Introduction

Established over the past several decades, scholarship on anthropology of the senses has built upon cognate and extant domains of anthropological inquiry including phenomenology, the body and embodiment, emotions and affect, religion, migration, transnationalism, food and foodways, visual anthropology, and linguistic anthropology, as well as broader theoretical and methodological developments situated in ethnographic endeavors. A common point of departure in sensory writings deals with the imperialism of sight and/or the Western pentad sensory model that is critiqued as both Eurocentric and limiting in exploring various other sensory orders across different societies and sensory hierarchies. In addition to anthropological research and critique, sensory studies in the discipline have also enacted interdisciplinary dialogues and engaged with theoretical and conceptual interfaces with such other disciplines as sociology, history, geography, philosophy, and art history, among others, known as the "sensory turn" across the spectrum of humanities and social science disciplines. While most anthropological scholarship on the senses has typically focused on Western societies or non-industrial societies, more recent works have begun to draw attention to societies in the non-West, including industrialized contexts in both historical and contemporary milieu. Broader themes found in anthropological sensory works have addressed modernity, globalization, aesthetics, heritage, and cosmology. Apart from primary data that is the product and mainstay of writing and analysis in ethnography, sensory scholars have harnessed a variety of secondary data across a whole range of social "texts" including archival documents, media reports, online platforms, songs, poetry, film, diaries, travel writing, and many others as varied genres of sensory practices in everyday life. Sensory data analysis may be approached through discussions focusing on singular senses, sensory pairings, or intersensorial relations and cross-cultural comparisons, as well as deliberations on synesthesia.

General Overviews

Broad overviews of the anthropology of the senses and social life are found in Classen 1997, Goody 2002, and Howes 2008. A detailed debate on what sensory anthropology/anthropology of the senses entails is provided in Ingold 2011 and Pink and Howes 2010, in which the authors deliberate on issues to do with perception, phenomenology, and interdisciplinarity. Low 2012 and Porcello, et al. 2010 shed light on theoretical issues as well as linguistic expressions of the senses. Fahmy 2013 draws attention to investigations on sound over time and before the rise of sonic technologies.


One of the earlier writings to conceptualize an anthropology of the senses.
Initiates a conversation to deliberate upon the importance of studying sound in history before the advent of recording technologies.

Unpacks the meanings of the senses through physiology and the social sciences, and across different cultures.

Illustrates the social life of the senses in America and elsewhere.

The author responds to David Howes’ critique of his work on the senses.

An overview in terms of sensory hierarchy, theoretical and methodological directions, and institutional efforts to develop sensory scholarship.

Where Sarah Pink outlines the future of sensory anthropology by considering interdisciplinary approaches and by critiquing an anthropology of the senses, David Howes responds by challenging this distinction.

The authors delineate three genealogies—communication, phenomenology, and materiality—in engaging with an anthropology of the senses which also integrates discourse and language with sensory scholarship.

Sensory Histories
Most works focus on the social life of the senses in Western or non-industrial societies, as pointed out by Smith 2007. Where some like Classen 1993 and Corbin 1986 place concerted emphases on the role of olfaction in contributing toward social order and in departing from the imperialism of sight, others like Romaniello and Starks 2016 and Smith 2006 venture into sensory discrimination, disarray, and discomfort in their historical investigations. Religion is a key theme in
sensory writings that adopt a historical lens, such as Corbin 1998 and Harvey 2006. The author of Corbin 1995 provides a clear discussion on the history and anthropology of the senses in his conclusion and delineates directions for further research.


An investigation into senses within and beyond Western contexts, which leans more toward olfactory discussions.


One of the pioneering works that examines the sociocultural significance of smell and olfactory vigilance with broader arguments made on civilization, modernity, and rationality.

Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

A history of somatic practices that spans various domains of social life including the economy, gender, health and hospitals, etc., with a conclusion on the anthropology and history of the senses.


