

## I

DEMOLISHING THE MUSEUM  
OF SENSORY AB/SENSE

One of the linguistic expressions that stuck in my mind when I was growing up in Greece in the 1970s was the derogatory term to describe a person who is harsh, who lacks affectivity, and who is seemingly inconsiderate of the feelings of the other, selfish, self-centred. That word is *anaisthitos*, which may be translated in English as insensitive – a translation, however, which does not exhaust the interpretative richness of the original word. Etymology and the literal meaning of word are of essence here. The Greek word is used here in a metaphorical sense, and literally it describes someone who has lost his and her senses (being thus unconscious) due to an accident. In this context, the word evokes someone who has no senses (*aisthiseis*, in ancient and modern Greek), who does not engage with others through his and her bodily sensory modalities. In pure terms, this is of course impossible. Yet at its core, this expression reveals both the fundamental importance of the multiple senses for human sociality, as well as the crucial link between bodily senses and affective and emotive interaction, implying that the person who is incapable of sensorially affective communication is, in a sense, handicapped.

To say that the bodily senses are fundamental for human social experience is almost a truism. Yet, we rarely reflect seriously on what that means. Some anthropologists (e.g. Feldman 1994; see also other papers in Seremetakis 1994a) have boldly claimed that many people in the West today live under conditions which can be described as a state of cultural anaesthesia. This is how Feldman (1994) defines such a condition:

‘the banishment of disconcerting, discordant and anarchic sensory presences and agents that undermine the normalising and often silent premises of everyday life’ (89). In effect, this is a state where the material world, other people, place, time, and history are experienced in a highly regulated bodily manner; where the affective import of sensorial experience is tightly controlled; where a seemingly autonomous vision acquires primacy; and where other sensory modalities are permitted only in certain contextual situations and are channelled to produce certain experiential effects, often linked to the market and to capitalist commodification.

Despite its historical validity and interpretative force, this hypothesis is, of course, generalising and not devoid of deliberate exaggeration. The ‘cultural anaesthesia’ thesis may be seen as expressing a longing for the return to an originary and mythical Empire of the Senses, where bodily sensuous engagements were completely free and unregulated. It is often assumed, especially in popular writings, that the bodily senses are natural, pre-cultural, the royal road to a prelapsarian state of being and consciousness. ‘Getting in touch with our senses’, as advocated especially by New Age spiritualism, is seen as the way to curing all ills of humankind. At the same time, the domain of sensorial-experiential economy is a fast-expanding terrain for capital and profit in late modernity; the commodification of sensorial experience is omnipresent today. As will be shown in this book, there is nothing pre-cultural about the bodily senses. There has always been a tension between the anarchic and messy world of the senses (and bodily and sensorial memory), and the often politically motivated attempts by various people and groups to regulate and channel sensorial experience, often using material culture and physical and built space. Besides, as I will show in Chapter 3, the primacy of autonomous vision and the regimentation and regulation of sensorial experience have been challenged, especially in the twentieth century, by a range of forces and processes, albeit with mixed results.

Yet Feldman and other such authors are aware of these issues and are onto something very important here. They have put their fingers on a defining feature of some dominant trends in Western modernity: a distinctive sensorial-affective regime with clear social and political consequences and effects. The driver who experiences the city space, the suburb, or the country primarily from her air-conditioned car is insulated from the unregulated and messy sensory reality of place – the heat and the cold, the smells and the sounds that shape experiences and

localities. At the same time, however, that driver is immune to the social and political reality of people in the streets and in buses and trains, people who often cannot afford a car, or who, for ecological or other reasons, may prefer cycling or public transport. In most American cities and towns, for example, it is the poor and the people from ethnic communities who live and experience the sensory reality of the street, the bus and the train, as opposed to the sensory anaesthesia (or rather the tightly controlled sensorium) of the air-conditioned private vehicle. Class, race, gender, and ethnicity are deeply implicated in distinctive sensorial regimes, as will be shown in this book. To give just another example, most Western, present-day people experience contemporary war and conflict through a TV or computer screen, and, of course, through the sanitised images and sounds that the captains of Western information networks allow. War, however, for its victims means bodily violence and pain, the sight of blood and of mutilated body parts, the smell of urine and excrement (generated out of fear and desperation), the odour of dead and decomposing bodies. This is the sensory experiential reality of war, and yet modern wars are perceived by most Western people today through the dusty lenses of cultural anaesthesia. And the same can be said for at least some military personnel, who are able to launch offensive attacks on a foreign country thousands of miles away, often using unmanned air vehicles, known today as drones. War thus becomes akin to a sensorially sanitised computer game (cf. Baudrillard 1995).

