contemplation is encouraged (at the expense of participation) by rules like: 'Do not touch the exhibit!' The disengagement of all the senses, save for sight, is also encouraged by the technique of linear perspective drawing, as discussed by Howes in the Introduction. This technique is foreign to most non-Western cultures. Among the Tsimshian of the Northwest Coast, for example, one finds a style, known as 'split representation,' that is the virtual antithesis of linear perspective vision. Consider the representation of Bear taken from a Tsimshian housefront in Figure 1.

If we ask 'What is the point of view expressed in this representation?' we are forced to admit that it does not have one, but many, as many as there are sides to Bear. The animal has, in fact, been cut from back to front and flattened so that we see both sides of Bear at once, as well as the back, which is indicated by the jagged outlines meant to represent its hair (Boas 1955: 225). Since *we* know that one cannot see an object from all sides at once, we conclude that the artist 'lacked perspective.' But what we ought to be asking ourselves is how the artist's hand might have been guided by the multidirectional world of the ear rather than the unidirectional world of the eye, given that his culture is an oral-aural one.

In effect, the Tsimshian 'wraparound' representation of Bear corresponds to the experience of sound, which also envelops and surrounds one (Ihde 1976). The 'ear-minded' Tsimshian would thus seem to transpose visual imagery into auditory imagery in their visual art. To understand that art involves what Edmund Carpenter has described as 'hearing with the eye' (1972: 30).

A more explicit example of an auditory-based visual representation is found in the intricate geometric designs of the Shipibo-Conibo. These designs, which are kept by the Shipibo-Conibo in glyphic books and used extensively in the decoration of artefacts and clothes, are said to embody songs. During the healing ritual the shaman, in a hallucinogenic trance, perceives these designs floating downwards. When the designs reach the shaman's lips he sings them into songs. On coming into contact



FIGURE 1  
Tsimshian representation of Bear  
(After Boas 1955: 225)

with the patient, the songs once again turn into designs which penetrate the patient's body and heal the illness. These design-songs also have an olfactory dimension, as their power is said to reside in their 'fragrance' (Gebhart-Sayer 1985).

Geometric designs are also used extensively by the Desana of Colombia, who, like the Shipibo-Conibo, associate them with a series of sensory manifestations. The symbolic significance of Desana baskets and mats, for instance, lies not only in the design of their weave, but also in their specific odour and texture (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1985a). It is telling of the extent to which we in the West live under the thrall of the visual that, although the multisensory nature of Desana baskets is evident, while that of the Shipibo-Conibo designs is not, most Westerners would be as unlikely to pick up on the non-visual significance of the former as they would that of the latter.

Just as artefacts and designs can have sensory significance beyond the

visual, so can music have sensory significance beyond the auditory. One example of this is the design-songs described above. Another is that of Desana instrumental music, discussed by Classen in chapter 17, which interrelates all of the senses. The music of the Kogi of Colombia has a specifically tactile aspect, because, for the Kogi, sacred songs are 'threads' which tie one to benevolent forces (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1974: 298). Artefacts and aesthetic manifestations, therefore, may well evoke sensory associations or resonances far beyond those immediately apparent to the outside observer.

Masks provide other kinds of information about a culture's sensory order. As Edmund Carpenter (1972: 22) notes with regard to the use of masks in West Africa: 'West African dancers and singers close their eyes partially or wholly. The masks they wear are similarly carved. Masks with open, staring eyes are rare and usually covered by hanging hemp or fur. Sight is deliberately muted.' By way of contrast to the downplaying of vision evidenced by West African masks, a positive emphasis on vision is manifested by the paper figures used ritually by the Otomi of Mexico. The Otomi only give eyes to those figures representing good beings, such as humans, thus according a high moral value to eyesight (Dow 1986: 103). Yet another contrast is presented by the masks which the Kalapalo of Brazil make to represent powerful spirits. Kalapalo spirit masks emphasize all of the senses: eyes are fashioned from mother-of-pearl, ears protrude, noses are long, and the tongue and breath are represented by a pair of red cotton strings hanging from the mouth. This is because powerful spirits are said to be 'hyperanimate,' and thus possess extraordinary sensory powers. The particular auditory bias of the Kalapalo is evidenced, however, in the fact that the most important distinguishing characteristic of powerful spirits is their ability to create music (Basso 1985: 70, 245-7).

Given all that has just been said, it should be apparent that when artefacts are put on display in museums they are stripped of much of their sense. Can their sense be preserved rather than reified in museum exhibits? If so, how? Would it help to affix a note explaining the other sensory dimensions of the artefact? Or, should curators stop at nothing less than re-creating the total sensory environment in which the artefact was originally used? What might be the drawbacks of providing simulations of the latter sort (see Baudrillard 1983; Ames 1985: 10)? The problem raised here can be focused by setting oneself the task of designing an exhibit for a Kaluli drum, bearing in mind everything noted by Steven Feld in his chapter in part II.

The preceding discussion is somewhat one-sided, insofar as it has concentrated on how non-Western artefacts are perceived by Western

observers. In the interest of balance, one should also examine how Western artefacts are perceived according to the sensory models of other cultures. In *A Musical View of the Universe*, for instance, Ellen Basso relates that her glasses were understood by a member of the 'ear-minded' Kalapalo, not in terms of their visual function, but in terms of the sound they made on being put on: 'nnguruk' (1985: 64).

### 3. *Body Decoration*

- *What can the ways in which a culture decorates and deforms (reforms) the human body tell us about that culture's sensory order?*
- *Are any of the sense organs physically emphasized through the use of earrings, nose-rings, scarification, paint, etc.?*
- *Which senses figure foremost in cultural ideals of personal beauty?*

The topic of body decoration is closely related to the previous section on artefacts and aesthetics. A culture's ideals of personal beauty are influenced by its aesthetic ideals, and the ways in which bodies are decorated are often similar to the ways in which artefacts are decorated. The designs which the Shipibo-Conibo use to decorate artefacts and clothes, for instance, are also painted on the faces of members of the tribe for healing and festive purposes (Gebhart-Sayer 1985).

Body decorations (ornaments, scars) can seem purely 'cosmetic,' but they frequently convey information about group identity and social status as well. At a deeper level, they may serve to 'embody' a particular sensory order, as Seeger (1975) found among the Suyu of Brazil. As will be recalled from our discussion in chapter 11, among the Suyu ear-discs serve to emphasize the cultural importance of hearing and moral behaviour while lip-discs are associated with speaking, singing and aggression.

An interesting variation on the Suyu example is presented by the Dogon of Mali. Among the Dogon, a girl's 'education in speaking' begins at age three with the piercing of a hole and the insertion of a metal ring in her lower lip. This is followed by the piercing of her ears at age six. If she continues to make grammatical errors or utter uncouth remarks by age twelve, then rings are inserted in the septum and wings of her nose (Calame-Griaule 1986: 308–10). For those who come from cultures which do not postulate any connection between the organ of smell and speech, this practice will be found difficult to comprehend. For the Dogon, however, 'Despite its invisible nature, [speech] has material properties that are more than just sound ... [It] has an "odour"; sound and odour having vibration as their common origin, are so near to one

another that the Dogon speak of "hearing a smell" (Calame-Griaule 1986: 39 and 48, n. 69). Thus, according to Dogon conceptions, words may be classified by smell. Good words smell 'sweet,' and bad words smell 'rotten,' which explains the practice of operating on the nose so as to encourage the reception and utterance of 'good-smelling words' and the repression or deflection of bad ones. We may conclude that the Dogon (unlike the Suya) regard smell, speech, and hearing as equally 'social faculties.' At least ideally: 'the mouth too ready to speak is likened to the rectum' (Calame-Griaule 1986: 320). In other words, bad or impetuous speech is synonymous with flatulence.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes it may take some probing to discover the deeper sense of what are ostensibly 'beauty marks.' To take an example from Western culture, the artificial beauty spots which were so popular in Enlightenment France, and which we think of as purely visual, were in fact always dipped in perfume giving them an olfactory dimension (Genders 1972: 129). In modern Africa, the Tiv of Nigeria have a special marking called 'catfish' which is incised on a young woman's belly. When confronted with the suggestion that the designs were not purely decorative, but rather symbolic of the girls' biological roles as wives and mothers (i.e., their fertility), the Tiv more or less agreed: 'They said that the scars are tender for some years after they are made and these artificial erogenous zones make women sexier and hence more fertile' (Brain 1979: 78). Note how the Tiv give a tactile meaning to the visual markings. What we would also note is that the heightened cutaneous awareness such markings make possible is consistent with other facts about Tiv society. Kinaesthetic awareness also appears to have been developed to a remarkably high degree in this culture: 'Those of us brought up in the northern European tradition are underdeveloped rhythmically. We have a single beat that we dance to, whereas the Tiv ... have four drums, *one for each part of the body*. Each drummer beats out a different rhythm; talented dancers move to all four' (Hall 1977: 77-8). Is the Tiv case unique, or are scarification and related forms of body decoration normally found in those cultures which place a premium on 'bodily intelligence'?

#### 4. *Child-rearing Practices*

- Which of the senses do caretakers stress or repress the most in raising children? Touch, taste, hearing?
- Do the socialization practices emphasize self-control or self-indulgence, individuality or conformity?

- *Are these emphases reversed or altered at any stage of a child's development?*
- *Is the primary means of education visual, oral, kinaesthetic? How are children taught to conform to their culture's sensory order?*

The first moments and months of a child's existence are of paramount importance with respect to shaping the sensory orientation that individual will manifest for the rest of his or her life. In North American society, it is customary for the newborn to be separated from its mother, clothed, and put to sleep in a crib. In other cultures, infants are virtually always in contact with the skin of some caretaker or other. The communication styles of adults have been shown to reflect these early childhood experiences (Montagu 1978). For example, North American society is an extreme example of a 'non-contact culture,' in that there is considerably less sensory involvement, eye contact, and touching, and relatively greater interpersonal distance, during social interaction, than in, for example, most African societies, where child-rearing practices tend to be more tactile.

Socialization practices have also been found to influence 'perceptual style' (Wober, ch. 2). For example, the Inuit perform better on Witkin's Embedded Figure tests, and thus manifest greater 'field independence,' than the Temne of Sierra Leone. Temne child-rearing practices tend to be strict, and emphasize conformity; those of the Inuit are more lenient and foster individuality. The greater ability on the part of Inuit subjects to disembed figures from surrounding fields (i.e., to experience items as separate from context) may thus be related to the greater likelihood for a sense of separate identity to emerge in Inuit society than in Temne society (Berry 1966).

Of course, the Embedded Figure test only pertains to differentiation in the visual field. As far as the Temne are concerned, it may simply be that vision is not a field of 'productive specialization' (in Ong and Wober's sense) for them, because they attach more importance to discrimination in the auditory or proprioceptive field. This possibility must always be borne in mind. It is best gauged by examining the *full* range of educational practices in place in the society, as well as the amount of time allotted to each of them. Thus, in some cultures children are taught how to dance from an early age, in others to recite sacred texts from memory.<sup>5</sup> Or again, in some cultures children (and adults) are told what to do, in others they are shown what to do. Thomas Gregor writes of the Mehinaku of the Brazilian Amazon: 'The villagers are given to the use of visual aids in teaching. Whenever I failed to follow an explanation of a ritual or custom, I was urged to wait until I could see

it; then I would understand. The Mehinaku teach physical skills ... by having the pupil look on as the work is performed. There are ... occasional verbal explanations but these are a relatively small part of the teaching process' (1977: 40). Different techniques may be used according to the nature of the material which is being communicated. Among the Yanoama of the Brazilian Amazon, for example, shamanistic knowledge can only be communicated in the darkness, thus a shaman speaks only at night (Biocca 1970: 72).

Children do not always manifest the same sensory order as adults. For example, it has often been observed that North American children have a greater interest in odours and tastes than do North American adults (Porteus 1990: 145–73). Among the Inuit, the self-control manifested by adults contrasts with the self-indulgence of infants. Inuit children are characterized by their 'touchability.' They are 'cuddled, cooed at, talked to and played with endlessly' (Briggs 1970: 71). When they cry they are instantly comforted, either through touch or through food. Indeed, nearly all delicacies are saved to be given to children for this purpose. Touch and taste, therefore, are given free rein in infancy.