An intriguing account of the sensory significance of bells and auditory patrimony that traverses religion, politics, territoriality, and law.


Focuses on the sense of smell in exploring early Christianity in the first seven centuries and notes the emergence of a distinct religious epistemology.


Casts a sensory lens in depicting Russian history across difficult or unfamiliar contexts such as wartime, climate, consumerism, and foodscapes.


An insightful treatise on the ideology of race and racial identity in the context of American southern history.

A systematic account of how the senses mattered in Europe and North America, organized by one sense per chapter.

**Readers**

Social science writings on the senses have tended to discuss the field alongside other cognate domains such as the body and embodiment. These discussions are found in Le Breton 2017 and Synnott 1993. Attention drawn to sensory awareness and the importance of the researcher’s sensory positionality are addressed by Howes 1991 and Stoller 1997.

The comparison of how the senses unfold in scientific and social scientific domains is taken up in Dronick 2006 and Korsmeyer 2005. Where Bull and Back 2003 maneuvers beyond sensory orders and engages with sounds of alterity, Erkmann 2005 contemplates on sonic contestations vis-à-vis modernization, technology, and global forces.


A multidisciplinary reader on soundworlds and their utopian and dystopian manifestations.


An anthology which engages with such domains of inquiry including morality, law, contemporary art, and science.


A reader with chapters addressing technological mediation, religious soundscapes, music, and cosmology.


A collection of works that deliberate upon the various senses across different societies and cultures, with a concluding chapter that provides pointers on how to study sensory worlds.


Combines both social scientific and physical scientific takes on gastronomy by using a range of historical and contemporary examples.


Reflects on how an anthropology of the senses has emerged from earlier studies on the body, phenomenology, and perception.
Sensory Ethnographies

Ethnographies that embark on direct sensorial investigations as the point of departure are found in Desjarlais 2003, Feld 1990, Geurts 2002, Pink 2004, and Stoller 1989. Other ethnographies discuss the social and cultural practices of a specific community pertaining to gender issues, cosmology, religion and rituals, and inequalities, with one or two chapters devoted to sensory data and analysis. The author of Roseman 1991 focuses on ritual performance and articulates a link between medical and musical domains in her theoretical contributions to the fields of ethnomusicology and interpretive anthropology. Seeger 1981 extensively analyzes issues to do with the social organization and cosmology of a culture by leaning toward the importance of nature, the body, and metaphors, with a couple of chapters that address olfaction.

A fascinating work that combines sensory analyses with life history approaches.

One of the few earlier ethnographies that foregrounds the importance of sound and cultural coding.

Interrogates sensory epistemology by presenting an indigenous theorization of sense orders in southeastern Ghana, including child socialization and linguistic orientations.

A comparative ethnography on the performance of gender identity and the home negotiated through sensory experiences in the contexts of England and Spain.

Articulates the relation between music and medical domains of everyday practice and how these shed light on cosmological order.


One of the earlier ethnographies to discuss sensory practices at length by focusing on olfaction.


Charts out a sensory approach to ethnographic research and writing and emphasizes the importance of paying attention to the senses in fieldwork.

**Food and Foodways**

Studies on food, foodways, and the senses address a range of themes, including migrant identities and formation of home and sentiments of belonging; food in colonial contexts vis-à-vis cross-cultural encounters; and gender socialities. Xiao 2017 and Sutton 2001 carry discussions on the production and deployment of embodied knowledge in connection with material culture. Abdullah 2010 talks about how students studying overseas share gastronomic practices and memory-making of "home" through a range of sensory registers. Where Sutton 2010 theorizes gustemology as a way of advancing theoretical deliberations on food and the senses, Rhys-Taylor 2017 draws attention to the relation between food, city life, and urban theory. Bender 2017 looks at culinary tourism, colonialism, and mobility in appraising cross-cultural sensory encounters, while Miller 2017 focuses on encounters between multiple species in the context of agrobiodiversity. Mack 2010 discusses American consumer culture, gender relations, and sensory marketing in the 1900s.


