

The Social Life of the Senses: Charting Directions

Kelvin E.Y. Low*

Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore

Abstract

Sensory scholarship in the fields of sociology, anthropology, history and geography, among others, has proliferated in the last few decades. Sensory works in these disciplines argue for the senses as social, highlighting important insights that further our comprehension of selfhood, culture, and social relations. In this paper, I delineate five interrelated sections that inform how sensory works have developed over time. In the first section, I provide an adumbrated background with regard to the hierarchy of the senses, and call attention to the need to move beyond the hegemony of vision. The second section offers a discussion on how Sociology has contributed to sensory studies, addressed alongside other disciplines. Building upon these two sections, both theoretical directions and methodological issues will be deliberated in the third and fourth sections respectively. The last section locates the development of sensory research in organizational terms, by elucidating upon the various institutional efforts that have been pursued towards organizing sensory research and scholarly publications through different avenues. The article then concludes by putting forward the concept of sensory transnationalism as a suggestion for the next step forward towards broadening sensory research.

Social science literature on the senses has proliferated in the last few decades, especially in the fields of sociology and anthropology. Departing from related works located within disciplines such as biology, psychology, and physiology, sensory studies argue for the senses as social, revealing important insights pertaining to selfhood, culture, and social relations. In this paper, I summarize this field in five interrelated sections. First, I provide a brief discussion of the ‘hierarchy of the senses’ and the need to maneuver beyond the hegemony of vision. In a second section, I discuss the contribution that Sociology can offer, alongside other (often overlapping) disciplines. The third and fourth sections examine (respectively) theoretical and methodological issues in sensory studies. Finally, a fifth section describes the various institutional efforts that have been pursued towards organizing and promoting sensory research. The article concludes with suggestions for the next step forward towards broadening the field of research, by focusing on the concept of sensory transnationalism.

A hierarchy of the senses

Taking a ‘glance’ at the history of the senses would reveal that sight has ‘occupied something of a hegemonic position in Western culture’ (Smith 2007, 19). Sight has been assigned a pre-eminent status in the sensorium, as reflected in Plato’s (1961) and Aristotle’s (1951) hierarchy of the senses. With his penchant for the use of visual images and metaphors (Korsmeyer 1999), Plato exalts the supremacy of sight as the foundation of philosophy given its ability to convey beauty, thereby acting as a conduit which leads to God and Truth (Smith 2007; Synnott 1993). Similarly, Aristotle shared Plato’s position on sight, privileging it as the first sense of four others: *visus*, *auditus*, *odoratus*, *gustus*, and

tactus (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch; Jütte 2005). The conception of ‘five senses’ is thus attributed to Aristotle (Stewart 2005). The eminence accorded to sight parallels various developments across Europe including stained-glassed windows of ecclesiastical architectural styles of the medieval period which engendered the filtering of abundant measures of light, adding on to the medieval fascination with light and color (Urry 2000).

Following Jütte (2005, 61), the hierarchy of the sensorium is a product of cultural construction, of the ‘phylogenetic development of the human species’, and of the advancements in technology that run parallel to processes of civilization. Where vision took the lead in the order of things, other senses such as smell or touch occupied positions of ‘animality’ given the associations with lust, gluttony, and savagery (Classen et al. 1994; Synnott 1991). This is however, a sensory taxonomy which should be further queried, given that some cultures may not abide by the same five-sense model as their sensory ordering of the world, nor would some merely subscribe to one variant per sense modality. The ethnographic examples below indicate – and following the works of Classen and Howes – that sensory scholars need to identify and explain the social significance of (1) the number of senses within a culture and how they operate; (2) the different types of one sense within a culture; and (3) different sensorial hierarchies that are subscribed by different societies. Cumulatively, such discernment of culture-specific sensory epistemologies also relates to how sensory practices reflect upon issues of power, social relations, and cosmology. These important dimensions of social life would otherwise be eclipsed should one adhere unproblematically to the Euro-American model as a referential frame.

Among the Anlo-Ewe of Southeastern Ghana, for example, balance is an important sense which also connotes the character of an individual in terms of moral uprightness (Geurts 2002). The Hausa of Nigeria, as Ritchie (1991, 195) tells us, recognize two categories of senses comprising the multimodal (the *ji*-complex) and the monomodal (sight). *Ji* or ‘to feel’, is the only verb that the Hausa employ for all the non-visual senses. Among the Weyéwa of highland Sumba, Indonesia, there exists a total of seven taste categories ranging from sour, sweet, salty, and bitter, to tart, bland, and pungent (Kuipers 1991, 118). Instead of regarding taste terminology as reflecting upon mere gustatory sensations, Kuipers (1991, 112) note that the taste vocabulary of the Weyéwa is meaningfully ordered in relation to the context of a ‘social visit’ – where encounters between agemates of the same sex involve an exchange of ingredients such as betel fruits. Taste, in this context, then serves as a barometer of the prestige and wealth of the giver, including the countenance of the host that is exhibited to the guest. Therefore, linguistic referents of taste wield significant socio-communicative import.

