

THE MEMORY OF THE SENSES:

HISTORICAL PERCEPTION, COMMENSAL EXCHANGE AND MODERNITY

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This is a paper in five acts — Saliva, the Journey, Traffic, Dust, and Reflexive Commensality — that explore the senses and material culture as exchange, memories, ethnographic description, and as a conceptual problematic of fieldwork and modernity. The montage of these impinging fragments concurs with my proposal that the numbing and erasure of sensory realities are crucial moments in socio-cultural transformation. These moments can only be glimpsed at obliquely and at the margins, for their visibility requires an immersion into interrupted sensory memory and displaced emotions. Thus the use of montage here is not simply an aesthetic or arbitrary choice. Sensory and experiential fragmentation is the form in which this sensory history has been stored and this dictates the form of its reconstruction. For I believe that there can be no reflexivity unless one passes through an historical reenactment of perceptual difference.

Montage also reflects the transactional dimensions of my research in rural and urban Greece on sensory experience, memory and material history which combines traditional fieldwork inquiry with the biographical experience of my generation; a generation that straddles the admixture of rural and urban economies and cultures that has taken place since the post war period. In fusing the ethnographic and the biographical I focus on everyday language use, and the symbolic and affective dimensions of material culture as passageways into those experiential

fragments, deferred emotions and lost objects that were not part of the public culture of Greek modernization, yet were integral to the tangible force of its historical passage. The mixture of fieldwork inquiry, biography and narrative styles here also refracts the ready-made montage that organizes that hybrid figure called the “native anthropologist;” a figure that is the very embodiment of the syncretism of incomplete modernization.

SALIVA

The grandma dressed in black, sitting at home or at the edge of the fields, feeds the baby.¹ The baby in the cradle or on her lap is wrapped tightly in strips of cloth. She takes a piece of crustless bread, the inside of the bread known as *pstha* crumbles it with her fingers and puts a few crumbs in her toothless mouth. The tongue rotating moistens the bread with saliva till it becomes a paste, “clay.” She molds the bread till its texture signals that it is ready for the child. She takes the bread from her mouth and places it in its toothless mouth.² The baby swallows it as she swallows her saliva flavored by the bread. Her fingers reach for more bread and the act is repeated. On other occasions she dips the crumbs first in olive oil before molding them with her saliva. She talks and chants to the baby, calling to it: “my eyes,” “my heart,”

“my soul,” “my bread loafs” (*frajolitses mou* — when referring to the pudgy white legs), “my crown.” She continues till the baby sleeps, both waiting for its mother to return from the fields.³

Different names pertain to this process of feeding a child in various parts of Greece. In the Southern Peloponnese, for instance, this child has been “raised” with *masoulithres* or *ladhopsthala* (the former derives from the verb *masáo*, to chew; the latter from the nouns *ládhi*, olive oil, and *psithala*, bread crumbs). They are described as clay-like substance (*pílos*) resembling that prepared by the birds to feed their little ones in the nest. The process of raising a child is known as “resurrecting a child” (*anasténo pedhi*). This child will often be described as having been “resurrected with *masoulithres* by his grandma” (*anasthike me masoulithres* or *i yiayia tou to anástise*). The notion of resurrection is connected to the movement from down to up, from death to life, from sleeping to awakening, and from the raw to the baked (cooked). A woman raises a child as she raises dough into bread. Working the bread with the tongue and the saliva, the grandma changes it to dough which is then used to raise the child. Raising here is akin to baking. Children are also “baked in the ocean.” There the “salt and sun bake the child” (*to psinoun*) transforming a pale body into a “crusty skin.” Baking gives form: color, shape, texture. Enculturation is a sensory process and tied to the acquiring of form. It draws its imagery (color, shape, texture) from the body and food processing. There is no rigid dichotomy between enculturating and natural processes that transform the body. Northerners, for instance, or dull persons are often characterized as “raw” or “dough” or “inedible” precisely because they are not properly enculturated (raised) in Greek ways. Baking results in an upward movement: coffee is “baked” until it rises to form a top (*kaimáki*) — the top implies sedimentation, texture in taste. Bread and deserts are baked to rise and/ or till they form a crust. When they are not raised, they are not “ready” and thus considered “raw”; as Greeks say, “pale like dead.” The stiff, raw and dead can be raised to life, can be baked. The raw food is

termed *omó* — which is also a metaphor for the uncultivated person.

Baking involves the alternation between raising (the up) and sleeping (the down). The act of baking and cooking in general, is always a trial. The cook “has to be fully alert” because cooking is a sudden awakening of substance and the senses. It is often said after a dish has finished cooking “let it sleep now, let it rest.” The cook also rests at this point; most of the time she does not eat the food she prepares for others, for she is “filled with the smells.”

The child is resurrected because the passage from the womb is a passage out of the dark and from a state of sleep. Babies are wrapped in cloth, and the dough is covered with blankets and towels to rise. The mouth of the grandma (softening the bread) is an oven, as is the womb (see also duBois 1988). The grandma feeding the baby with her mouth is resurrecting it by awakening its body point by point, by calling and naming *points*⁴ (*semía*) of the body: “my eyes,” “my heart,” “my soul,” or “my olive” referring to a birth mark. These are inferential codes for a complex act that engages other parts and points of the body not explicitly named. The entire act of feeding the child and naming the points of the body is an awakening of the senses. The act of talking to the child engages hearing. Naming the eyes awakens vision, the transference of substance from mouth to mouth animates taste and tactility.

