

# Introduction

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Everyday life with its unfailing routines is at once a set of banalities and a deep mystery. On the one hand, everything is known; in performing the tasks of everyday life people know what to do, where and when, without thinking. On the other hand, if one steps aside for a moment, and looks at the behaviors as they appear in scenes that unfold on the daily 'stage', one cannot help but wonder why and how. Why do people accept the unquestioned authority of what is to be done even though the 'powers' that demand their performance are unseen? How does it come about that the familiar is embraced as both inevitable and comforting?

Looking at everyday life with these questions in mind underlines our conviction that what may seem to be a series of personal choices is actually a mix of social options that operate in different domains of human experience. Although we cannot hope to uncover the full range of influences that have an impact on the 'program' that unravels every day, we will, in this book, talk about one of the most elusive aspects of daily life—how social factors impinge on the senses. As the articles show, the most intimate sensory experiences—the hearing, smelling, touching, and seeing that people do in everyday life—shape, and are shaped by social structures and processes. Since there is good reason to suppose that location makes a difference, we present a collection all centering on sensory experiences related to specific places in Asia. The point is for the collection to bridge a conception of place with conceptions of how the senses 'work' in diverse social domains in Asia and how various aspects of everyday life are interrelated with these experiences.

Presenting 'social perspectives on the senses' in Asia, we are interested in beginning to uncover how and to what extent particularities of place mold sensory experiences and the 'common sense' that governs everyday life. The articles contribute to an understanding of the extent to which sensory experiences are similar in a shared geographical location with, to some extent, shared cultural orientations.

We have been guided by several fundamental assumptions:

- From some points of view, the unique contribution of sociology to knowledge of the world is the exploration of laws that apply to people in the aggregate. While macro-sociological theorizing and research are of the utmost importance in grasping the sweeping trends of how the world works, life is not lived in the aggregate, and understanding how individuals actually conduct their lives in concert is a challenge that social science cannot ignore. Analyzing the lived experience of the everyday is important in its own right.

- Investigations of everyday life also contribute to the ‘larger picture’. Sociological analyses of everyday life allow a nuanced articulation of the dimensions of macro-influences and the depth of their impact on the world as people know it.
- The spaces in which everyday life unfolds are significantly diverse. Human beings do not live in the kind of neutral multi-dimensional *spaces* that can be described mathematically. They live in *places* charged with meanings and feelings that build up over time. Places are of course important for framing moments of action. Moreover, their meanings are enriched by memories of what has gone before and by the consciousness of new memories accruing in them. Not least, places afford a specific, but wide range of sensory experiences.
- When sensory experiences (hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, smelling) are understood exclusively in terms of the physiological and psychological mechanisms that make them possible (Dunn 1997, 2001, McIntosh et al. 1999), their significance is reduced immeasurably. Implicitly, through the senses, people experience and often find out about the aggregate of which they are part. Through the senses, we assess the degree to which our behaviors are / have been appropriate. Through the senses we ascertain atmospheres, moods, intentions, configuring experiences as happiness or sadness. Through the senses, we acquire our grasp of how meanings are created by ties with people in *places*.
- Experiences through the senses in places of significance can therefore be the key to a deeper understanding not only of the systematic meanings that infuse *everyday life* but also of the contradictions that become salient when we have to deal with the ties, the rushes of emotion, the conditions that evoke actions of particular kinds and the amassing of memories. All together, the contradictions disclosed in the meanings that surface as a jumble of sensory experiences govern the ways individuals position themselves in collectives and fashion their entry into the world with compliance or resistances.

### **Importance of Everyday Life to a Sociological View of the World**

There is a rich background for our initiative in the social science literature.