While sight ranks at the top of Plato’s and Aristotle’s hierarchy, smell is an emphasized faculty among the Suya of Central Brazil (Seeger 1981) and the Ongee who inhabit the Andaman islands (Classen 1993; Howes 1991). In the case of the former, olfaction takes on symbolic importance as it is utilized as a classificatory mechanism through which both persons and substances are categorized. Strong, pungent, and bland smells correspond to different degrees of danger, animality, and sociality. For the latter, odor is the ‘vital force of the universe and the basis of personal and social identity’ (Classen 1993, 1). Within the Ongee cosmology, notes Classen, the maintenance of ‘olfactory equilibrium’ is of primary concern.

In my own work on olfaction, I analyzed the social meanings of smell (with concurrent consideration of the other senses) in the context of historical and contemporary Singapore (Low 2009). This was in line with what Drobnick (2006) terms as ‘olfactocentrism’, a calculated counterpoint to the hierarchy of the senses that has been broached in

sensory scholarship. Drobnick's use of the term acts as a critique of vision, otherwise known as 'ocularcentrism' – a way of challenging Euro-American stances on sensory hierarchy so as to demonstrate the social relevance and importance of the other senses occurring in a plurality of social contexts. A related and equally pertinent point concerns how isolating one sense for analysis may lead to a neglect of how the senses work together, hence exhibiting sensory bias and muting multi-sensory experiences. This is a position which earlier studies have also attempted to overcome (Classen 1993, 2005; Rodaway 1994; Sutton 2005). In his work on food memories and the role of the senses operating within cultural specificities, for example, Sutton (2005, 305) notes that 'sensory experiences cannot be compartmentalized' and hence one ought to address the senses in simultaneity or through deliberations on synesthesia. These varying efforts also indicate how the empire of sight has to be critically evaluated when one pays careful attention to the social life of the (other) senses contextually.

Comparing disciplinary approaches in sensory studies

So far, my critique of the hegemony of vision has relied mainly on examples drawn from anthropological works on non-industrial societies. What then, has sociology to offer in terms of presenting evaluations of the sensorial? In comparing disciplinary trajectories, Vannini et al. (2011) posit that while a sociology of the senses may be located through the classical works of Simmel, Mead, and Dewey, its counterpart, anthropology, has 'almost reached maturity' in sensory endeavors.¹ Agreeing that there is a sociology of the senses – although claiming at the same time that it is 'at best in its infancy' – Vannini et al. (2011, 13) refer to Simmel's [1908] *Sociology of the Senses* and other scholars located within the symbolic interactionist paradigm such as Dewey's (1934) conception of experience as aesthetic transactions between individual social actors and the world, and James' (1983[1890]) psychological take on the emotions as studies which form the inception of a sociology of the senses. Simmel (in Frisby and Featherstone 1997, 110–111) suggests that sense impression offers an avenue through which 'knowledge of the other' may be achieved, thereby illuminating the sociological importance of sensory impression.

Another classical theorist, Marx (1959, 108, emphasis in original), who was inspired by materialist philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, proclaims that 'Man is affirmed in the objective world not only in the act of thinking, but with *all* his senses'. This positionality is one that parts company with the Western tradition ranging from Plato to Hegel (Synnott 1991). Where Hegel ranks the senses as mechanisms for survival and as communicative media, Marx frames them vis-à-vis proletariat animalization, contending that the proletariat worker is removed of all of his senses within the capitalist system (Howes 2003; Synnott 1991). The negation of the worker's senses, Marx (1954, 401–402) remarks, emerges due to a sensorially injurious work environment filled with 'artificial elevation of temperature,' 'deafening noise' and 'thickly crowded machinery'.

Apart from some of the symbolic interactionist theorists mentioned earlier, one may also predicate sociological directions on the senses through phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) who addresses lived experiences of social actors by reflecting upon the embodiment of perception and social existence (Vannini et al. 2011). The field was later developed by other interactionists including Becker and Goffman. As Vannini et al. (2011) reason, one may regard Becker's (1951, 1963) works on jazz and consumption of marijuana as studies which demonstrate how the senses of hearing and taste are contingent upon various processes of socialization, cultivation and regulation. Goffman (1979), on the other hand, has drawn our attention to the visual dimensions of

interaction in his work on *Gender Advertisements* in relation to the performativity of gendered corporealities.

In toto, both sociological and anthropological works have substantively contributed to sensory research, not to mention other disciplines including history (Corbin 1986; Smith 2007) and geography (Porteous 1985; Rodaway 1994). The point here is not *per se* to raise (non-fruitful) disciplinary distinctions where sensorial work is concerned, however.² Rather, one should take heed of *how* the senses have been theorized within these varying fields, and how they have been studied through a plethora of sensory methodologies – both of which will be discussed in the following two sections.

Studying the senses – theoretical directions

One of the first ways to think about how the senses have been theorized may be to explore senses as *signifiers of cultural expression*, contingent on the enactment of values, norms, and practices of a given society through the sensorium (Howes 2003). As Classen (1993, 1) queries:

How does the sensory order of a culture relate to its social order? Is there a natural order of the senses? How is sensory experience expressed and ordered by language? What alternatives are there to our own ways of sensing the world?