The act of calling and naming is also an act of exchange. The substance transferred from the mouth of the grandma to the mouth of the child is her saliva, her taste or flavor, that becomes its own taste. It is food baked within her, with parts of her, her substance which is then transferred. This act can be contrasted to the feeding of the child with baby food from a jar bought in the store. By naming the child’s gaze “my eyes,” the grandma exchanges body parts and establishes vision as a social and sensory reciprocity. She calls the child “my heart” for the emotions in this awakening are as sensual as the senses are emotive. This act of sharing and naming parts and senses constructs one heart for two bodies, as

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one food was baked with saliva for two mouths, as one soul is raised for two persons, as one pair of eyes is imprinted on two bodies. The grandma gives her parts to see them inscribed on the child over time. *This is what she receives back from the child: the memory of herself in parts.*

The points of the body once awakened are not merely marks on the surface but are an active capacity. Awakening these points as sensate is opening the body to semiosis. The senses, the "points" (*semta*) of the body, are the sites where matter is subjected to signification. Semiosis here is inseparable from interpersonal exchange. The child is not only exposed to substance but to *shared substance*. The grandma's molding of the bread crumbs with saliva is a transcription of the self onto matter which is then transferred into the body of the child. This is the materialization of the person and the personification of matter.⁶ The transcription of self onto substance and then into the child's body is inseparable from the transmission of emotions as a fuel of this exchange — which is why this is understood as "one heart for two bodies." Or as the sayings go, "we are one breath," "we are one home," we grew up "with one food, one water."

The act of exchange is registered on the senses that seal it as a social relation. In turn, the senses are synchronized and crossed with each other and with *the Other*, so that senses and subjects can witness and be witnessed. "Listen to see" is the colloquial Greek phrase to demand attention in conversation; or "I can(not) hear it"⁷ in reference to tasting a food flavor. The memory of one sense is stored in another: that of tactility in sound, of hearing in taste, of sight in sound. Sensory memory is a form of storage. Storage is always the embodiment and conservation of experiences, persons and matter in vessels of alterity. The awakening of the senses is awakening the capacity for memory, of tangible memory; to be awake is to remember, and one remembers through the senses, via substance. Cooking food in grandma's mouth with saliva imprints memory on the substance internalized by the child. Memory is stored in substances that are shared, just as substances are stored in social memory which is sensory.

Grandma feeding the child is also resurrecting it from death as a kind of generational sleep. She feeds the child that is often named after herself, her husband or one of her dead children. Personal names are passed down in families through alternate generations. This

naming system endows the exchange of food, body parts and senses with an historical inflection — which is why it is all the more important for the senses and memory to witness and to record (historicize) the acts of exchange.⁸ In this context, the food is not only cooked by saliva but also by emotions and memory. In turn, social memory is baked (raised) and thus reproduced by awakening the child. The dead can be raised through cooking, eating, awakening and exchanging, which all require memory. Ceremonial eating follows all death rituals.

The storage of memory in the senses, which awakens both, is based, like any other form of storage, on deferred consumption. Women in this culture distribute before they consume. Cooking is always for others. Cooking defers the immediacy of consumption. This is epitomized by the grandma who molds the food in her mouth and instead of swallowing it, places it in the mouth of the baby. A common Greek expression is "she was taking the food out of her mouth to feed him" referring literally to how one was raised and metaphorically to how two people relate; another expression of exchange is "you eat and I am filled." The deferment of consumption is affective because one always cooks for significant others. To defer and to store is to place into alterity, the self registering substance and emotions in the other. Storage by both donor and recipient encodes the material world. If matter was to be subjected to immediate consumption, there would be no senses, no semiosis, and no memory. The senses defer the material world by changing substance into memory.

The return to the senses (experiential or theoretical), therefore, can never be a return to realism; to the thing-in-itself, or to the literal. In realism, matter is never deferred, but supposedly subjected to total consumption. When the child returns to the senses, this passage will always be mediated by memory, and memory is concerned with, and assembled from, sensory and experiential fragments. This assemblage will always be an act of imagination — thus opposed to the reductions of realism.⁹

THE JOURNEY

The child now living in the city, returns to visit the grandma in the country. The trip to the village to visit grandma was by train. It meant camping out on a long journey. This entailed elaborate preparations, such as



the packing of functional items for surviving the trip and numerous gifts for friends and relatives. Every station was identified with specific foods, their particular tastes and smells — one station with *souvláki*, another with rice pudding, pistachios, *pastéli*, dried figs. The child traveled through substances to reach grandma; a journey that sharpened the senses and prepared the child for diving into the village. The child arrived to the smell of the ocean, the trees, lemon, orange, olive, the sound of the donkey's bray, and the omnipresent, loud, loud music of the cicadas: sensory gates that signified entry into a separate space. The child greets the grandma who has been surveying the road like a gatepost, and passes into her world through the smells and texture of her dress. Shoes are removed as the child enters the main door and the pebbled floor leaves an indelible mark on the insteps. Its feet soon move from the hard pebbled floor to the soft mud of the gardens soothing its insole; an ingestion of

the wet and the dry through the insole. Tactility extends beyond the hands.

