

Senses, Affects and Archaeology

Senses, Affects and Archaeology:

*Changing the Heart, the Mind
and the Pants*

By

José Roberto Pellini

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THIS BOOK IS IN SEARCH OF THOSE WHO CAN STILL LAUGH,
THOSE WHO DID NOT GIVE UP

THIS BOOK IS IN SEARCH OF DREAMERS

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FOREWORD

UNCOMFORTABLE

It's seven o'clock and I've just woken up. Still a bit jet-lagged and confused, I stumble to the room balcony. I open the doors and see the beautiful day it is. A lovely and mild December morning. As I look at the city from above, I realize how much I love the sun and blue skies. Cloudy weather just makes me feel depressed, but Carol, my wife, is just the opposite. She loves cloudy and rainy weather. I go back into the room feeling excited, happy, but still not really feeling that I am in Cairo. I change clothes and go down for breakfast. As we sit at the table, I tell Carol that I still don't feel like I'm in Egypt:

- Have you seen what a beautiful day it is? The slight chill, the blue sky, I'm excited, why don't we go for a walk?

- You're right it's a beautiful day. I just wish it were a little bit warmer.

- Yes, but you know what Cairo is like this time of the year."

- I still prefer warmer temperature. That's why I always insist that on doing our fieldwork in Luxor in March, when it's warmer.

- Yes, but you know that this year the best time for the whole team to be able to work together was December. Next year we might all make it in February or March.

- That would be perfect.

- You know, I was just looking at Cairo from the room balcony while you were in the shower and it almost felt like looking at any other big city. Cats fighting over food, cars speeding on the streets, a homeless person begging, people hurrying everywhere, grey buildings. It felt like looking at Sao Paulo, with just a little less pollution.

- It doesn't feel like we're here to me either.

- I suppose it's only normal. We got here at dawn and came straight to the hostel. We went to sleep almost immediately, and here we are at breakfast already. We haven't really been here long enough to even notice it's Cairo.

- It's not just that. Look what you're having. Orange juice, yogurt, bread, milk, eggs.

- Lovely.

- Yeah, delicious, I know. But it's exactly like breakfast at home.

- You know what breakfast in a hostel tends to be like: continental. Look, that's the first real sign that we're in Cairo, the boy there has just lit a cigarette. Let's get out of here. I hate cigarettes !!!!. It's first thing in the morning and this is already getting on my nerves. You smokers are just mental. I can't believe he's smoking at the breakfast table.

- Not all smokers are clueless. I smoke but I don't smoke over breakfast, indoors or inside our house."

- The only reason you don't smoke at home is because you know cigarette smoke makes me sick. I love Egypt, but there's not a single person here that doesn't smoke. Egypt should be like Kyoto, a smoke-free city" - We were in Kyoto in 2016 at the WAC congress. Because Kyoto is a smoke-free city, I had a few minor inconveniences like loops of anxiety. Luckily, just outside the hotel we were staying at there was a square with a 'hotspot' area where smoking was allowed. The space was small and shared by 20 to 25 smokers. It was not exactly pleasant, but my addiction was much stronger than any reserves I might have felt. The hotspot was like an island in the middle of the square, glass-wall sealed on all sides. We smokers looked out at people passing by and they looked back at us. Smokers came in and out frantically, no one spent very long inside. It was as if nobody wanted to be recognized as a smoker. I felt uncomfortable, exposed in the middle of the square, under the accusing stare of passers-by, but I think this was exactly the effect such a layout was meant to have. I was being branded as a smoker, as a weak polluter of the airs, a stinking offender of people's good taste. The 'hotspot', the cigarettes, the smell, all served as social markers, charting everyone into the two broad categories of smokers and non-smokers. Along with this sensory evaluation comes a moral judgment. With our aged skin, our stubborn odour and our nicotine-yellow fingers, we smokers transgress the socio-sensorial aesthetics. As a result of this categorizing, smokers and non-smokers are attracted to antagonistic relationships that are impregnated with affective connotations. For me it was not a novelty that sensory politics created categories of us and other. But it was perhaps the first time I had experienced it. For the first time I was the other. I know cigarettes annoy many people, and I even find the idea of a smoke-free city very interesting.

- I think the men have noticed you were angry and decided to leave.

- Yes, that's possible.

- But back to the subject. This doesn't feel like Cairo.

- I've told you!!.... but seriously, I also still don't feel completely in Cairo. But I think this has to do with the fact that we haven't really experienced the city yet, you know? Mingled with people, etc.

- Yeah, the only people we've really interacted with are the airport staff and the taxi driver.

-Yeah. And airports don't really count because they all look the same. You never know where you are if you live from one airport to another. We have gone through four to get here, Confins in Belo Horizonte, Cumbica in São Paulo, Casablanca and Cairo. Except for the odd detail, they all look the same. The cold marble-looking stone floor, odour-less glass windows where you can only see airplanes, blue offices and those brushed metal plates as decorations. All very standardized.

- They're Marc Augé's non-places.

- When you get in and out of airports it seems that you've never actually left the place. Maybe that's why the journey feels longer than it actually is. These journeys are like being in an endless loop, always entering and leaving the same place.

