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**AN ESSAY ON THE ‘SENSORY (EXPERIENTIAL) PHENOMENON’ WITH A
PERSPECTIVE FROM THE ANTHROPOLOGY**

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ABSTRACT

Following the rise of life philosophies and phenomenology in the early 20th century drawing into attention to the importance of human experience; the bodily experience and its sensory contents have begun to be examined. Especially, after World War II, the sensory phenomenon of the human and place interactions and their forms, nature, and dimensions have begun to be examined both scientifically and philosophically. Due to approaches paying attention to the sensorial interpretation of the world, the ‘sensory phenomenon’ emerged as a paradigmatic turn in the field of humanities and social sciences, and anthropology; and anthropologist David Howes called this shift as a ‘sensorial revolution’. This paper starts with a chronological reading on the ‘sensory phenomenon’ in the modern era and continues to discuss the process until the foundation of the nucleus of ‘Centre for Sensory Studies’ in 1988 by anthropologist David Howes and sociologist Anthony Synnott. Then, the paper makes an end of revealing the summary of the period after the 1980s; while the sensory studies influenced a variety of disciplines, and afterwards, the spatial dimensions of the sensations have been explored.

Keywords: Sense, sensory discussions in the modern era, Sensory Studies Center, David Howes

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1. INTRODUCTION

The critics on the mainstream transcendental characteristics of systematic philosophies in Western Philosophy paid attention to the importance of human experience in the 19th century, then the life philosophies and phenomenology, experimental psychology in the early 20th century has resulted in a prolific atmosphere in the field of anthropology to discuss the sensory and perceptual elements (Howes, 2005a; Howes, 2005b). The central issues started to base on the sensory (existential) nature of human and place interactions (Howes, 2005a). Zardini says that “*the human and social sciences, from anthropology to geography, have undergone a ‘sensorial revolution’ ...*”, and we have observed this new situation in different fields of study (Zardini, 2005: 22). This article tries to discuss some of the pioneer works related to the ‘sensory phenomena’ in the field of anthropology. The first section focuses on the period from the 1900s until the 1970s, and it investigated this period as an initial process before the important debates made towards the sensory studies’ abundances. Then, some examples have been reviewed in the sensory debates before focussing on the spatial features of the ‘sensory phenomenon’. The latest part of the article shows us that all ‘sensory studies’ played a significant role in comprehending the relationship between the environment and people. They challenged to deal with the ocular-centric research approaches. So, many academic discussions began to see the sensory sides of the human-place relation within different perspectives. The 1980s has been a cornerstone in the context of the sensory debates. After the foundation of ‘Centre for Sensory Studies’ in 1988, research from diverse field paid attention to the importance of sensory matters in the examinations of the built and natural environments. Especially, he works of anthropologist David Howes has shed light on further studies such as architecture, sensory studies, urban studies, ethnography beside the field of anthropology.

2. THE PERIODS

2.1. THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE 1900S UNTIL 1970S

One of the first attempts has been made by philosopher and psychologist William James in his book ‘*The Principles of Psychology*’ in 1890 paying attention to the significance of examining senses and emotion in psychology forming the inception of studies based on the sociology of the senses. One of the other attempts was made by neo-Kantian Sociologist Georg Simmel who published ‘*Sociology of the Senses*’ in 1908. In his book, he stressed the importance of examining sense impressions providing to achieve the knowledge of others and the important methodical role of these research for sociology (Low, 2012). In 1919, one of the founders of cultural history, Dutch Historian Johan Huizinga published ‘*The Autumn of the Middle Ages*’ paying attention not only to the historical experience but also a historical sensation of the late medieval period under the influence of the Dutch literary movement called ‘Sensitivism’. As well as psychometric methods in sensory studies, another direction emerged due to the philosophical approach of Humboldt which based on examining senses and sensation via language as a second direction in sensory studies. Under the influence of the approach of Humboldt, American anthropologist Franz Boas claimed there are some links between the elements of society and their environments and paved the way for cultural relativism. American social psychologist Roger Brown and linguist and neurologist Eric Lenneberg conducted some experiments to find out whether colour perception varies between speakers of languages that classified colours differently. Under the influence of Simmel, American urban sociologists Robert Park and Ernest Burgess published ‘*Introduction to the Science of Sociology*’ in 1921 extending the ideas of Simmel and seeking proper methods for sociology and