Sociological interest in everyday life is implicit in the work of all the canonical European ‘fathers of sociology’. In the work of each and all, the impulse to look at everyday life stemmed from a different source as did the methodology that they were inspired to adopt. In the minds of Comte (2000/1844) and Spencer (1895), for example, there was no question but that any discussion of the nature of the social had to begin with an analysis of the family as a basic social unit, and of how individuals interpreted their world in spiritual and in symbolic terms. Their sources were detailed ethnological reports of how people kept their lives going in different places outside Europe. It is well-known that in the large, Marx (1978)

was interested in describing how under capitalism, the relations of production and distribution were such as to constrain the productive class to limitations in consumption. His systematic monitoring of economic behavior was, however, fired by a deep concern for the plight of workers and their families. On his part, Durkheim (1951, 1964/1938) emphasized searches for elements of the 'collective consciousness' and the 'collective conscience' in careful analyses of national statistics. But as the typology of *Suicide* shows, through his examination of how national suicide statistics correlated with statistics about religious affiliation he was interested in deducing *personal* motives for seeking to end one's life.

Still, the sociological concern of these pioneering sociologists was above all that of drawing a comprehensive picture of 'society', the name for the collectivities that were being discovered to be natural social formations, as the nation-state was being institutionalized. Weber's approach was somewhat different. He analyzed collectives defined by their religious orientations in order to ferret out relationships between institutionalized religion and actions in the realm of the polity and the economy (1963, 1968, 2002). Although he declared that his objective was to characterize collectivities, he charted the outcomes as consequences of 'subjectively adequate reasons' for action in different domains of living. As a sociologist Weber compiled 'ideal types' of historically-generated abstractions that conceptualized repertoires of motivations for action. They were conceived as the purified 'ideas' that prompted typical actions in given collectives. They were not ideas that would be found in the realities of mundane living, but they were designed to serve as a base for comparisons with the actuality of the everyday. In his project of building a 'formal sociology', Simmel went further into micro-social experiences, embracing views of individuals thrust into the world of everyday life from diverse angles. Simmel (Wolff 1950) called attention to the intrinsically social meaning of small 'sociations', and grounded his sociological project on sources that reflect practices and their existential meanings. Among the sets of individual experiences that he sought to analyze are practices of friendship, marriage, being a stranger, and life in the city, all deeply personal conditions and practices.

Inspired by Simmel's approach to capturing the texture of real life, sociologists at the University of Chicago developed research projects designed to disclose everyday practices, especially among people who were not considered 'normative'. These included hoboes, taxi-dancers, juvenile delinquents, and thieves (Anderson 1923, 1928, Cressey 1932, Shaw 1966/1930). But at the same time, they developed theoretical tools that legitimated the concern with the petty details of living, the school of symbolic interaction, which was nourished by the philosophy of John Dewey (1994/1916) and the social psychology of Charles Cooley (1902) and George Mead (1934).

Continuities and discontinuities in the logic of everyday life can be traced in the long range as well. In Volume I of his magnum opus, Braudel (1981) describes the everyday as the heart of the history of the Mediterranean basin during the fifteenth to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In his *History of Manners*, Elias (1969) traces the process of the acquisition of civilization as emerging through the

implementation of agency. He focuses on the widest implications of the taken for granted, showing further how configurations of daily practices are involved in the formation of states and in the nature of European civilization (Elias 1982). In recent work, change as the foundation of everyday life is delineated in descriptions which locate everyday life in particular types of movement, specifically of *automobility* (see Urry 2007), which underlines flows that cannot be stemmed. While these approaches to analyzing everyday life seem to accept the accessible and the familiar as fundamental and inevitable, the works of Lefebvre (2000), De Certeau (1984) and Debord (1961) among others, describe everyday life as a trap to be resisted and in the case of Lefebvre, even as a cradle of resistance and the jumping off place for ultimate revolt.

Thus, everyday life as a topic of research discloses both 'fields of possibility' and 'fields of doubt' (Highmore 2002: 4). Many believe that it is still important for social scientists to ask naïve questions, responses to which can be culled from novels, such as those of Balzac and De Maupassant, as well as from psychoanalytical explorations of how traumatic experiences of early life color everyday life throughout adulthood. The very range of approaches confirms the fluidity and the uncertainty that underpin any attempt to define what everyday life *is*.