- And not only that: There's all those state agents repeating their predetermined and visually-oriented behaviours. With their scanners, cameras and surveillance systems. Flavours and aromas are all normative and follow Western aesthetics, with fast food and international coffee chains. To me, the coffee at Heathrow in London tastes just like the one at Narita in Tokyo. It's always the same thing. Not to mention Duty Free shops, where you keep seeing the same products from the same brands, whether in Lisbon or in Nairobi. Only one or two of them have local products

- And if you ever find something, the cost is just ridiculous and nothing like what you find on city street-markets. It all looks artificial, without any personality. Sanitized to meet Western aesthetic standards.

- You're right. It's almost like a policy of palate-normalization, blurring textures, images and aromas into one; standardizing movements, affections, moods and behaviours. It prevents the 21st Century traveling tourist from feeling any stress and keeps them comfortable with what they already know, to travel more perhaps just buy more.

- But don't worry, as soon as we've finished our coffee and gone out onto the street, you'll really feel like you're in Cairo."

Carol was right, as soon as we went out onto the street Cairo made itself present in all its intensity and revealed what I find one of its most striking features, the horns of cars. Because of the very few traffic signs in Cairo, order on the streets is established through car horns. One beep for a car to stop, a beep to turn or to warn the occasional absent-minded pedestrian that one's approaching; a beep to avoid hitting the car in front of one's own or the car on the side. A beep to catch a friend's attention; a beep to pick up a passenger and a beep to leave another. Whether one's in

their hostel room, in the library or at a restaurant, the background sound is uninterrupted beeping. A constant and almost harmonic symphony that gets under one's skin and penetrates deep into the body. Although this isn't really a problem, and Egyptians seem to handle the row incredibly well, I feel particularly affected by the shrill sound of horns. Each horn makes my body tremble, it scares me and affects my mood. High-pitched sounds bother me, make me angry, I prefer when it's quiet. I simply cannot relax in the middle of noise and I get irritated when surrounded by excess sound information. This might have to do with the environment I was brought up in. At home, even the most ordinary of conversations was held shouting. Whoever passed by and saw my family members having a conversation would think they were having an angry argument. This might have been what causes me to associate loud sound and confusion, quarrel and disturbance. It's also probably why I prefer silence. But while the sound of horns annoys me, the sound of the Koran makes me calm, even though I'm not religious.

- So just like the smell of cigarette smoke makes you sulk, what gets to me is the sheer sound volume here. High, strident sounds make me uncomfortable. Here in Cairo, for example, I am irritated by the constant sound of these horns. It's horn twenty-four hours a day. Listen even inside a room on the sixth floor of a hostel, one can clearly hear the sound of horns. It feels like the cars are just beside you.

- The horns bothers me, too, but not half as much as cigarette smoke. It's not all loud sound that bothers you. You always said that you love the sound of the call to prayer in Islamic countries and that's pretty loud.

- True. While the sound of the horns affects me really negatively, altering my mood and restricting my actions, the daily calls to prayer, coming from the mosques, calms me down.

- I also love that sound too. That's when I know that I am really far from home, that I am in Cairo, Istanbul or Marrakesh.

- Like you, I'm not religious either, and yet I feel affected. I cannot explain just what I feel when I hear the call to prayer. It's an intense, mysterious sound. I always feel as if time stands still when the voice of the Imam echoes through the air. The sound of the Koran has an ancient soul that is difficult to explain. Words literally fail me whenever I try to describe this experience.

- To me it feels like the world goes silent whenever the Koran is chanted in the mosques. It seems that a deep silence has taken over the city.

- I get the same impression, which is odd because while we hear the call to prayer, we both get the same time impression of absolute silence. It

is something intense, intimate, sacred, timeless. I don't know. It seems that the sound goes through one's body, it reverberates in other people, unifying the landscape and the bodies surrounding us.

- Why don't we make the most of the fact that we're on the street, and try to buy the gear we're going to need for the excavation?

- What a great idea. But do you know where to find it?

- Not exactly, but we'll ask."

- But you can't speak Arabic."

- But I know how to make gestures and mime ... lol.

- Oh my God!!!!

We stopped at a local store and tried to explain what we wanted. It was hard to communicate, although we used gestures, photos, drawings and maps. Although we couldn't communicate very well, people were amazing at trying to understand what we wanted. Incidentally this is one of the great qualities of the Egyptian people, their extreme attentiveness and willingness to help. These attempts to communicate for shopping end up working as ice-breakers for socialization. A way in which two cultures, two languages meet and get to know each other, exchanging looks, sounds, gestures, and ensuring that a part of each one stays with the other, not to mention the stories that each side will tell about the encounter, perpetuating the memory of this momentary but intense relationship. The whole process was fun, and we all laughed out loud at the nonsense we seemed to be making. What is most interesting is to see how a common situation like this can lead to completely different results depending on the basis on which the relationship springs up, on the affections involved, and on the discourses and narratives that are brought as baggage and which manifest themselves during the relationship. How often do we not get angry or frustrated when we can't understand something that someone is trying to tell us or when we are misunderstood? How many conflicts arise from miscommunication? It all depends on the elements involved in the relationship, the assemblies that are built around a relationship. In the end we got some directions and went behind the packaging shops. Each step took us deeper into the neighbourhood, an area filled with little streets, crammed with small local businesses, fairs, old buildings, with people wearing traditional clothes and not a single foreigner in sight. Everyone seemed curious or even surprised at our presence. They looked at us intently. At one point we got completely lost and Carol mentioned that she felt like an intruder in that place.