As an Inuit child passes infancy, she or he is expected to learn to suppress the senses of taste and touch. Jean Briggs notes several examples of this among the Utku. When a new child is born, its older sibling is discouraged from breastfeeding by the mother as follows: 'Your little sister has nursed and gotten the breast and the inside of the parka all shitty and stinky; it smells [and tastes, one word has both meanings] horrible' (Briggs 1970: 158). Similarly, being poked in various parts of the body is a favourite game with infants. Older children, however, are warned: 'Watch out, your uncle's going to poke you if you don't cover up and get dressed!' (Briggs 1970: 149). Thus, older children are taught to regard as unpleasant sensations which they formerly regarded as highly pleasurable. Touch, in particular, is greatly restricted after the period of infancy. Briggs writes: 'Utku husbands and their wives, children older than five or six and their parents, never embrace or kiss ... and rarely touch one another in any way, except insofar as they lie under the same quilts at night' (1970: 117).

The senses which are developed in adults are sight, so necessary for hunting and other practical endeavours, and above all hearing, by which oral traditions are passed on (Carpenter 1973: 26, 33). People in Inuit society are therefore trained to grow out of the 'infantile' senses of touch and taste into the 'practical' sense of sight and the 'social' sense of hearing. Many cultures mark such an entrance into the adult sensory and social order by a specific rite, as in the case of the Barasana male puberty rite described in the section on cosmology (see below).

### 5. *Alternative Sensory Modes*

- *What exceptions to the dominant sensory model exist within a society?*
- *Are different ways of sensing attributed to or manifested by women and men?*
- *How are persons with sensory handicaps treated?*

In the previous section we saw that children sometimes manifest a markedly different sensory order than adults. Women also frequently manifest a sensory order which differs from the dominant one. Women and men are commonly held to perceive the world in different ways, with the male way usually being normative and the female way a complementary adjunct at best, and an aberration at worst. Different sensory characteristics are often attributed to men and women as well. Among the Hua of Papua New Guinea, for instance, the inside of the male body is considered to be white, hard, and odourless, that of the female body to be dark, juicy, and fetid (Meigs 1984: 127). In the Amazon, men are commonly thought to be cold and women to be hot (e.g., S. Hugh-Jones 1979: 111), while the reverse holds true for the indigenous cultures of Mexico (e.g., Lopez Austin 1988: 53). All of these characteristics, of course, are associated with fundamental cultural values.

Those rites which initiate a girl or boy into the adult world often serve as initiations into a particular, gender-determined sensory order. The Yanoama, for instance, believe that a woman should not speak with a louder voice than a man's, i.e., that she should not assert herself (Biocca 1970: 136). During the female puberty rite, consequently, a girl will be shut in a cage and not allowed to speak for three weeks. After this time, she may begin to speak, but only very softly. At the moment of re-emergence, her lips and ears are pierced (Biocca 1970: 82), which undoubtedly serves to mark the socialization of her speech and hearing according to the 'correct' female sensory order.

Aside from, but related to, these sensory differences arbitrarily imposed upon the sexes by culture, are the differences in sensory orders which women and men may actually (as opposed to theoretically) manifest. Among the Desana, for instance, the male sensory order is characterized by an emphasis on transcendent sight acquired through narcotic visions. Women, who are not allowed to take narcotics, appear to have a sensory order which emphasizes senses other than sight – in particular, touch (Classen, ch. 17).

Such sensory distinctions are related, it goes without saying, to the social distinctions made by a culture between different groups, as well as to the different practices of such groups. Some of the groups within

society which may manifest alternative sensory modes include: religious specialists, outcasts, and, in larger societies, the ruling and working classes and ethnic groups. Among the ancient Nahuas of Mexico, for example, nobles had 'the right to eat human flesh, to drink pulque and cacao, to smell fragrant flowers, and to be given the gift of aromatic burning incense' (Lopez Austin 1988: 393).

The reactions displayed by a culture to the real or imagined sensory differences of persons from other cultures can also prove revealing of local sensory preferences. The Sharanahua of Peru, for example, see westernized Peruvians as 'speakers of another language, eaters of disgusting animals like cows, potential cannibals with enormous sexual appetites' (Siskind 1973: 49). Anthony Seeger reports that the Suyu regarded his practice of taking notes as evidence that his ears were 'swollen,' for the Suyu believe that knowledge is acquired and retained by the ear, not the eye (Seeger 1987: 11).

The treatment a culture accords to persons with sensory handicaps, notably the blind and the deaf, is especially revealing. While one must keep in mind that blindness is a handicap even in the most auditory of societies (because of the practical value of sight), it may be much less of a handicap in some cultures than in others. In certain cultures blind persons may be thought to compensate for their sightlessness by being clairvoyant, or by having supernatural powers of hearing (Paulson 1987: 5-6). Indeed, the different modes of perceiving of persons with sensory handicaps can in themselves form the basis of a fascinating study (see Sacks 1985 and 1989).

Finally, alternative sensory modes often come into play when people are rebelling against some aspect of their existence. Among the Inuit, for example, who regard excessive emotions of all kinds as dangerous, anger is usually expressed by withdrawal and rejection of all sensory stimuli. Jean Briggs gives an example of this among the Utku Inuit of the Northwest Territories: 'In such moods [of anger] Raigili might stand for an hour or more facing the wall, her arms withdrawn from her sleeves - the latter pose a characteristic Utku expression of hunger, cold, fatigue, and grief. If her mother tried to tempt her with a piece of jammy bannock [cake] she dropped it or ignored it. If her father tried to move her she was limp in his hands' (Briggs 1970: 137). Another example of this rejection of external stimuli is the case of an adolescent girl in the same community who, intensely unhappy, pretended to be deaf for a summer (Briggs 1970: 137). Such withdrawal can also take the form of sleep. Sleeping long hours is a characteristic sign among the Inuit of an emotional disturbance (Briggs 1970: 281).

Varieties of sensory experience thus exist not only among cultures, but also within cultures.

### 6. *Media of Communication*

- *What media does a society use for communication? Is the dominant medium the spoken word, the written word, the printed word, or the electronic 'bit'? What other kinds of sensory codes are employed?*
- *How do members of the culture react when exposed to new communications media?*
- *If the culture manifests a preference for some media of communication over others, which senses are engaged the most and how?*

It is important to analyse the *full* range of media used for communication in the culture – music, dance, food, perfumes, designs, writing, television, etc. – and not simply those which have to do with the transmission of 'the Word.'<sup>6</sup> The so-called 'orality/literacy divide' has been shown to be misleading. As the essays in this book attest, oral cultures can be quite diverse in their sensory and symbolic systems, as can literate cultures. Furthermore, not all cultures which possess writing are literate to the same degree or in the same ways (Scribner and Cole 1981). Among the Hanunoo of the Philippines, for instance, writing is used almost exclusively for romantic purposes (Frake 1983: 340). In general, one may expect a culture which is predominantly oral to manifest an auditory bias and one which is predominantly literate to manifest a visual bias. However, this is at best a preliminary typology which must be supplemented by the study of the full range of media used in a society and how they interact with one another.<sup>7</sup>

Reactions upon first exposure to Western communications media can serve as a litmus test of a culture's sensory order. Thus, a Tully River Aborigine, seeing whites communicate with each other by means of written marks on paper, put a letter to his ear 'to see if he could understand anything by that method' (Chamberlain 1905: 126). As one would expect, in the local language, 'to understand' is expressed by the same verb as 'to hear.' Such reactions can also shed light on our own sensory order. For example, the naivety of the Western belief in the 'truth of photography' is nicely brought out in the story of the Tanzinian chief who, when shown various photos, 'recognized some of the pictures of animals ... but invariably looked at the back of the paper to see what was there, and remarked that he did not consider them finished since they did not give the likeness of the other side of the animal' (Wober 1975: 80). This clash of expectations is instructive: the chief expected

the picture to show what he *knew* about the animal in question (namely, that it has more than one side), whereas we are satisfied with being shown only what one can *see*.

Such inventions as the telephone and television might seem to have extended the scope of human communication to an unprecedented degree, but it is important to recognize how they also limit human communication by occluding other channels of sensory awareness. Cultures which do without these particular means of communication exploit other media – that is, they extend their senses in other ratios, which may be equally complex. Odour communication is very important to the Desana, for instance, who admire and elaborate on the use of odours by animals (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1985b). The Murngin of northern Australia have evolved an intriguing ‘audio-olfactory’ sort of technique for communicating with whales. As one informant told Warner: ‘we can take sweat from under our arms and put our hands in the water, and we can put that water in our mouths and sing out the power names of that whale. It is just the same as if we were asking him for something’ (1958: 354–7). In a related form of communication found among a neighbouring people, the members of one moiety rub the sweat from their armpits on the eyes of the other moiety to enable the latter to ‘see with sacredness’ (Berndt 1951: 44).

As these examples suggest, there exist many possible ways of combining the senses for purposes of communication, and the audio-visual is but one among them.<sup>8</sup> The extent to which this particular combination (the audio-visual) has been developed in the West reflects the depth of our commitment to a particular ‘régime of sensory values’ (Corbin 1986), one which, significantly, privileges the distance senses. The Murngin and their neighbours have experimented with other ratios, the audio-olfactory and the olfacto-visual, and they evidently enjoy a very different mode of relating self to self, and self to world, in consequence.

### *7. Natural and Built Environment*

- *Does the natural environment call for the exercise of some senses more than others, and if so in what ways?*
- *How does the layout of the community influence sensory perception? Is the home sealed off from the outside world or is there an interchange of sensory perceptions?*
- *Does the home consist of only one room or are there separate rooms for different activities? Does the family sleep together or separately?*

Perception, like cognition, must be studied in its ‘natural setting’ (Berry

et al. 1988). Perceptual experiments carried out in psychology laboratories yield clear results. Try carrying out the same experiment in the midst of a Moroccan bazaar, the Arctic tundra, the Sepik River region of Papua New Guinea – suffice it to say, the results will not be the same. The point here is that the natural environment *does* influence perception. It may call for the use of some senses more than others, or in any event in different ways from our own, as Gilbert Lewis found in the course of his fieldwork among the Gnaou of Papua New Guinea:

Although it is usually easy to walk through the forest, there are no perspectives, no open views ... The light is dimmed and greenish ... Occasionally one passes through a path of unmoving air faintly scented by some plant like honey-suckle; one passes transient smells, of humus, of moist rotting wood or bruised fruits. The Gnaou people are alert to smell ... in some cases they use scent to decide the identification of trees or shrubs, scraping or cutting the bark ... The canopy and confusion of trees alters sounds and calls, limiting and muffling them, but as though enclosed in a leafy hall, the sharp screech or squawks from a nearby bird sound echoes in one's ears. I found the localization of forest sounds difficult, ... although the native people were accurate in pointing to the direction and finding them. They excel in identifying bird calls. (Lewis 1976: 46)

Lewis's account of how the environment affects the senses agrees in an interesting way with the privileging of the auditory and olfactory modalities in the context of ritual communication, and as metaphors for cognition, in other New Guinea societies (Howes ch. 11).<sup>9</sup> However, as Classen points out in chapter 17, cultures may seek to compensate for the restrictions imposed upon the senses by the environment. A society in which the availability of odours and flavours is limited by nature, for example, may value these all the more because of their scarcity. Witness the high value accorded to Eastern spices in the Europe of the Middle Ages (Clair 1961: 15). Therefore, contrary to Berry (1966, 1975), we would hold that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the characteristics of a culture's physical environment (e.g., arctic tundra vs. tropical forest) and its cognitive style (e.g., field-independent vs. field-dependent).

The built environment also influences perception. In a classic study, Segal et al. (1966) demonstrated that the fact of living in a 'carpentered world' as opposed to a 'circular' one (like that of the Zulu, with their oval huts and compounds) makes a person more susceptible to the Sander Parallelogram illusion (see Figure 2).