This regime is situated in Western capitalist modernity (defined here as the dominant, social, political, and material condition in the West after the Middle Ages), and in this book, I will attempt to locate this sensorial condition within its broader historical contingency, from the economic and political processes to the modes of representation that this contingent moment desired and eventually established. But as has been noted several times in the past, it is a mistake to see modernity as a unified, monolithic, and overarching regime with no alternatives. There are multiple modernities, even in the West, and as I will show, there are contexts within the modern West that have produced alternative sensorial frameworks. Likewise, there have been theoretical and other philosophical attempts that have critiqued that dominant regime, and, of course, there are the various social contexts, present and past, outside Western modernity, in which alter-modern, multi-sensorial

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experiential realities and interactions are the norm. These alternative sensory worlds in modernity and outside it, as well as the social thinking that undermines the cultural anaesthesia of Western modernity, are going to be some of the guiding forces for this endeavour.

This is a book about archaeology and the bodily senses.<sup>1</sup> It is not so much an exploration of the long-term development of various sensorial modalities, as a first reading of its title may imply. Some sections of this book will venture into a historical excursus, but the book's main aim is to explore how archaeology as a specific device of Western modernity has dealt with the bodily senses so far, and more importantly, how certain, reconfigured, counter-modern (or, better, alter-modern) archaeologies can redeem and reconstitute the multi-sensorial, experiential modes of engaging with the world. Moreover, as the subtitle of the book denotes, any discussion of the senses cannot but explore the components that enable sensorial experience to come into effect. I have selected to highlight two such components in the subtitle: (social) memory and affect. Other key components in my exploration will be the notions of things and of matter, and the notion of flows: flows of substances, sensorial stimuli, memories, affective interactions, and ideas. Rather than venturing into the organic and cultural nature of individual sensorial modalities, this book will mostly foreground the condition of sensoriality as activated and structured by (material and immaterial) fluidity and affectivity.

To many, the archaeology of the senses appears a contradiction in terms: the bodily senses, they would say, are ephemeral, intangible, ethereal. How can we therefore pinpoint the concrete, material *evidence* for sensory interactions amongst people who lived before us? This common-sense belief is illustrated by the British cartoonist Steven Appleby, in his satire of the (impossibility of the) archaeology of sound (Figure 1). I hope that this book will convince the reader otherwise. Archaeology relates primarily to materiality and time. It explores the material presence and the concrete and specific formal qualities of beings and things (including space), and their social and cultural lives and meanings in diverse temporalities. These formal and physical qualities of the world are the properties that our sensorial engagements rely upon: the smoothness or the roughness of surfaces, the sound-amplifying qualities of houses and other spaces, the odorous effects of plants and other substances. The archaeology of the senses is therefore feasible in very tangible terms. Moreover, the field of archaeology, having primary access to the materiality of the world, is in a