There is also a tactility of smells. Each smell generates its own textures and surfaces. No smell is encountered alone. There are combinations of smells that make up a unified presence, the grandma's house: the garden aroma combined with the animal dung; the oregano bunch hanging over the sheep skin containing the year's cheese; the blankets stored in the cabinet which combine rough wool with the humidity of the ocean; the oven exhuding the smell of baking bread and the residue of the ashes; the fresh bread in the open covered with white cotton towels. Nothing is sealed for the sake of preserving. To do so would mean to silence the smells preventing them from being "heard." As one moves from place to place in the house and gardens, these smells come in waves.

The senses in this place are moving constantly, they are not stationary. They blend, combine and recombine,

shifting positions and transforming contexts. The fig is on the tree in the field one day, and next morning hundreds of figs are gathered and placed on bamboo mats on the beach, by the ocean to sundry. They look like pebbles and their strong sour taste blends with the smell of the sea. Then comes the olive season or the noodle making. For smells have seasons and each season smells. There is no watermelon in the winter, for instance, as in America. For taste has seasons too, and each season tastes. Each season also has its colors, as well as its sounds: cicadas, winds, ocean, earth.

TRAFFIC

The grandma sits on a wooden stool, her legs comfortably spread apart with her skirt around them forming an armchair. Her face dark, her hair tied in a bun, her hands freckled and rough. The child slips into her lap. It is time for fairy tales. Slipping into her lap is slipping into a surround of different smells and textures, sediments of her work in the fields, the kitchen, with the animals. Through the anxieties of the parents, the child has learned that the grandma is the person who places it in contact with things dangerous and improper. She is the one who has a different relation to water, its qualities and economy, and thus to washing. She is the one who introduces "dirt."

She cracks a walnut. She "cleans" the inside, the "bread" (*psitha*), by peeling off the thin membrane that covers it. She splits the inside into pieces and reveals the parts of a new cosmos. She is a woman in the middle of chickens, dogs, cats, rabbits, goats, wells, mountains, oceans. These become the material emblems of her fairy tales, and the countryside the allegory of her stories. The landscape exhibits the fragments and ruins of her tales; its topography becomes a narrative sequence in itself. Her stories, inscribing the ocean, will come in waves. Yet, these tales are not the mere combination of her physical world. Outside invisible forces crack the surface and pop up to disorder and repatch that reality. Pirates and brigands raiding the ocean, monsters in the mountains, bad and good fairies fighting, snakes laying in ambush for passersby, ghosts talking, guiding and misguiding you. In one instance a child will be born by popping out from the woman's calf. The parts of the body, like the parts of the world, are mobilized; parts that were stationary

and insignificant. These parts now recombined begin to signify. This is a repatching of the human body and of the "body" of the world.

This recombination and mobilization of the "body" through the fairy tale is staged on the grandma's own body in the ways she performs and tells her story. Through breathing, vocal tones and gestures, her body enacts all the forces, characters and movements of the story. As the grandma and child eat the walnut, the fairy tale and its telling become the saliva on the "bread" of the present, bringing the past into the child's mouth.

Next morning the ocean will no longer be the ocean, a flat surface for play. It will also be a surface cracked by the raiding pirates. In this cosmos, the unexpected, the incongruous will appear suddenly from the casual and the everyday through their interruption and transformation. Sitting in between her legs, the child is split between two worlds like the tree in her fairy tales that grows in between two rocks which make its abode; a split home formed by a stereoscopic vision ignited by the fairy tales in which the past and the present, the phantasmagoric and the everyday are juxtaposed on the material landscape and the senses.

When the fairy tale is remembered through play in the city, the child's new stereoscopic vision infiltrates the urban space, the city apartment, the parlor and the bedroom, creating an alternative geography. Within the apartment, the child will uncover obscure spaces, corners, closets that will become separate and imaginary and within which the fairy tales will be reenacted. These can be "old rooms" or unfinished rooms and alcoves which contain discarded objects of all sorts, colors and shapes. They become artifacts, actors of the fairy tale landscape. On the street old buildings, abandoned buildings, or buildings under construction will be transformed into "open" spaces for the transcription of the fairy tale surround.

Through her fairy tale (*paramythi*), the grandma brings the past into the present as a transformative and interruptive force. This very action defines the efficacy of the fairy tale as post-mythic — something related to myth but beyond it, a narrative that extracts and liberates, disassembles and reassembles the substance and fragments of myth in order to create passageways between times and spaces. Just as she chops up the landscape of the countryside rearranging its parts in order to convey her tales, the infiltration of the child's present by these

narratives chop into pieces its world picture, undermining surface coherence with foreign elements. The fairy tale as narrative, performance and persona is post-mythic to the extent that it challenges and decenters contemporary myths that divorce and segregate the past from the present; myths that respectively depict the past and the present as separate homogeneities. The grandma's narration hooks things, shifting them from one space and time to another. This narrative redistribution interrupts the present as a closed continuum because it inserts and works with objects and experiences that are qualified by their spatial and temporal strangeness. Thus she becomes a *colporteur*¹⁰ similar to the journeyman, the carnival performer, the sailor, who are comfortable moving between the city and the country and who bring with them glittering trinkets and other exotica; everyday objects from different sites and epochs. *Colporteurs* tell stories of the exotic and the different with artifacts as well as with language. Their stories, their small goods are bits and pieces of alterity that bring with them semantic possibility in miniature.