trying to define limits, scope and aim of sociology as a new rising discipline through starting from nature of human and interaction with their environments (Howes, 2013). The American philosopher and psychologist John Dewey conceptualized the human experience as an aesthetic transaction between the individual social actors and the world in his book *'Art as Experience'* published in 1934 (Low, 2012). In 1939, neo-Kantian sociologist and historian Norbert Elias published *'The Civilizing Process'* examining civilizing process from the Middle Ages to modernity as an internalization of the emotions and individuation of society causing limitation and orientation of touch and physical impulses. After three years, in 1942, Annales Historian Lucien Febvre published *'The Problem of Unbelief in Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais'* examining the sensory underpinnings of thought in different historical periods especially sixteenth-century European society who placed less emphasis on sight and more emphasis on hearing and smell when compared with twentieth-century Europeans (Howes, 2005a; Howes, 2005b; Howes, 2011; Howes, 2013).

After World War I, the attention to field research shifted from physiology to social morphology as the analysis of social organization working on and with the ground of the senses to a halt. In this direction, various publications have been published since the late years of the first half of the 20th century such as *'Arts De L'Oceanie'* of Maurice Leenhardt published in 1947, *'Time/Space Concepts of the Aivilik'* of Edmund Carpenter published in 1955. In the 1950s two anthropologists Margaret Mead and Rhoda Metraux focussed on the meaning of the senses and their social context. These attempts caused the emergence of approaches based on the assessment of cultures as text and this type of investigations reached its climax in the mid-1980s with the publication of *'Writing Culture-The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography'* by James Clifford and George E. Marcus published in 1986 (Howes, 2011). In 1962, structuralist anthropologist Levi-Strauss published *'The Savage Mind'* coined the term 'science of the concrete' based on concerning and classification of things following their embodied attributions such as colour, odour, sound as a method of understanding indigenous knowledge based on classification of the natural world through sensible qualities and complex sense-based taxonomies. He also examined sensory codes of myths to trace the operations of the mind. In the same year, media theoretician Marshall McLuhan published *'The Gutenberg Galaxy'* emphasized strong links between the senses and examined the role of emerging media and technological devices on the enhancement of sensual capacity and fusion between senses. In this book, he expressed the evolution of human communication as an *'oral stage'* (by referring to the dominance of speech in the medium of information), *'chirographic stage'* (by referring to the dominance of writing), *'typographic stage'* (by referring to the invention of printing and press) and *'electronic stage'* (referring to TV and internet and fragmentation and extension of the senses via electronic media), he discussed the hegemony of vision, disembodied knowledge in the media (Howes, 2013). In 1963, sociologist Howard S. Becker published *'Outsiders'* examining the links between the consumption of 'marijuana', and senses of hearing and tasting and processes of socialization, cultivation and regulation. In the same years, sociologist Erwig Goffman published two articles dealing with everyday life, senses, and construction of the self. He generated the interactional approach assessing a society as a network of interactions and dealing with individuals' selves, behaviours, senses, and other psychological manners in this interactional context. In 1967, sociologist Harold Garfinkel generated ethnomethodology focusing on the dynamical social interactions within the experiential and sensorial context of actors constituting the society by benefitting from phenomenology (Low, 2012). *'The Hidden Dimension'* of Edward T. Hall published in 1966 and *'The Castaldi Collection from Central and Southern Baja California'* of

William C. Massey published in 1966 and these studies caused speculations on the meaning of sensory experience in different cultures. Brent Berlin and Paul Kay published '*Basic Colour Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*' in 1969 dealing with the meaning of the senses and generated an evolutionary scale by benefitting from colour terms in languages based on linguistic relativity. Through these examples, sensory matters have been more visible in the humanities and social sciences (Howes, 2011; Howes, 2013; Howes, 2014).