In other words, the fundamental premise of studying the senses involves theorizing how senses form modes of knowing. To realize this, one may turn to Chau's (2008) suggestion on two interrelated modalities as models of sensory studies. The first is based upon a Geertzian approach of 'senses as a cultural system', and the second, a Csordasian cultural phenomenological approach. Raising Geurts (2002) work on the Anlo-Ewe where she attempts to construct 'an indigenous Anlo sensorium' by focusing on the local concept of *seselelame* or 'feeling in the body' that parallels Csordas (1993) 'somatic modes of attention', Chau (2008, 488) contends that such a phenomenological enterprise does not quite address 'how social actors actively construct their social worlds in sensorially rich manners'. In other words, Chau (2008, 490; emphasis in original) questions: 'Are the natives simply *being* in the world? Or are they actively *producing* this world, and doing so sensorially?' In tandem, Chau refers to Desjarlais (2003) phenomenological work on the life histories of the Nepalese Yolmo, and points out that how social actors shape their sensory lifeworlds do not seem to be foregrounded in his study. For Chau (2008, 489) then, both semiotics and phenomenological undertakings represent a 'sensory-interpretation' model of sensory analysis rather than a 'sensory-production' model of social actors' sensorial experiences. His solution is to draw attention to the '*production side* of the participating agents' (2008, 490; emphasis in original).

I have earlier referred to the works of interactionists vis-à-vis Vannini et al. (2011) towards delineating sociological trajectories on the senses, and it is from here that we can frame sensory theorizing with reference to scholarly directions pursued within the canon in sociology of everyday life. This would also be a step taken to further illustrate Chau's sensory-production model. Through the everyday life perspective, one studies the banal, the mundane and taken-for-granted aspects of social life which then come to bear upon sensory embodiment in connection with sociality through different sociocultural dimensions. These include food and foodways in local (Sutton 2010) and transnational settings (Abdullah 2010; Law 2005), memorywork and identity politics (Chapman 2005; Seremetakis 1994; Waskul et al. 2009), migration (McKay 2005; Ray 2010), urban spaces

(Edensor 1998; el-Khoury 2006), and dance (Hahn 2007; Potter 2008), to name a few. Theorists located within the sociology of everyday life include Goffman (1956, 1963a,b) and his interactional approach, and Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodology. By referring to the familiar and commonsensical as subjects of inquiry in which the focus lies upon social actors' everyday practices, these theorists can therefore be made sensorially relevant.

The ethnomethodological approach, for instance, involves investigating 'practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life' (Garfinkel 1967, 11). Following this, social actors are regarded as 'reality constructors' (Mehan and Wood 1994). In tandem, Goffman's allusion of social life to the world as a stage implies that social actors 'perform' on a routinized basis. Combining such trajectories towards analyzing sensory constructions that foreground how actors actively convey sensorial idioms of the everyday would therefore fit well with Chau's (2008) sensory-production model.

Overall, the above deliberations are pertinent towards sensorial determinations of particular social orders that are time and place specific. However, it is likewise necessary to consider, beyond the senses as ways of ordering social life, *sensorial disorders* as a second theoretical direction.³ In other words, while the senses provide valuable insights into sociocultural scripts and norms, they simultaneously engender transgressions and lead to interruptions in day-to-day socialities. Here, I am thinking of sensuous disruptions – furthered from Howes (2005b, 357) proposition on dealing with 'experiences of the senses [that have] gone awry' – that may be located in such contexts as sensory powerlessness and illness (Chuangatiansup 1999), sensory distress of the homeless (Desjarlais 2005), and the presumed sensory inferiority and racial differentiation in the context of slavery (Smith 2006). It is only with parallel considerations on both sensory orders and disorders that we may more comprehensively analyze the sensorial contours of everyday life which both organize and disarray social life and subjectivity.

A third theoretical strand relates to *constructions of self and embodiment*, which Waskul et al. (2009), Paterson (2009), and Ferzacca (2010) deliberate upon by employing the notion of the 'somatic'. Conceptualizing *somaphore* as a useful analytical device for addressing the relationship between senses and society, Ferzacca (2010, 42) explains how somaphores are bodily expressions that represent and operate 'in a conceptual system that continually draws upon 'sense' for one of its terms from one realm and then associates this with others in the social and cultural reproduction or somaphoric organization of experience, thought, behavior, and, of social life'. By focusing on the Javanese *kampong* soundscape and taste sensation as the 'somaphoric organization of social life' that reflect upon 'social positions, statuses, roles, tasks, obligations [and] derivations' (2010, 44), Ferzacca (2010, 59) adds to theories of embodiment by paying attention to 'feeling-meaning' in Javanese social life.

