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SENSORY REPRESENTATIONALISM IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE SENSES: A CASE OF INDIAN AESTHETICS

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This article offers a critique of representationalism in the anthropology of the senses by using the example of Indian aesthetic theory. Sensory representationalism is the view that sensory experiences are primarily understood as mental representations of the external world, often leading to a non-differentiation between the lived sensory experience and the mental image or concept of that experience. I will argue that sensory representationalism is strongly reflected in the views of Constance Classen and David Howes, key authors in the anthropology of the senses. Relying on existing discussions in the anthropology of the senses, insights into Indian aesthetics and my own fieldwork on the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava religious phenomenology, I will show how such an understanding is misleading and conflates phenomenal experience with its discursive mediation.

Keywords: sensory representationalism, Indian aesthetics, rasa theory, anthropology of the senses

ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE SENSES

Anthropology of the senses is an epistemological orientation in anthropology that explores culture by attending to the senses. Preceded by anthropology's growing concern with body and embodiment, anthropology of the senses solidified as a distinct field of anthropological studies in the 1990s (Howes 1991b: 29–32; 2011c: 441). This was achieved primarily through the work of Constance Classen (1993, 1994), David Howes (1991a), Anthony Synnott (1991, 1993), Paul Stoller (1989, 1997), Nadia Seremetakis (1996b), Michael Taussig (1993), Steven Feld (1982) and Feld and Keith Basso (1996), where the main theoretical groundwork for the discipline was particularly articulated by Constance Classen (1997) and David Howes (1991a).

In their review of anthropology's sensorial engagements, Porcello et al. (2010) distinguish three currents. With their distinct background or "genealogy" (ibid.: 53) these currents emphasize three different approaches to the senses in culture: communication, materiality and phenomenology. The work on communication and media carried out by Marshall McLuhan (1962, 1994) and Walter Ong (1967, 1982) comprises the central point of departure for Howes and Classen. McLuhan's work is characterized by a focus on the senses as they are used in discourse, particularly on their symbolic traffic and ways in which people make meaning by using the senses to "convey social values" (Classen 1997: 405). In this regard, "Worlds of Sense" by Classen (1993) is a milestone in the cultural history of the senses that clearly shows how discourse on the senses is a value-laden discourse. As Classen concludes: "sensory models are conceptual models, and sensory values are cultural values. The way a society senses is the way it understands" (ibid.: 136).

The work by Nadia Seremetakis (1996b) is particularly concerned with the ways material culture engages with the senses and memory. Grounded in the works by Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin on technology and perception, Seremetakis explores the senses as entry points into the "history of memory" that allows for "recovering forgotten or erased experiences that reintegrate the sensorial with the material" (Porcello et al. 2010: 54). By expertly combining reflexive and evocative writing styles, Nadia Seremetakis draws on her fieldwork experiences and her memory of growing up in Greece to understand the senses as "a collective medium of communication" that cannot be reduced to language (1996a: 6). Perception, objectification, representation, and memory are thus intertwined, ongoing processes that continuously entangle objects and places. Consequently, sensory memory is a culturally mediated material practice that "places the senses in time and speaks to memory as both meta-sensory capacity and as a sense organ in-it-self" (ibid.: 9).

A prominent example of the phenomenological approach to the senses in anthropology is the work of Paul Stoller, who was very much influenced by the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Dewey's radical empiricism. In his studies of the spirit possession among the Songhay of Niger, Stoller was particularly sensitized to the important role that sound and taste have in Songhay culture, as opposed to the Western focus on vision. Stoller thus argues for "sensuous scholarship" (1997), a methodological approach that not only directs a researcher's attention to the ways people use and talk about the senses but also requires the researcher to engage with his or her senses in the exploration of culture.