A characteristic figure of *colportage*, in urban and rural Greece has been the *pramateftis* or *yirólógos* (*práma* means thing, event — deriving from the verb *pramatévo* which means I handle, trade, deal with, or put together; *yíro* means (a)round, and *lógos* discourse). Both terms concern the circulation of things, words, signs, and sounds, as inseparable elements of trafficking, understood as a symbolic, performative and economic practice — a way of telling stories with objects and a way of circulating other cultures and their objects through stories. *Colporteurs* have also been repairmen of all sorts, fruit and vegetable vendors, fishmongers who traveled with donkeys and later motorcycle trucks, the newspaper man, and earlier the gypsy with his little monkey that danced to the tunes of the *défi* (a drum) and caricatured known personalities. On special days in the cities, this traffic was joined by the *ghaitanáki*, a carnival figure of a donkey formed by two men under a frame covered with multicolored strips of paper and dancing to the beat of a drum played by a third man. All these figures, along with the sailor and the returned emigrant, created a traffic of exotica, an alternative economy that transcended urban/rural spatial and temporal boundaries within a periphery. Many of them were also envoys of an invisible market network that connected this periphery with the markets of other peripheries in distant parts of the world, all of

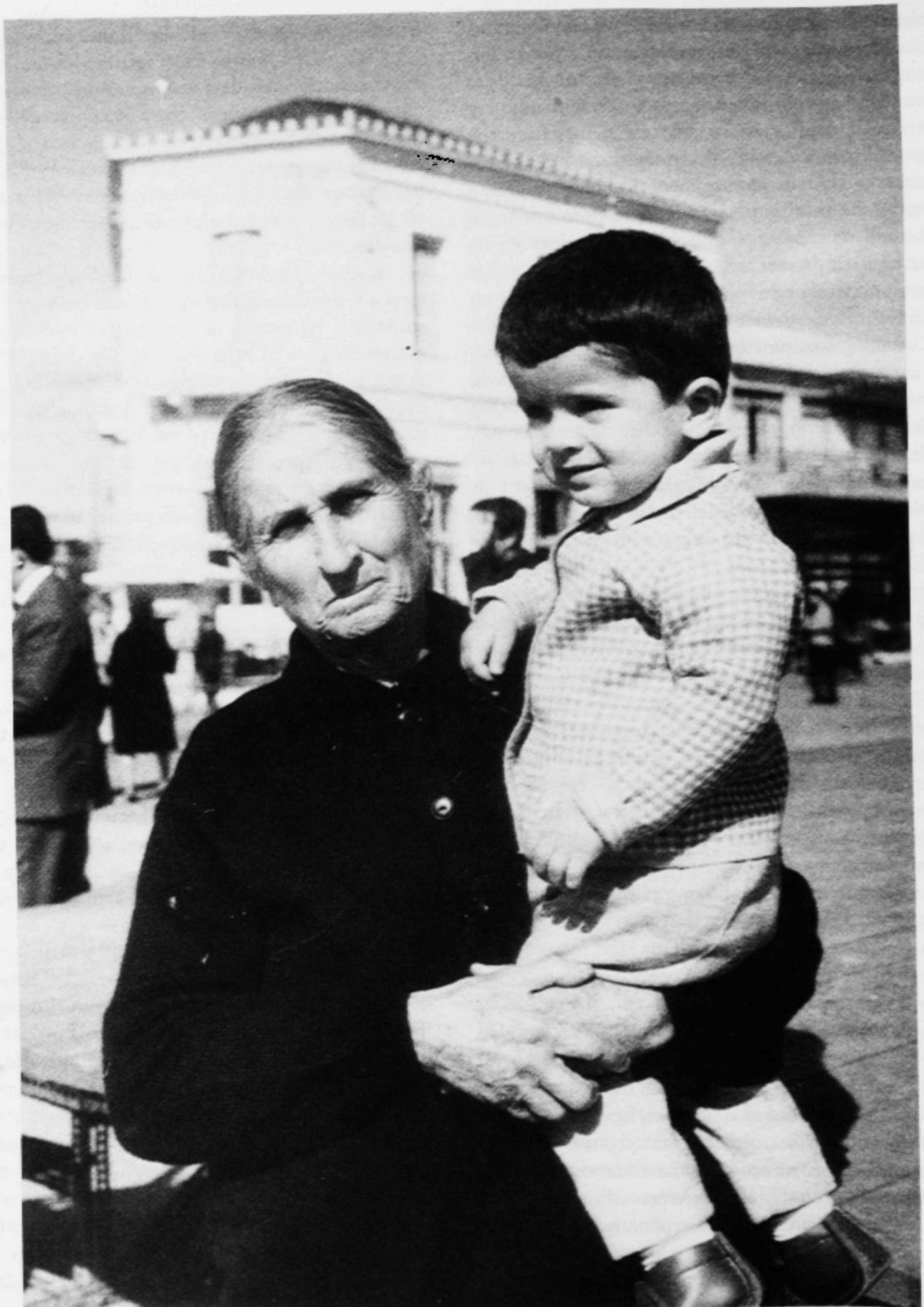
which bypassed and/ or exploited dominant economies.

