

Exploring geographies of the Senses :The role of smell in geographical experiences

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Some historic sensory issues in production of place...

Sight - 'line of fire', imposing identity,
axial vista, 'city beautiful', surveillance...

Hearing - calls to battle, prayer, work,
markets, resonant spaces...

Touch - greeting, blessing, honouring,
responding to wind, rain, snow, sun...

Smell - wind direction, waste, gardens...

Taste - places of eating, potable water...

Some modern sensory issues in production of place...

Sight - 'line of sight', planning and iconic identity, vista, lighting, surveillance...

Hearing - noise at work, building regulations, planning > soundscape design...

Touch - crowd control, surveillance, wind, sunlight > bioclimatic design...

Smell - wind direction, waste, gardens...

Taste - places of eating, potable water...

Sensual Turn in Academy?

- In the last few decades there has been diverse research on the senses in a wide range of disciplines. This sensual turn in scholarship comes after a long and dry period... Shifting attention to other senses is also a **reaction against the incorporeality of conventional academic writing as well as a challenge to the so-called hegemony of vision in Western culture**
- This visual dominance is primarily due to the association of sight with both **scientific rationalism and capitalism and to the technological advance of the visual means for observation and reproduction ...**
- As a result, many academics are now eagerly rediscovering **how colours, touches, movements, tastes and smells can be important means for geographical experiences..**

...Geography is conventionally understood as a visual discipline, with an emphasis on optic methods and techniques such as observation and mapping. Our cartographic roots encouraged our reliance on sight, but this has had a profound impact on the way we contemplate the world around us... Until recently geographers have unwittingly associated this visual world with reliable knowledge, without considering how the other senses might shape our everyday lives and geographies.

(Law,2005,439)

Smell is neglected?

- Perhaps smell is the only sense we can't control. We can eschew touching and tasting, close our eyes, or cover our ears. But we have no choice but to smell with every breath.
- Classen et al. (1994) argued that **sensory equilibrium should be recovered** by addressing the importance of odours and olfactory codes because **academic circles in the western world have long excluded smells from their accounts** and concentrated on the visual and the auditory, without being accused of any sensory biases.
- We feel difficulties with describing smells and olfactory experiences. When we can't find the relevant names for specific smells, we employ words borrowed from other senses.

The Importance of Smell

- Smell is not simply a biological and psychological phenomenon but also complex and multi-layered one.
- Smell is geographical, hence a social, cultural, historical, economic and political phenomenon.
- Odours are invested with cultural values and employed by societies as a means of and model for defining and interacting with the world.

**Smell plays important roles in
everyday life worlds...
from food consumption,
body and special preferences,
personal hygiene and security,
memories and nostalgia,
class, gender, national or
ethnic dimensions of
geographical experiences
including spatial politics.**

Olfactory Gulf?

- The public space in modern western societies is thoroughly sterilized and especially devoid of the stink of savagery.
- On the contrary, the inhabitants of earlier periods in Western history used scent. In effect a deep 'olfactory gulf' seems to lie between the deodorized, western, modern world and the richly scented lives of their ancestors
- In Arab-Muslim societies, odours and perfumes still play an important role in their everyday life worlds and are regarded as an indispensable element at the special events like birth, circumcision, marriage and death.

Smell and Geography

- Hirsh (1992: 29) contends:
...Among people from the Eastern United States, the scent of flowers prompts nostalgic feeling; among those from the South, the scent of fresh air; among those from the Midwest, the smells of farm animals and among those from the West Coast, the smells of meat cooking or barbecuing often prompt such feelings. The most common odour known to stimulate an olfactory-evoked recall in people, regardless of their geographic origin, is the odour of baked goods.

Smell & Memory of childhood

- A special odour may revive a memory of the past and reconstruct the related landscapes with a concrete image. For many adults especially, some of their strongest memories and recollections of geographical experiences in their past are related to the senses, especially, the olfactory one.
- When it comes to smell, many writers and artists reminisce about the favourite smells of their childhood. Porteous (1990) also pointed out that smell seem especially important in childhood because adults tend to associate childhood with certain smells.

Proust's memory...