Paul Stoller was one of the first anthropological pioneers who started paying attention to the senses after the linguistic turn in the humanities. Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to claim that anthropologists were not concerned with the senses before. Alfred Haddon's (1901) report on the Torres Straight expedition conducted at the end of the 19th century is the earliest example of research that, among other things, dealt with the senses. However, the results of this quite positivistic study were interpreted in the light of a racist worldview of the time, concluding that "primitive" senses are indeed more developed in "primitive" cultures. Namely, the Western cultural space of the 19th and early 20th century

regarded touch, taste and smell as "lower", "primitive" senses, as opposed to sight and hearing as "higher" and "civilized" senses. Although such a preference for sight can be traced back to Greek philosophers (Classen 1993: 3–4, 1997: 402; Ihde 2007: 6–7) it can also be explained in the light of the Cartesian legacy that understands senses as mediators between the outside object and thought. From such a perspective, vision is a more objectifying sense, more reliable and much more apt in constructing the outer object in the mind, than, for example, smell or taste, whose objects are seen as more elusive (Bagarić 2011: 85; Classen 1999: 272; Ihde 2007: 6–9). Hence, "civilized" sight and "primitive" smell. In connection to this, Tim Ingold comments that "the very idea that the world is known by representing it in the mind is bound up with assumptions about the pre-eminence of vision that are not applicable cross-culturally" (2000: 250).

In his illuminating overview of the history of anthropology's sensory engagements, Howes (2003: 4–16) explains how anthropology started neglecting senses after World War I. This was primarily because anthropologists of the time tried to distance themselves from racism, sensationalism, and exoticism of much of the 19th-century research into other cultures. Compared to issues of kinship, land tenure, political and social organization, interest in senses seemed less vital a theme to focus on. This was particularly the case with "lower" senses. In this way, modernist anthropologists of the mid-20th century inherited the sensory bias of their predecessors, continuing to keep sight and hearing in high regard as the least subjective senses of all. The ability to record visual and sound data on the media especially underscored this. Although structuralism, particularly that of Claude Lévi-Strauss, did pay attention to the mythic symbolism of the senses, it is obvious that, as Classen noticed, Lévi-Strauss's interest "lay more in tracing the operations of the mind than with analysing the social life of the senses" (1997: 406). With the onset of the linguistic turn in the 1970s and the subsequent dialogical and reflexive years, the senses receded even more from anthropological attention, now diverted to the textual and interpretational landscape of culture. Yet, influenced by postmodern writing and the subsequent "crisis of representation" (Marcus and Fischer 1999: 8) that ensued, the senses, just like the body, made themselves more and more present in anthropologists' attention, which consequently led to the development of the anthropology of the senses in the 1990s.

One of the major discussions in the anthropology of the senses is concerned with the status of vision and the aforementioned occulocentrism of Western culture. The debate has its roots in the work of Marshall McLuhan, who argues that the printing press and communication technology emphasized the usage of the visual sense which consequently changed the "sense ratio" of Western culture, substituting "an ear for an eye" (McLuhan 1962: 27). The idea of the "sensory order" of culture or "proportional elaboration of the senses within a particular cultural logic" (Howes 2005a: 23) particularly resonated with Constance Classen and David Howes who recognized the fact that discursive hierarchy of the senses within culture expresses social values. This meant that cultures could be studied and compared based on the sensory orders they engender.

The impact of assuming such a perspective was especially well demonstrated in Howes's (2003) reinterpretation of the ceremonial exchange system known as the "*Kula* ring" among the Massim of the Trobriand Islands. Among the Massim, as Howes maintains: "existence, like beauty, is in the *ear* of the beholder" (ibid.: 83, my italics), meaning that the highest values of Massim culture are expressed through and associated with the sense of hearing. Therefore, to understand the rationale behind Massim ritual practices, as Howes maintains, one needs to deploy "sensuous reasoning" (ibid.: 120). Shells involved in *kula* exchange are "bundles of sensory powers and relations" (ibid.: 112). They are exchanged for fame, which in the Massim language translates to a word that also means noise and sound. Circulation of *kula* shells is thus the "production and circulation of sound" (ibid.: 67) where "the sequencing of the senses in ritual action meshes with the ideal sensory attributes of selfhood, and the two together manifest the elementary structure of the Massim sensory order, or way of sensing the world" (ibid.: 106). Howes points out that this "way of sensing the world", or perceiving in Massim culture, is more "self-outered" than "self-centred"; it has more to do with "the *production* of effects in others, as opposed to the *reception* of in-coming stimuli" that Western psychology is endowed with (ibid.: 115, original italics).