Discusses the links between sensory food practices, memory, and constructions of "home" among students studying abroad.


Explores the durian and its accompanying tastescapes as the site of colonial relations.


A commentary on US consumer culture, the senses, sensory marketing, and gender relations.
Focuses on the maintenance of agrobiodiversity, sensory anthropology, and multispecies ethnography in Brazil.

An ethnographic coverage of tastes and smells in the context of urban multiculturalism which draws attention to gentrification, ethnic relations, and globalization.

Intersects foodways and memories in his theoretical discussions on ritual, exchange, and material culture.

Presents an intersectional analysis of food and the senses and reflects upon gustemology as a concept to advance theoretical and ethnographic directions.

On discourses of tea appreciation, embodied knowledge, and government initiatives in southeast China.

**Linguistic Issues**

Sensory scholars focusing on language and sensory categories develop their argumentation in relation to ethnic identity and cosmology, and via cross-cultural comparisons. Both Black 2013 and Majid and Levinson 2011 consider the limits of language. Metaphorical aspects are taken up by Beer 2014 and Le Breton 2016, while Tufvesson 2011 talks about analogy-making, iconicity, and expressivity of language use. Geurts 2002 provides a comprehensive discussion on indigenous terminology in moving beyond Euro-American categories, and includes bodily experiences and embodiment.

Investigates olfactory terminology in relation to sociality and social identity in interethnic contexts using cognitive anthropology and ethnography.

Deliberates on the ontology and epistemology of language by examining senses, objectification, and embodiment.
Problematizes the sensory order of the Anlo-Ewe people of Ghana by paying close attention to polyvocality in indigenous terminology and categories of sense-making and sense-use.

Problematizes the different components of language and how they tie in with the senses, sense perception, and the use of metaphors.

Locates links between linguistic use and the sensorium by connecting individual perception with cultural constructs.

Demonstrates how sensory experiences are encoded through iconicity in Peninsular Malaysia.

**Sensory Methodologies**

The field of sensory research requires newer and innovative ways of deploying methodologies in order to procure and articulate sensory data. While most works build upon existing ethnographic approaches, others further develop their methods in relation to advancing theory and concept building. The author of Pink 2009 situates her discussion by deliberating on sensory subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and emplacement and considers research positionality. The collection emerald, et al. 2016 is one of the few works that focus specifically on cases from the Global South in showcasing a range of methods and genres including poetry, song, dance, and other art forms. Where Merchant 2011 suggests videography as a multi-sensuous methodology in line with visual anthropological methods and film theory, Low 2015 explores both textual and non-textual methods in procuring sensory data in urban milieu through smellscape walkabouts and analyses of texts as secondary data. Weidman 2012 makes a case for how music and apprenticeship lead to the acquisition of embodied and sensorial knowledge. Sparkes 2009 connects multisensory ethnographies and sport sciences, and Herzfeld 2007 challenges assumptions in sensory scholarship and provides an overview of some groundwork accomplished in the field.

An interesting collection of articles harnessing performance ethnography, autoethnography, poetry, and other genres to deliberate on both traditional and non-dominant senses through examples culled from the Global South.

An overview that engages with notions of sensory semiosis and agency along with brief discussions on extant methods.

Surveys sensory methodologies that cover both textual and non-textual approaches in studying urban social life.


Draws on methods employed by visual anthropologists to record, through videography, pre-reflective sensory data such as proprioception in the context of diving.


A useful methodological reader on multisensoriality in ethnographic endeavors, methods, and practices discussed through the concept of emplacement.


Suggests approaches toward producing sensual ethnographies in sport and exercise sciences.


On knowledge acquisition through music learning, embodiment, and the calibration of the apprentice’s body.