### **Space and Place in the Realization of the Everyday**

Performances of the everyday are located in predefined spaces. While space has often been described as 'amorphous and intangible' (Relph 1976: 8), Lefebvre's (2000) view is that space always provides a context for meaning and socio-cultural practices determine that meaning. In developing a Marxian theory of socio-spatial praxis, he identifies the revolutionary transformation of society with agents' freedom to take over space, to control space by right. In this way he counters the Althusserian insistence on space as an expression of social structure that is advocated by Castells (see Gottdiener 1997).

Harvey (2004: 2) insists that space as a geographical element has to be examined from at least three points of view: as an 'absolute' that exists independently of matter; but also as a relationship between objects that 'relate to each other'; or as relational, with space 'contained in objects in the sense that an object can be said to exist only insofar as it contains and represents within itself relationships to other objects'. In most cases, therefore, it is understood that universalistic generalizations about space take on importance when they are adapted to 'the particular, the local, and the specific' (Smith 2007: 107), in a word, to an association with place. By contrast with the objective orientation that can be adopted toward space, subjectivity is embedded in place. As such it is a focus of interest in the concerns of philosophers and geographers but also in the work of ethnographers and anthropologists. According to Preston (2003, 2005), developing an appreciation of the overwhelming effects of place is a primary task

of philosophy. Casey (1996, 2001: 684) finds precedents in the work of Heidegger (1971) and Merleau-Ponty (1962), that show how a broad philosophical view of place is connected with issues of ontology and identity. Simply put, the self can only develop in a place. Indeed, from a psychological point of view, identities incorporate a spatial dimension which is their identification with place (Hopkins and Dixon 2006: 175).

Places are characterized by paradigmatic architectural conceptualizations populated by objects and people distributed according to syntagmatic principles that are implicit or explicit in ideology (Gottdiener 1995). Each object 'constitutes the intersection between social context and the codified, connotative ideologies of social practice, on the one hand, and the material, objective, production or design practice which produces the object world, on the other' (Gottdiener 1995: 56). Thus, people identify themselves in relation to the contextualized ideologies and in relation to the use values of the object, finding in *place* centers of meaning (Relph 1976: 22), a union of space and lived culture, a combination of memory and lifestyle that can be seen to constitute a community (Harner 2001, Lippard 1997). There is also evidence of the interaction of gender and place in McDowell (1999) and Andrews (2003) who locates '... a Geography of Nursing' through an analysis of the relationship between an abstract space and places of nursing practice.

The meanings of place in the framework of social structure have been a recurrent theme in the journal, *Cultural Anthropology* (see especially, Cooke 1990) as well as in books. We will cite a few. Deliberately trying to explain the wide variety of meanings locality can have to people, a collection edited by Feld and Basso (1996) unites essays on how 'place' is understood and used in language in locations as disparate as New Guinea, East Anglia, and Kentucky. The message of the collection is pithily summed up by Geertz who, in an 'Afterword' (1996: 262), points out that 'no one lives in the world in general'. In another collection, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) bring together articles that relate to how migrants experience place. They interpret the steady increase in trans-national migration as a phenomenon of more and more people deliberately exchanging one place for another across determinate borders. The processes are influenced by the mass media, which many see as 'placeless', and by the consumption of signs which makes at once for 'place-making' and resistance. Among those who are constrained to 'place-making', it is important to consider the 'displaced, deterritorialized and transient populations ... [which are] engaged in the construction of locality as a structure of feeling' (Appadurai 1995: 222). Later, Inda and Rosaldo (2001) look at how the fluidity of resources, finances, work, and people which defines globalization, affects and is affected by place. In this context, 'the defense of constructions of place' (Escobar 2001) is also an important element in the strategies of social movements which often emerge to resist violations of dearly held places.