Howes's account is a good example of how to attend to the interplay of the senses in cultural discourse. Namely, all sensory anthropologists would agree that the exploration of sensorial engagements both within and across cultures should be done by attending to multimodality or multisensoriality of human experience (Howes 2011c: 436; Pink 2009: 26; Porcello et al. 2010: 57) or, as Ingold calls it, the interchangeability of sensory perception (Ingold 2000: 276). Such an approach strives not only to divide the sensorium into distinct modalities, but it also addresses the way in which the senses are interrelated and can be translated into one another; the way in which senses reinforce, conflict, or amalgamate with each other. Such an approach is very much in line with Merleau-Ponty's (1962) observation of the unity of senses:

> The sight of sounds or the hearing of colours come about in the same way as the unity of the gaze through the two eyes: in so far as my body is, not a collection of adjacent organs, but a synergic system, all the functions of which are exercised and linked together in the general action of being in the world... When I say that I see a sound, I mean that I echo the vibration of the sound with my whole sensory being, and particularly with that sector of myself which is susceptible to colours. (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 209)

SENSORY ORDERS AS LIVED OR REPRESENTED

Although connected to the cosmological order of a particular culture, the concept of sensory order does not necessarily mean that the preferred sense is actually used more in everyday life, for as Classen admits, "every society will make practical use of all of the senses" (Classen 1997: 401). The hierarchy of the senses has to do with "the ways in which

different sensory domains are invested with social value" (ibid.); in other words, in the ways society uses the senses in discourse to make sense of the cultural experience. It is exactly this difference between senses *as lived* and senses *as represented* that comprise the core of Tim Ingold's critique of anthropology of the senses as outlined by Classen and Howes, because, as Ingold points out, "what is discourse, if not a narrative interweaving of experience born of practical, perceptual activity?" (Ingold 2000: 286).

According to Ingold, the program of the anthropology of the senses, as outlined by Howes and Classen, is not "concerned with varieties of sensory experience, generated in the course of people's practical, bodily engagements with the world around them, but with how this experience is ordered and made meaningful within the concepts and categories of their culture" (Ingold 2000: 283). This is a fact that Classen (1997: 401), as we have seen in the previous paragraph, has no problem admitting. However, the problem lies, as Ingold continues, in the conviction that "what has been thought and written in terms of the senses can be neatly partitioned off from what has been lived and felt through them" (Ingold 2000: 286). Thus, for example, according to Classen, the aim of anthropology of the senses is "neither to assume that smell, taste and touch will be dominant in a particular culture, nor to assume that they will be marginal, but to investigate how meanings are, in fact, *invested in* and *conveyed through* each of the senses" (Classen 1997: 405, my italics). This definition together with Howes's understanding of the senses as "*mediators* of experience" (Howes 2005b: 399, my italics) are clear examples of implicit Cartesian legacy, of reified, objectified and representationalist understanding of the senses that Ingold (2000: 281–87, 2011b, 2011a) is particularly keen on criticizing. The senses in such a perspective turn out to be conduits that mediate and present the experience to the "little man behind the eyes" who makes sensory information meaningful. What Classen seems to disregard is that meaning is already *invested in* any act of perceiving *as it happens*. Values are not just ascribed to the senses on the level of discourse through symbolic and conscious interactions of interpretations. Our body, our corporeality also unconsciously ascribes values to various modalities of our being-in-the-world through the repetition of coherent or disjunctive configurations in our being and the world, through repetition of perceptions, imaginations and memories of co-experiencing of sense, body and place across time. As Krimayer (1992) contends, the body insists on meaning, or as Merleau-Ponty points out: "My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my 'symbolic' or 'objectifying function'" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 140–41).

To put it differently, perception through any sensory modality does not need to end in representation to become meaningful. Meaning, as Merleau-Ponty so ardently argues, is already ingrained in any attending to the world, representational and non-representational alike. Thus, Classen's and Howes's masterful accounts are more concerned with the way that meanings are *conveyed through* the senses rather than how meanings are *invested in* the senses when people experience them going on about their daily lives, in the flux of their embodied attention over time. In this way, the error that both Howes and Classen are committing is quite similar to the error that many anthropologists committed when they

dealt with the body as representation (Bagarić 2011: 88). It is an error that was rectified in anthropology by the articulation of the concept of embodiment, because, as Jackson warns us, "subjugation of the bodily to the semantic is empirically untenable" (Jackson 1989: 122).