- Don't you feel like an intruder here?

- I don't know about feeling like an intruder, but I really feel a little bothered.

- I feel like I shouldn't be walking around here. Like I'm bothering people.

- We might not exactly be a bother, but we definitely affect these people with our presence just as much as they affect us. Foreigners probably hardly ever come here, so I suppose it's normal for everyone to keep looking at us. Everything about us says we're different. Our clothes, the way we walk, the way we talk ends up attracting attention. At the same time, we may be feeling uncomfortable precisely because of this difference.

- Maybe. In the centre of Cairo I don't feel that way. There are other foreigners, there are signs and stimuli that I can recognize. But not here. It's all very different and I feel like I'm intruding on their lives. But it's not the first time I've felt this. I always feel like this whenever I go to very different places. I'm sure if I went to a native village I would also feel like an intruder.

- Just like we can't understand well what we feel I think they must find it hard to understand what our presence makes them feel. After all, it's something that affects normal everyday life.

- Isn't it interesting to see how difference attracts people? Back in Brazil everybody wants to know about Egypt, and not just the ancient pharaonic monuments, but they are curious about Islamic culture. About the food, clothes, odours and daily habits.

- Whenever I'm asked about Egypt people always want to know if it's a safe country. There is a growing association between violence and Islamic communities. But this is the fault of the media and of hegemonic countries. All those images that we consume in the West showing the Muslim community as a group of terrorists end up affecting our behaviour, and even our judgment. The bad thing about the media is how it's always moment trying to objectify violence in the figure of the Muslims. These images of the Arab world as violent and of the Muslim as a murderer are run so insistently that we unconsciously associate the Muslim world with the idea of violence. The result is, as we have seen, a growing sense of Islamophobia. The strength of media education ends up naturalizing the idea that Muslims are violent.

- I know, even my family, who are already used to our coming all these years, is still worried. But also, just turn on the television you see Twin Towers falling, you see people in turbans carrying guns and all this ISIS story, which is exploited and put out of context as to ratify the discourse that associates violence with the Islamic world.

- And in comes Donald Trump with those ridiculous attempts to ban the presence or entry of Muslims in the United States. Could you possibly

think of anything more violent? All this does is increase hatred and persecution. It's as if every Muslim was naturally violent. But people forget the violence perpetrated by Christians, by evangelicals or by those who don't follow any religion.

- Well, what to say about a guy who wants to build a wall separating the United States from Mexico. We live in a world where right-wing policies are creating the worst stimuli and fostering the worst affections. Encouraging us to hunt the different, the foreigner.

- That's why I say we should decolonize our senses, our affections, to go beyond our automatic, internalized media education. That's the only way to get rid of this mindset that ends up classifying the self and the other, creating categories that only serve as tools of colonization. Creating the idea that the Muslim is violent only justifies Western policies of colonization. In the same way, when we say that someone is primitive, who needs education, we are giving ourselves permission to educate him, to colonize him.

- I agree. But it's not easy to get rid of this programming that the media and hegemonic institutions instil in us.

- It has to be something you do on a daily basis. Since the eighteenth century at least we have been associating the idea of poverty with disease, violence, irrationality and so when you go through a poorer area, like a favela in Rio de Janeiro you feel affected, afraid and insecure. There is a clear interest on the part of hegemonic institutions in classifying the Muslim as violent, the resident of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro as a drug trafficker or an assassin, the indigenous as primitive or irrational, the woman as sentimental ... It all justifies political, economic, cultural, military domination. We must fight back against this, because violence is not the exclusive to one group or another. Unfortunately, there is violence everywhere, even in so-called First World countries.

- Well, just to think that there is such thing as first and third world countries is already a colonizing position.

- Absolutely.

As we talked about senses, affections, colonization, we found two stores that sold plastic bags, but in none of them did we have what we wanted so we decided to go and eat, since we were already very hungry.

- All this talk and this long walk has opened my appetite.

- What whetted my appetite was this maddening smell of food.

- It's tameia. So provocative ... lol.

- Now I'm really hungry.

- Finding food here is no problem, the problem is deciding what to eat, everything smells so good. Because we do not go to that restaurant, there

are tameia, shawarma, soups, tahine, fowl, roast chicken, salads and more - the restaurant was on a corner next to a clothing store, it was small but the scent of food pouring out of it was absolutely delicious.

We could eat a koshari - this is a typical dish in Egypt, it has rice, noodle fillets, chickpeas, all topped with tomato sauce and grilled onions.

- Okay, let's. The only problem is that with so much carbohydrate we can walk to Rio de Janeiro ha ha ha.

- But that's exactly why it's cheap. The more carbohydrate the cheaper the food. See Brazil' famous rice and beans.