- Proust describes the memory of the senses evoked by food, in his famous *Madeleine* description:

But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, **taste and smell alone**, more fragile but more enduring, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, remain posed a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, **in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence**, the vast structure of recollection.

Smell, Food, Memory

- Low's (2005) research shows that associations between race and smell in Singapore are often made, where informants tend to stereotype categories of 'Indian', 'Chinese' and 'Malay'. In the Asian communities, sensory experiences can evoke memories, constitute their ethnic identity and even hand down the traditions they embody to the next generation in connection with their food.

Asians smell of food. We Asians really smell of what we eat. Koreans smell of garlic, Indians smell of curry, Filipinos smell of vinegar, and so on. ...

Celebrate the smell of their native food... this celebration revolved around the idea of social reproduction and cultural continuity. I want my children to experience the taste and smell of the food so they will know the roots.

(Martin, 2005: 45)

Odors Often Evoke feelings of Nostalgia

- People born in the 1920s: flowers, grass, rose, pine, soap, manure
- People born in the 1930s: flower, hay, sea air, pine, baby powder, burning leaves
- People born in the 1940s: baby powder, mother's perfume, hay, cut grass, flowers, sea air, roses, tweed
- People born in the 1950s: baby powder, mother's perfume, dad's cologne, crayons, pine, Play-Doh
- People born in the 1960s: baby powder, mother's perfume, chlorine, window cleaner, dad's cologne, detergent, paste, Play-Doh, disinfectant, refineries, motor oil, exhaust
- People born in the 1970s: baby powder, mother's perfume, mothballs, plastic, hair spray, suntan oil, chlorine, felt-tip pens

Nostalgia & the Odors of Childhood

- People born before 1930 in less urbanized and industrialized times mentioned natural odors as reminiscent of childhood.
- But those born after 1930 were more apt to mention perfume, cosmetic and artificial odors as reminiscent of their childhood.
- What are the odors of your childhood?

Scenes from Everyday Life

:A Distinctly Korean Cuisine & Geography

- Korean cuisine can be characterized as seasonal, diverse and distinctly flavored.
- The distinctively Korean flavor and aroma of Korean cuisine is achieved through fermentation.
- The long and winding coastline provides an abundant harvest of marine plants and animals.
- Inland, in the valley plains nestled between mountains, rice is cultivated during the hot and rainy summer season, and then harvested in the mild fall season along with other grains, vegetables, legumes and fruits.

Smell & Everyday Life in SE Asia

- Walking through the tropical streets in Southeast Asia, one would encounter various smells,,,

...the stench of kitchen waste rotting by the wayside, the piercing fragrance of Jasmine flower and burning incense emanating from religious altars, the heavy aroma of food being cooked by street vendors, the seductive scent of flowering gardens, the sweet odour of tropical fruits, the reek of rotting fish at a fish market, the sharp stink of urine from a public latrine or the foul pong of a trash heap.

Potentials and Pitfalls of the senses in geography education

- Sensory experiences in childhood can be a critical factor in cultivating a love for nature and geographical imagination.
- They engage children in debate about local environmental issues by discovering real-life problem and arousing strong feelings. (ex. Sewage, human and animal waste and industrial rubbish)
- If children know the origin and have a deeper understanding of the circumstances where the smell is formed, some pungent or ethnic smells could be acceptable.
→ Opportunity to develop empathetic understanding of distant places and other cultures beyond a tokenistic approach.

Potentials and Pitfalls of the senses in geography education

- Stench issues in classroom should be dealt with cautiously. Those who emit odours shouldn't be hurt or bullied; Respect for cultural and sensory diversity should be valued.
- General lack of an appropriate vocabulary and media in teaching the non-visual sensory landscape should be overcome.
- If children are educated to recognize and express their sensory experiences in connection with places, they could enrich their geographical experiences and refresh their image about distant places.

Intellectual Pioneer Spirit!!!

Let's proceed beyond the visible world and
testify some alternative methods and
techniques

Feeling, touching, hearing,
tasting and smelling geography!!!

I want to listen to your voices....

- Do you have any idea, feeling, emotion, memory, or experience in your mind when you smell it?
- Do you have any strong olfactory memory in connection with some place, especially in your childhood?