To conclude, the gist of Ingold's critique of the anthropology of the senses is that it should be concerned *both* with the senses as lived and the senses as represented, not just with the latter as Classen and Howes maintain. Therefore, if we just focus on the senses as metaphors and representations of social values then the critique of Western visualism, rehabilitation of the other senses, or sensory orders of other cultures are only, as Ingold claims, implicit propagation of Cartesian dualism, a "critique of modernity dressed up as a critique of the hegemony of vision" (Ingold 2000: 287).

I would like to turn now to the problem of the occulocentrism of Western culture that Howes and Classen, according to Ingold, uncritically propagate in their writings due to their representationalist bias. To understand this point, we can turn to Ihde who distinguishes between "reduction *to* vision" and "reduction *of* vision", which are both interwoven in the occulocentrism of Western culture. Reduction *to* vision, as Ihde reveals, "lies not so much in a purposeful reduction of experience to the visual as in the glory of vision that already lay at the centre of the Greek experience of reality" (Ihde 2007: 6). In other words, the printing press and media technology only exacerbated that which was already there in Western culture. One could, however, argue that literacy, the printing press, and visual media culture imposed an additional sensory load, which increased the time that Westerners spend attending to the world through the visual sensory modality, more than they did before, consequently making McLuhan aware of this Western "natural attitude" that prefers sight in discourse.

The other aspect of Western occulocentrism as articulated by McLuhan, Ong, Classen and Howes reflects the reduction *of* vision. It is the reduction in understanding of vision as a solely objectifying sense, "one which ultimately separates sense from significance" (Ihde 2007: 9). Ihde continues to clarify that in order "for this second reduction to occur there must be a division of experience itself" (ibid.). This division that Ihde hints at can be dovetailed with Merleu-Ponty's notion of reversibility (Merleau-Ponty 2007: 136, 143, 1968: 351). It is a concept that posits an essential dialectic in human existence, with polarities akin to Hegelian notions of "in itself" and "for itself." Every act of perception, across all sensory modalities, has two intertwined but never overlapping possibilities: the sentient and the sensible (Čargonja 2013: 27). Thus, with regard to vision, one of them is seeing, which is interchangeably informed by one's own visibility. One's lived experience is always intertwined with a reflexive stance towards it. Therefore, in light of Merleau-Ponty's reversibility thesis, the discussed reduction of vision is a reduction of vision only to the sensible or the visible, completely disregarding seeing, watching or looking.

Consequently, the anthropology of the senses should be an epistemological orientation that tries to account for both poles of the sense reversibility; an orientation that is not only

informed by representations of the precepts but also, as Pink maintains, by the theory of sensory perception (Pink 2009: 15). As Ingold points out: "Just because here vision, or there touch or hearing, have been singled out as vehicles for symbolic elaboration, this does not mean that people will see, hear or touch any differently in consequence" (Ingold 2000: 283). This does not mean that "sensory orders" as noticed by Howes and Classen are imaginary scholarly constructs, far from it. There is no doubt that they exist, but we should be clear that they only exist in the represented, symbolically patterned or codified culture, not necessarily in the lived one as well. It is in this light that we should take Geurts's definition of a sensory order as "a pattern of relative importance and differential elaboration of the various senses, through which children learn to perceive and to experience the world and in which pattern they develop their abilities" (Geurts 2002: 5).

In my understanding, Ingold's critique, quite contrary to Howes's somewhat contentious response to it (2011a, 2011b), does not undermine the tremendous contribution that Howes and Classen have brought to the table of sensory anthropology. As was shown earlier, Ingold is only questioning Howes's conviction that anthropology of the senses should be *only* about the patterning of representations of the sense and that phenomenology has nothing to contribute in this regard. Like Ingold (2000: 285), I also believe that the fact that we say "I see what you mean," as opposed to some other cultures which might say "I hear" or "I taste what you mean," is indeed very significant. However, I do not believe that answering the question of why a society chooses one sense over another to express its values is a question that can be answered only by resorting to cosmological explanations, or by disregarding non-representational aspects of reality. Like Ingold, I am more inclined to compare "the experience of unison arising from our mutual engagement in verbal dialogue to the experience, with… unison between perceiver and perceived" (ibid.) in any form of sensory practice.