- Carbohydrates for the working class and file mignon for the rich. Palate differences separating social classes.

- Exactly, for me class separation is nothing more than a sensory separation, that is, those experiences that you can feel or not, that you have access to or not. We cannot taste the taste of a \$ 15,000 wine, but some can. We cannot feel the softness of a cotton sheet in a hotel that costs \$ 5,000 a day, but others can. I for one cannot smell the scent of a Chanel perfume.

- But I think it's not just class, but gender too. I as a woman cannot experience experiences that are only allowed to men.

- I agree, but let's go, I've already paid and wanted to go to Khan el Kalili.

- On foot?!!!!

- Yes, why?

- Well it's such a long, long way...

At that moment we were trying to cross a street and a car scraped past us. Walking around Cairo can sometimes be a great adventure, especially when you come across a big avenue. Here it is very common to see people walking among cars, even in great avenues. I remember the first time I tried to cross a street in Cairo. There was no traffic signal. I stood still trying to figure out how I'd cross the street since it was a busy street with cars coming at high speed. After a few minutes of watching people move, I realized that to cross the street I should just keep walking and expect cars to avoid me, at least that's what everybody else was doing. It was absolutely amazing how people would calmly walk between cars at high speed and how naturally cars avoided them. Many crossed the streets while looking down at their cell phones or the newspaper, as if there were no cars, trucks, or bikes in the streets. There seemed to be a tacit agreement where people just walked on and cars would avoid them. It was a choreographed ballet, something magical. Neither drivers nor pedestrians seemed to be bothered or scared by the situation. I got the impression that cars were not seen as menacing machines, but as something natural to

symbiotically share space with, in a true ontology of the streets. Nowadays, after ten years of coming to Egypt to work, I am already used to this situation, as this part of everyday life across Egypt. In Luxor for example, motorcycles circulate inside the tight zouk streets and you can tell Egyptians from foreigners just by how they behave towards bikes and cars. Tourists and the less well-advised walk shily and scared, while Egyptians don't hesitate; they just keep going quietly and expect the vehicle to avoid them. There is no precedence for motorcycles, cars, machines over humans. Human and non-human seem to live in apparent harmony.

It was almost four in the afternoon when we reached the Khan el Kalili zouk. We weren't there to buy anything, just for a walk. Carol is quite self-controlled with money and I am the family crazy consumerist.

- I love all these colours. The hanging carpets, the lamps, the chandeliers...

- That's because you too are a total consumerist.

- I know I am. But I really think it's all beautiful, whether you buy it or not. I admit if we had enough money I would buy almost everything. You know that I want our house to have Arab-world-inspired decoration, because that makes it feels like we're in Egypt all year long.

- Me too, but that doesn't mean we have to buy absolutely everything."

- It's just that everything's really inviting. I'm compelled to buy. The way the products are exposed, the vibrant colours, salespeople's calls, the conversation that makes you feel like a friend, the odours, the textures, everything seems to say, hey look at me, come buy me, buy me, you need me, look how cute, I am, how soft and smelly, buy me, buy me!!!!

- Yeah, I know. But you really ought to control yourself.

- Look at those earrings there. What do you think about them?

- Those silver ones? Beautiful.

- Do you see they have several small pendants on the end, as if they were some sort of rattle?

- Yes.

- Actually they are not just earrings, they are amulets used in Zar rituals.

- Exorcism rituals?

- Exactly. They're protection against evil genies.

- I find this theme of genies very intriguing. I thought genies were Hollywood stuff. I never thought they would actually be part of the Islamic religion.

- Basically, the Koran teaches that God created men, angels and genies or jinn. Angels and jinns live in the invisible world and humans in the

visible world. Invisible here refers not only to vision, but everything beyond human perception. The invisible world cannot not exist without the visible world just like the visible world cannot exist without the invisible world.

- So the existence of one is conditioned to the existence of the other

- Not just that. They worlds are not considered as opposites that complement and blend together, but as are entangled worlds in the sense that they are non-separable, in an ontological sense.

- That's a form of relationality.

- Of course. Studying this topic made me think about these elements of intra-action, relationality and different ontologies. The invisible world and the visible world, or if you prefer the perceptible world and the imperceptible world, are relational. Neither of them would exist without the other. This is a basic ontology within Islam. We in the West distrust the invisible world, but in Islam the invisible world is an ontological reality.

- Well, that creates a world that is very dynamic and fluid, very different from our Western Cartesian world.

- Exactly, that's what I meant to say, but as usual you're faster and smarter than me.

- hahahaha. That's why you married me.

- That's ... right!