This traffic was a choreographed time keeping mechanism. Hours, days and seasons were measured in alternating performances, each accompanied by its sounds, smells, textures and visual spectacle. *Colporteurs* were figures stepping on and off the road as if it were a public stage, and in the eyes of the child they were akin to the fairy tale as the entry of the “fantastic” into the everyday.

There was traffic at night as well. When all movement stopped, the drunkard would appear. Staggering and stuttering, he passed next to low windows scaring everybody, especially the children. The drunkard of the urban neighborhoods, singing and grumbling against the world, interrupting the silence of the night was feared though tolerated. Nobody would call the police. He was the scarecrow people would play with but not expel.

The ingredients of *colportage*, the scattered contents of the unpacked myth, that is disseminated through fairy tales and exotic traffic ornamented the everyday character of the child's present, lending it new auras. *Colportage* has nothing to do with completed appearances and geometric closures; rather in ornamenting the everyday with the sensibility of the different it cuts up the edifice of the routine and prosaic, it forms fragments and animates broken up pieces of multiple realities in transit. This is the migration of sensory forms via material artifacts, and the memory they leave behind. The traffic of exotic matter here is both literal and symbolic, actual and remembered; the transport (*metaphorá*) of artifacts and narratives from one historical or cultural site to another is their metaphorization. Therefore *colportage* and its engagement with what can be shifted and altered is neither nostalgic nor realist.

In *colportage*, moments of the past and the different are glued onto the experience of the present. This is both montage and the fermentation of non-synchronicity in the present. *Colportage* is not the transfer of parts and meanings into predetermined functions nor is it mechanical substitution.¹¹ With her saliva and stories, the grandma glues past generational and collective history onto present biographical experience. This dynamic traces how the imaginary and mythic postures of one generation are received within the childhood experience of another. The *colportage* of the grandma and its witnessing by the child does not fashion a non-contradictory totality. The grandma and child collaborate



in the sensory and narrative refiguration of the rural landscape; a refiguration that also functions as a meta-commentary on the urban landscape because it recharges the marginalized and the ephemeral within the urban with exotic¹² meanings. This transcoding is all the more poignant because within modernity and between the rural and the city landscapes, the worlds of memory are rapidly replaced. Through the underground passageways between grandma and grandchild, through saliva and fairy tale, through evocations of persons, dead and/or supernatural, and through shared food, an alternative world of memory is set up against the structure of repression and displacement called modernity.

When the grandma comes from the village to visit her children in the urban center, she has to be patched up to appear publicly in the metropole. This is a montaging that only the grandchild can read. For occasions like a family wedding or baptism, grandma is taken to the hairdresser to get her hair fixed, given a hat with a veil, a matching suit or dress, special shoes that constrain her feet, a small purse otherwise useless to her, with some money and a handkerchief placed in it so it won't be empty. She is dressed and staged in this manner to make an appearance for she is the hidden element of her

Once upon a time my son
a good king ruled over a far away land

I remember to this day grandma starting
this way, her mind sailing in different times,
tenderly talking to me of this and that
witchcraft, love and great killings
Of good young kings who
conquered castles, killed the witches
and defeated monsters

And when the sweet sleep targeted my mind
my thought returned to the world of the fairy tales

Bad times took away from my dreams,
along with my joy, grandma's stories
They often come back from the old times
— God if it were only true —
like a gust of wind, those fairy tales

Don't cry my little girl for you open
wounds on my chest,
the two of us will make the world
a fairy tale.

GRANDMA'S FAIRY TALES, CRETAN MANDINADHA
COMPOSED AND SUNG BY THE CRETAN GROUP
HAINIDHES, POPULAR AMONG GREEK YOUTH.





children's past. In the city she is the exposure of the inside to the outside, the rural to the urban. It is at this moment that the grandchild catches the present fabricating the past. The child is between two loving worlds and split into two, as if in between two mirrors never able to capture its full image in any one of them.

For the grandma this dressing up and ornamentation is inappropriate to her life cycle where one only dresses

world. Dressing up the grandma forms a dialectical image in which two failed utopian expectations or sensibilities converge within the same form: that of the rural and that of the urban. In this simultaneous investiture and divestiture of the grandma, the child witnesses the repression of the rural, its historical vulnerability and at the same time the inability of modernity to fully transform the grandma. There is one



this way for death. She can sense that she is modernized as an element of a no longer pertinent reality which is now named "the past." For the grandchild, however, the dressing of the grandma transforms her into a redecorated artifact. The extraction of the grandma from her rural context and her transformation becomes in the child's perception analogous to its own coercive extraction from imaginary places and play and its insertion into an adult

such "grandma" in every other Greek household.

In comparison with the sensory layers and residues with which grandma is dressed in the village, she is now covered with "dead" objects. In this masquerade, she becomes the negated past, a fossilized display in the urban museum: the living room, the parlor. The deadening of the rural "past" and its framing in the parlor-museum transforms the sensory alterity of the



grandma into dust. Dust is the perceptual waste material formed by the historical-cultural repression of sensory experience and memory. It is also the form that residual culture takes once it is compartmentalized as the archaic and sundered from any contemporary pertinence and presence.