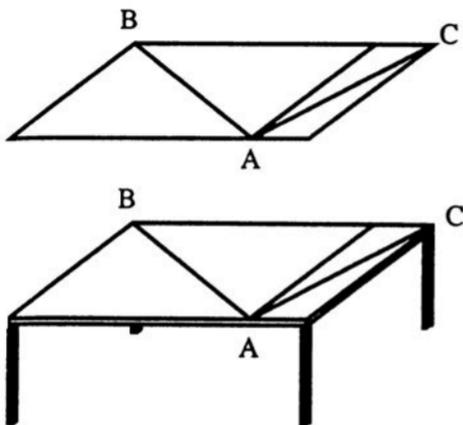


FIGURE 2

The Sander parallelogram. The respondent is asked: 'Which of the two lines, AB or AC, is shorter?' (See discussion at page 288.) (After J.B. Deregowski, *Illusions, Patterns and Pictures: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* [New York: Academic Press, 1980], 14)

The built environment can also be analysed as a projection of a given culture's sensory profile. We think of Michel Foucault's (1979) insightful analysis of how Bentham's design for a prison, the Panopticon, has been generalized to encompass other spaces (the hospital, the school), such that we moderns live in a 'society of surveillance.' By contrast, for the Suya, 'the sonic transparency of their community makes of their village a concert hall' (Seeger 1987: xiv). For the Inuit, 'visually and acoustically the igloo is "open," a labyrinth alive with the movements of crowded people' (Carpenter 1973: 25).

The construction of the built environment in the image of a culture's sensory profile is apparent in the nineteenth-century English and French bourgeois fetish for balconies: 'From the balcony, one could gaze, but not be touched' (Stallybrass and White 1986: 132). It is also apparent in the proliferation of rooms within the bourgeois dwelling. This multiplication had the effect of privatizing what were once more social functions (the preparation and consumption of food, the elimination of bodily wastes, sleeping) by confining each to a separate room (Corbin 1986; Howes 1989). The fragmented (as opposed to synaesthetic) understanding of the sensorium with which we moderns operate is at least partly attributable to this great nineteenth-century repartition of space and bodily functions. Imagine the intermingling of sensations that would result from simply removing some of the inner walls we have built up.

## 8. Rituals

- *In ritual settings, is any sense usually more engaged than others, for example, sight by costumes and dance, hearing by speeches and music?*
- *Are any senses suppressed in order to privilege other senses?*
- *Is there a sequence to how the senses are engaged or alternately extinguished in a ritual?*
- *Is the ritual specialist distinguished by the use of any one sense or particular combination of senses?*

It has frequently been noted that ritual communication takes place through physical demonstration: 'it concretely enacts assertions rather than simply referring to them in discourse' (Knauff 1985: 247). Many anthropologists have also drawn attention to the 'multi-channel character' of ritual communication (Leach 1976; Stone 1986). As Fredrik Barth (1975: 223) observes of ritual performance among the Baktaman of Papua New Guinea: 'Different aspects of a ritual performance reach the participant by way of each of his different senses; and the diversity of meaningful features and idioms is very great.'

Ideally, the ethnographer wants to attend to each and every message in each and every channel; for example, among the Baktaman, the smell of burning marsupial, the redness of the dancers, the different drum rhythms each invoking a different spirit, all contribute to the total meaning of the event. Regrettably, it is rarely possible for the ethnographer to attend to all these sensations at once. However, cultures also tend to be selective regarding the media they emphasize. The Suya, for instance, perform their major rituals at night, excluding the significant participation of vision and giving prominence to their ceremonial singing (Seeger 1981: 87). The Bosotho of southern Africa resort to 'played aurality' (as a matter of conscious preference to other sensory modes) to resolve situations of crisis (Adams 1986). The Moroccan ritual of silent wishes described by Griffin (ch. 14), where even speech is proscribed and everything centres around the burning of the seven kinds of incense, is a further example of a ritual which augments some meanings at the expense of others by restricting the number of sensory channels in use.

In addition to rituals which stimulate all the channels of sensory awareness at once,<sup>10</sup> and those which restrict them to a few, there are rituals that accentuate and suppress different modalities according to a certain sequence. We think of the Japanese midday tea ceremony (*shogo chaji*), a minutely prescribed rite, which takes from three to five hours to complete. In the tea ceremony, the 'progressive induction into ritual

time is reflected in an increasing emphasis on non-verbal modes of communication' (Kondo 1983: 297). Thus, conversation is permitted upon first entering the tea garden, but in the tea hut itself it is the burning incense, scrolls, and flower arrangements that set the tone. The moment of greatest symbolic intensity – imbibing the tea – is surrounded by silence. The whole purpose of this ritual is to instil a mental attitude of introspective 'emptiness' (Kondo 1983: 301); hence the sequencing of the sensations. In Japan to be introspective (which is *the Zen state*) is to close one's ears but keep one's other senses open. We close our eyes.

At the opposite extreme from the Japanese tea ceremony, which celebrates the senses in a determinate order, are those rituals designed to 'overcome' or 'vanquish' them, and thus pave the way for a transcendental experience. Valentine Daniel describes one such rite in *Fluid Signs* (1984). The ritual involved an arduous six-mile pilgrimage in honour of Lord Ayyappan (that was supposed to help the devotee achieve union with Ayyappan), which Daniel undertook with some Tamil friends. There is a definite sequence to the order in which the senses are 'merged' or 'collapsed' in the course of this ritual. As Daniel recounts, first hearing goes, then smell, then sight, then 'the sense organ *the mouth*' (taste and possibly speech), and finally, all these organs having 'merged' into the sense of touch (which itself feels nothing besides pain as of this late point), that sense too 'disappears,' along with any sense of self (Daniel 1984: 270–6).<sup>11</sup> This sequence may be read as an expression of the sensory profile of the Tamil culture of South India, hearing and touch being at opposite ends of the Tamil sensorium, the other senses in-between.

The rituals described above can be said to use techniques of 'sensory deprivation' to achieve their effects. As the sensory deprivation literature attests, restricting sensation in one channel enhances sensitivity in other channels as the sensorium seeks to recover 'sensoristasis' – that is, to compensate for the deficit (Zubek 1969). When all the senses are occluded, experimental subjects have been known to hallucinate sensations, or produce percepts from within, so as to fill the void. There is a further body of literature, less well known than the above, which concerns how applying a stimulus to one sensory channel can enhance perception in some other. For example, exposing subjects to the scent of cassia or vanillin facilitates the perception of the colour green while at the same time inhibiting the perception of red or violet (Allan 1971).

It would be interesting to analyse accounts of vision quests, shamanic flight, possession dances, and the like in the light of this literature on the application of sensory restriction and cross-modal enhancement

techniques to human subjects. Lisa Andermann's analysis of how the senses are combined in Ndembu rituals of divination (ch. 16) is a step in this direction. Another account is provided by Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, who describes the ways in which the Tukano restrict and stimulate the senses in order to have bright and pleasant narcotic visions:

In the first place, the participants should have observed sexual abstinence for several days before the event and should have consumed only a very light diet, devoid of peppers and other condiments. In the second place, physical exercise and profuse perspiration are thought to be necessary for the visionary experience ... Next, the amount and quality of light are said to influence the sensitiveness of the participants who occasionally should stare for a while into the red glow of the torch ... Finally, acoustical stimulations are said to be of importance. The sudden sound of the seed rattles, the shrill notes of a flute, or the long-drawn wails of the clay trumpets are said to release or to modify the luminous images. (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978a: 11)

Lastly, the sensory specializations of a culture's ritual experts can indicate which senses are considered most important by that culture. In chapter 17, Classen explores this topic in relation to the ritual experts of the Andes, who are characterized by their orality, and those of the Desana, who are characterized by their penetrating gaze. By contrast, the healers of the olfactory-conscious Warao of Venezuela must possess an acute sense of smell, as both diseases and the medicinal herbs which cure them are distinguished by their odours (Wilbert 1987). In cases where shamans or sorcerers are believed to stand outside society, their particular sensory characteristics can be considered to contradict the normative sensory model, as among the Suya of Brazil and the Wolof of Senegal (Howes, ch. 11).

## 9. *Mythology*

- *How is the world created? By sound, light, touch?*
- *What kinds of sensory descriptions are contained in the myths? Is there much visual description, interaction involving touch, dialogue?*
- *How are the senses of the first human beings portrayed? If there is a 'fall from grace,' does this come about through the misuse of any particular sense?*
- *Does a culture hero have acute eyesight, a keen sense of smell, superior strength, or any particular physical characteristics?*
- *How are myths passed on? Are they told or acted?*

The 'sensory codes' of diverse South American Indian myths have been analysed by Lévi-Strauss, and he has shown how the contrasts in one sensory modality can be transposed into those of another, after the manner of a fugue. What this form of analysis unfortunately leaves out is the whole question of the *value* attached to the different modalities in different societies; if factored in, these values might explain why, for example, in one of the myths discussed by Lévi-Strauss, the Opaye myth of 'How men lost their immortality,' death came because they smelled its stench, while in a Shipaya myth it came because people failed to detect its odour (see Lévi-Strauss 1969: 147–63).

A sensorial (as opposed to structural) anthropological analysis of myth would be attentive not only to how a culture 'thinks with' smells and tastes, and textures and sounds or colours, but also 'thinks in' or 'through' such media (see Jackson 1989: 137–55). Since Plato, as Synnott shows in his essay in part I, but particularly since the 'Enlightenment' (Ong 1967: 63, 221), the idiom of Western thought has been ocular.<sup>12</sup> It is hard for us to imagine the world in any other light.<sup>13</sup>

The Hopi do, however. The Hopi think 'in sound,' as Kathleen Buddle has shown in a recent article called 'Sound Vibrations' (1990), which analyses the Hopi Myth of Creation. In the myth, Spider Woman brings the Twins into being by chanting the Song of Creation over them, and then commands one of them to: 'Go about all the world and send out sound so that it may be heard throughout all the land.' The Twin goes out, and: 'All the vibratory centres along the earth's axis from pole to pole resounded his call; the whole earth trembled; the universe quivered in tune. Thus he made the whole world an instrument of sound' (Waters quoted in Buddle 1990: 10). It is consistent with Buddle's analysis that there are no 'things' – no tables or chairs, to use the standard example of Western philosophers – in the Hopi universe, only vibrations; hence the fact that in the Hopi language one speaks of 'tabling,' not 'a table,' and 'chairing,' not 'a chair' (Whorf 1956).

In the Hopi cosmogony the world is created by sound, whereas in the Desana cosmogony the world is created by the light of the sun. The emphasis on light in the latter myth agrees with the great importance the Desana accord to sight. However, in the Desana case, the sense which is most emphasized in creation is not the one most valued in society. Sight is the subject of immense symbolic elaboration in Desana culture, because of its prominent role in creation and perception, but hearing is ultimately of greater importance because of its association with comprehension (Classen, ch. 17).<sup>14</sup> Thus, the study of cosmogonies can provide a basis for a fuller, more nuanced understanding of the meaning of the senses in society.

Other kinds of myths can be read for information on a culture's sensory priorities in other ways. In many myths from the Massim region of Papua New Guinea, the ancestors of humanity lack mouths or digestive tracts. Food is simply dropped in a hole on top of the head and comes out of the anus still whole. These ancestral beings only become human when their mouths (and genital orifices) are cut or burst open, which normally occurs at the same time they acquire 'culture' or rules. Thus, according to Melanesian notions, the sensory order and the social order emerged together, and 'orality' is equally central to both. Put simply, 'to have a mouth' is to be 'civilized the Melanesian way' (Kahn 1986: 151–3). As Michael Young observes: 'The mouth, from which issues the magic which controls the world and into which goes the food which the world is manipulated to produce, is the principal organ of man's social being, the supremely instrumental orifice and channel for the communication codes of language and food' (1983: 172).

A culture's ideal sensory model can sometimes be inferred from the sensory abilities and qualities manifested by its culture heroes. In a Desana myth, for instance, Megadiame, an ant-man, is presented as eating only pure foods, having perfect face paintings, giving off the odour of herbs 'that induce respect and love,' making clear sounds while bathing, and singing and dancing well (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971: 267). In the myths of other cultures, a hero may display one or two outstanding sensory qualities, such as a beautiful appearance, clever speech, or remarkable sexual powers. In the case of a hero who is quick-witted, but has no particular sensory characteristics, one is led to wonder whether this may not be indicative of a certain 'desensualization' in the culture concerned. It is not only the direct employment of the senses and sensory stimuli in myths which should be attended to, but also their indirect use or exclusion. For example, a lack of visual description, such as we find in the Hausa 'Tale of Daudawar Batso' (Ritchie, ch. 12), implies a corresponding lack of interest in (or repression of) the visual.