We left the market without buying anything, and decided to take a taxi and finish our tour at Zamalek, a neighbourhood on an island in the Nile. Arriving to Zamalek feels like one has left Cairo and entered some upper or middle-class European neighbourhood. The noise of the horns is left behind, concrete grey gives way to tree green, and the sound of lively market negotiations is replaced by the lounge music of the chic shops. Shawarma gives way to the gourmet food of the restaurants, the galabeyas are replaced by Western – even hipster-style clothes – and old and bumped cars are replaced by brand new ones. Even the bakeries with their daily biscuits, very common all over Egypt, are sold here in small trays decorated like expensive boxes of chocolates. The neighbourhood houses the thriving Egyptian upper classes and these foreigners who live in Cairo and prefer a more westernized experience. If this westernized aesthetics is already evident in Zamalek, in so-called new cities, such as New Cairo, Maadi, Six of October City, Katameya, the feeling is pushed to the limit. These new cities are all tailored to the needs of the hegemonic elites, with their condos and gated communities, with their western-style mansions and luxury hotels. With their perfectly irrigated gardens right in the middle of the desert, streets cleaner than in Tokyo, imported cars, billboards with

English-only advertisements and a happy family lifestyle. Looking at a photo of any of these cities, one might think it has been taken in Dubai, Beverly Hills or any expensive neighbourhood in an American or European cosmopolitan capital. Everything about these new cities is designed to avoid any unpleasant feelings or whatever might distract the elite from their shared universe. Thus, the frequent smell of tobacco found at the traditional bars in the centre disappears, the sound of the horns of Tahir is gone, along with the explosion of colours of Khan el Kalili, and a deodorized, silent and aesthetically organized landscape emerges. The affective intensities are controlled through homogenization and discipline of the senses, and thus the organic vivacity of the city gives way to automation. I am not advocating that societies do not change, nor defending a purported original and static cultural purity, for this would be a form of reversed colonialism. But it strikes me that these westernized bubbles designed for a hegemonic elite organize the senses and affects in ways that are so different from the rest of Egypt, and I believe this triggers conflicts like those arising in the Arab Spring.

Still discussing the contrasts between New and Old Cairo, Carol and I went for a walk around Zamalek, stopped for coffee and then decided to start or 50-minute walk back to our hostel at Tahir Square.

We spent another 5 days in Cairo waiting for the documents of the Brazilian Mission to be ready to start our work and then went to Luxor. Arriving in Luxor and especially in the West Bank made Carol and I incredibly excited, even though it was the middle of the night. We were so happy to be back again. If the turmoil of Cairo drains one's energy, dispelling one's attention and having an overall negative effect, the West Bank in Luxor, on the other hand, always has a positive effect, putting one in a good mood and making one feel more energetic. In the West Bank I feel at home, there is a different atmosphere. Many say this is due to the strong Sufi presence, others put it down to the tombs of the saints scattered across the West Bank, like that of Sheik Abd el Gourna, sitting on the slope of the Theban Necropolis. Others say the unique atmosphere is created by the quantity and beauty of pharaonic sites. For me it's caused by all of this and more, and because of the desert. The desert fascinates me, brings me peace, calm, causes me to travel into myself. Where many can only see sand and plain colours, I see life and transformation, calm and stillness. The desert is always changing. In the morning it is yellowish, at midday it gets bluer, in the afternoon, towards sunset, it becomes red. Of all the things that affect me about this country the desert is the one that moves me most intensely, and maybe that's why Luxor is the only place in

the world where I can sleep all night. When I'm in Brazil, I wake up every two or three hours during the night, here I fall fast asleep.

But there are other things that make a difference to me about Luxor. Opening the window before the sun rises, going up to the balcony and feeling the cold wind touching my face is one of the most fantastic experiences I have ever experienced. One can feel it on one's skin, when in a last effort the sun breaks behind the Temple of Luxor, overcoming the darkness, burning the horizon and appearing majestic in the blue sky. Effort, ecstasy and calm, the cycle of the sun in the morning here. In the middle of all this spectacle, feeling this intensity, I can quite easily understand why the sun was once revered here.

Another thing that makes Luxor different is the people. If Egyptians generally tend to be friendly and welcoming, on the West Bank in Luxor they are even more so. Things get very intimate in the West Bank. As we spend an average of forty, forty-five days a year in the West Bank, we end up making many friends and even those who are not really friends end up recognizing us on the streets and greeting us pleasantly every year. Last year, after two days in Luxor we went to a market where we still make small purchases of groceries. The owner recognized us immediately and greeted us with enthusiasm. How not to be affected by his cheerfulness? How not to be happy for the rest of the day after this experience? One might even say that the community on the West Bank is small and this creates a strong social cohesion allowing people to recognize each other more easily. But I think that would rationalize our West Bank experience too much.

I think what I and Carol feel when we come to the West Bank every year is the result of a material-discursive process where West Bank affects us as we affect the West Bank. All this feeling of happiness, of warmth, of peace, of relaxation, of excitement, which is sometimes hard to put into words, flows spontaneously in our bodies when we listen to the silence of the desert, when we see the image of the Theban Necropolis, when we smell the near-handmade bread at the bakeries, when we move through the small unpaved adobe alleys, when we enter the old houses, when we take the dust off our bodies, and when we feel the textures of the city, smell the flowers, etc. The textures, lights, sounds, tastes, movements, moods, atmospheres, palates, which are captured by the senses and organized by affections. All of this informs us that we are not at home, it tells us about who we are, informs us about who the other is.