Throughout the Mediterranean, the undusted house is a “dead” house, very much like the rural house “devoured” by overgrown weeds or abandoned by emigration (Seremetakis 1991). Dust offends the senses. It is the loss of the home to otherness: the temporal effacement of its semantic “surface,” and its historical

sedimentation. There is a relation between the accumulation of dust and the displacement of memory. The dust covered surface is alien to that sensory sedimentation that characterizes the grandma’s house as a storage site of sensory memory where no odor or tactility is sealed — where not even the soil, the dirt with its smell and texture, can be left to become “dust,” i.e., agriculturally dormant.

In Greek exhumation practices women mourners, after bringing the bones up from below the earth and back into their perceptual field, dust, wash, and sun dry the bones. This eliminates any foreign particle on the

bone and restores the legibility of the artifact which is to be used as divination text. Without dusting they cannot “see” the bone in the divinatory sense nor touch it in the emotional sense. To make sensory contact with the bone without cleaning it, is to touch only the “dust.” It is as if the bone, artifact of the remembered dead, has its own senses always in communication with the mourner’s memory which can be blocked by the dust. Yet the dust is not devoid of signification. The dust on the bones and their cleaning encapsulates a material allegory of the temporal chasm that separates the living from the dead. This is the distance that is crossed by exhumation, an act of ritual purification that is understood as a sensory restoration and awakening of both the mourner and the bones which places them in communication. This awakening through the senses is divination (Seremetakis, 1991).

In modernity dust forms around the culturally hollow space of the old that has been emptied of all indigenous meaning but which leaves its traces behind. Antiquarian, “tribal” and “folk” exotica inserted into the parlor space and then defined, encysted, encased and isolated as dust, emerge as fossilized displays, as a collector’s artifact — a direct antithesis of the sensory mobility of living colportage. The past collected and encased is the past devoid of semantic possibilities because its meaning has been completed, exhausted, totalized and consumed; that is, turned to historical dust. Historical and cultural difference introduced into the parlor settles in as surface without depth, devoid of the record of exchanges that produced it; thus devoid of emotions, memory and the senses.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the process of collecting, staging and displaying exotica, archaized the past and domesticated cultural otherness. This interiorization was mediated by a circuit of spaces of containment, typified by the urban parlor, a space which communicated with the museum and the academic study. The logic of the museum was inscribed into the parlor, and the museum itself was inhabited and enjoyed as an enlarged public living room. The parlor-museum encapsulates western modernity’s petrification and consumption of ethnological and historical difference. In parlor sites, items of older periods and other cultures which had their particular aromatic, tactile, and auditory realities were desensualized and permitted a purely visual existence. In this process, vision itself was desensualized

and subsequently metaphorized as and reduced to a transparent double of the mind unmediated by any material, spatial and temporal interference (Corbin 1986; Foucault 1979; Fabian 1983). The taming of difference through sensory neutralization, fabricated a false historical continuity between past and present through the cover of dust. The history of fieldwork, the anthropology of the senses and the archaeology of dust are linked to the extent that spatial devices like the parlor and the museum mediated the modern perceptual experience of culture-bound sensory alterity. The encounter with the ethnographic other was filtered by the spatial containment and sensory repression of the parlor exhibit.

In the first decades of the 20th century, fieldwork and ethnography were informed by the impulse to exit from spaces of epistemological, textual and artifactual containment, such as the academic study and the ethnological museum — sites that were cultural variants of the parlor. Recent criticism emanating from within the discipline and from post-colonial sites inadvertently disclose the spatial and sensory continuity between parlor site and field site (see Fabian 1983; Asad 1975). Fieldwork depended on spatial instruments such as the political geography of colonial pacification and tribalization. These spatializing grids were reinforced by parlor-like sensory orientations and homogenizing representational strategies that privileged vision-centered consumption of ethnographic experience, the reductive mapping of cultural traits, and the narrative genre of a static ethnographic present (Clifford 1988; Fabian 1983). This flattening of cross-cultural sensory experience into visual diagrams and atemporal spatial metaphors exported the parlor to the field site and transformed the latter into an open air museum.

REFLEXIVE COMMENSALITY

Between grandma and grandchild sensory acculturation and the materialization of historical consciousness occurred through the sharing of food, saliva and body parts. Another expression of this type of reciprocity is encountered in Maniat mourning ceremonies (Seremetakis 1990, 1991) where the lament circulates from mouth to mouth among singers as a shared substance. This sharing imparts a material density to the antiphonic exchanges of mourners from which oral

history emerges. In Greek exhumation practices, the sensory presence of the dusted bones of the dead reawakens the memory of past commensal exchanges with the dead. Ignited by the collective memories invested in the bone as emotive artifact, the exhumers create a commensal ritual grounded on material substances, present and absent (past).

Commensality here is not just the social organization of food and drink consumption and the rules that enforce social institutions at the level of consumption. Nor can it be reduced to the food-related senses of taste and odor. *Commensality can be defined as the exchange of sensory memories and emotions, and of substances and objects incarnating remembrance and feeling.* Historical consciousness and other forms of social knowledge are created and then replicated in time and space through commensal ethics and exchange. Here each sense witnesses and records the commensal history of the others. In this type of exchange, history, knowledge, feeling and the senses become embedded in the material culture and its components: specific artifacts, places and performances. In processes of historical transformation and/ or cross cultural encounter, divergent sensory structures and commensalities can come into conflict with each other, and some are socially repressed, erased or exiled into privatized recollection and marginal experience. These dynamics indicate profound transformations in a society's relation to material culture and to systems of knowledge bound up with the material.