Differences between *space* and *place* are underlined by the fact that architects are known to make deliberate efforts to design selected public spaces so that they will not be recognized as places that lack distinction. The tension between

‘place’ and ‘placelessness’ is neatly explored by Gottdiener (2001) who, while pointing out that airports in their uniformity can be seen as examples of efforts at placelessness, acknowledges that increasingly the initial conceptualization of airport design as planning for characterless spaces is giving way to designs that accord with cultural symbols. The evolution of space into place apparently marks a trend in the spirit of the times, so to speak. From a different angle, we can trace this change in the lifework of one of the outstanding geographers of the twentieth century, Yi-Fu Tuan. From his initial investigations, Tuan was interested in how people fit into geography. In an early work, he took an objective view of how human beings connect to space. The chapters of his landmark book, *Topophilia* (Tuan 1974), describe these connections by looking at space from a distance, so to speak. But his recently published work, a reflective presentation of his experiences on *Coming Home to China* (Tuan 2007), is a personal monograph on the deeper meanings of ‘place’. In it he describes a visit to the country he left at the age of ten by conveying to the reader the sights, sounds, and smells (not always pleasant) of his homeland, which he still perceives in a sense as his ‘place’.

### **Sensory Experiences as the Core of Everyday Living**

The sensory meanings accorded to places have indeed become a ‘respectable’ basis for geographical research. Recognizing that what we absorb through the senses is the substance of our personal translation of abstract space into ‘place’, the location of our identities, we can only wonder at why sensory experiences have suffered from relative neglect in the social sciences. Surely the senses are foremost to the experience of what people undergo in places. As a rule, it is understood that the senses are purely bodily phenomena. But there are different ways of looking at these internal experiences. The idea that it is impossible to explain perception, that is, openness to sensory experiences, solely by examining physiological mechanisms is not new in itself. Orthodox experimental psychology that held to the reductionist position was challenged from two directions in the twentieth century: first from the vantage point of linguistics and later from within the community of psychologists.

Already in 1929, Sapir, a linguist and anthropologist, formulated what later came to be called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, arguing that ‘Human beings ... are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society.... The fact of the matter is that the ‘real world’ is, to a large extent unconsciously, built upon the language habits of the group.... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose [us to] certain choices of interpretation’ (Sapir 1958 [1929]: 69, Whorf 1956). On the basis of this insight that: ‘No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality’, Sapir concludes that there is an extremely wide range of sensory perception.

Later in the twentieth century J.J. Gibson, an ecological psychologist, concluded from his experiments that perception is not merely a direct outcome of what one is exposed to and prepared for through one's language. It has to do with the prevailing environment. Gibson's concept of 'affordances', to describe, as he put it (Gibson 1986/1979: 127) 'what the environment offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. [but basically]... something that refers to both the environment and the animal ... [and] implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment'. The detailed meaning of the concept, 'affordance' and its ramifications for understanding how perception gets done and what it means are still being explored extensively in experiments as well as in field research and in work related to artificial intelligence and robotics (see Jones 2003, McGrenere and Ho 2000, Norman 1999, Stoffregen and Bardy 2001). One outgrowth of these studies is the discovery that no single sense can be exercised (is, in a word, 'afforded') alone. A consequence of this conclusion is the insight that once people accommodate themselves to any given place, they become involved in holistic sensory experiences. Psychologists have shown, in sum, that place is important for affording the exercise of any sensory mode and for experiencing inter-sensory events.

Thus, perception is best understood as shaped by the interaction of human beings with the environment. But that interaction is guided by and interpreted with the very language tools that affect the possibility of perception. Clearly, these processes cannot be halted at will. They are institutionalized in language, which applies to every sphere of living and is pervasive in everyday life. But language is the mechanism that makes it possible for people to live in groups and for groups to live as neighbors. We have come full circle—everyday life is inevitably related to place, which is comprehended as a conglomerate of sensory experiences. It is these experiences that, in one way or another, govern human 'dispositions'. While analyses of the 'lifeworld' (Schutz and Luckmann 1973) tended to characterize everyday living as a domain of mere custom or habit, an enclave detached from the processes of history and from the yoke of science; current work views everyday life as the dynamic core of the social and in many ways the launch pad for investigations of the social.

### **Performing Everyday Life**

Configurations of dispositions, the habitus, are the motors for performing everyday life. Descriptions of the 'habitus' of any group of people, and of its consequences constitute translations of practices into language. Researchers can rely on observations and create opportunities for rendering evident different levels of the everyday and their interaction with different levels of the social structure.