It is through these sensory experiences that the affective flows arise to capture our bodies. One cannot possibly forget the sound of Koran as we sit by the Nile, the flavour of chichi of the traditional restaurants, the tastes

of *tameia*, the *karkade* - the hibiscus tea - the *shawarma*, the movements around Tahir, the experience of walking in the desert or in the streets of Cairo among the cars. One cannot possibly forget the madness of Khan el Kalili with all its music and colours, or the odours of the spice market, the silence and the green of Zamalek, or the sunset of the west Bank. How could one forget the different atmospheres at Luxor's west Bank, the feeling of being welcome? Today, Carol and I rescue those incredible days with the image of the painting we bought at the Luxor market, through the taste of the spices we still keep in our kitchen, through the texture of the clothes we bought at Cairo, with the photos and videos on the computer. It is in these small moments that the virtual character of our memories is actualized and triggers new affective flows that sometimes mark the body with intense nostalgia, with rage, with joy.

Experiences like these, that take us out of the monotony and automatic flow of everyday life, remind me that we are full-bodied beings and that it is through the senses, affects and memories that we experience and render the world meaningful. Through the senses we feel the aroma of flowers, the temperature on a hot day, the breeze of the wind on our face and the sweet taste of strawberries. Through the senses we feel our body and the world in movement, we feel the atmospheres of places, the world's moods and dispositions. Through the senses we affect and are affected by the world.

Imagine yourself for a moment without your senses. Imagine that from one hour to the next, you no longer have your taste, your vision, your hearing, your sense of temperature, your sense of movement, your self-perception. Imagine that you can no longer taste the difference between a glass of water and a glass of wine, imagine that you can no longer feel the difference between silk and coarse cotton, imagine that you try to see something on the horizon, but you can no longer even what's right in front of you. Imagine that you no longer feel your body walking, no longer feel the movements around you, that you cannot feel the temperature difference. What would your world experience be like? Probably chaotic because without our senses we could not create memories, we could not form an identity, we could not affect or be affected by the world.

In everyday life we are affected by stimuli, whether they are physical or not, whether they are conscious or not. These occur in the form of light, aromas, sounds, temperatures, movements, atmospheres, moods and other intensities that we cannot always name consciously. Our body responds to these stimuli by moving affects that will organize all the potential elements present within a given relationship, increasing or decreasing our ability to affect and be affected by the world. Thus, more than a

physiological tool that captures the world's stimuli, the senses are those elements that allow us to affect and be affected by stimuli and intensities present within the relations that we establish with the world in our daily life. Reality is not given to us by sensory perception, because sensory perception does not create or reveal the perceived object. The reality of what is perceived is not in the senses but in its actualization. It's the affects that actualize the senses through the agential cuts, and in this way we cannot think of senses and affections as separate elements (BARAD, 2007). Through our senses and affections we actualize the different potentialities that intra-act in a relation giving shape to reality (BARAD, 2007). As Hammarstrom (2015) would say, perception does not measure something non-existent, it actualizes one of the existing possibilities in the perceptible and that is why everything we experience as experience is transient and variable. In this way, the self is a potentiality that is formed from intra-actions between different elements present within a relationship, and which are moved and actualized by sensory, affective, mnemonic and space-time experiences (Barad, 2007; Deleuze, 1987). Conceived as intra-actions, senses, affects, memories, and narratives cannot be thought of separately, since the material and the immaterial are mutually constituted from practices that are material-discursive. Material and discourse do not precede the relationship, both are the result of a relationship. For example, from childhood, we are subjected to social situations that teach us not only the adequate sensory course of action, but also what each sensory perception means, and thus we learn to hear, see, touch, feel and be affected. This is what Ranciere calls the distribution of the sensible.

INTRODUCTION

IN THE HOSPITAL AMONG SAINTS, PHILOSOPHERS AND SCIENTISTS

When I took a civil service exam to become a professor at the University I was required, as part of the procedures, to have a number of medical tests done as a health check. It was an endless list of tests. Blood, urine, and many others, with acronyms I had no idea about. Among these exams was a specific one, a lung x-ray, nothing too complicated. I went to get this test done at a private clinic, a clinic specializing in imaging, specially designed for cancer patients. The floor was of a dark granite-like stone, so clean I could see my face in it. The white walls blending with soft tones of green did not have a single stain. A pine scent had a sense of cleanliness floating in the air, and padded leather chairs created comfort, while a system of indirect lighting points generated an intimate atmosphere. A soft music played almost imperceptibly was the only sound one could hear, as the people waiting to be examined spoke in very low voices. Everything seemed incredibly tidy. I felt very comforted. The very friendly attendant, with a big smile on her face, was incredibly attentive, put me in a good mood and made me feel relaxed. She asked me for a doctor's authorization for my tests, to which I replied I did not have one. She said it was impossible to have the tests done without one, so I would have to go to a public health clinic to get a permit from a doctor. She pointed me towards a health clinic on the corner of that very street. I was with my wife Carol. We left and went straight to the health clinic. As soon as we arrived, my body began to tense up without my noticing. Two rusty old iron railings lead into the clinic's entrance. The old-painted walls were peeling. The row and shouting voices made it hard to understand what was being said inside the clinic. The lights did not work and the building had cracks. The wood counter was all cracked and stained. In fact, there were stains all over the place, on the nurse's apron and the walls; on the floor and on the desk. I could not stop myself looking at the spots, as they seemed to be jumping at me with sharp teeth. Instinctively, I crossed my arms and approached the nurse to ask for the guide for the test. She was nice too, but

while she was taking care of me, she also spoke to ten other people. I started getting very anxious. I wiggled my feet frantically. After 15 minutes, she signed the guide and gave it to me. I took the paper with my fingertips to avoid further contact. My instinct was to run away from that place, because everything seemed to be telling me, 'Be careful, you're going to die!!!!'. As we crossed the exit door my body relaxed. Carol was laughing out loud. I asked her why she was laughing:

-What are you laughing at?