The history of the senses in modernity (see Corbin 1986; Vigarello 1988; Gay 1984; Crary 1991) can be understood as the progressive effacement of commensality; that is of a reflexive cultural institution that produced and reproduced social knowledge and collective memory through the circulation of material forms as templates of shared emotion and experience. In modernity, commensality is not absent but is rendered banal, functional or literal and increasingly reserved for the diversions of private life.¹³ Yet commensality leads an underground existence as a repressed infrastructure of social knowledge (see also Marcus 1991).¹⁴ In current ethnographic discourse commensality either has the status of fieldwork anecdote, or it is reified as a discrete object of inquiry internal to the culture of the Other. This is a curious pattern in a discipline that frequently worries over its own commodification of ethnographic knowledge, and which associates its progress with the recent expansion

of surfaces of knowledge-consumption resulting from the multiplication of subdisciplines and specializations.

How can inquiry into the commensal practices of other cultures be undertaken when researchers do not consider nor generate accounts of the historical formation-repression of commensal ethics and sensory reciprocities within their own culture and particular discipline?¹⁵ Is there a commensal structure for the social production of knowledge in anthropology? Does this structure communicate with the organization of the senses and material culture in modernity? If so how does this affect the ethnographer's perception of the commensalities of cultural others?

The relation between dust and what it covers is not a relation of appearance and essence. It is a relation of historical sedimentation. *Dust is not deposited only on the object but also on the eye.* Sensory numbing constructs not only the perceived but also the perceiving subject and the media of perception; each of these are reflexive components of an historical process. Thus dust can be a subject of historical analysis just as much as the senses, objects and experiences that dust interrupts and blurs.

When the anthropologist first enters the field site the sensory organization of modernity, the perceptual history and commensal structure of the discipline direct her/him to first see dust. Without long-term fieldwork and sensory archeology the anthropologist may never come to know that this dust is a surface residue of the researcher's own acculturation that obscures depth: other sensory surfaces that embody alternative materialities, commensalities and histories. Without a reflexive anthropology of the senses, fieldwork, short¹⁶ or long-term, remains trapped in the literal, captive of realist conventions that are themselves unacknowledged historically determined perceptual and commensal patterns. This is well understood by those who inhabit the memory of other sensory and material reciprocities. How can they take anthropologists seriously if the latter go with the dust?

"When I die, I am going to leave this gold tooth for you." "But Grandmother, how are you going to pull it out once you are cold and gone?"... "You'll pull it out."

Empty the table, and over the emptiness, dust.
Over the dust the habitual searching of your bony

fingers. Is it a candle, or a tooth? Whenever I see that glow in the dark I'll know it's you coming home to visit.

EXCERPT FROM STRATIS HAVIARAS' NOVEL
WHEN THE TREE SINGS



NOTES

This paper was presented in the panel "The Anthropology of the Senses and European Modernity" organized and chaired by the author (sponsored by the Society for the Anthropology of Europe) at the 90th Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association, Chicago, 1991. It was also presented to the faculty of the department of anthropology at the University of Chicago in the spring of 1992. I wish to thank all anonymous reviewers for their comments, and most of all Lucien Taylor, for his sensitive reading of this paper and for his decision to publish it without revisions. Thanks to Paul Stoller for his constructive remarks as a discussant at the AAA panel at which this paper was first given. This paper would not have been possible without my fierce dialogues with Allen Feldman.

1. Given the incomplete and uneven character of capitalist penetration and modernization in Greece and the accelerated rural to urban migration, which still allows for reverse seasonal migration (back to the country), the structure of the Greek family particularly from the perspective of a generational profile, can span rural and urban economies and cultures (for a fuller discussion see Seremetakis 1991). Therefore in Greece as in other cultures that have undergone similar uneven transformations, e.g. Latin America, the grandmother has been a central and ubiquitous figure in the popular imagination, literature and cinema representing the anomalous persistence of the past in a present that has not superseded it.

2. Mutual toothlessness points to the twinship of grandma and child as liminal figures in this social context. Greek folksayings and humor on the mimetic relations between old age and infancy are common; they concern the lack of teeth and the inability to consume "adult," that is, hard food. The elderly frequently comment with irony on this resemblance. For instance, the perceived similarity between the physical, mental and social aspects of the life-cycle stages of old-age and infancy, informs the organization and intensity of mourning rituals in Inner Mani (see Seremetakis 1991). Also, in Inner Mani there are strong semiotic parallels between the imagery of birthing and dying (ibid.). The association sparked by toothlessness does not imply the infantilization of the elderly. In Greek rural culture, the infant, like the grandma, participates in a liminality with divinatory and cosmological implications. With the intensification of

modernity and the internalization of Western notions of the life cycle and human development both the infant and grandma, particularly in the urban milieu, undergo a reciprocal infantilization as helpless entities.

3. The use of the present tense here does not imply the narrative strategy of the ethnographic present, but simply replicates the style of storytelling in Greek culture. If we accept that anthropology is another form of storytelling, we must allow for indigenous forms of narration to infiltrate the ethnographic narrative.

4. See Seremetakis (1991) for a discussion of the "points" of the body as liminal orifices where exchanges between the outside and inside take place.