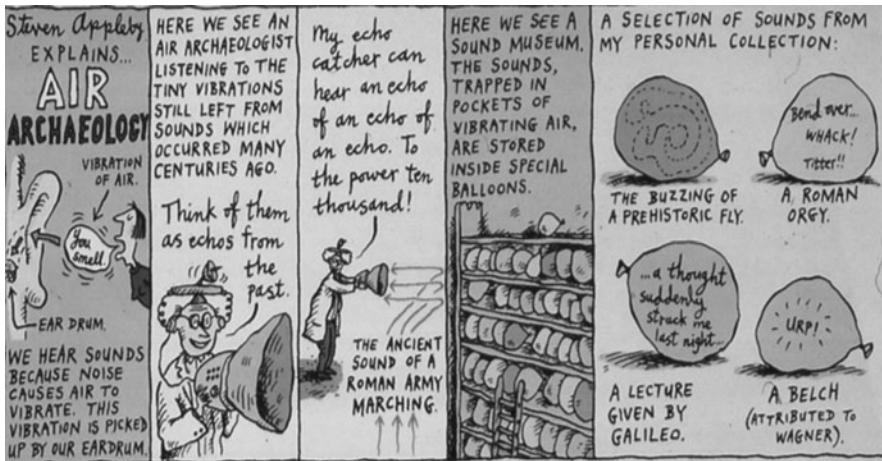


FIGURE 1. The cartoonist Steven Appleby explains 'Air Archaeology': an indication of the public distrust of the possibility of retrieving past sensorial phenomena (courtesy of the artist)

privileged position to explore the sensorial arenas and to contribute immensely to the broader discussion on sensorial experience and its social-power effects. Not only do dominant sensorial regimes change, but there are also multiple, at times conflicting, sensorial modes of engagement in any specific context, often producing sensorial clashes. So as well as historical change, perhaps more importantly, archaeology can explore that sensorial diversity and multiplicity. As for time, archaeology can investigate the diverse sensorial regimes in various temporal configurations. I deliberately avoid here the usual expressions on long- or short-term changes over time because, as I will show, the view of time that this book subscribes to is not the linear, cumulative time of social evolutionism, nor the 'long durée' of Braudel and the other historians associated with the Annales School. It is rather the social and experiential time which recognises the multiple temporalities that co-exist in physical form in the world around us. This is the Bergsonian view of duration and multi-temporality (Bergson 1991/1908), which I will explain in detail in Chapter 4.

Archaeology, as we know it and practice it today in the West, is a field intrinsically linked with modernity, and as such, it is founded on the epistemology of *evidence*; it accepts only claims for which concrete and physical evidence can be presented. I mentioned above, and I will show throughout this book, that the sensorial field, being as it is embedded in

matter, has left plenty of material evidential traces. But let us reflect on this notion of evidence for a moment. The word itself reveals its genealogy in the field of vision (*videre*, to see, in Latin), implying thus that only concrete proof which can be seen is admissible in the ‘courts’ of archaeology. But what evidence do we need in order to know that people in other contexts (geographically or temporally remote from our own) sensed surfaces, textures, smells, and tastes, and felt pleasure, pain, and sorrow, as we do? Obviously, I do not mean to imply here that all people in all contexts experience sensuous events and emotions *in the same way*, nor do I subscribe to an unreflective, pre-cultural, homogenising view of the human body and of the bodily senses. Yet, the evidential obsession of archaeology is embedded in a thesis that is ethically (as well as epistemologically) unsustainable: a thesis that refuses to recognise the sensuous and affective abilities of the other.

Archaeology has thus produced so far mostly people who are *anaisthitoi* – people not only without faces (to evoke Ruth Tringham’s memorable phrase, 1991), but also without sensuous and sensorially capable bodies. True, we cannot tell, for example, whether the soft or rough surface of a pot felt, when touched, the same to a human being in Neolithic times as it feels to a researcher or a museum visitor today; and in some ways, it does not matter that we cannot. But it is important that in the same context, some vessels have soft surfaces and some rough, and that we can tell that the sensorial effect would have been different. It is also important to explore how the contents of this pot, whether food, drink, or other substances, produced distinctive sensorial effects, and enabled conditions of conviviality and affectivity to emerge. The detection of these diverse sensorial and affective possibilities, and their social meanings and political effects, as experienced by different people, different genders, different social groups, are key tasks for the archaeology of the senses.

The archaeology of the senses as a project acquires additional currency and importance, well beyond the confines of the discipline, for one additional reason. The sensory engagement with the material world is a key experiential mode for the generation and activation of bodily memory. I refer here to social as opposed to individual and cognitivist memory, and to the practices, experiences, rituals, and performances that produce and enact, voluntarily or involuntarily, remembering and forgetting (cf. Connerton 1989). The *work of memory* (cf. Cole 1998) relies

on the senses, and the senses rely on the materiality and the physicality of the world. In other words, the senses are materiality's way of producing remembering and forgetting.