INDIAN AESTHETICS AND SENSORY REPRESENTATIONALISM

The previous section provided a theoretical overview of what is often referred to as the Howes-Ingold debate in the anthropology of the senses. In this section, I will apply these insights to discuss sensory representationalism on the example of Indian aesthetic theory. Indian aesthetics refers to the rich and sophisticated tradition of thought that emerged on the Indian subcontinent, encompassing its diverse cultural, linguistic, and philosophical heritage. It explores the nature of art, beauty, and aesthetic experience, emphasizing universal human emotions while being deeply rooted in the spiritual and cultural contexts of South Asia. However, before I continue, I would first like to make it clear what I mean by representationalism. In philosophy, it is a view of sensory experience that does not make a distinction between "conscious sensory properties and representational properties" (Papineau 2021: 30). In other words, the representationalist perspective conflates pre-reflective and objectified experience.

I will proceed with some of Howes's remarks on phenomenology, Indian aesthetics and the importance of taste in the Indian cultural hierarchy of the senses that Howes articulated in a debate with Pink published in the Social Anthropology journal (Howes 2010b, 2010a; Pink 2010b, 2010a). It will demonstrate that Howes's claims cannot be applied consistently under the generally accepted notions of what phenomenology is. I also stress the importance of understanding the notions of sensory orders as orders in cultural sensory representations, which do not have to coincide with the orders in the lived sensory engagements.

In the debate about the future of anthropology of the senses, Howes voiced a rather strong critique of phenomenology that I found particularly misinformed. To illustrate, Howes sees Merleau-Ponty's elaboration of pre-reflective unity as a "naïve emphasis" that "overlooks the ways in which senses conflict with one another" (Howes 2010b: 335). Furthermore, he criticizes phenomenology for being incapable of dealing with intersubjectivity and politics and for "ignoring the extent to which perception is a cultural construct" (ibid.). There is ample literature dealing with these general critiques of phenomenology, and it is beyond the scope of this text to address them here. I would like to focus on one instance where Howes is specifically referring to phenomenology and Indian aesthetics. As a part of the published debate, in his response to Sarah Pink, Howes criticizes Ingold for disregarding senses such as taste and smell in his phenomenologically-minded writings. According to Howes, Ingold propagates the sensory bias of Western culture that gives most value to the senses of vision and hearing. Howes concludes by arguing that "a phenomenology drawn from a more tasteful source, such as Indian aesthetics, might produce a very different understanding of the environment" (ibid.). I have selected this sentence because I believe it reflects representationalist bias and also provides an invitation to examine the example of Indian aesthetics and test the validity of Howes's claims.

Howes writes this rather perplexing sentence as part of his critique of Pink and Ingold and their alleged undermining of "the cultural importance and authority of indigenous models of perception" (ibid.). However, Howes's (ibid.) consideration of Indian aesthetics as a "tasteful source" and a possible ground for phenomenology is problematic. Firstly, because of the misleading characterization of *rasa* theory as "tasteful", and secondly because it implies a somewhat unclear understanding of what phenomenology is. As we shall see later, Indian tradition has schools of thought that could be considered phenomenologies. Howes's statement also implies that a phenomenology drawn from a "tasteful source" might somehow give precedence to the sense of taste, which would in turn produce a perception and a consequent understanding of the environment that accounts more for the sense of taste.

The reason Howes considers Indian aesthetics more tasteful is because taste ranks high in Indian cultural representations, or in the "sensory order" of India as understood by Howes and Classen (Goswamy 2005; Pinard 1991). Indian aesthetics is an excellent example of that. It is based on *rasa* theory, articulated by sage Bharata Muni in *Nāṭyaśāstra*,