Grounding the notion of *somatic work* within the traditions of phenomenology, dramaturgy, and symbolic interactionism towards studying the senses – in particular, olfaction – and selfhood, Waskul et al. (2009, 7) propose that somatic work involves reflexivity in making sense of one's sensory experiences. Individuals then negotiate and make these experiences 'congruent with personal, interpersonal and/or cultural notions of moral, aesthetic or and/or logical desirability'. In this manner, conceptions of selfhood rest upon 'perceived sensations and active sense-making practices' that amalgamate into the embodied self as a 'somatic accomplishment' (Waskul et al. 2009, 6). The somatic work that the authors refer to has to do with how social actors make sense of and fashion sensual selves through the meanings associated with memory and olfactory perception. In essence, the

act of remembering stands as a type of somatic work, given that it involves deploying sensual practices as a vehicle by individuals so as to establish continuity of self over time.

Methodology and the sensorial self

From these varied theoretical vectors that shed light on how the senses may be interrogated, I now turn to methodological formulations that scholars have tendered hitherto. Indubitably, it will not be possible to provide an exhaustive take on sensory methodologies as harnessed by different social scientists. The aim here is rather to comprehensively illustrate how ‘experimental strategies’ (Vannini et al. 2011) of researching on the senses entail both the bodily experiences of the researcher and the researched. In what follows, I discuss how sensory data is articulated through the medium of language and other avenues, including brief reflections on the researcher’s own sensorial positionality (cf. Pink 2009) while conducting sensual research. Apart from the usual methodological toolkits such as narrative interviews, participant observation, and visual methods, sensory research requires other innovations on the part of fieldworkers so that the senses in social life and social interaction may be further tapped into and procured as data.

As places are also locales through which the senses transpire and mediate sociality (Sibley 2001), ‘smellwalks’ (see also, Duruz 2011) may be a useful method towards surveying how ‘smells may be spatially ordered or place-related’ (Porteous 1985, 359). This would also correspond to Vannini et al.’s (2011, 69) argument that collecting sensuous data requires ‘bodily exercises’, given that ‘they are dependent on sensory intelligence, which is a reflexive bodily activity’. On the other hand, and in conjunction with Chau’s (2008) call for a more sensory productive direction on the part of those whom we study, Pink (2004) has adopted what she terms ‘visual ethnographic research’ in her study on the sensorial performativity of gendered identities in English and Spanish homes. By conducting both tape-recorded and video interviews, Pink contends rightly that the respondent is just as much a collaborator in research as the researcher him/herself. Moreover, the latter is equally taking on an embodied position by carrying out sensuous research. Through getting respondents to use a digital camera video with a fold-out screen in conducting a ‘home-tour’ with the author, Pink posits, despite the privileging of the visual and the oral, that audiovisual media is effective towards evoking embodied experiences vis-à-vis sensorial and synaesthetic metaphors.

Sensorial strategies imply that the researcher is neither a neutral nor a non-participating observer. Instead, his or her own body and senses are embroiled in the process of being an embodied researcher. Take for example, Wacquant’s (2004) fieldwork and boxing apprenticeship in Chicago’s black ghetto. With his intention to build up a ‘carnal sociology’ through presenting both the moral and sensual worlds of the boxer, Wacquant (2004, 7) emphasizes upon a ‘sensual logic that informs boxing as a bodily craft’:

One would need to call up all the tools of visual sociology or even those of a truly sensual sociology that remains to be invented to convey the process whereby the boxer becomes organically “invested” by and bound to the game.... For it is with all of one’s senses that one gradually converts to the world of prize-fighting and its stakes. To give this proposition its full force, one would need to be able to capture and convey at once the odors...the cadenced “thump” of punches against the bags and the clanking of the chains they hang from, each bag having its own sound, each drill its tonality...the light “tap-tap” or frantic galloping of feet on the wooden floor while skipping rope...the rhythmic puffing, hissing, sniffing, blowing, and groaning characteristic of each athlete.... The combination of all these elements produces a sort

of *sensuous intoxication* that is key to the education of an apprentice boxer. (2004, 70–71; emphasis in original)

Wacquant's sensory education is also discernible in Retsikas' (2008) work on ethnicity and personhood in East Java, albeit in different measures. As Retsikas himself puts it, he had to 're-train' himself when it came to the various sensory encounters emerging throughout the course of his fieldwork in the late 1990s. These include learning how to appreciate and taste different culinary dishes such as *nasi goreng* and *sate kambing*, as well as enduring the spiciness of raw chillies. In sum, and as with the stances adopted by Pink and Wacquant, Retsikas (2008, 127) concludes that the fieldworker's body ought to be regarded as a 'living, physical, sensing and experiencing agent' in the course of pursuing (anthropological) research. Building upon this positionality, then, brings us to an understanding that the generation of (anthropological) knowledge stems from the 'transformable body' of the researcher (Retsikas 2008; see also, Paterson 2009). From this point where we acknowledge the involvement of the fieldworker's body and sensory exposures, what then can we make of issues pertaining to the translation of sensuous portraits of social life?