One way of situating this book within a broader field is to look at the archaeology of the body, its closest intellectual context. Archaeology has been slow in incorporating the human body and the bodily senses as central issues of inquiry. Early accounts focused on representations of the body, seen as abstract aesthetic values or as simplistic narratives. 'New archaeology' discourses dealt with environment, subsistence, and techno-economic issues, producing thus an image of the body and of the senses akin to mechanical devices of production and consumption. Post-processual approaches refocused attention on contextual meanings, but the representationist paradigm remained dominant. Under the influence of what was called the linguistic turn, the past was seen as text that can be read. The textual paradigm came under scrutiny and criticism by later interpretative approaches, and the recent wave of phenomenological accounts has redirected attention towards the human body.

In recent years, echoing developments in other fields, the archaeology of the body is emerging as a new, dynamic, and exciting field. A number of meetings, conference sessions, and articles sustained and nourished this interest (e.g. Borić and Robb 2008; Fisher and DePaolo Loren 2003; Hamilakis 1998, 1999a; Hamilakis and Sherratt 2012; Hamilakis, Pluciennik, and Tarlow 2002; Joyce 1998, 2005; Kus 1992; Meskell 1996; Meskell and Joyce 2003; Montserrat 1998; Rautman 2000; Stutz Nilsson 2003; Tarlow 2011, 2012; Thomas 2000; Treherne 1995; T. Yates 1993). It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that within this broader sub-field, there is still a tendency to focus on certain themes, most notably bodily representations and their meanings, bodily metaphors, and notions of individuality and personhood, often at the expense of sensorial and corporeal experience (cf. Joyce 2005). It is not accidental that the first book-length account on the human body (Rautman 2000) is entitled *Reading the Body*. Bodily representations are of course material and are corporeally perceived and deployed, and these studies are valuable and worthy, but the experiential element is still often underplayed. For example, while the *Reading the Body* volume contains some physical anthropological studies which could have been deployed as the starting point for investigating bodily experiences, these are not integrated within the overall framework of embodiment and sensuous experience. The



archaeology of the body is still mostly representational rather than experiential. Even phenomenological approaches which have undoubtedly contributed to the foregrounding of bodily experience do not seem to have broken their links with the linguistic and discursive paradigm, and seem to be focusing (with a few recent exceptions), to a large extent, on vision and sight treated as an individual, autonomous sensory experience, at the expense of other sensorial modalities and experiences and of sensorial memory.

Yet the sensorial engagement with the world is far wider, and does not necessarily involve depictions of bodies, visual or textual. What is often missing from these valuable and fascinating debates are the auditory, olfactory, and tactile engagements with things and materials – the tastes, the smells, and the sounds, the residues of which are often much less glamorous but nevertheless material and accessible. More recently, sensory and experiential archaeology has started making some important contributions. Earlier phenomenological approaches, especially those linked to landscape studies, despite their emphasis on autonomous vision, have paved the way (e.g. Tilley 1994; see also Chapter 3), and more recent studies have attempted to rectify some of the early phenomenological shortcomings with mixed success (e.g. Tilley 2004a; and for critiques, Brück 2005; Johnson 2012). But the archaeology of sensorial experience is still at its infancy and faces enormous challenges. As I will also show, many of these sensorial attempts still operate within the historically specific paradigm of the five senses, and they rarely connect sensoriality with affectivity.

This book attempts to reorient archaeological thinking towards the study of sensorial experience, and the condition of sensoriality in general; towards closeness and immediacy, rather than ‘eternals’ and ‘essentials’, abstract structures and schemes; ‘to the texture and the skin of the everyday’ (Harrison 2000: 501). Thus, the aim of this book is not to promote yet another subfield – that of the ‘archaeology of the senses’ (which may result in the marginalisation of this approach) – but rather to work towards a new framework (or, to put it more boldly, a new paradigm) which could help us rethink the genealogy of the discipline, and, inevitably, reexamine our research questions and our methodological procedures. This framework could be of relevance to any archaeological subfield, from environmental archaeology and the archaeology of food to the archaeologies of technology, religion, or ‘ritual’. In some



ways, this is a post-theoretical book. After all, etymologically, the Greek word *theoria* relates to the sense of sight, as well as to contemplation and reflection. Interestingly, the term eventually came to mean just contemplation, thus depriving the concept from its sensorial if ocular routes. This book is thus somehow ‘post-theoretical’ in the sense that it advocates the celebration of the concrete and the empirical, and of multi-sensorial modes of being-in and attending to the world.