As a social phenomenon, therefore, the study of everyday life must be guided by an empirical pragmatism (Crook 1998). Researchers have found a variety of ways to discover the methodological complications of the mundane. Underlying

actions are complicated conceptions of methods and principles. Morris (1988) uses anecdotal reporting to demonstrate how complex the habitus of everyday life is, and to show how *erudite* the *mundane voice* is (see also Gregg 2004). As the location for the practices and for the foundations of identity, place is saturated with meaning which heaps up over a lifetime, but also over group time, throughout history (see Burkitt 2004, Melucci 1989). For inhabitants, outer evidence is perceived in the practices that express habitual actions and practices, the 'habitus' that governs how human beings approach the long range of the macro as well as immediate tasks (Bourdieu 1977, Casey 2001). Indeed, as has repeatedly been shown, life experience is irremediably filled with history on the one hand and with surprise events that depend on the application of different kinds of knowledge, on the other (Sandywell 2004).

Research projects which have attempted to trace components of everyday life from different angles of vision include recent studies of the city as a place which expresses representations, community and civic culture, myths and collective memories, sentiments, identities and lifestyles; developed in specific interactions and practices (Borer 2006: 181). Such work calls attention to what is externalized as the experience of place and is, therefore, highly important; but it is far from exhaustive. In attending to what keeps people 'busy'—making a living, sustaining the family, keeping friends, and participating in community—the social structuring of 'inner' activity can safely be taken for granted. Much of what happens to people in places cannot be included under such headings. Even though people are rarely aware of everything that is happening at a given moment in everyday life, it is likely that the details of sensory experience in any given place are key indicators of feeling and meaning.

Clearly, we are convinced that in order to begin to understand why 'we lack resistance to the present' and why everyday life is such a tantalizing phenomenon to describe and explain sociologically (see De Certeau 1984, Lefebvre 1991, 2000/1971, Sztompka 2008), it is important to try to consider the full range of the taken for granted—the senses that guide human action. That is to say, the description of everyday life has to begin with an attempt to unpack conscious action together with the capacities that guide those actions. Uncovering the diverse ways in which the senses are invoked because of surrounding affordances, and the impact of the available language is the responsibility of social scientists. We can map the centrality of place in affording opportunities for action—habitual and rare to bizarre according to contingencies.

Most important in connection with this book is the recognition that most of the work done on place and on the senses has been carried out in the West. Bhabha (2004) argues that there must be a way of overcoming the single-minded approach to analyses. In his view, it is important to promote a post-colonial theoretical approach to overcome Western violence toward what are far too easily defined as 'other' cultures. Such violence can be discerned in the traditional and chronic, if subtle, denigration of non-Western cultures in research projects. Echoing the claims of Sapir-Whorf, he points out that the cultural source of this denigration

can be found in the reification of binary oppositions such as ‘center / margin, civilized / primitive, or civilized / savage, enlightened / ignorant’. He recommends a fundamental realignment of the methodology of cultural analysis toward the ‘performative’ and ‘enunciatory present’ and advocates ‘linguistic multivocality’ as the means toward a reinterpretation of the politics of colonization. But the thrust of Bhabha’s emphasis on the potential for ‘cultures’ to interact in complex ways obscures the omni-presence of everyday life, the life-world in which the people who ‘do’ cultures experience and interpret places.

In sum, the research brought together in this book deals with the complexities of the everyday by addressing four main objectives:

**1. To fill a lacuna in extant scholarship on the senses and everyday life in Asia**

While recent works have dealt with historical and anthropological dimensions of the senses (see, for example Ackerman 1990, Almagor 1987, Classen 1993, Howes 2003), attention to the senses in Asian societies has been scarce, with the exception of a few works such as that of Cohen (1988), Law (2001), and Schulman (2006). Moreover, extant sensory scholarship has relied mainly on historical and secondary data for analysis and interpretation, where original empirical data are either lacking or insufficient. By contrast with other scholarly endeavors which tend to highlight the social salience of the senses in non-industrial societies (for example, van Beek 1992, Pandya 1993, Rasmussen 1999) or in Western/historical scholarship (for example, Classen 2007, Smith 2007), our collection comprises original data collected through ethnographic, historical, discursive, and participatory research which goes beyond Western paradigms and concepts to structure in-depth analyses of sensory experiences.