Finally, it is essential to consider the means by, and context in which, myths are passed on. Are they read in private or told to a group? If the latter, are they usually told in the dark or in the light? Are they told before meals, during meals, after meals? Are they danced? Sung? Represented in pictures? What other sensory phenomena accompany their communication? Are the myths understood differently by different groups within society?

#### 10. *Cosmology*

– *How are sensory data used to order the world? Are things classified by their colour, shape, smell, texture, sound, taste?*

- *What symbolic use is made of the imagery of the senses?*
- *How are the 'soul' and 'mind' conceptualized? In which part of the body is the soul or mind thought to reside?*
- *What are the sensory characteristics of good or evil spirits?*
- *How are the senses elaborated in the afterlife? Is there a different sensory order from that of earthly life? Are sweet fragrances or good foods emphasized? Is there any sensory deprivation, such as darkness, silence, hunger?*

It has often been noted that non-Western cultures classify things by sound to a much greater extent than do Western cultures (Ohnuki-Tierney 1981; Schieffelin 1976). Even more pronounced, at least in certain parts, is the classification of things by smell or taste. The Batek Negrito of peninsular Malaysia classify virtually everything in their environment by smell, including the sun and the moon. The sun is said to have a bad smell, 'like that of raw meat,' while the moon has a good smell, 'like that of flowers' (Endicott 1979: 39).

This is not so much a case of the 'classificatory urge' (Lévi-Strauss 1966) gone wild as an index of the centrality of smell in the Batek sensorium. This smell-mindedness also distinguishes the Batek as a people from the other people of the Malay Peninsula (in a manner analogous to the way the differential extension of the senses by means of body decoration functions as a means of cultural differentiation in the Mato Grosso region of Brazil). For example, the neighbouring Chewong also pay close attention to odours. However, unlike the Batek, they have only to be careful that no two different foodstuffs be present *in the stomach* at the same time (Howell 1984: 231). The Batek must never so much as *cook* different species of meat at the same time, for fear that the mixing of smells would offend the nostrils of the Thunder deity, and bring calamity (Endicott 1979: 74). Thus, the order of both peoples' universes depends on keeping the categories of creation separate, but whereas in the Batek case the distinctions are expressed primarily in terms of ethereal odours, in the Chewong case the categories are more substantive, having to do with stuffs. The greater substantivism of the Chewong cosmology is consistent with the heightened visualism of Chewong epistemology, as discussed by Howes in chapter 11.

In the previous section on myths, the importance of examining how a culture thinks 'in' or 'through' the senses was underlined. To grasp the indigenous epistemology it also helps to study how the culture conceptualizes and localizes the 'soul' or 'mind' within the body. Not all cultures are agreed in this regard. The ancient Greeks associated the soul with the breath, the Mehinaku of Brazil place the soul in the eye

(Gregor 1985: 152), the Zinacanteco of Mexico, in the blood (Karasik 1988: 5). In the West, we think of the mind as residing in the head; the Uduk of the Sudan locate it in the stomach (James 1988: 69). According to the Aguaruna of the Amazon: 'The people who say that we think with our heads are wrong because we think with our hearts. The heart is connected to the veins, which carry the thoughts in the blood through the entire body. The brain is only connected to the spinal column, isn't it? So if we thought with our brains, we would only be able to move the thought as far as our anus?' (Brown 1985: 19). What different sensory priorities and modes of thinking are produced by these different localizations of being and thought within the body?

A culture's representations of spirits can be a good source of information on its sensory model. In cultures with a pronounced olfactory sensitivity, good spirits are often associated with good odours and evil spirits with bad odours (see Griffin, ch. 14). Care must be taken in analysing such material, however, for a one-to-one correspondence between the sensory profile of spiritual beings and the sensory order of human beings cannot be assumed. The fact that the chief deity of the Tarahumara of Mexico is blind, for instance, might lead one to think that the Tarahumara do not value sight. On the contrary, sight is of the utmost importance to the Tarahumara, since it enables them to provide the deity with game (which his blindness makes him unable to hunt for himself) and thus maintain a harmonious relationship between the supernatural and natural worlds (Kennedy 1978: 130).

The same caveat holds for the analysis of the role of the senses in the afterlife. Sometimes the imagined sensory gratifications and/or deprivations of the afterlife replicate the ideal sensory model, at others they invert it, while in still other cases the afterlife is simply a projection of what a culture imagines the sensory existence of a corpse or disembodied spirit to be. The Barasana of the Amazon, for instance, consider the world of the dead to be characterized by coldness, hardness, a strong odour, the separation of the sexes, and the consumption of 'spiritual' foods, such as coca, beer, and tobacco. To some degree this represents an ideal male sensory order, as men are supposed to be cold and hard. The complete realization of this sensory order, however, occurs only in the context of the male initiation rite. During this rite, initiates must have no contact with fire or women, only tobacco, coca, and beer are consumed, and strong-smelling beeswax is burnt. During ordinary life, the ideal sensory order in fact consists of a combination of hot and cold, regular foods and spiritual foods, and so on (C. Hugh-Jones 1979; S. Hugh-Jones 1979).

It is of particular interest to examine representations of the afterlife

in relation to the liturgy, or ritual life, of a given community. Sometimes it is possible to detect a sort of balance of opposites between the quality of worship and the vision of the afterlife. We think of the contrast between Islam, on the one hand, and Hinduism, on the other – Islam with its austere worship and sensual heaven, Hinduism with its sensual worship and ultimate transcendence or escape from sensation. Other religions appear to fall in-between these two extremes, such as some of the varieties of Christianity, where earthly liturgy and heavenly bliss mirror each other. Understanding the role of the senses in the afterlife postulated by a culture, therefore, requires first understanding the role of the afterlife in that culture.

### Epilogue

In this book, we have explored all sorts of different ways of combining and emphasizing the senses in culture. In the process we have disabused ourselves of the notion that the senses are 'windows' on the world and have come to realize that perception is not value-neutral: everywhere the sensory order is bound up with the cultural order in intimate ways. It is paradigmatic of the sensory order of our own culture that we have approached this variety of sensory experience through the visual medium of a book. We hope that in this case, however, the medium will *not* be the message, and that the essays contained in this volume will provide a basis and an impetus for an exploration of sensory patterns and combinations that go far beyond any of the reigning paradigms of textuality (see Howes 1990c).

The 'ethographer's ethnographer,' Bronislaw Malinowski, once invited book-bound anthropologists 'to step outside the closed study of the theorist into the open air of the Anthropological field' (Lessa and Vogt 1972: 63). It is not enough for anthropologists to leave behind their texts and step into the field, however, if their senses continue to be shuttered by visual metaphors and models such as that of the text. Our new invitation to anthropologists and students of culture is to step outside the closed visual model of the text into the open-ended, dynamic model of the sensory combinatory.

### Notes

- 1 The idea that human beings are equipped with five senses, not two or six, might seem obvious and beyond dispute, but it is in fact no less symbolic than the idea that there are two or six, since according to the latest scientific estimates there are seventeen senses (see Rivlin and Gravelle 1984).

- 2 For a tasteful critique of the Mackenzie Brown article see Pinard 1990.
- 3 How can one become aware of what one's own sensory biases are? The simplest exercise for this purpose is the one initially popularized by Galton. The exercise involves recalling the scene at breakfast, describing it, and then analysing the extent to which you depend on each of your senses in memory. For example, is it the words for each of the objects on the table that come to you, or their visual images, or the motions you performed in grasping them, etc. The labels for these three pre-dispositions are 'verbalizer,' 'visualizer,' and 'kinesthete' (see James 1961: 169–77). More comprehensive discussions of how to discover your own sensing pattern, and how to control as well as use it for purposes of cultural analysis, can be found in Métraux (1953), Hall (1977: 169–87), and Cesara (1982: 48, 109–11).

Other techniques for enhancing sensory awareness include, paradoxically, the 'spiritual exercises' first proposed by Loyola (see Synnott, ch. 5), and developed to an excessive degree by James Joyce (1946: 409–12). It is also helpful to consider the work of the musicologist R. Murray Schafer (1977) on 'soundscapes' and the geographer J. Douglas Porteus (1990) on 'smellscapes' and 'bodyscapes' by way of sensitizing oneself to the limits of 'the tourist perspective' (Little, ch. 10), and coming to perceive how sounds, smells, and textures really *matter* in the environment of a given culture.

- 4 Like the Suya, however, the Dogon would seem to regard sight as an 'antisocial' or pre-social faculty. For example, it is by means of graphic symbols (paw marks) that Fox communicates with human beings in the context of Dogon divination. The dreams inspired in people by Fox are also silent. The reason for this is that Fox's tongue was severed by the Creator, Amma, as punishment for resisting the latter's cosmic plan and bringing death into the world (Calame-Griaule 1986: 102–3, 146).
- 5 In North American society, such skills are relatively underdeveloped, because of the paramount value attached to learning to read and write, which entails shutting up and sitting still. On the cognitive implications of the amount of stress different cultures attach to the development of different faculties, such as to read, to recite, or to dance, see Gardner (1983).
- 6 Indeed, why the fascination in Communications Studies departments with 'the technologizing of the word' (Ong 1982)? Might this verbocentrism have something to do with the religious orientation of those who laid the groundwork for this discipline (i.e., McLuhan and Ong)?
- 7 While anthropologists normally search for 'consonance' across media (Douglas 1982b: 68), dissonances can be equally revealing. Stoller and Olkes (1990) have shown how messages in one medium, say the verbal message 'This is a formal (read: "thick") social occasion,' may be contra-

dicted by those in another; for example, a woman serving a 'thin' (meatless, hence informal) sauce on the occasion in question (see further Appadurai 1981). Similarly, documentary producers have been known to get a point across by, for example, playing 'Rule Britannia' while images of London slums, as opposed to Buckingham Palace, pass by on the screen (Morgan and Welton 1986).

- 8 Of course, Western culture also employs non-audio-visual media of communication, such as food codes, but these are rarely explicit and are completely overshadowed by the dominant media.
- 9 One also wants to be attentive to how the different environmental niches spanned by a culture (for example, sea and land) give rise to different sorts of sense perceptions (such as wet/dry, or feeling buoyant and moving speedily / feeling heavy and slow), and how these are valued and elaborated upon in the culture's symbolic system, as Nancy Munn (1986) so well demonstrates in *The Fame of Gawa* (see also Ohnuki-Tierney 1981).
- 10 Perhaps the most splendid example of stimulating all the senses to the same extent at the same time is provided by the traditional Indian courts: 'The fulfillment of every sense was considered an art in the Indian courts ... Scents were blended to suit moods and seasons and were believed to complement the colour of clothing' – thus, musk was worn with winter silks; vetiver was associated with lemon scent, and gossamer went with summer garments' (Patnaik 1985: 68). The complex combinatorics of emotions, seasons, and sensations played out daily in these courts has no Western equivalent. Baudelaire's *Correspondances* pales by comparison (see Howes 1986: 42–3).
- 11 To illustrate, midway through the third stage of the trek, an informant told Daniel: 'I stopped smelling things after Aruda Nati.' To which Daniel responded: 'Did you not even smell the camphor and incense sticks offered at the various shrines on the way after Aruda?' His informant replied: 'You might say I felt it. I didn't smell it' (Daniel 1984: 272). Incidentally, when the last of the senses, that of pain, 'goes' or 'dissolves,' close to the end of the trek, 'love' is said to take its place.
- 12 For an intriguing account of French thought in the sixteenth century, when the sensorium appears to have been more balanced, and 'thoughts existed in a more clouded and less purified atmosphere' than they have since the 'Enlightenment,' see Febvre (1982). According to Febvre (1982: 432): 'The sixteenth century did not see first: it heard and smelled, it sniffed the air and caught sounds.'
- 13 Indeed, we are positively hindered from so doing by the glare of the television screen: 'On the television screen, the world, broken down at its source, is reassembled as dots of light, and in this respect the television screen is everyone's personal converter of light back into matter which

originally has been decomposed as light.' The television screen makes the world 'matter as a matter of light,' and that is all (Romanyshyn 1989: 186).