I share Howes (2005a) stance on the role of language that provides a medium for articulating sensorial experiences. Similarly, Hughes and Paterson (1997, 332) point out that both language and metaphor are 'vehicles for making sense of bodily sensations and actions' as language is necessary in order to 'turn sensation into sense or meaning'. Language is imperative when it comes to providing linguistic expressions of the sensate towards contributing to comparative deliberations on metaphoric, metrical, morpho-syntactic, and metonymic meanings of the senses (Geurts 2002; Lee 2010; Ning 2009; Plümacher 2007; Porcello et al. 2010). I suggest that it is also through an appreciation of linguistic and cultural variations across different sensoria (see for example, Geurts 2002; Seeger 1981), that one may garner further insights into how social meanings are attached to different sensory nodes within and across pluri-sensorial paradigms. This notwithstanding, what one also needs to reflect upon is that language should not be allowed to develop into a 'structural model that dictates all cultural and personal experience and expression' (Howes 2005a; 4). A more reflexive attitude towards one's style of writing is recommended when it comes to presenting sensory elements. This entails the incorporation of vivid metaphors, rich sensory descriptions (Stoller 1989), and such literary techniques as flash-forwards, teasers, autoethnographies, and stories in order to produce sensuous writing (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2009; Vannini et al. 2011). Other non-textual outlets for translating the senses may also be found in the use of ethnodrama, other performance pieces, or various audio technologies towards presenting sensual ethnography (Sparkes 2009).

Organizing sensory research and publications

Aside from considering intellectual trajectories that have to do with the theorization and methodological components of sensory work, it is also important to be apprised of institutional and pedagogical directions that the field of sensory studies has developed over the last few years. Here, I wish to draw attention to both publications and organizational efforts that have systematically featured scholarship on the senses. In 2006, the first issue of the journal *The Senses and Society* was launched by Berg Publishers under the editorship of anthropologist David Howes. Apart from featuring an interesting array of recent works on the senses, a component of each issue also presents reports on sensory exhibitions and workshops, which is an important outlet to showcase the various activities that scholars working in this field are undertaking.

Berg Publishers also houses a *Sensory Formations* series, where seven readers have been published since 2004. In addition, the University of Illinois has recently tabled up a series that locates sensory research in history, with historian Mark M. Smith (2007) as its series editor. Other publishers that have recently put out sensory titles include, among others, Ashgate, University of Pennsylvania Press, Duke University Press, University of California Press, Routledge, and SAGE. These are indeed important steps taken in the direction to carve a niche for sensory studies, and a series in their own right, rather than to collapse or subsume sensory endeavours within cognate fields. Another important platform for which academics and students interested in the senses can look up is the website <http://www.sensorystudies.org>. It basically functions as a pertinent portal for which the contents offered include a directory of researchers, sensory syllabi, works-in-progress, recent publications, as well as forthcoming events.

In the current 2011–2012 academic year, the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University houses scholars – both faculty and graduate researchers – who work on the theme ‘Sound: Culture, Theory, Practice, Politics’. Such an institutional platform that provides an interdisciplinary environment for sensory scholars to work within also raises interesting questions concerning how each discipline – be it sociology, anthropology, history, geography, or political science – treats the senses with its own disciplinary toolkits (both theory and methods), and how they may possibly find some conceptual synergy towards adding on to sensory analyses in fruitful ways.

Vannini et al. (2011: 10–11) suggest that a sign of consolidating a ‘new sub-discipline’ such as the senses may be reflected ‘when a new study group or section is established within one of the major professional associations’. At the time of their publication, neither the American, British, European nor International Sociological Associations have under their research group endeavors, seen one that features the senses centrally. Apart from ‘neighboring’ fields such as emotions, the body, and visual sociology which have witnessed the establishment of study groups or research committees in some if not all of the above associations, sensory work has only very recently been proposed and institutionally recognized by the International Sociological Association as a thematic group. This is an initiative which a colleague, Devorah Kalekin-Fishman and I worked on. *TG07 Senses and Society* was initially regarded as possibly repeating what other research committees are focusing on (such as one working on the body; cf. Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2009). Given the overview presented above concerning the sensualization of theory and methodology (see also, Ray 2011), it is only necessary that the senses be accorded an intellectual radius of its own, than for it to be too readily subsumed under its cognate cousins within the parameters of embodied scholarship (Low 2009).

The above projects and outlets importantly reflect how the field of the senses has developed in many exciting ways that can only add to the cause of recognizing such a field in its own right. Where similar domains of inquiry such as sociology of the body, emotions, and visual sociology have only recently gained foothold in the world of academia, social scientific interest in the senses have, by now, also began to emerge from a nascent stage, availing further insights that can and have contributed considerably to theory, method, and epistemology in the social sciences and beyond.