**2. To offer comprehensive and nuanced views of emerging notions of space and place, lending prominence to the varied contexts in which the senses operate and are acted upon**

Data obtained from different Asian societies located in East, Southeast, and South Asia as well as the Middle East, contribute to locating the senses at the forefront of social experience and interaction, thereby complementing the burgeoning field of sensory research. In addition, they present investigations into different spheres of social life which intersect with, and are influenced by the senses to create a context of place. Among the spheres explored are food consumption and shopping, everyday rituals, apprenticeship and power relations, and heritage conservation.

**3. To provide grounds for discussion of the senses in trans-national settings**

By now it is commonly acknowledged that the senses do not operate in individuals in isolation, nor are they acted upon homogeneously within a particular social context. In our book, trans-national settings are featured (see the chapter by Abdullah on food ingestion for students studying abroad, and Iida’s research on notions of touch for both Thais and foreigners). Contributors to this volume

highlight and tease out new ways of exploring how the senses affect everyday life experiences beyond 'local' settings and cultures.

#### **4. To underscore the value of a multi-disciplinary approach to analyses of the senses as a distinct level of everyday life experience**

This book brings together scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds—sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and economics—in a concerted effort to place the senses in and of Asia in the foreground for analysis and interpretation.

#### **Structure of the Book**

Thematically structured in three parts with an Introduction and an Afterword, the collection elaborates on issues which cohere with the goals that we have detailed.

Introduction: The Introduction provides a background for the articles in the book by surveying the social science literature on everyday life, analyzing the tensions and uncertainties of place and space, and highlighting the importance of sensory experiences as determinate factors in the habitus of everyday life in different parts of Asia.

Part I on 'Experiencing Space and Place' comprises three chapters which center on the broad intertwining of the senses and acquired dispositions toward patterns of thought, behavior, and taste. Kalekin-Fishman's chapter, tracing sounds in Israeli everyday life, shows that sound can be seen as a link between micro and macro places, technologies and relationships. Ferzacca examines Javanese 'structures of feeling' and 'affective registers' which metaphorically render experience in sensory terms with materiality of social life made concrete in a 'somatophoric' (body as metaphor) organization of experience in urban sites. Heide Imai describes 'Sensory Encounters in the Alleyways' of Tokyo by highlighting 'the daily and sensory experience of urban life at the bottom edge' of a conurbation positioned as a city which seems to be located exclusively in the unlimited space of the global.

Part II focuses on 'Traditions and the Senses' and presents two chapters that deal with how the senses shape traditions. Low's chapter provides insights into how memories of the Singapore army are constructed and perpetuated, thereby demonstrating the salience of the senses as effective cues in texturing the past along with the use of nostalgia in nation-building processes. Senses are summoned in the reconstruction of the past. Mu Peng, writing about 'Apprenticeship and Embodied Knowledge in Rural China' shows that the sensory appreciation of how masters use their bodies is integral to religious knowledge. Only long-term apprenticeship and identification with the masters ultimately ensures ritual efficiency.

In Part III, 'Sensory Experiences across Borders', three chapters each explore a central experience of the senses, emphasizing convergences and divergences in different milieus. In a chapter on Thai massage, Junko Iida shows how differently touch is experienced by the massage practitioners and their clients, many of whom

are tourists. Abdullah's chapter on food and the senses addresses how sensory cues through food preparation and consumption elucidate different, perhaps even divided identity formations for students who study overseas, far from the place they call home. Bricas and Figuié's work traces the changing consumption patterns of the Vietnamese under modernization.

The 'Afterword' explores the theoretical themes that emerge from the collection and discusses the kinds of further research that are implied.

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