- 14 Of course, oral communication usually forms an important part of education in our society as well. It is not essential, however, as the existence of 'correspondence courses' attests. In experiments involving the Sander parallelogram (see above, page 277, Figure 2), the respondent is asked: 'Which of the two lines, AB or AC, is shorter?' Respondents raised in a carpentered environment usually say 'AC' even though AC is, in fact, 15 per cent *longer* than AB. Respondents raised in a circular environment, like that of the Zulu, do not usually make this error. The reason for this misperception may have to do with the Western subject automatically interpreting the two-dimensional representation as if it were three-dimensional (i.e., as if it were drawn on the surface of a rectangular table).

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# INDEX

- Adams, Charles, on sensory research, 14–15
- Aesthetics. *See* Beauty
- Africa. *See* Bosothe; Dogon; Hausa; Kenya; Mayotte; Morocco; Ndembu; Nigeria; Songhay; Temne; Tiv; Uduk; West Africa; Wolof; Yaka; Yoruba
- Afterlife, sensory orders of, 284–5.  
*See also* Death
- Aguaruna, thought located in heart by, 284
- Ainu, concepts of blood among, 260
- Alberti, Leon, and linear perspective, 4–5, 6
- Alfuru, association of smell and death by, 137
- Alloula, Malek, on photography, 155
- Andaman Islands, role of smell in, 145–6
- Andermann, Lisa, 187, 188, 261, 280
- Andes: senses in cosmology of, 188, 239–47; rejection of Western visualism in, 242; sensory order of, compared to Desana, 251–3; environmental influence on sensory order of, 252; senses in language of, 262–4
- Animals: lack of speech of, 44; senses of, opposed to human senses by Aristotle, 63; Aquinas on, 68; senses of, hierarchized by Hegel, 72; auditory classification of, by Kaluli, 87–9; olfactory classification of, by Suya, 177; multi-sensory classification of, by Desana, 248–9
- Anthropology: interpretive, 6–8; dialogical, 7–8; interest of, in feral children, 47; structural, 97; taste not studied in, 111–12; smell not studied in, 129, 146; and colonialism, 159, 172; visual, 172, 181, 221–2, 230, 239. *See also* Ethnomusicology; Model of the text; Semiotics
- Anthropology of the senses, 3–4, 6, 10–11, 16, 125, 167–70, 185–6, 189, 190n.6, 285; term first used by Porter, 19n.1; general considerations on, 257–9; on field re-

- search, 259–61; on overcoming personal sensory biases, 260, 261, 286n.3; on library research, 261; on language, 262–4; on artefacts and aesthetics, 264–8; on body decoration, 268–9; on child-rearing, 269–71; on alternative sensory modes, 272–4; on media, 274–5; on environment, 275–7; on rituals, 278–80; on mythology, 280–2; on cosmology, 282–5
- Appadurai, Arjun, on food in Hinduism, 226, 228
- Aquinas, Saint Thomas, denigration of the senses by, 68–9, 75, 75n.1
- Arguedas, José María, 242
- Ariès, Phillipe, on death in the West, 147n.3
- Aristippus, 61
- Aristotle, 61; on hierarchy of senses, 63–4; on taste, 117
- Arnheim, Rudolf, on visual intelligence, 11
- Art, Western, 6; concepts of, 264; influence of orality on visual, 265. *See also* Artefacts; Beauty
- Artefacts: display of, in museum, 79–80, 268; Kaluli drums, 82–4; senses evoked by, 264–8; multi-sensory nature of Desana, 266; Western, perceived by other cultures, 268
- Asceticism. *See* Sensory deprivation
- Augustine, Saint, ambivalence of, towards senses, 66–7
- Australian aborigines: symbolism of blood among, 260; reactions of, to writing, 274. *See also* Murngin
- Aymara, music of, 242
- Ayurveda medicine, 100; role of taste in, 222. *See also* Siddha medicine
- Babb, Lawrence, on food in India, 225
- Baktaman, senses in rituals of, 278
- Barasana: male initiation rite among, 271, 284; concepts of the afterlife among, 284
- Barth, Fredrik, on ritual performance, 278
- Batek Negrito, odour classification of, 283
- Beauty: multi-sensory concepts of, among Shipibo-Conibo, 5–6; Western ideals of, 6, 15, 63, 264, 269; of women in Christianity, 66; non-visual concepts of, among Hausa, 197–8; sensory order expressed in ideals of, 264–8; ideals of personal, 268
- Bergson, Henri, on spatialization, 29
- Berlin and Kay, on colour terms, 16, 113, 117–18, 125, 172
- Bernard, Saint, on bodily pleasure, 68
- Berry, J.W., 21n.8, 276
- Bettelheim, Bruno, on feral children, 47, 59n.4
- Birth: associated with death, 141, 143–4; olfactory symbolism of, among Inuit, 141–2; rituals in Morocco, 211, 216, 217
- Blind: reactions of, on recovery of sight, 52; perception of space and shape among, 52; as metaphor for ignorant, 66; cultural perceptions of, 273; deity of Tarahumara, 284. *See also* Keller, Helen
- Blood: contaminating nature of, among Inuit, 141–2; symbolism of, among Ommura, 179; associated with *jinn* in Morocco, 214; said to ‘talk’ in Zinacantan, 233; sensory properties of, 260; primar-

- ily visual in West, 260; primarily tactile in Siddha medicine, 260; audio-tactile in Guatemala, 260; primarily olfactory among Ainu, 260; audio-olfactory in Australia, 260
- Boddy, Janice, 261
- Body: opposed to mind in West, 5, 14, 70, 109, 170; intelligence of, 11, 109, 184, 269; as basis for perception, 17; communication with, 25; Christian attitudes towards, 65–9; Descartes on, 70, 76n.4; Marx on, 73; as Kaluli metaphor for drum, 82; concept of, in Siddha medicine, 102; as sensory homunculus, 168–9; associated with society by Ommura, 179; cultural construction of, 182; representations of, in Melanesia, 259, 272; creation of human, in Papuan myth, 282; locations of soul and mind in, 283–4. *See also* Birth; Blood; Body decoration; Brain; Death; Ear; Eye; Mind; Mouth; Nose; Senses
- Body decoration: among Kayapo, 175–6, among Suya, 175–6, 268; in Mount Hagen, 181–2; among Shipibo-Conibo, 268; related to social order, 268; related to sensory order, 268; among Dogon, 268–9; in West, 269; in Mato Grosso, 283
- Bolton, Charlene and Ralph, on senses in Andean ritual, 246
- Bonnaterre, Pierre-Joseph, on ranking of senses, 49
- Bosch, F.D.K., 229
- Bosotho, aurality among, 278
- Bouysse Cassagne, Thérèse, on Andean music, 242
- Brain: Hausa concepts of, 194–5; Desana concepts of, 250–1, 254n.4. *See also* Mind
- Briggs, Jean, on Inuit, 271, 273
- Brillat-Savarin, Jean, on taste, 111
- Buddhism, role of hearing in, 45
- Buddle, Kathleen, on Hopi, 281
- Candle, Zinacanteco symbolism of, compared to Western, 236
- Cannibal Tours*, 156
- Capitalism: effects of, on senses, 14, 74; and tourism, 149–50, 160–1; sight in late, 154; photography in late, 156; as perceived in Andes, 242
- Carpenter, Edmund, 8, 265; on sensory profiles, 168; on masks in West Africa, 267
- Chelseden, William, and recovery of sight by blind, 52
- Chewong: importance of sight among, 174; smell associated with spirits by, 174; minimal social organization of, 178; importance of smell among, 283
- Children: autistic, compared to feral, 47, 59n.7; among Wolof, 183, 184, 190n.7; deemed 'saltless,' by Hausa, 200; rituals involving, in Morocco, 217; sensory development of, 269–71; in non-contact vs contact cultures, 270; effects of rearing of, on field independence, 270; sensory orders of, different from adults, 271; interest in odours and tastes among North American, 271; sensory order of Inuit, 271. *See also* Birth; Feral children
- Christ, Jesus, and the senses, 64. *See also* Christianity

- Christianity: ambivalence of, towards senses, 64–9, 75; gratification of senses in, 67; and materialism, 75; sensory philosophy of, revised after Vatican II, 76n.2; role of senses in Mass, 129; role of smell in, 134; sensory similarity of liturgy and afterlife in, 285
- Chrysostom, John, on the senses, 65–6, 75
- Classen, Constance, 12, 13, 186, 188, 276
- Clifford, James, on metaphors for ethnography, 7, 8
- Colonialism: in Western music, 80; in Western medicine, 108; and tourism, 149, 156–7, 161; and ethnography, 159
- Colour: of Kaluli drums, 87; terms for, as opposed to taste, 117–18; vocabulary of Weyéwa, 120; over-emphasized in anthropology, 181; symbolism of, in Morocco, 214–16; symbolism of, in Zinacantan, 233–4; in Desana cosmology, 247–9, 254n.4; perception of, influenced by smell, 279. *See also* Berlin and Kay
- Common sense, 71
- Concordia Sensoria Research Group, 12, 186
- Condillac, Etienne, sensory philosophy of, 49, 57, 71
- Corbin, Alain, on the suppression of odour, 144–5
- Cosmogony: different senses evoked in, 240; role of senses in Andean, 240–1, 244; role of senses in Desana, 247–8, 281; role of sound in Hopi, 281
- Cosmology: visual, in West, 6, 10, 30, 239; multi-sensory, among Shipibo-Conibo, 6; auditory, among Songhay, 10; role of food in Hindu, 228; role of temperature in Zinacanteco, 234, 237n.2; as way of sensing world, 239, 254; role of senses in Desana, 239, 247–53; role of senses in Andean, 239–47; role of senses in, 282–5
- Crapanzano, Vincent, on possession rites in Morocco, 217–18
- Cubism, 19n.2
- Dakota, use of incense by, 131
- Dance, among Kaluli, 89–90, 181. *See also* Kinaesthesia
- Daniel, Valentine, 15, 279, 287n.11
- Darrah, Allan, on Hausa, 199
- Deaf: and dumb, 43–6; as metaphor for ignorant, 44; negative reactions of, to recovery of hearing, 53; cultural perceptions of, 273; as expression of unhappiness among Inuit, 273
- Death: and odour in Oceania, 130, 136–9; burial practices in Oceania, 136–9; associated with birth, 141, 143–4; denial of, in West, 147n.3; rituals of, in Morocco, 219–20; and odour in Amazonian mythology, 281. *See also* Afterlife
- Desana: role of senses in cosmology of, 188, 239, 247–54, 281; sensory order of, compared to Desana, 251–3; environmental influence on sensory order of, 252; multi-sensory artefacts of, 266; sensory order of, 272; odour communication among, 275; sensory profile of culture hero among, 282
- Descartes, René: emphasis on mind over senses by, 70; primacy ac-