5. For a fuller description of olive cultivation as well as the emotional and symbolic connotations of olives and the olive tree see Seremetakis 1991.

6. See Weiner (1976) and Strathern (1988) for analogous descriptions of the personalization of matter in Melanesian contexts. However, their accounts do not explicitly focus on the link between emotions and historicization (witnessing) which is central to the understanding of exchange both in Greece and in other cultures.

7. Expressions such as "I hear the garlic" are used throughout Greece and most commonly in Crete and the Peloponnese. Dictionary definitions of the verb *akouo* (I hear) associate it with the auditory, including literal hearing, but also receptive learning and obeying an order; the latter indicating that hearing is never passive but tied to the notion of agency. It is also tied to witnessing as in the phrase "I hear in the name of" (my name is). At issue in this article is the metaphorization of hearing in other senses such as taste and vision. This metonymic displacement violates any segmentation of the senses as discrete perceptual organs. One reviewer of this article suggested that it be translated as a generic term for perception ("encoded sensation"). This gloss loses the inflection of metaphorical transfer from one sense to another. *Akouo* is not a generic phrase that takes on the character of a particular sense in changing situations. To maintain this is to assume a division of the senses. To translate it as generic perception is also to maintain a Cartesian distinction between language and material experience which reduces the polysemy of sensory crossing to rhetorical word-play.

8. The naming of body parts and sensory capacities throws new light on Greek personal naming and exchange.

Earlier discussions of Greek naming practices in anthropology viewed naming as the mechanical reflex of

kinship rules, inheritance requirements and collective religious identity (see for instance Bialor 1967; Kenna 1976). Personal naming was understood as upholding homeostatic, atemporal or cyclical institutions; it was also primarily viewed as an ideational-linguistic practice. Alternate generational naming is supposed to assimilate the individual to the kin collective of persons who share names and eventually depersonalize those whose names are transferred to later generations. This style of naming replicates collective institutions by suppressing the passing of finite time (see for example Herzfeld 1982). Herzfeld added a performative element to this model by suggesting that Greek naming constructs social identity through the instrumental manipulation of rules and norms; the ultimate concern was what one "gains" from the conferral. Here, naming was associated with the rhetorical side of performance and value manipulation.

Baptismal naming has also been linked to the symbolic "resurrection" of the person whose name is transferred. But here the vernacular use of the term "resurrection" has been restricted to the theological sense of the term as an event and final outcome which preserves individual identity against death. In contrast, this paper shows that "resurrection," "raising" and "baking" are neither isolable nor terminal events, but speak to ongoing and accumulated reciprocities, and to long term caring for the other. This is the storage and personification of the self in the other over time which cultivates, matures and individualizes the recipient through the poetic intensification of sensory memory. Personification must be distinguished from any dichotomy of the individual and the collective that informs all discussions of Greek naming (see for example Stewart 1988). Personification is the transcription of the self into alterity, *not* the recycling of identity onto a blank mimetic slate. It does not aim at producing repetitive sameness, it is instead, a thoroughly historical and historicizing process that recuperates the difference between the young and the old, the living and the dead, the past and the present. This historical sensibility, with its focus on the shifting of emotions, identity, substance and memory from one form or vessel to another, also carries with it an aesthetic sensibility for variety and multiplicity. Personification through sensory and personal naming does not lead to depersonalization but rather to the cultivation of the distinct through transformative exchange, which preserves nothing that is not first altered by being exchanged.

Thus to limit naming practices to mentalist-linguistic

and instrumental formulas, is to cover with dust the sensorial, materially dense, performed *poesis* (making and imagining) of naming. Through reciprocities of naming and other modes of exchange the self is, via the senses, dispersed and transcribed in parts onto diversity and history. These issues have been discussed in length in *The Last Word* (Seremetakis 1991).

9. The critique of descriptive realism here does not necessarily mean to say that there is no reality outside the text, but rather points to the possibility of alternative modes of describing and depicting the Real which retroactively locate realism as a cultural construct with its own historical and social specificity.

10. Colporteurs or colporters are hawkers and peddlers (originally of books, pamphlets and religious tracts). For a literary analysis of colportage, colporteurs, and their relation to spontaneous cultural montage see Bloch (1989). He associates it with "...the yearning for a constellation in the world, made out of esoteric and weird things, the yearning for the curious as objective quality" (Bloch 1991: 181).

11. These characteristics distinguish colportage as defined here and by Ernst Bloch (1988), from Lévi-Strauss' famous notion of *bricolage* which emphasizes the ordered placement of a serendipity of materials within a stabilized structure which then endows these elements with a classificatory order. Colportage contests discrete systems of classification.

12. Recently it has become fashionable in anthropology to criticize any tendency to exoticize as ethnocentric and romantic. However such criticism has been deployed in such a reductionist manner as to efface indigenous fascinations with the exotic and local "romanticisms" in diverse societies which may have little to do with 19th century European predilections and their contemporary holdovers.

13. This correlates with the privatization of what is actually social memory, which is consequently removed from collective historical consciousness.

14. Marcus' discussion of "corridor talk" indexes a repressed commensality in academia since it engages unofficial practices for consuming and exchanging disciplinary knowledge.

15. See Stoller (1989), for an analogous critique of fieldwork and protocols of representation in anthropology.

16. The growing legitimacy of short term fieldwork within anthropology merely exacerbates this situation.

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