Suggestions for the next step forward

Given these deliberations on theoretical directions and methodological considerations, there are therefore many possibilities as to how the field of sensory scholarship can further develop from hereon. I would like to conclude by suggesting the concept of ‘sensorial

transnationalism' (Low and Kalekin-Fishman 2010, 198) as an example. While it is logical and necessary to study the senses by contextualizing them within the milieu in which they are employed, one also has to consider how such sensory knowledge, when taken out of context, is either subscribed to in similar or contrasting manners. Although there have been, in the last few years, some works that may touch on the notion of sensorial transnationalism (for example, Law 2005; Thomas 2004), it is imperative to regard such transnational registers as not only materially bounded in space and place. Instead, transnational sensescapes (Low and Kalekin-Fishman 2010) implies an acknowledgement of the importance of sensory memory; how one responds to sensory use in a different cultural context resulting from short/long-term migration is contingent upon one's situated sensory paradigm at 'home'. Memory, in this instance, serves as a pertinent resource for which the sense of self is sustained (cf. Dann and Jacobsen 2002; Thomas 2004). In order to maneuver beyond the materiality of sensory transnationalism, the idea of 'sensorial interface' may serve useful, where it refers to 'the site of two or more dissimilar sociocultural contexts of sensory knowledge and use' (Low and Kalekin-Fishman 2010, 198). Sensory interfaces may be culled from extant works such as Lida's study (2010) on Thai massage that raises a cross-cultural haptic encounter between Thai masseuses and foreign clients, or how 'sensescapes' serve as a 'rhetorical mental bridge' which connects two different social contexts, as proposed by Iğsiz (2008) in her study on the 1923 Greek-Turkish compulsory population exchange.

By engaging with the transnational aspects of how social actors negotiate these sensorial interfaces, we are then able to augment our understanding of particularity and difference in sensuous appropriation taking place vis-à-vis cross-cultural meeting points. Furthermore, the sensory disruptions that I raised earlier would also be better understood within this local-transnational frame. This undertaking would thereby broaden the field of sensory studies by taking into further consideration, how sensory models occur both within and between cultures where experiences of the senses are mediated and where sensory memberships are enucleated beyond the local.

Short Biography

Kelvin E.Y. Low is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the National University of Singapore, where he was awarded his M.Soc.Sci. and B.Soc.Sci. (Hons) degrees. He went on to complete his Ph.D. at the Faculty of Sociology, University of Bielefeld, Germany. Recent publications include a co-edited book on *Everyday Life in Asia: Social Perspectives on the Senses* (Ashgate 2010), an authored work on *Scents and Scent-sibilities: Smell and Everyday Life Experiences* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2009), and journal articles on the senses published in *Current Sociology* and *Sociological Perspectives*. Another area of research that Kelvin is presently working on addresses the links between social memory and migration, where he is preparing a manuscript on Chinese female migrants in Singapore (*samsui* women) and how they are remembered and venerated as pioneers through a plethora of memory 'texts'. He is also conducting research on the Nepalese Gurkhas in Singapore, Nepal, and the U.K. by interrogating social memory, belonging and citizenship issues. A third project that Kelvin is working on looks at sensory relations and experiences in Asian historical contexts.

Notes

* Correspondence Address: Kelvin E.Y. Low, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, 11 Arts Link, AS1 #03-06, 117570 Singapore. E-mail: socleyk@nus.edu.sg

- ¹ It should also be pointed out that there are theoretical divisions within a discipline such as anthropology as scholars deliberate over different approaches towards interrogating sensory worlds. See for example, Howes and Pink (2010), and Ingold (2011).
- ² See Vannini et al. (2011, 10–15) for further discussions on more recent sociological works on the senses, and the field of anthropology of the senses.
- ³ Compare this with Edwards and Bhaumik (2008, 286) notion of ‘rupture’ which points to experiences of ‘visual destabilization and fracture’ emerging through different political, aesthetic, religious, and economic contexts.