an ancient text on theatre and dance composed between 200 BCE and 400 CE (Haberman 2003: xxxvi). The Sanskrit term *rasa* serves as a gustatory metaphor that can be interpreted as "juice," "nectar," "essence," "taste," or "savour" (ibid.). In the realm of Sanskrit drama and literature, it means the enjoyment or pleasure derived from art, often referred to as aesthetic relish or sentiment (Chari 1990: 22; Fernández Gómez 2009: 105; Haberman 2003: xxxvi). *Rasa* refers not to the emotion itself but to the refined and relishable essence of that emotion. The author of *rasa* theory, Bharata Muni, deals with the particular configurations of aesthetic components engendered on the stage by performers that are conducive to the onset of aesthetic experience or *rasa* in the audience. These major components are: eight foundational emotions (love, humor, sorrow, anger, courage, fear, disgust and wonder), stimulants of emotion, indications of emotions, transitory emotions and involuntary bodily manifestations of emotions (Chari 1990: 17; Haberman 2003: xxxvii–xxxviii). Bharata discusses specific configurations of aesthetic components conducive to the amplification of particular foundational emotion to its state of *rasa*, or aesthetic relish. Thus, for example, to refine the foundational emotion of love into amorous *rasa,* main stimulants in a drama would be the characters in love or objects related to them. Corresponding enhancing stimulants would be a romantic setting, ornaments, flowers etc. Conducive indications of emotions could be looking sideways, coy glances, and sweet words; and the transitory emotions might be jealousy, humor, suspicion etc. When all these components are attuned to the foundational emotion and properly mixed by an expert playwright, *rasa* or aesthetic relish may arise, just like in cooking. Bharata Muni actually uses the analogy of cooking a meal to illustrate how aesthetic experience or *rasa* arises from the interaction of the aesthetic components:

> 35. […] Just as many articles of various kinds of auxiliary cooked food is brought forth, so the states [*aesthetic components*] along with different kind of histrionic representation [*play*] will cause the sentiments [*rasa*] to originate.
> 37. Just as a combination of spices and vegetables imparts good taste to the food cooked, so the states [*aesthetic components*] and the sentiments [*rasa*] cause one another to originate (Ghosh 2002, 1:107, VI 36–37) (*my italics*).

The sense of taste is selected as a metaphor for a highly valued experience in Indian tradition. However, there is nothing in Bharata's elaboration of aesthetic components that would give any special precedence to the sense of taste as a crucial condition for the onset of aesthetic experience. After all, the performance is aimed at the audience that mainly hears or sees what is happening on the stage. Actors and stage props cannot stimulate the taste buds of the audience. Therefore, there is no experiential reason why we might call *rasa* theory "tasteful", quite the contrary. In a theatre, the eyes and the ears of the audience are the senses that are far more engaged in achieving aesthetic experience than the tongue or palate. Taste here is merely a synesthetic metaphor that bridges emotional refinement and gustatory delight. The main reason we might call *rasa* theory "tasteful" is because it is objectified through a gustatory metaphor. To put it differently, the main reason to characterize Indian aesthetics as tasteful is that Indian culture chooses to rep-

resent aesthetic experience with a term that also signifies the sense of taste, even though the sense of taste is not of any constitutive importance to the actual aesthetic experience for which it stands. Therefore, to characterize Indian aesthetics as "tasteful" rather than "tastefully articulated" is a form of representationalism that misleadingly conflates lived aesthetic experience with its cultural elaboration through *rasa* theory.

To illustrate this issue further, I turn to two authors from performance theory in the Indian context (Zarrilli 2004; Schechner 2001). Though not anthropologists, Zarrilli and Schechner, working within performance studies, offer valuable perspectives on *rasa* aesthetics through their focus on embodied experience in intercultural performance. In his article, Schechner vividly elaborates the metaphorical association of *rasa* with taste, describing it as a process akin to ingestion and digestion, rooted in the body's "snout-to-belly-to-bowel" axis (Schechner 2001: 27). While evocative, this approach may appear to verge on a representationalist tendency, potentially literalizing the semantic link between *rasa* and gustation. Schechner writes that "rasa fills space, joining the outside to the inside" and that performance functions like a meal to be savored (ibid.: 29). However, it is also clear that he does not propose that audiences literally consume performance; rather, his digestive extrapolations are intended as vivid metaphors that evoke the immersive, affectively charged quality of rasa experience without collapsing it into actual gustatory sensation. Zarrilli's phenomenological account of the actor's aesthetic inner bodymind focuses not on metaphor, but on the lived, cultivated modes of embodied awareness through which emotion is enacted rather than represented. He describes this inner mode of experience as emerging through long-term engagement with psychophysical disciplines such as *kalaripayattu*, yoga, or acting, whereby "an inner subtle bodymind is revealed, and can be cultivated aesthetically through specific practices" (Zarrilli 2004: 662). This aesthetic bodymind allows the performer to shift from everyday bodily absence to heightened self-presencing, offering a mode of attunement that bypasses symbolic mediation. Taken together, these two perspectives help clarify that while Indian aesthetics draws on the metaphor of taste, its core experiential logic remains rooted in the affective immediacy of embodied performance, not in the gustatory sense per se.