- corded to sight by, 70; and self-body integration, 76n.4
- Devereux, George, 13, 21n.9
- Devisch, Renaat, 20n.4, 146n.1, 208
- Dogon: body decoration among, 268; role of speech among, 268–9; antisociality of sight among, 286n.4
- Douglas, Mary, 144; on restricted/elaborated codes, 19; on flavours, 113; on dirt, 139, 141
- Dumb. *See* Muteness
- Dundes, Alan, on visualism in West, 169
- Dürer, Albrecht, 4–5
- Ear: as seat of reason among Sedang Moi, 44–5; emphasized in Buddhist iconography, 45; control of, in Christianity, 65–6; related to spirit by Hegel, 72; decoration of, by Suya, 175, 268; as seat of reason among Suya, 176, 273; as seat of reason among Ommura, 180; in Hausa proverbs, 198; in Inca mythology, 241; in Kalapalo masks, 267; decoration of, by Dogon, 268–9; decoration of, by Yanoama, 272. *See also* Hearing; Language; Sound; Speech
- Eck, Diana, on sight in India, 188, 221–30
- Education of the senses: importance of, in Enlightenment, 49, 57; of feral children, 49, 56–9; as variable according to culture, 270–1
- Elias, Norbert, 144–5
- Empedocles, 61, 62, 71
- Environment, influence of, on sensory orders, 252, 275–7, 287n.9
- Ethnomusicology, critique of, 79–80
- ‘Evil eye’: widespread among Moslems, 199; compared to ‘evil mouth’ among Hausa, 199; yellow as protection from, in Morocco, 215; and spouse selection in Morocco, 220n.1
- Extrasensory perception: of Kaspar Hauser, 56; of children among Wolof, 190n.7; of Ndembu diviner, 204–5; and smell, among Yaka, 207–8; and sight, in Morocco, 213; of Peruvian curer, 258; attributed to blind, 273
- Eye: ambivalence towards, in Christianity, 64, 65–6; as means of temptation, 66, 67; control of, in Christianity, 66, 69; as expressive of soul, 72–3; decoration of, by Kayapo, 176; decoration of, in New Guinea, 181–2; in Morocco, 212–13, 220n.1; importance of, in India, 221; representations of, in masks, 267; as location of soul among Mehinaku, 283. *See also* ‘Evil eye’
- Feld, Stephen, 8, 15, 181, 267
- Feral children: sensory orders of, 47–60; Genie, 48; strong sense of order among, 56; influence of social conditioning on sensory perception of, 56. *See also* Hauser, Kaspar; Wild Boy of Aveyron; Wolf children of India
- Feurbach, Anselm von, on Kaspar Hauser, 50
- Field independence theory. *See* Witkin’s field independence theory
- Flavour: metaphors of, in Yoruba music, 18–19; role of, in Weyéwa meals, 114–17; Weyéwa symbolism of, 123–4; in Hausa proverbs, 196–7, 201; people classified by,

- among Hausa, 200; and desire among Hausa, 200–1; in Hausa medicine, 201; in Ndembu medicine, 208; symbolism of, in Morocco, 218–19; associated with mental states, in India, 227; in Tamil mythology, 227; in Desana cosmology, 248–50. *See also* Food; Taste
- Food: Aquinas on, 69; among British working class, 113; in Weyéwa culture, 114–17, 121; smell of, 131; in Chewong culture, 174, 283; associated with women among Suya, 178; in Hausa culture, 195–7, 200–2; restrictions of, among Ndembu, 205, 208; in Moroccan culture, 218–19; in Hinduism, 222, 225–30; in Zinacanteco ritual, 235–6; in Papuan mythology, 282; among Batek Negrito, 283. *See also* Flavour; Taste
- Foucault, Michel, on Western medicine, 106, 107, 209; on surveillance, 277
- Freud, Sigmund, on the senses, 28, 29; critique of, 190n.6
- Gardner, Howard, on body intelligence, 11
- Geertz, Clifford: on cultures as texts, 6–7; on world views, 13
- Gell, Alfred, on smell, 128, 131–2, 140
- Gennep, Arnold van, 136
- Gill, Sam, 20n.4, 265
- Gnau, sensory environment of, 276
- Goody, Jack, 13
- Greece, Ancient: attitudes towards the senses in, 27, 61–4, 65; soul associated with breath in, 283
- Gregor, Thomas, on Mehinaku, 270–1
- Griffin, Kit, 186, 187, 278
- Gruen, A., on field independence theory, 39–41
- Guatemala, role of pulse in, 260
- Hall, E.T., 286n.3; on the suppression of odour, 144
- Hallucinogens: used by Shipibo-Conibo shaman, 5–6, 265; role of, among Desana, 249–50, 252, 272; synaesthesia produced by, 249; Tukano rituals for the taking of, 280
- Hanunoo, writing among, 274
- Haraway, Donna, on tourism as colonialism, 156
- Harrison, Regina, on sight in Andes, 245–6
- Hausa, 187, 193–4; senses in language of, 193, 194–202, 282; senses in proverbs of, 195–200
- Hauser, Kaspar: history of, 50; language skills of, 51; sense of hearing of, 51; sense of sight of, 51–2; acuteness of sense of smell of, 52–3, 55; sense of taste of, 53, 55–6; sensitivity of, to temperature, 53–4; sense of touch of, 54; effects of socialization on, 56
- Hearing: in Songhay culture, 9; importance of, among Hebrews, 26–7; among Temne, 33; in Buddhism, 45; sense of, in feral children, 51; ranking of, by Aristotle, 63–4, 65; McLuhan on, 171–2; not always emphasized in oral cultures, 174; opposed to sexuality by Suya, 175; importance of, among Suya, 175–6; as understanding, 176, 180, 194, 251,

- 255n.6, 273, 274; and sociability, 177, 178, 219; importance of, in New Guinea, 180, 181; in Hausa proverbs, 198; in Ndembu divination, 206; in Moroccan culture, 216–17; in Zinacanteco culture, 231–2; in Andean cosmology, 240–4; primacy of, among Desana, 250–3, 255n.6, 281; in Islam, 258; importance of, among Inuit, 258, 271; bias for, expressed in language, 262; primacy of, among Kalapalo, 267, 268; associated with smell by Dogon, 269; in Tamil ritual, 279. *See also* Deaf; Ear; Language; Sound; Speech
- Hegel, G.W.F., 61; hierarchization of sensory organs by, 64, 72–3; compared to Marx, 73–5
- Heidegger, Martin, on language, 26
- Hertz, Robert, on death, 136–9, 143, 144, 145
- Hinduism: role of senses in, 221–30; role of food in, 222, 225–30; orality and literacy in, 20n.5, 259; role of sensuality in, 285. *See also* India
- Hobbes, Thomas, on the senses, 69–70
- Hopi: sense of time among, 27; role of sound vibrations among, 281
- Howell, Signe, 20n.4; on the Che-wong, 174–5
- Hua, sensory classifications of, 272
- Hume, David: on taste, 27, 28; on senses as palliative for reason, 71, 75
- Incas: traditions of, compared to Andean, 239, senses in cosmology of, 240–7; senses in rituals of, 246. *See also* Andes
- Incense: in churches, 129; in Mayotte, 130; in Ancient Greece, 131; among Dakota, 131; as creating solidarity, 134; in Moroccan ritual, 210–12; in Zinacanteco ritual, 233, 235–6
- India: role of sight in, 188, 221–5, 259; role of taste in, 222, 224–30; senses in ritual in, 279, 287n.11; senses fulfilled in courts of, 287n.10. *See also* Hinduism; Siddha medicine
- Innis, Harold, 29
- Insanity, as a sensory disorder, 174, 190n.4
- Inuit: and field independence theory, 32, 270; child-bearing practices of, 141; pollution taboos of, 141–2; sensory order of, 258; individuality fostered by child-rearing practices of, 270; sensory orders of children and adults among, 271; expression of anger among, 273; sensory qualities of built environment of, 277
- Irigaray, Luce, on sensory preferences of women, 14, 189
- Isbell, Billie Jean, on senses in Andes, 245
- Islam: influence of, on Hausa, 193–4; ‘evil eye’ in, 199, 258; sensuality in, 285
- Itard, Jean, 49, 53, 57–8
- Jackson, Michael, 4, 8, 20n.4, 169, 182
- Japan, tea ceremony in, 278–9
- Jerome, Saint, on marriage, 67
- Jinn*, sensory aspects of, in Morocco, 211–20
- Judaism, role of senses in *Havdalah*, 129

- Kakar, Sudhir, on Hinduism, 226, 227, 229
- Kalapalo: senses in masks of, 267; auditory bias of, 267, 268
- Kaluli: role of drumming among, 15, 79–99; social organization of, 81–2; description of drums of, 82–4; construction of drums by, 84–7, importance of bird sounds to, 87–9, 94, 96–7; dance among, 89–90; drumming technique of, 89–94; association of birds and dead by, 89, 94, 96, 97; importance of hearing among, 181; exhibit for drum of, 267
- Kamala. *See* Wolf children of India
- Kant, Immanuel, smell excluded from aesthetics of, 145
- Kayapo: body decoration among, 175; importance of touch among, 175
- Kearney, Richard, on images in the West, 4
- Keller, Helen, on perception, 10, 52
- Kenya: tourism in, 16, 148–63; exoticized, 150–3; Samburu of, mythologized, 152–3
- Kinaesthesia, 25; in Ndembu divination, 206; conveyed through language, 262; emphasized by Tiv, 269. *See also* Dance
- Kirk-Greene, Anthony, on Hausa proverbs, 195–6, 198
- Kogi, music of, 267
- Kuipers, Joel, 16
- Lambek, Michael, 129–30
- Language: and the senses, 26, 262–4; among feral children, 51; concepts of, among Kaluli, 90, 96; and smell, 132–3, 140, 142; taboos of, 140; visual bias of, in West, 169, 192; sensory metaphors in, 169–70, 263; senses in English, 169, 262–4; auditory bias of, in Africa, 192–3; senses in Hausa, 193, 194–202; heat emphasized in Tzotzil, 237n.2; creative power of, in Andes, 240–1; senses in Quechua, 246, 262–4; sight and hearing in Desana, 251, 252; creative power of, among Inuit, 258; terms for sensory organs in, 263; smell emphasized in Dogon, 269; lack of nouns in Hopi, 281. *See also* Orality; Orality and literacy; Sausure; Semiotics; Speech
- Leach, Edmund, on language and taboo, 140
- Leder, Drew, 17
- Leenhardt, Maurice, 20n.4; on the body in Melanesia, 259
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 95, 109, 117; on feral children, 47; on sensory codes, 281
- Lewis, Gilbert, on the environment of the Gnaou, 276
- Literacy, 171–2; in the West, 286n.5. *See also* Media; Orality
- Little, Kenneth, 12, 16, 222
- Locke, John, sensory philosophy of, 49, 57, 71, 75
- Lowe, Donald, on the senses, 168
- Loyola, Saint Ignatius, 75; spiritual exercises of, to control senses, 69, 286n.3
- MacCannel, Dean, on tourism, 160
- MacCracken, Grant, 156
- Mackenzie Brown, C., on orality and literacy in India, 259
- Maclean, Charles, on wolf children of India, 50
- McLuhan, Marshall, 10, 29, 178; on

- sense ratios, 8, 20n.3, 167–8; on effects of media on senses, 170–3; critique of, 172–8; on textuality, 181
- Malaysia, role of speech in, 43–5
- Malinowski, Bronislaw, 130, 135, 285
- Marks, Lawrence, on synaesthesia, 263
- Marx, 14, 61, 67; critique of Hegel by, 73; on primacy of bodily needs, 73; on role of senses in history, 74; on sensory degradation caused by capitalism, 74, 75
- Masks: sight muted in West African, 267; all senses emphasized in Kalapalo, 267
- Mauss, Marcel, on ‘body techniques,’ 182
- Mayotte, role of smell in, 129–30
- Media: and sensory specialization, 191, 274–5; chirographic, 29–30, 171; typographic, 30, 171; electronic, 30, 158–9, 171–2, 287n.13; non-audio visual, in West, 287n.8. *See also* Literacy; Orality; Orality and literacy; Photography
- Medicine: Chinese, 100; Ayurveda, 100, 222; Siddha, 100–10; Western, 106–10, 180, 187, 204, 209; Ndembu, 187, 203–9; Hausa, 201; role of smell in Warao, 280
- Mehinaku: teaching methods among, 270–1; soul located in eye by, 283
- Men: in Kaluli culture, 82–3; sensory dominance of, among Suya, 177–8; visual dominance of, in West, 177, 189; deemed hot and spicy by Hausa, 200; deemed hot and superior in Zinacantan, 237n.3; sensory dominance of, among Desana, 249–50, 254, 272; sensory substitutions of Desana, 258; sensory orders of, 272; deemed white, hard, and odourless by Hua, 272; deemed cold and hard by Barasana, 284; Barasana initiation rite of, 284
- Mind: opposed to body in West, 14, 70, 109, 170; opposed to senses in West, 62, 70, 71, 75; associated with head in West, 284; associated with stomach by Uduk, 284. *See also* Brain; Soul
- Mitchell, Timothy, on the world as exhibition, 157
- Model of the text, 6–8, 285
- Montaigne, Michel: on sensory pleasure, 69, 75; on smell, 129, 133
- Montessori, Maria, 60n.7
- Morocco, sensory order of, 187–8, 210–20, 278
- Mount Hagen, body decoration in, 181–2
- Mouth: control of, in Christianity, 65; Hegel on role of, 72; decoration of, by Suya, 175–6, 268; ‘evil,’ among Hausa, 199; in Kalapalo masks, 267; decoration of, by Dogon, 268; decoration of, by Yanoama, 272; as sense organ in India, 279; in Papuan mythology, 282
- Mulvey, Laura, on photography, 155
- Munn, Nancy, 287n.9
- Murugin, symbolism of sweat among, 275
- Museums: visualism of, 79–80, 151; role of senses in, 267
- Music: in Yoruba culture, 17–19; Augustine’s love of, 67; Aquinas on, in church, 68; social role of,