I suggest in this book that there is a fundamental paradox at the heart of modernist archaeology: on the one hand, due to its specific genealogy and history, it has been constructed as a device of modernity that relies primarily on the sense of autonomous and disembodied vision. On the other hand, such attitude is constantly undermined by the intensely physical, embodied interaction with things and environments. It is this tension which provides an opening for the exploration that I will be attempting in this book. This historical understanding of archaeology, as well as an understanding and appreciation of the sensuous properties of matter, of things, together with a growing body of work in philosophy, anthropology, history, human geography, and social theory, could help develop a multi-sensorial archaeology, and reinstate vision as a perceptual mode closely entangled and interwoven with all other senses in a synaesthetic,<sup>2</sup> experiential manner rather than as an autonomous field. Such an endeavour is not simply a matter of redressing the balance, of inserting other sensory modalities into a primarily visual field. It is rather a project of deriving a new understanding (which will also engender a new practice) of the entanglement between materiality and human sensory and sensuous action and experience. Inevitably, this is also a political project, not only in bringing into the fore marginalised sensorial regimes and alter-modern archaeologies, not only in demolishing what Feldman (1994) has called the ‘vast and secret museum of historical and sensory absence’ (104), but also in enabling, through the exploration of past and present sensorial diversity, the formation of new trans-corporeal socialities. These will be governed by sincere and open affective interactions which can counter the sensorial hierarchy and individualisation imposed by the dominant bodily regimes of Western modernity.

While sensorial experience is linked to neurophysiological processes (common to all human beings), a biological universalist approach on the senses is rejected here, in favour of a context-specific, historical,

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and cultural understanding of the phenomenon. Contrary to earlier attempts and despite the immense public fascination they have generated (e.g. Ackerman 1995/1990), there cannot be a natural history of the senses. Sensorial experience is universal and cross-cultural, but the definition and meaningful understanding of sensorial modalities and interactions are context specific, and depend on class, gender, age, or other attributes. The appreciation and acceptance of the affective power of sensoriality will not only enrich our stories about the past, it will totally alter the way we experience, transform, and are transformed by past and present materiality. More specifically, this approach can open up novel interpretative horizons by thinking through issues such as bodily perception and experience, memory and its workings, and power as an embodied, bio-political process. Moreover, a paradigmatic shift based on sensoriality may constitute one fruitful way of escaping a series of dichotomies inherent in the archaeological enterprise since its inception, such as mind versus body, subject versus object, science versus culture, and theory versus practice.

Inevitably, an archaeology inspired by sensoriality will have to start with a project of dual genealogical inquiry: the exploration of how conventional and official archaeology as a primarily visual device of Western modernity has shaped ideas, methodologies, and techniques to the present day; and the excavation of the researcher's own sensorial prehistory, the ways by which our sensory realms and biographies define our engagement with the world, including our archaeological excursions. This genealogical inquiry will thus allow us to deploy our own bodies as the primary tools in understanding the links between bodily senses, materiality, and memory, not simply in the conventional sense of the deployment of keen archaeological observation (a sight-oriented technique), but in an effort to reflect on our mnemonic experiences and their re-enactment through the bodily senses. There is no perception which is not full of memories, noted Henri Bergson (1991/1908), a phrase that I will be returning to throughout this book. My experiential perception of the world, including archaeology, is shaped by my own bodily and sensory memories; the decipherment of my own sensory stratigraphy will thus inform my reflexive attempts which will be scattered throughout. Rather than starting the book with a long reflexive excursus, however, I will be interjecting some genealogical vignettes throughout, as they emerge, suddenly and unexpectedly,