2.2. IN THE 1970S: THE SHIFTS IN HUMANITIES AND TOWARDS THE SENSORY STUDIES

Beginning from the 1970s, sensory studies emerged as a result of the paradigmatic shifts in humanities and these are firstly the '*linguistic turn*' in the 1970s influenced by Saussurian semiology and Wittgenstein's notion of language games which assessing culture as a 'language' or 'text', then the '*pictorial turn*' in 1980s stressing the significant role of visual imagery in human communication and cultural systems caused the emergence of a new field as visual culture studies, and the '*corporeal turn*' drawn attention to the significant role of body and embodiment as a paradigm for cultural analysis and the '*material turn*' canalized the physical infrastructure attentions of the social world caused to the emergence of material culture studies. These shifts in humanities contributed to the emergence of sensory revolution in humanities focussing on the cultural life of the senses. These approaches have criticised firstly the bias privileging language and meaning over other types of vocalizations and commented on the visualism and materialism; and they stressed the dynamical, reciprocal, intersensory, dimensions of our everyday engagement with the world. These aspects of sensory studies brought about to be paid attention to the interaction between senses and architectural environments as the material container of cultural and social values. Then the researchers from various disciplines such as human geography, social history, urban anthropology focused on the sensorial side of the world (Howes, 2005a; Howes, 2005b).

Since the beginning of the 1970s, the spatial context of senses and landscapes of senses begun to be examined and some terms referring to the landscape of senses such as soundscape has been begun to be used. In 1971, American anthropologist Ashley Montagu published '*Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*' which was one of the major contributions in the genealogy of the sense-specific subfields of sensory studies dealing with the sense of touch. In the following year, in 1972, two of the other major contributions in the sense-specific subfields of sensory studies especially visual culture studies have been made by John Berger's '*Ways of Seeing*' and Michael Baxandall's '*Painting and Experience in 15th Century Italy*'. One of the first attempts to research the spatial context of senses has been made by Yi Fi Tuan through his book entitled '*Topophilia: a Study of Environmental Perception: Attitudes and Values*' in 1972. He first drew attention to the spatiality of the senses and their role in shaping the emotional relationships of people to their habitat, he emphasized the difference between space and place following better adaptation and attachment through senses. In 1975, as well as sense-specific subfields of sensory studies, specific sensory and national based sensory research shifted to the more holistic and inter-sensory, multisensory, or transnational understanding of the sensorium-based approaches as a historical formation. One of the first bibliographic studies in this category has been made by Lousi Vinge in his work '*The Five Senses*' published in 1975. In the same year, the anthropologist Anthony Seeger published '*The Meaning of Body Ornaments*' examining body decoration among the Gêspeaking peoples of Mato Grosso in Brazil demonstrating the links between the variation in the ornamentation of a body part (eye, ear, nose). In 1978, Michael Bross has made extensive research examining how the sensory restriction techniques to one sense organ can alter the sensitivity in

other sensory channels, this work paved the way for research constructing typologies of cultures sorted in terms of which of the possible sense ratios they actualize by benefitting from measuring their sense ratios measured through sensory restriction techniques. In 1979, Pierre Bourdieu published *'Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste'* which has been one of the major works in taste based cultural studies in the 20th century. The 1970s has been the period the new dimensions have been generated to the sensory context of the humanistic-based research (Howes, 2011; Howes, 2014).