- among Kaluli, 79–99; Western interest in exotic, 80; in Ndembu culture, 206; in Zinacanteco culture, 232; in Andean culture, 242; in Desana culture, 249, 254n.3; in Shipibo-Conibo healing rite, 265; in Kogi culture, 267. *See also* Percussion
- Muteness: as metaphor for ignorance, 45; of Wild Boy of Aveyron, 51
- Myers, C.S., on taste, 111–12
- Mythology, role of the senses in, 280–2
- Nahuas, sensory order of nobles among, 273
- Navajo: sand paintings of, 264–5; aesthetics of, 265
- Ndembu: senses in medical system of, 187, 203–9; sensory order of, 208–9
- Needham, Rodney, 134–5, 146; on percussion and transition, 128, 133
- Nigeria: field independence theory in, 35–42; tonal languages of, 192–3. *See also* Hausa
- North America. *See* Dakota; Hopi; Inuit; Nahuas; Navajo; Otomi; Tarahumara; Tsimshian; West; Zinacantan
- Nose: Hegel on role of, 72; social role of, among Ommura, 179; in Kalapalo masks, 267; decoration of, by Dogon, 268. *See also* Odour; Smell
- Oceania. *See* Alfuru; Australian aborigines; Baktaman; Batek Negrito; Chewong; Gnau; Hanunoo; Hua; Kaluli; Malaysia; Mount Hagen; Murngin; Olo Ngaju; Ommura; Papua New Guinea; Sedang Moi; Tanimbar Islands; Torres Straits; Trobriand Islands; Umeda; Weyéwa
- Odour: of Shipibo-Conibo design songs, 5–6, 266; in rites of passage, 16, 128–47, 211–12; of God, 66; of Descartes' corpse, 76n.3; and death, 130, 136, 281; cures effected by, 130; used to communicate with gods, 130–1, 133; and personal space, 132–3; as culturally coded, 133–9; as opposed to colour and sound, 140; classifications of, 140; of men and women, according to Suya, 177; uses of, in Morocco, 211–12; associated with *jinn*, 213; linked with colour in Morocco, 214; in Desana cosmology, 248–50; of Desana baskets, 266; of speech among Dogon, 268–9; communication among Desana, 275; classification by, among Batek Negrito, 283. *See also* Incense; Smell
- Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko, 7, 8, 287n.9
- Olo Ngaju: burial practices of, 136, 138; concepts of funerary contagion among, 138
- Ommura: body and society associated by, 179; importance of hearing among, 180; role of appearance among, 180
- Ong, Walter, 8, 12–13, 185, 195; critique of, 12–13, 253; on effects of media on senses, 170–2
- Opaya, myth of death among, 281
- Orality, 25–6, 28; among Songhay,

- 9–10; in Andes, 241–4, 247; influence of, on visual art, 265; in Melanesia, 282
- Orality and literacy, 12–13, 26, 171–2, 173; in Africa, 19; in the West, 29–30, 171; critique of model of, 173–5, 253, 274; among Hausa, 194; in Andes, 242–4; in India, 259
- Otomi, sight emphasized by, 267
- Out of Africa*, 148–9
- Papua New Guinea: male/female classifications in, 272; orality in mythologies of, 282. *See also* Kaluli; Mount Hagen
- Parmenides, 61–2
- Paul, Saint, denigration of senses by, 64–5
- Peirce, Charles, 15, 103–5, 106–7, 110n.4
- Penfield, Wilder, on sensory homunculus, 168–9, 189n.1
- Percussion: role of, among Kaluli, 79–99; in rites of passage, 128, 132, 133, 134; among Ndembu, 206; complexity of, among Tiv, 269
- Performance, theory of, 20n.4, 150, 157–8, 160–1, 278
- Photography: in Western medicine, 108; in tourism, 154–6; as means of domination, 156; supposed truthfulness of, 182, 274; role of, in Hindu studies, 221; of Navajo sand paintings, 264; rejected as incomplete, 274–5
- Pinard, Sylvain, 186, 188, 261
- Pinel, Phillipe, on touch, 49
- Plato, 61, 73; denigration of senses by, 62–3; primacy accorded to sight by, 63, 281
- Porter, Roy, 19n.1
- Proprioception: and field independence theory, 33–4; importance of, in West Africa, 33–4; importance of, in New Guinea, 182
- Psychology, 10–11, 25, 276; cognitive, 173; sensory, 186; Freudian, 28, 190n.6. *See also* Witkin's field independence theory
- Pulse: in Siddha medicine, 100–10; in Guatemalan culture, 260; in Zinacantan culture, 233
- Rabain, Jacqueline, on the Wolof, 182–4, 190n.7
- Rasmussen, Knud, on Inuit, 141–2
- Rattray, R.S., on Hausa proverbs, 197
- Reichel-Dolmatoff, Gerardo, on Desana, 240, 280
- Representation: 'crisis' of, 8; world constructed as, 157–8
- Ritchie, Ian, 21n.10, 186, 187
- Ritual: of healing among Shipibo-Conibo, 5–6, 265; of transition and smell, 16, 128–47; agricultural, among Weyéwa, 123; of transition and sound, 128, 132, 133, 134, 216, 232; senses in Catholic mass, 129; senses in *Havdalah*, 129; of death in Oceania, 130, 136–9; of purification among Dakota, 131; of divination, among Ndembu, 203–9; of silent wishes in Morocco, 210–11, 216–17; of birth in Morocco, 211, 216, 217; sound in Moroccan, 216–17; of pilgrimage in India, 225, 279; senses in Zinacantan,

- 231–7; senses in Andean, 246–7; senses in Desana, 249; role of senses in, 278–80; Japanese tea ceremony, 278–9; of male initiation among Barasana, 284
- Romanyshyn, Robert, 5, 6, 19n.2, 287n.13
- Roseman, Marina, 261
- Sander parallelogram illusion, 276–7
- Saussure, Ferdinand de, 10, 104
- Scopophilia, 155. *See also* Sight
- Sedang Moi, hearing associated with intelligence by, 44–5
- Seeger, Anthony, 3, 8; on Suya, 175–9, 268, 273
- Segal, M.H., on Sander parallelogram illusion, 276
- Self: as spectator, 5–6; invention of category of, 145. *See also* Body; Mind
- Semiotics, 20n.5, 103–5; applied to Siddha medicine, 105–10; and the problem of the olfactory sign, 134–5
- Sensationalism, 57. *See also* Condillac; Locke
- Senses: cultural construction of, 3, 17, 57–9, 61, 253–4, 285; interplay of, 8, 167–8, 172, 186, 258; as foundation of thought, 10, 62, 69–70, 173, 281, 283–4; development of, in children, 25; effects of media on, 29–30, 170–2, 274–5; cultural history of, in West, 29–30, 61–76, 170–3; distrust of, in West, 61–2, 64–70; as opposed to mind, 62, 70, 71, 75; scientific paradigm of, 71; glorified by Romantics, 76n.5; ratios of, 167–70; emphasized through body decoration, 175–82, 268–9; divided arbitrarily in West, 177, 277, 285n.1; among Wolof, 185; grouping of non-visual, among Hausa, 194–202; in Ndembu medicine, 203–9; in Zinacanteco ritual, 231–8; assigned cultural values by Desana, 250; objectified in the West, 253; number of, 258; in language, 262–4; in Kalapalo masks, 267; in Japanese tea ceremony, 278–9; merged in Tamil pilgrimage, 279; controlled by Tukano, 280; fulfilled in courts of India, 287n.10. *See also* Education of the senses; Extrasensory perception; Hearing; Kinaesthesia; Proprioception; Sensory deprivation; Sensory order; Sensory specialization; Sight; Smell; Taste; Touch
- Sensorial anthropology. *See* Anthropology of the senses
- Sensory deprivation, 279; of feral children, 48, 50, 55, 57; in Christianity, 64–9; induced by capitalism, 74, 75; hallucinations caused by, 279; and sensory enhancement, 279; among Tukano, 280
- Sensory order: definitions of 10, 14, 18, 28, 33, 189; of Western women, 14, 189; of feral children, 47–60; extraordinary, 48; of Greeks, 61–4; cultural construction of, 168; determination of, 170; displayed in body decoration, 175–6, 268; Suya, compared with Kayapo, 175–7; Suya, compared with Western, 175–7; of Suya, 175–8; of Wolof, 183–5; of Desana women, 188; of Ndembu, 208–9; of Morocco, 210, 219–20;

- of Zinacantan, 236–7; manifested in cosmogonies, 240; Andean, compared with Desana, 251–3; influenced by environment, 252, 275–7; of Inuit, 258; as dynamic, 259; of groups within society, 259, 272–3; of Inuit children, 271; of women, 272; of men, 272; of West, as perceived by Sharanahua, 273; of the West, 275, 285; bourgeois, 277; of Tamils, 279; in Melanesia, 282; ideal, inferred from culture heroes, 282; of spirits, 284; of afterlife, 284; ideal, of Barasana men, 284; of sixteenth-century Europe, 287n.12. *See also* Cosmology
- Sensory specialization: among individuals, 11, 168, 189; among cultures, 28, 168, 189, 253, 258, 260; of Zinacanteco shaman, 235; of Andean diviners, 241–2; of Desana shaman, 248; in rituals, 278–80; of ritual experts, 280
- Sensotypes. *See* Sensory order
- Sexuality: cultural restraints on, in West, 57, 67; Aquinas on, 69; and smell among the Yaka, 146n.1; associated with eating by Hausa, 200–1; fears of, among Desana, 249–50, 251, 258; and body decoration among Tiv, 269; Western, as perceived by Sharanahua, 273
- Sharanahua, perceptions of Westerners among, 273
- Sharon, Douglas, 258
- Shipaya, myth of death among, 281
- Shipibo-Conibo: use of senses in ritual, 5–6, 7; geometric designs of, 5–6, 7, 265–6; aesthetics among, 264
- Siddha medicine, 15; role of pulse in, 100–10; humours in, 100–3, 105
- Sight: emphasis on, in the West, 4–6, 11, 19, 33, 63–4, 68, 70, 72, 169, 242, 253, 255n.6, 281; among Greeks, 27, 63–4; and literacy, 30, 171; and touch, 51–2, 169; sense of, in feral children, 51–2; as metaphor for intelligence, 63, 169, 177, 180, 232, 255n.6; as deceptive, 69; in Western medicine, 106, 107–8, 180, 187; emphasized in tourism, 149, 150–1, 154–9; McLuhan on, 171–2; primacy of, among Chewong, 174; deemed antisocial by Suya, 176–7; and individuality, 177, 178; male dominance of, in West, 177; reduction of, in New Guinea, 180, 182; associated with witchcraft by Wolof, 183–4; in Hausa proverbs, 195–7; elaborated by Hausa, 199–200; in Ndembu medicine, 204–6; primacy of, among Ndembu, 208–9; in Moroccan culture, 212–13; elaborated in India, 221–5, 259; in Zinacanteco ritual, 232–4; primacy of, in Andes, 244–6, 251, 253–4; in Desana cosmology, 247–50, 251–3, 258, 281; in Islam, 258; among Inuit, 258; practical role of, among Suya, 258–9; conveyed through language, 262; emphasized in Western aesthetics, 264, 265, 266; muted in West African masks, 267; emphasized by Otomi, 267; role of, in teaching among Mehinaku, 270–1; in Inuit culture, 271; in Western institutions, 277; in