References

- Abdullah, Noorman. 2010. ‘Comfort Food, Memory, and ‘Home’: Senses in Transnational Contexts.’ Pp. 157–76 in *Everyday Life in Asia: Social Perspectives on the Senses*, edited by Devorah Kalekin-Fishman and Kelvin E.Y. Low. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Aristotle. 1951. *De Anima*. Trans. K Foster and S Humphries. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Becker, Howard. 1951. ‘The Professional Dance Musician and His Audience.’ *American Journal of Sociology* 57: 136–44.
- Becker, Howard. 1963. *Outsiders*. New York: Free Press.
- Chapman, Adam. 2005. ‘Breath and Bamboo: Diasporic Lao identity and the Lao Mouth-Organ.’ *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 26(1): 5–20.
- Chau, Adam Yuet. 2008. ‘The Sensorial Production of the Social.’ *Ethnos* 73(4): 485–504.
- Chuengsatiansup, Komatra. 1999. ‘Sense, Symbol, and Soma: Illness Experience in the Soundscape of Everyday Life.’ *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 23: 273–301.
- Classen, Constance. 1993. *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and across Cultures*. London: Routledge.
- Classen, Constance, David Howes and Anthony Synnott. 1994. *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell*. London: Routledge.
- Classen, Constance. 2005. ‘Fingerprints: Writing about Touch.’ Pp. 1–9 in *The Book of Touch*, edited by Constance Classen. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Corbin, Alain. 1986. *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the French Social Imagination*. New York: Berg Publishers Ltd.
- Csordas, Thomas. 1993. ‘Somatic Modes of Attention.’ *Cultural Anthropology* 8(2): 135–56.
- Dann, Graham M.S. and Jens Kristian Steen Jacobsen 2002. ‘Leading the Tourist by the Nose’ Pp. 209–35 in *The Tourist as a Metaphor of the Social World*, edited by Graham M.S. Dann. New York: CABI Publishing.
- Desjarlais, Robert. 2003. *Sensory Biographies: Lives and Deaths among Nepal’s Yolmo Buddhists*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Desjarlais, Robert. 2005. ‘Movement, Stillness: On the Sensory World of a Shelter for the ‘Homeless Mentally Ill.’’ Pp. 369–79 in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, edited by David Howes. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Dewey, J. 1934. *Art as Experience*. New York: Minton.
- Drobnick, Jim. 2006. ‘Introduction: Olfactocentrism’ Pp. 1–9 in *The Smell Culture Reader*, edited by Jim Drobnick. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Duruz, Jean. 2011. ‘Tastes of Hybrid Belonging: Following the *laksa* Trail in Katong, Singapore.’ *Continuum* 25(5): 605–18.
- Edensor, Tim. 1998. ‘The Culture of the Indian Street.’ Pp. 205–21 in *Images of the Street: Planning, Identity and Control in Public Space*, edited by Nicholas R. Fyfe. London & New York: Routledge.
- Edwards, Elizabeth and Kaushik Bhaumik. 2008. ‘Ruptures.’ Pp. 283–86 in *Visual Senses: A Cultural Reader*, edited by Elizabeth Edwards and Kaushik Bhaumik. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Ferzacca, Steve. 2010. ‘Somaphoric Organizations of Self and Society in Java.’ Pp. 41–62 in *Everyday Life in Asia: Social Perspectives on the Senses*, edited by Devorah Kalekin-Fishman and Kelvin E.Y. Low. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Frisby, David and Mike Featherstone (eds.). 1997. *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Garfinkel, Harold. 1967. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Goffman, Erving. 1956. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Goffman, Erving. 1963a. *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*. New York: The Free Press.
- Goffman, Erving 1963b. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Engelwood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Goffman, Erving. 1979. *Gender Advertisements*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Geurts, Kathryn Linn. 2002. *Culture and the Senses: Bodily Ways of Knowing in an African Community*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Hahn, Tomie. 2007. *Sensational Knowledge: Embodying Culture through Japanese Dance*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press.

- Hockey, John and Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson. 2009. 'The Sensorium at Work: The Sensory Phenomenology of the Working Body.' *The Sociological Review* 57(2): 217–39.
- Howes, David. 1991. 'Olfaction and Transition.' Pp. 128–147 in *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses*, edited by David Howes. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Howes, David. 2003. *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Howes, David. 2005a. 'Introduction: Empires of the Senses.' Pp. 1–17 in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, edited by David Howes. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Howes, David. 2005b. 'The Senses Disordered.' Pp. 357–60 in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, edited by David Howes. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Howes, David and Sarah Pink. 2010. 'The Future of Sensory Anthropology/the Anthropology of the Senses.' *Social Anthropology* 18(3): 331–40.
- Hughes, Bill and Kevin Paterson. 1997. 'The Social Model of Disability and the Disappearing Body: Towards a Sociology of Impairment.' *Disability & Society* 12(3): 325–40.
- Iğsız, Asli. 2008. 'Documenting the Past and Publicising Personal Stories: Sensescapes and the 1923 Greco-Turkish Population Exchange in Contemporary Turkey.' *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 26: 451–87.
- Iida, Junko. 2010. 'The Sensory Experience of Thai Massage: Commercialisation, Globalisation and Tactility.' Pp. 139–56 in *Everyday Life in Asia: Social Perspectives on the Senses*, edited by Devorah Kalekin-Fishman and Kelvin E.Y. Low. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Ingold, Tim. 2011. 'Worlds of Sense and Sensing the World: A Response to Sarah Pink and David Howes.' *Social Anthropology* 19(3): 313–17.
- James, W. 1983[1890]. *Principles of Psychology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jütte, Robert. 2005. *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- el-Khoury, Rodolphe. 2006. 'Polish and Deodorize: Paving the City in Late Eighteenth-Century France.' Pp. 18–28 in *The Smell Culture Reader*, edited by Jim Drobnick. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Korsmeyer, Carolyn. 1999. *Making Sense of Taste: Food & Philosophy*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.
- Kuipers, Joel. 1991. 'Matters of Taste in Weyewa.' Pp. 111–27 in *The Varieties of Sensory Experience*, edited by David Howes. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Law, Lisa. 2005. 'Home Cooking: Filipino Women and Geographies of the Senses in Hong Kong.' Pp. 224–41 in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, edited by David Howes. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Lee, Amy Pei-jung. 2010. 'Reduplication and Odor in Four Formosan Languages.' *Language and Linguistics* 11(1): 99–126.
- Low, Kelvin E.Y. 2009. *Scents and Scent-sibilities: Smell and Everyday Life Experiences*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Low, Kelvin E.Y. and Devorah Kalekin-Fishman. 2010. 'Afterword: Towards Transnational Sensescapes.' Pp. 195–203 in *Everyday Life in Asia: Social Perspectives on the Senses*, edited by Devorah Kalekin-Fishman and Kelvin E.Y. Low. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Marx, Karl. 1954. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol I. Trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, Karl. 1959. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Pub. House.
- McKay, Deirdre. 2005. 'Migration and the Sensuous Geographies of Re-emplacment in the Philippines.' *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 26: 75–91.
- Mehan, Hugh and Houston Wood. 1994. 'The Ethnomethodology of the Human Reality Constructor.' Pp. 322–40 in *Four Sociological Traditions: Selected Readings*, edited by Randall Collins. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception*. (translated from the French by Colin Smith) London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Ning, Yu. 2009. *From Body to Meaning in Culture: Papers on Cognitive Semantic Studies of Chinese*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co.
- Paterson, Mark. 2009. 'Haptic Geographies: Ethnography, Haptic Knowledges and Sensuous Dispositions.' *Progress in Human Geography* 33(6): 766–88.
- Pink, Sarah. 2004. *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life*. New York: Berg.
- Pink, Sarah. 2009. *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. Los Angeles & London: SAGE.
- Plato. 1961. 'Phaedo.' Pp. 40–98 in *The Collected Dialogues*., Trans. Hugh Tredennick edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Plümacher, Martina. 2007. 'Color Perception, Color Description and Metaphor.' Pp. 61–84 in *Speaking of Colors and Odors*, edited by Martina Plümacher and Peter Holz. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co.
- Porcello, Thomas et al. 2010. 'The Reorganization of the Sensory World.' *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39: 51–66.
- Porteous, J. Douglas. 1985. 'Smellscape.' *Progress in Human Geography* 9: 356–78.
- Potter, Caroline. 2008. 'Sense of Motion, Senses of Self: Becoming a Dancer.' *Ethnos* 73(4): 444–65.