2.3. THE 'SENSORY TURN' AND THE FOUNDATION OF SENSORY STUDIES IN THE 1980S

The 'sensory turn' as Howes called emerged in anthropology in the 1980s thanks to various overtures to the senses in the anthropological and historical literature of previous decades. Howes makes a big contribution to reveal the story of the sensory debates in 1980 (Howes, 2005a; Howes 2005b). In 1981, Lawrence A. Babb published an essay *'Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism'* dealing with visualism in Hindu culture. In the same year, anthropologist Anthony Seeger published *'Nature and Society in Central Brazil: The Suyu Indians of Mato Grosso'* focussed on the primary role of olfaction among Suyu Indians. In 1982, ethnomusicologist Steven Feld published *'Sound and Sentiment'* which can be assessed as one of the early texts in anthropology focussing on fundamental aurality and sound symbolism of Kaluli of New Guinea modes of perception and cultural expression. Historian Alain Corbin published *'The Foul and the Fragrant'* investigating the social life of smell in nineteenth-century France. In 1982, British anthropologist Mary Douglas published *'In the Active Voice'* dealing with links between economic, social, and cultural aspects of societies and their influence on the sense of taste. In 1983, anthropologist Johannes Fabian published *'Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object'* dealing with the sense of time across cultures to pay attention to assessing cultures through avoiding examining under the perspective of Western-centrism. In the same year, Michael Jackson published an essay entitled as *'Knowledge of the Body'* drawing attention to the dynamical role of body and senses on the conceptualization of the *'umwelt'* among natives especially Kuranko initiation rituals and criticized the anthropological approaches assessing cultures as texts due to their ground-based on disembodied concepts and de-contextualized sayings and claimed cultural meaning resides in activities and somatization and regulating perception via sensations instead of verbalizations (Howes, 2011, p. 6). In 1984, American cultural anthropologist Paul Stoller published an essay as *'Sound in Songhay Cultural Experience'* focusses on the problematic visualism of Western thought, and culture and ways of transcending this bias to connect with the cultural experience of non-Western subjects; and he has dealt with the inner and penetrating dimension of sound to objects in Songhay cultural experience in Nigeria. In the same year, in 1984, the cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove published *'Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape'* debating the idea of the landscape which is rooted in a Western painterly and literary tradition and suggested to bracket and replace the concept of a landscape with a more neutral term of the *'sensescape'* such as soundscape, smellscape, bodyscape and so forth. This study paved the way for recognition of the significant contribution of senses to people's orientation in space, to their awareness of spatial relationships; and the appreciation of the qualities of micro and macro-spatial environments. In the same year, Tamil anthropologist Valentine Daniel published *'Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way'* examined whether there are any sequences between the senses determined by the culture in pilgrimage activity devoted to Lord Ayyappan in Southern India and, he explained the collapse of the sense of hearing, sighting, tasting and speaking and touching and merge all of them for the

disappearance of any sense of self. In the same year, anthropologist Joel C. Kuipers published an essay *'Matters of Taste in Weyéwa'* focussing on the role of sense of taste on social significance among Weyewa people living in Sumba in East Indonesia. Then, Stephen A Tyler published an essay *'The Poetic Turn in Postmodern Anthropology'* dealing with the sense of sight and seeing-as-knowing complex. These studies displayed different cultures display different perceptual orientations and culture must be analyzed holistically. In the following year, in 1985, anthropologist Sidney Mintz published *'Sweetness and Power'* investigating social, political, and economic impacts of sucrose and dealing with working of African slavers on the sugar plantation and effects of capitalism on them, and he asserted the matter of sweetness and power opened a space within the nascent field of sensory history for researching and writing the history of sensations, or sensuous substances. In the same year, philosopher Michel Serres, published *'The Five Senses'* focusing on the role of senses on body and world, and asserted the senses as continuously exceeding or surpassing the body by 'mingling' with the world, and each other. In 1989, Peter Jackson published *'Maps of Meaning: An Introduction to Cultural Geography'* examining the evolution of cultural landscapes and interpretation of past environments and nature of giving meaning to the world and bodily and sensory basis of the meaning (Howes, 2011; Howes, 2013; Howes, 2014).

2.3.1. THE FOUNDATION OF CONCORDIA SENSORIA RESEARCH TEAM (CONSERT)

In 1988, the nucleus of the Centre for Sensory Studies has been formed through a research program called 'The Varieties of Sensory Experience', and it has been organized by the sociologist Anthony Synnott and anthropologist David Howes aiming to take the senses out of the psychology laboratories and get back the sensations into the everyday life, in history and cultures. As well as Howes and Synnott, cultural historian Constance Classen joined the team and CONSERT (Concordia Sensoria Research Team) has been formed altogether. In their team, Classen focussed on the cultural history of the senses, and Howes and Synnott focussed on generating a new approach for anthropology and sociology of the senses, respectively. They focussed on several projects and published some books. One of their major works was *'Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell'* published in 1994 examining the cultural, historical, and social context of a sense of smell. After this publication, they began to pay attention to the second senses (sense of hearing) and lower senses (smell, touch, and taste), and they organized a conference entitled *'Uncommon Senses: An International Conference on the Senses in Art and Culture'* held in April 2000 with the funding of the Quebec Social Science Research. Thanks to the foundation of CONSERT, many publications have been published, a lot of research have been conducted, several laboratories have been found since 1988 and the field of sensory studies has been established. After the 2000s, Bianca Grohmann joined the team and another dimension as marketing and senses added to the research area of the team. As well as these research areas, after the 2010s, the social construction of masculinity and male sensibilities (*Re-Thinking Men published in 2010*), technology and the sensorial transformation in the modern period (*Entangled published in 2010*), has become other research issues of CONSERT. The CONSERT defined their research approaches on the senses and sense perception as