NATIVE PHENOMENOLOGIES

Now let me discuss the second significant aspect of sensory representationalism noticed in Howes's statement – an unclear idea of what phenomenology is in a cross-cultural context. Many non-Western cultures have developed traditions of knowledge on subjectivity and methods of inquiry that could be dovetailed with the Western philosophical endeavor of phenomenology (Desjarlais and Throop 2011: 96). I will call them native phenomenologies. In line with Husserl's notion of phenomenology as the study of appearances, I will side with Halliburton's understanding that phenomenology "refers to how one experiences – at the level of consciousness, mind, and body – being in and living in, the world" (Halliburton

2002: 1125). In his study of the Indian understanding of embodiment in Kerala, which does not coincide with Western mind-body distinction, Halliburton demonstrates that there are local or native phenomenologies. He understands them "as constituted by both local analytic theories of experience and lived experience itself" (ibid.: 1126). Therefore, phenomenology is a cross-cultural category, and its culturally constructed understandings of the processes of subjectivity might often entail theological concepts.

Among many traditional schools of thought in India that could be regarded as native phenomenology, Sāṃkhya stands out as the oldest and most influential one. Sāṃkhya literally means numbering or enumeration (Gerald James Larson 1998: 3), which is the main concern of this philosophical school – to list, to enumerate twenty-three manifest principles or categories of existence (Burley 2007: 108) for discrimination between spirit (*puruṣa*) and nature (*prakṛti*). Such discrimination consequently leads to liberation (*kaivalya*), a realization that the true self has nothing to do with matter (Grimes 2007: 544). Many authors (Bhattacharyya 1992; Gerald J. Larson 1969; Burley 2007) have shown that Sāṃkhya, with its detailed analysis of the components of experience and its focus on the distinction between the self (*puruṣa*) and the experiential field (*prakṛti*), shares similarities with phenomenological approaches in Western philosophy, particularly in the fact that both systems engage in a systematic investigation of consciousness and experience.

Now, if we take the most general definition of phenomenology as the study of what appears to consciousness, then it is obvious that any phenomenological project is going to be primarily concerned with actual experience. Therefore, even if we set out to articulate a theory of sensory perception based on *rasa* theory, as Howes suggests, even though Indian phenomenologies already exist, then we would be more concerned with the senses that Bharata Muni considers being of constitutive importance for aesthetic experience. Consequently, this means that such phenomenology would not provide us with a theory of sensory perception that gives precedence to the sense of taste, nor would we produce a different understanding of the environment that brings the sense of taste to the front. What we might actually end up with is a theory of sensory perception that attends more to the senses of sight and hearing and their connection with emotions.

My point is that the Indian philosophical tradition already contains phenomenological traditions that are in great part connected to Sāṃkhya and that the idea of constructing phenomenology based on Indian aesthetics sounds very odd. However, because some of the aesthetic components of *rasa* theory are emotions and their visible or audible stimulants or bodily expressions, one might consider *rasa* theory to have a phenomenological character. Therefore, we could talk about the phenomenology of *rasa* theory, but not about *rasa* theory as phenomenology. There is clear evidence of the influence of Indian phenomenology, i.e. Sāṃkhya philosophy, on Indian aesthetics (Pollock 2016: Xv, 36, 112). It is important to keep in mind that *rasa* theory was primarily conceived as a theory of Indian drama and not as the study of subjectivity. Therefore, one has to distinguish between Indian phenomenology as outlined in the Sāṃkhya philosophy and other schools of thought and Indian aesthetics as outlined in *rasa* theory, just as it is important

to understand the difference, for example, between literary theory and phenomenological philosophy in the West.

Furthermore, many texts written by Western or Indian authors alike (Burley 2007; Chattopadhyaya, Embree and Mohanty 1992; Halliburton 2002; Morley 2001; Paranjpe and Hanson 1988; Puligandla 1970; Ramakant 1965) show that Western and Indian phenomenologies share many points of connection. The main differences between these two phenomenologies, however, could hardly be seen as grounded in the sense of taste, or any other sense, for that matter. Therefore, the quoted sentence by Howes implies a rather confusing understanding of what phenomenology is. If we take the most general definition of phenomenology as the study of what appears to consciousness, then Howes's sentence would imply that it is the sense of taste that somehow appears more to the consciousness of the Indian people; that the nature of Indian experience of the environment is somehow more colored by the sense of taste. It is clear that, again, the problem is in mistaking or rather jettisoning the study of lived experience from the study of experience as representation. The former is the focus of both Western and Indian phenomenologies, and the latter is Howes's exclusive concern. As I mentioned in the previous paragraphs, why and how an individual or a society chooses certain sense metaphors to express values and meanings of particular lived experiences is indeed a question worth pursuing. However, to think that, in a society, the senses referred to through sense metaphors are more experienced in all or the predominant number of individual experiences that these metaphors represent, is indeed misleading.