**Religion**

Major themes that arise from this sub-domain of sensory inquiry include cosmology, cognition, sacrifice, rites, symbols, spirituality, and religious materialities. Divine presence and power materialize through the senses. This line of argument is found in the discussion put forward by Babb 1981, which explores the relationship between devotees and deities through visual interaction, as well as in that of Brahinsky 2012, which locates the centrality of the body in making religion felt and tangible. Issues revolving around ethics are taken up in Desjarlais 2014, where the ethics of care is explored in contexts of death and dying and morality, including another tangent on ethical discipline, morality, and embodiment discussed by Hirschkind 2001. Michaels and Wulf 2014 balances between Western and non-Western theories in its exposition of rituals, and Howes 1987 talks about the phenomenology of olfaction in relation to liminality and transitional categories in ritual contexts.


The author demonstrates how seeing is an important component of visual exchanges and power between Hindu deities and their human worshippers.
Showcases how Pentecostalism is enacted in sensory terms in the contexts of certainty and conversion.

Presents the interconnections between the senses, morality and ethics of care in times of dying and grief among Yolmo Buddhists of Nepal.

Unfolds the relation between tradition and sensory skills through the case of cassette-sermon that shapes moral and ethical contours.

On the olfactory aspects of liminal status and transition in ritual and social categories.

A collection that showcases how the senses are tied to embodiment, emotions, and cultural memory by deliberating on both Indian and Western theories.

**Material Culture**

Museum studies, temporality, consumer culture, and commodification form some of the main anchors of sensory works that address material culture. Harries 2017 engages specifically with tactility in a work on how artifacts serve as objects of history. The relationship between objects and time is also explored by Johnson and Foster 2007, which examines body decoration through dress in linking the past, future, and tradition together. Similarly, contributions found in Seremetakis 1994 embark on an anthropology of everyday life in placing the senses in relation to modernity, experience, and knowledge. Where Classen 2007 notes the social and sensory life of things in museum-going experiences, Edwards, et al. 2006 charts out the different sensory orders through which material culture manifests in different societies in the fields of anthropology and art history.

An exploration of the social and sensory life of things in the context of English museum culture dating between the 1600s
and the 1800s.

A reader which conjoins sensory studies, critical museology, colonialism, and art history in engaging with the politics of representation.

How items become artefacts of the past through sensory access to history.

An interesting array of papers focusing on dress, dress objects, and the senses that draw from societies all over.

A classic on an anthropology of everyday sensibilities and cultural memory.

Space and Place—City Life

Urban space and place acquire sensescape characteristics when inhabited by different groups of social actors who are local residents, long-term residents, and foreigners with transient stays in the city. Territorial boundaries are thus drawn up when different sensory orders and behaviors enact and clash in various locales of city life. The relationship between sound and communal life in contemporary Japan is explored in Hankins and Stevens 2014. Urban redevelopment and renewal in the context of global forces and processes are themes found in Degen 2008 and Colombijn 2007. Holwitt 2017 makes a case for the notion of sensorial citizenship in urbanity by linking urban renewal, aesthetics, and food smells. Where Low 2013 analyzes contrasting sensory orders and scripts between locals and foreigners, Cohen 1988 illustrates how different urbanites comprising local sex workers and foreign customers regard the sensorial presentation of self and sensory use of space in urbanity.

A classic in analyzing Thai sensory urbanity by evoking the idea of olfactory dualism.

A historical-anthropological exercise on how to approach a study of soundscapes in connection with modernization and globalization processes.
Exposes urban redevelopment, sensory practices, and urban living in addressing social and ideological cohesion in city life and public encounters.

Essays here explore the social life of sonic practices in 20th- and 21st-century Japan and discuss how sound relates to aesthetics, politics, and ethics through social movements, popular culture, and art.

Deliberates on the relationship between food smells and urban citizenship vis-à-vis urban discriminatory and exclusionary practices.

Introduces the notion of sensory transnationalism to engage with sensory interfaces of dissimilar sense-behavior between locals and migrants.

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