-I'm laughing at you.

-What do you mean by me?

-Did you not notice anything strange?

-Of course I did. Did you see that place? It looked dirty, old, filthy.

-That's precisely why I'm laughing. So you who study senses, affections, perceptions did not realize how you behaved in there.

-As well?

-You were tense, agitated, restless. It looked like you were going to die at any moment. You so obviously felt uncomfortable inside the place.

-But of course, everything seemed to say: 'I'm going to contaminate you, I'm going to contaminate you

-See, you behaved in the exact same way as those you criticize. Those who associate dirt with illness and death.

-No but...

-Think about how you behaved and be clear. Pay attention to what you're saying ...

-It is true. You're absolutely right. I have fallen into the very trap I'm always trying to fight. One more lesson to learn.

-Precisely. But this just goes to show how complicated it is to set aside this colonized sense-affective education, with its classifications and labelling of the other.

-But it's because it seems natural. We have learned these lessons as children and just reinforce these practices on a daily basis without even realizing we're doing so.

-Good, but we're already late. Maybe you can use that in the classroom to exemplify just how far we perpetuate hegemonic sensorial-affective discourses and practices. We kept walking towards the other clinic along with my medical examination. At the same time, I could see what it was about that normative environment that made me feel so comfortable and relaxed. It just matched my material and discursive expectations perfectly.

Our sense-affective education is not just a discourse but a material-discursive practice that limits, delimitates, includes and excludes, arranges and rearranges the elements we grasp and interpret within the assemblies in which we are participating. That is why it is so important to understand how we are educated within these material-discursive practices, for this is the first step towards freeing our sense-affective processes and decolonizing our worldview. To understand where it all originated, we have to go back a little in time and arrive in Ancient Greece.

A philosopher

Aristotle was not the first Western philosopher to worry about the senses. Before him, Empedocles, Democritus, and Plato also showed an interest in human sensory aspects. In the West, almost everything we know about the senses before Aristotle comes from the writings and commentaries of his disciple Theophrastus (Jutte 2005). In his work *De Sensibus* he divided the earlier thinkers up to Aristotle into those who believed that senses were stimulated by similarities, and those who believed that senses were stimulated by oppositions. For example, touch and taste could be considered similar since they both presupposed contact. Moreover, the attitude of the Greeks in general towards the senses was of a certain scepticism (Synnott 1993). Parmenides was one of the first to make a distinction between senses and reason. Empedocles was another who believed in the fallibility of the senses, but, unlike most philosophers of his time, he said that the mind was fallible as well. Empedocles was the first Greek, according to Theophrastus, to explain sensory perception from the point of view of equality and not that of the difference between the senses. For him, the eye contained elements of water and fire. The fire allows us to see the brightness, and the water the darkness. But it was Democritus, the founder of the atomist school, who first described and named the senses in the West (Jutte 2005). According to Democritus: “There are two forms of knowledge, one genuine and one obscure. To the obscure belong the vision, the hearing, the touch, the taste and the smell. The other is genuinely and totally different from this ...” (Jutte 2005, 33).

Plato also worried about the senses. In “Timaeus,” Plato gives a detailed account of the senses, enumerating four senses that he calls the specific senses: taste, smell, hearing, and vision. In addition are the sensations that are felt throughout the body, which are common to the body as a whole: the sensations of temperature, light and heavy, hard and soft, rough and smooth, pleasure and pain. He does not point out a specific organ responsible for these sensations and therefore does not enumerate

touch as a sense. Although Plato considers vision to be the most intelligent of senses, Warning (2008) has shown that the philosopher did not value the senses according to their physical function, but according to their contribution to the process of knowledge formation. In this way, at least in principle, vision is not more important than hearing or any of the other senses. In “Timaeus,” Plato puts it that while we observe the revolutions in the sky, it is our ears that bring the thoughts in unison with ourselves.

It is only with Aristotle that Western philosophy made a more open defence of vision as a superior sense to others. In his work “Nicomachean Ethics” he says:

So then, as the activities differ, the corresponding pleasures differ. The sight is superior to the touch in purity, and the ear and the smell to the taste; Therefore, the corresponding pleasures are also superior, and those of thought are above all these. And within each of the two species some are superior to others. (Aristotle, *Ética a Nicômaco*: X, 5)

The Aristotelian doctrine of the senses proposes two variations in relation to Plato, the first being linked to the concept of entelechy, that is the idea of the being in actuality, and the second when he assigns a physical role to the senses. Warning (2008) argues that in this process vision naturally assumes the main role, and hearing is placed as important only for the formation of knowledge.