- Tamil ritual, 279; among Tarahumara, 284; antisociality of, among Dogon, 286n.4. *See also* Colour; 'Evil eye'; Eye; Photography; Scopophilia
- Silence: and speech, 26; in Moroccan ritual, 210, 216; in Japanese tea ceremony, 279
- Singh, J.A.L., on wolf children of India, 49–50
- Smell: underdevelopment of, in West 11, 16, 58, 145; decline of, in West, 16, 144–5, 259; in rites of passage, 16, 128–47; associated with intelligence, 21n.7; acuteness of sense of, in feral children, 52–3, 55; development of sense of, in blind, 52; hypersensitivity to, 52–3; loss of sense of, 53; impropriety of, in West, 57, 60n.6, 132–3, 144–5; ranking of, by Aristotle, 63–4, 65; deemed unattractive by Augustine, 67; neglected by anthropologists, 129; role of, in Oceania, 129–30, 135, 136–9; of cooking, 131; liminality of, 131–2, 135–9, 143; and memory, 132; biological nature of, 132; as opposed to language, 132–3, 135, 140, 142; and individualism, 145; among Yaka, 146n.1, 207; associated with spirits, 174, 284; among Chewong, 174, 283; antisociality of, among Suya, 177; functions of, in New Guinea, 179–80; in Hausa proverbs, 195–6, 197; in Ndembu divination, 207; associated with understanding, 207; functions of, in Morocco, 211–12; in Zinacanteco ritual, 233, 235–6; in Andean cosmology, 246; in Desana cosmology, 248–50; terms for, in Quechua, 263; related to speech by Dogon, 268; sensitivity of Gnaou to, 276; and colour perception, 279; linked with death in Amazonian mythology, 281; among Batek Negrito, 283; in courts of India, 287n.10; in Tamil ritual, 287n.11. *See also* Incense; Odour
- Songhay, senses in culture of, 9–10
- Sontag, Susan, 107; on photography, 156
- Soul: concepts of, in Oceania, 137–9; loss of, in Zinacantan, 233, 234; attributed to plants in Zinacantan, 234; associated with breath by Greeks, 283; located in eye by Mehinaku, 283; located in blood by Zinacanteco, 284
- Sound: as basic to Songhay, 9–10; and language, 25–6, 28; as a temptation, 67; symbolism of, among Kaluli, 79–99; of Kaluli drums, 83–4, 91–2; onomatopoeia among Weyéwa, 120; in rites of passage, 128, 132, 133, 134, 216, 232; associations of, with *jinn*, 216–17; in Zinacanteco rituals, 232; in Andean cosmology, 240–7, 252; in Desana cosmology, 248, 249, 252, 254nn.3,4; associated with creation, by Inuit, 258; onomatopoeia, 262; associated with odour by Dogon, 268; in Suya village, 277; in Inuit homes, 277; importance of, among Hopi, 281; importance of, in non-Western cultures, 283. *See also* Hearing; Language; Music; Percussion; Speech
- South America. *See* Aguaruna; Andes; Aymara; Barasana; Desana; Incas; Kalapalo; Kayapo; Kogi;

- Mehinaku; Sharanahua; Shipibo-Conibo; Tukano; Warao; West; Yanoama
- Soyinka, Wole, 17–19
- Speech, 26; association of, with intelligence, 43; in Malaysia, 43–5; emphasis on, contrasted with emphasis on hearing, 43–6; control of, in Christianity, 69; of drums among Kaluli, 94, 95; ritual, among Weyéwa, 121–2; role of, among Suya, 177; role of, among Wolof, 183–4; controlled by taste in Hausa proverbs, 201; role of, in Zinacantan, 231–2, 237n.1; importance of, in Andes, 240–4. *See also* Ear; Hearing; Language; Muteness; Orality; Orality and literacy; Sound
- Spirits, sensory aspects of, 174, 284
- Stewart, Susan, 156
- Stoller, Paul, on Songhay, 8–9
- Strathern, Marilyn and Andrew, on body decoration in Mount Hagen, 181–2
- Sullivan, Lawrence, 20n.4
- Süskind, Patrick, on odour in eighteenth-century West, 145
- Suya: body decoration among, 175–6, 268; primacy of hearing among, 175–6, 258, 273, 278; antisociality of sight among, 176–7; antisociality of smell among, 177; practical role of sight among, 258; acoustics of, village, 277
- Synaesthesia, 18; among Shipibo-Conibo, 5–6, 265; and Symbolists, 29; in rites of transition, 129; of oral communication, 171; of body decoration in New Guinea, 181; in Andean cosmology, 246; produced by hallucinogens, 249, 265; in Desana cosmology, 249, 252–3; in language, 263; among Dogon, 269
- Synnott, Anthony, 12, 14, 281
- Tanimbar Islands: role of smell in, 130; concepts of afterlife in, 137
- Tarahumara, role of sight among, 284
- Taste: as metaphor for discrimination, 16, 27–8, 58–9, 183; Yoruba metaphors of, 17–19; role of, in eighteenth century, 27–8, 58–9; elaborate vocabulary for, in Korea, 27; sense of, in feral children, 53; determined by custom, 55–6, 58–9; inferior to other senses, 63–4; of God, 66; definitions of, 112–13; vocabulary of, in West, 117–18, 124; terms for, contrasted to colour, 117–18; vocabulary of, among Weyéwa, 118–24; metaphors among Weyéwa, 122–4; linked to other senses, 125, 126n.2; asociality of, among Wolof, 183; in Hausa proverbs, 195–7, 201; metaphors of, among Hausa, 200–1; opposed to sight, by Ndembu, 205; in Ndembu divination, 205, 208; in Moroccan culture, 218–19; vocabulary of, in India, 222; elaboration of, in India, 224–230; in Zinacanteco ritual, 235; in Andean cosmology, 246; vocabulary of, among Desana, 249; interest in, of North American children, 271; in Inuit child-rearing, 271. *See also* Flavour; Food; Mouth
- Taussig, Michael, 203
- Temne: and field independence theory, 32–3, 270; conformity fos-

- tered by child-rearing practices of, 270
- Temperature: sensitivity of feral children to, 53–4; men and women classified by, among Hausa, 200; in Zinacanteco cosmology, 233, 234, 236, 237n.2; in Desana cosmology, 248–50; men and women classified by, in Amazon, 272, 284; men and women classified by, in Mexico, 272
- Time: sense of, among Hopi, 27; structured by heat in Chamula, 237n.2; structured by sight in Andes, 245
- Tiv: body decoration among, 269; kinaesthesia among, 269
- Torres Straits, taste vocabulary among inhabitants of, 111–12
- Touch: importance of, for blind, 10; among Greeks, 27; and sight, 51–2, 169; sense of, in feral children, 53–4; described as primary, 63; as inferior to other senses, 63–4; of God, 66; restriction of, by Loyola, 69; symbolism of hardness among Kaluli, 89, 90, 94, 96; importance of, in Siddha medicine, 100–3, 105; McLuhan on, 171–2; importance of, among Kayapo, 175; importance of, among Wolof, 183–85; importance of, for Western women, 189; in Ndembu divination, 206, 209; in Moroccan ritual, 217–18; in Zinacanteco ritual, 233, 234; in Andean cosmology, 240, 246; deemed anti-cultural by Desana, 251, 258; conveyed through language, 263; role of, in Navajo sand paintings, 265; significance of, in Desana baskets, 266; associated with music by Kogi, 267; and body decoration among Tiv, 269; in child-rearing, 270; in Inuit child-rearing, 271; in Tamil ritual, 279. *See also* Kinaesthesia; Proprioception; Pulse; Sexuality; Temperature
- Tourism: in Kenya, 148–63; and visualism, 149, 150–1, 154–9; as colonialism, 149, 156–7, 161; role of safari in, 149–54; wilderness and civilization as constructed in, 153–4, 162n.2, 163n.3; photography in, 154–6
- Trobriand Islands, role of smell in, 130, 135
- Tsimshian, sensory imagery of, 265–6
- Tukano, sensory preparation for narcotic visions, 280. *See also* Desana
- Turino, Thomas, on Andean music, 242
- Turner, Victor: on Ndembu, 109, 203–9; on symbols, 236
- Tyler, E.B., and feral children, 47
- Tyler, Stephen, 8
- Uduk, mind located in stomach by, 284
- Umeda, smell among, 179
- Victor. *See* Wild Boy of Aveyron
- Verbocentrism, 8, 9, 286n.6
- Visualism. *See* Sight
- Vogt, Evon, on Zinacanteco ritual, 231–7
- Warao, importance of smell among, 280
- West: emphasis on sight in, 4–6, 11, 19, 33, 63–4, 68, 70, 72, 169, 242,

- 253, 255n.6, 281; underdevelopment of smell in 11, 58, 145; mind/body dualism in, 14, 70, 109, 170; decline of smell in, 16, 144–5, 259; role of taste in eighteenth century, 27–8, 58–9; cultural history of senses in, 29–30, 61–76, 170–3; impropriety of smell in, 57, 60n.6, 132–3, 144–5; mind/senses dualism in, 62, 70, 71, 75; sight in medicine of, 106, 107–8, 180, 187; taste vocabulary of, 117–18, 124; odour and personal space in, 132–3; and tourism, 149, 156–7, 161; visual bias in languages of, 169, 192; development of media in, 170–2; visual dominance of men in, 177, 189; aesthetics of, 264–5, 266; beauty marks in, 269; as a non-contact culture, 270; sensory order of children in, 271; sensory order of, as perceived by Sharanahua, 273; surveillance in, 277; effects of house design on senses in, 277; location of mind in, 284; literacy in, 286n.5; non-audio-visual media in, 287n.8; sensory order of sixteenth century, 287n.12
- West Africa: masks in, 267. *See also* Hausa; Nigeria
- Westermarck, Edward, 210–20
- Weyéwa, 16, 113–14; role of taste among, 111–27; structure of meals among, 114–17; taste terms among, 118–24; agricultural rites of, 122–3
- Whitehead, Alfred, 29
- Whitting, C.E.J., on Hausa proverbs, 195–6
- Whorf, Benjamin, 27, 281
- Wild Boy of Aveyron: history of, 48–9; senses of, ranked, 49; muteness of, 51; sense of hearing of, 51; sense of sight of, 51–2; acuteness of sense of smell of, 52, 55; sense of taste of, 53; sense of touch of, 53–4; insensitivity of, to temperature, 53; sensory discrimination of, 55
- Wild children. *See* Feral children; Hauser, Kaspar; Wild Boy of Aveyron; Wolf children of India
- Witkin's field independence theory, 21n.8, 31; and children, 32; applied in West Africa, 32–42; applied in United States, 33, 38–42; the rod and frame test, 34–42; the embedded figures test, 35–42
- Wober, Mallory, 13, 31, 173, 187, 192–3, 195
- Wolf children of India: history of, 49–50; language skills of, 51; sense of hearing of, 51; sense of sight of, 51; acuteness of sense of smell of, 52, 55; sense of taste of, 53, 55; insensitivity of, to temperature, 53; sense of touch of, 54
- Wolof, sensory order of, 183–5, 190n.7
- Women: senses ranked by, 14; as snare for sight in Christianity, 66; in Kaluli culture, 82–3; categorized by taste terms by Weyéwa, 123–4; associated with strong odour by Suya, 177; and 'male gaze' in the West, 177, 189; sensory domination of, among Suya, 178, 189; sensory domination of, among Desana, 188, 249–50, 254; importance of touch for Western, 14, 189; deemed cold and sweet by Hausa, 200; sensory order of, in Morocco, 210–11, 216–17,

- 220n.1; deemed cold and inferior in Zinacantan, 237n.3; menstruating, deemed anti-cultural by Desana, 251; speech of, controlled by Dogon, 268; body decoration of Tiv, 269; deemed dark, juicy, and fetid by Hua, 272; speech of, controlled among Yanoama, 272. *See also* Birth
- Wordsworth, William, 19n.1
- Yaka, role of smell among, 146n.1
- Yanoama: shamans and darkness associated by, 271; female puberty rite among, 272
- Yoruba, gustatory metaphors for music among, 17–19
- Young, Michael, on orality in Melanesia, 282
- Zinacantan, Mexico: senses in rituals of, 188, 231–8, soul located in blood in, 284