- Ray, Krishnendu. 2011. 'Dreams of Pakistani Grill and Vada Pao in Manhattan: Reinscribing the Immigrant Body in Metropolitan Discussions of Taste' *Food, Culture & Society* 14(2): 243–73.
- Ray, Larry. 2010. 'Migration and Remembrance: Sounds and Spaces of Klezmer 'Revivals.' *Cultural Sociology* 4(3): 357–78.
- Retsikas, Kostantinos. 2008. 'Knowledge from the Body: Fieldwork, Power, and the Acquisition of a New Self.' Pp. 110–29 in *Knowing How to Know: Fieldwork and the Ethnographic Present*, edited by Narmala Halstead, Eric Hirsch and Judith Okely. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Ritchie, Ian. 1991. 'Fusion of the Faculties: A Study of the Language of the Senses in Hausaland.' Pp. 192–02 in *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses*, edited by David Howes. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Rodaway, Paul. 1994. *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place*. London: Routledge.
- Seeger, Anthony. 1981. *Nature and Society in Central Brazil: The Suyá Indians of Mato Grosso*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Seremetakis, C.N. 1994. 'The Memory of the Senses, Part I: Marks of the Transitory.' Pp. 1–18 in *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, edited by C.N. Seremetakis. Colorado: Westview Press, Inc.
- Sibley, David. 2001. 'The Binary City.' *Urban Studies* 38: 239–50.
- Smith, Mark M. 2006. *How Race is made: Slavery, Segregation and the Senses*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Smith, Mark M. 2007. *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Sparks, Andrew C. 2009. 'Ethnography and the Senses: Challenges and Possibilities.' *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise* 1(1): 21–35.
- Stewart, Susan. 2005. 'Remembering the Senses.' Pp. 59–69 in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, edited by David Howes. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Stoller, Paul. 1989. *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Sutton, David E. 2005. 'Synesthesia, Memory, and the Taste of Home.' Pp. 304–16 in *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink*, edited by Carolyn Korsmeyer. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Sutton, David E. 2010. 'Food and the Senses.' *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39: 209–23.
- Synnott, Anthony. 1991. 'Puzzling over the Senses: From Plato to Marx.' Pp. 61–76 in *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses*, edited by David Howes. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Synnott, Anthony. 1993. *The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society*. London: Routledge.
- Thomas, Mandy. 2004. 'Transitions in Taste in Vietnam and the Diaspora.' *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 15(1): 54–67.
- Urry, John. 2000. *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-first Century*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Vannini, Phillip, Dennis Waskul and Simon Gottschalk. 2011. *The Senses in Self, Society, and Culture*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Wacquant, Loïc. 2004. *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Waskul, Dennis D., Phillip Vannini and Janelle Wilson. 2009. 'The Aroma of Recollection: Olfaction, Nostalgia, and the Shaping of the Sensuous Self.' *Senses & Society* 4(1): 5–22.