According to Aristotle, the soul is composed of three faculties: the nutrition faculty, the perceptive faculty, and the cognitive faculty. The nutrition faculty is the first and most basic of all the faculties of the soul, being associated with the capacities of living beings to nourish themselves. Humans, plants, and animals present the nutrition faculty, since to survive they all need to feed themselves. The perceptive faculty has the function of informing the soul of the things of the world, and its existence depends on the nutritive faculty. The perceptive faculty is what separates the plants from the animals, since the plants only present the nutritive faculty. Thus, we can say that the perceptive faculty is the first and most basic characteristic of animals. Those beings that present the perceptive faculty also present a desiderative faculty, that is desire, because perception induces appetite and will. Finally, we have the cognitive faculty that depends on the other two faculties to exist, and characterizes only humans.

In the perceptive faculty, touch represents the most essential aspect. For Everson (2007), this is because Aristotelian rationality gives the perceptive faculty a practical function—that of perceiving the food in its environment, since animals, unlike plants that feed in their own place, must identify their food in the world in order to be able to move towards

it. Despite this it is not sight that allows the perception of food but touch, because not all animals can move towards food perceived at a distance, having to feed in their immediate surroundings. Touch is thus the first and most essential of sensations. It is present in all animals as the primary aspect of sensation (Aristotle 2010). In this sense, as the faculty of nutrition is the faculty of the soul that first characterizes a living being, touch is the sense that first characterizes animals. That is, what distinguishes animals from other living beings is precisely touch.

According to Aristotle, sensations are not produced by the sensory organ but by the action of an intermediary. In this way, when we perceive the object of perception moves the intermediary, which in turn acts directly on the sensory organ causing the sensation. The intermediary of vision is transparency, of hearing is air, and of smell is an indefinite substance. St. Thomas Aquinas, in commenting on Aristotle's "De Anima," attributes the action of the intermediate of smell to steam. In the case of taste and touch, the intermediary is the body. The difference between the palate and touch before the other senses is that while vision, hearing, and smell occur at a distance, in touch and taste the sensation occurs simultaneously with the action of the intermediary.

One Saint

With the early Christian thinkers the senses left the purely practical arena to assume a moral and spiritual position. According to Kupper (2008), we can observe three currents of thought on the senses between the thinkers of the medieval period:

- (1) The models derived from the Platonic theory, according to which the senses play an irrelevant role in the cognitive processes. This chain became stronger from the fifteenth century through the Christianized versions of the Platonic model
- (2) The Aristotelian models, which proposed that cognition always begins in the senses. Such a model was defended by thinkers like Avicenna, Averoes, Albert the Great, and St. Thomas Aquinas. Depending on the author, there were some differences as to the path followed by the cognitive process, but in general we have the *intellectus possibilis*, or passive intellect, being responsible for the connection between the sensible and the senses, and the *intellectus agens*, or active intangible intellect, being responsible for the processes of cognition

- (3) In the variants of the Aristotelian model, the acts of cognition that are associated with the senses refer to the material world, which generates a division of the cognitive process that comes to be seen as both a natural and moral phenomenon

In the Aristotelian models, according to Kupper (2008) the senses respond to wellbeing (*conservatio sui*). Thus, senses capture the information of the world and abstract possibilities of action in order to guarantee wellbeing. The intellect (*intellectus agens*) chooses the most useful from among the possibilities of action and establishes what the author calls volition, which can be either thought brought about by desire or desire guided by thought, i.e. the senses provide the perception of possible objects of desire for the desiderative faculty and thus become the instruments for the satisfaction of one's own desires. In this process, reason acts as the element that restricts desires, although it cannot avoid errors of judgement itself.

Among Christian thinkers, the senses continue to be conceived as both a means of attaining knowledge of the world and a faculty for the satisfaction of desires. But according to Kupper (2008), in Christian philosophy reason is in perpetual conflict with the senses. According to St. Augustine, original sin is nothing more than the permanent rebellion of desire against reason. In the "City of God," St. Augustine says that the inability of reason to control desires is the fault of reason itself. According to Kupper (2008), the relationship between reason and the senses becomes problematic at the centre of Christian doctrine. According to Spiegel (2008), Christ's redemptive sacrifice requires the idea of original sin, and original sin in turn represents the categorical exclusion of the possibility of humanity acting morally through its own rationality. The idea of original sin thus signifies the weakness of reason and rational judgement.

The point is that both desire and reason are born of the senses. According to Spiegel (2008), at the same time as senses could not be left aside, since they were considered the means through which the corporeal beings acquired information about the world, being necessary for their own self-preservation, the senses led inexorably to a failure to recognize the truth and, consequently, resulted in the metaphysical destruction of being. Controlling the senses in order to avoid temptations also meant limiting the possibilities of knowledge of the world. Thus, for Christians in the Middle Ages the senses functioned simultaneously as the basis for the maintenance of life and the main cause of spiritual death (Spiegel 2008). This fundamental inconsistency in the doctrine of the senses is well attested in the medieval text *Arcipreste de Talavera* (1438) by Alfonso