- focussing on the social and cultural context of the senses instead of the physiology and psychology of perception
- paying attention to the lower senses in an effort instead of the dominance of vision (and audition)

in traditional Western perspective

- focussing on the links between the senses in a holistic way (intersensory) instead of studying the senses individually
- focussing on analysing the commercialization and technologization of the sensory matters
- seeking for benefiting from multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research (Howes, 2013; Howes, 2014).

The 1990s have been very prolific years in terms of new disciplines that emerged in sensory studies such as anthropology of the senses, sociology of the senses, and geography of the senses and sensory studies formed as an interdisciplinary, international and intersensory research field. As well as the 1990s, the 2000s until today has been also very prolific in terms of publications in sensory studies.

Since the foundation of sensory studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, three main waves need to be considered. The first wave focussed on the senses as an object of study as they are means of perception and give the world but absent themselves in the process. This movement tried to draw attention to how we perceive the world through senses instead of what we perceive and relate to the world through perception was accepted as skills changing across cultures and history. Considering the senses, reflecting on the ‘means of perception’ has been the first revolutionary step of the sensorial revolution. The second wave paid attention to participate in sensation as a way of intimate sensing instead of observation of the sensation and focussed on all senses instead of an only sense of sight. Participant sensation treats the whole body as sentient and every sense as susceptible to skill instead of observation privileging sense of sight. Intimate sensing in participant sensation is complex, difficult, and filthy when compared with remote sensing which is clean, cold, detached, and easy. In this movement, another novelty has been the exploration of the spatial dimension of sensation and generated new terms related to space such as auditory space, olfactory space, and visual space and so on. The third movement paid attention to the links amongst senses and challenging the folk beliefs based on the separation of senses for drawing attention to the multisensorial, intermingled nature of aesthetic experience based on the union and/or transposition of sensations, rather than their separation (Howes, 2013). As Sarah Pink underlined the significance of the examination of the poly-sensory encounters on how people experience their environments (Pink, 2009: 37) have been paid attention to widely in these years.

CONCLUSION

The shifts in human sciences paved the way for research on the issues of sensations in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Different disciplines such as human geography, social history, ethnography, and especially anthropology have made a great contribution to the formation of research areas examining the role of sensations. The research began to stress the dynamic nature of our everyday engagement with the world through the sensations. They aimed to demonstrate what a focus on the senses could contribute to our understanding. This has important in ocular-centric research approaches. Then a ‘sensory turn’ emerged in the 1980s thanks to various attempts for understanding the senses as a paradigmatic shift by the researchers in CONSERT. This centre achieved a significant breakthrough in terms of overcoming the visual bias in the fields of arts, humanities, and social sciences. Then, the studies boosted their capacities to analyse human experiences by considering different methods based on the sensory qualifications of the environments. We have witnessed that the debates after the 1980s started to depict the experience,

perception and representing of the senses comprehensively added new dimensions. The sensory-based movements and methodologies created new horizons. They opened novel ways to discuss the sensory phenomenon in a poly-sensorial context. A deep understanding of a place requires a multi-sensory examination. This article that follows a phenomenological approach- says that any sensory experience of oneself structure and design the world. We know our environments are in a dynamic system characterised by constant changes and interactions among the sensory activities. The sensory aspects make the place integrated with continuous human perception. Therefore, we are continuously creating and recreate our surroundings through the way that we experience, perceive and sense.

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