"A TASTE FOR CHANTING"

In this last section, I will present an example from my own fieldwork that should provide a more hands-on illustration of sensory representationalism. I have become acquainted with Indian aesthetic theory through my research on the religious experience in the Hare Krishna movement, also known as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). This paper is grounded in more than a decade of my engagement with the movement and Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava religious phenomenology (Čargonja 2022, 2020, 2024), which started in 2007 as part of my doctoral research, and involved mainly the ISKCON community in Zagreb, Croatia. Since then, my fieldwork extended to communities in Belgium, Germany, the UK, the USA and India and included regular participation in yearly functions, numerous short and prolonged stays. Considering the experiential focus of my research, I subscribed to phenomenological approaches in cultural anthropology as articulated by Thomas Csordas (1994, 1990, 1997, 1999).

The Hare Krishna movement is a Western branch of a popular Hindu religion known as Gauḍīya or Bengal Vaiṣṇavism. With emphasis on both experiential and rational dimensions, the theology of this form of devotionalism is grounded in the Indian *rasa* theory.

Thus, the goal of life is to attain *bhakti rasa*, an amplified or ecstatic state of the love of God. Gauḍīya theologians, such as Rūpa Gosvāmī, used *rasa* theory to elaborate and discuss the varieties of religious experiences and practices conducive to it. One such practice is the chanting of the *mahā-mantra* or the names of God. For the Hare Krishnas, it is the most important devotional activity that is done publicly with instruments, also known as *kirtan*. There is also a more meditative form of this practice. Initiated members vow to chant individually for about two hours a day on their *japa* or string of beads. For many devotees, this has proven to be quite a challenge, especially because it is difficult to chant with focus and loving attention.

In theological literature and common parlance, there is an often-heard phrase: "having a taste for devotional service", "to have a taste for chanting". It became quite clear to me that "having a taste for" in these contexts meant being attracted to, having a desire for spiritual topics. Here is how one dedicated devotee living in Ireland explained this to me in relation to chanting:

> When we truly strive to chant sincerely... Sincerely means that when the mind wanders somewhere unrelated to the mantra or Krishna consciousness, we continuously bring it back and don't allow it to drift, no matter how much it tries to focus on another topic; we keep bringing it back every single time. And this is called... purification...
> [...] What are the symptoms of good chanting, proper chanting? That the taste for the topics of Krishna consciousness grows, for service to Krishna, while the taste for material, worldly pleasures and satisfactions fades away.

As these quotes show, having a taste for chanting or for Krishna conscious topics is a sign of spiritual advancement. Furthermore, as the following excerpt from a conversation with another devotee from Croatia shows, having a taste can even mean having a religious experience:

> A spiritual experience is the taste we all long for, the taste everyone craves. All these people here (on Earth) yearn for that taste, even if they don't realize it. I believe they are searching for that taste through everything they do in life... They want to enjoy good food, they want to enjoy sex, they want to enjoy various... intoxicants, relationships. But once you experience that spiritual taste, you understand that this is what everyone truly seeks.

Theological literature abounds with similar statements that use taste to express similar meanings. What all these examples testify to is how the sense of taste is used to express a valuable experience, which is in line with the previous discussions showing that taste ranks high in the Indian sensorium. Saying that something is tasteful means that it is valuable and saying that someone has taste means that they are refined and skilled. So, to make it clear, the representation of the sense of taste is used discursively to express value.

The same is true of the opposite expressions involving the lack of taste. Thus, one of the oft-heard expressions used by members of ISKCON (and Gauḍīya theologians as well) when they talk about their practice of chanting is something like: "I do not have a

taste for chanting" or "My chanting was so dry." I have found such expressions particularly intriguing. The first time I observed these statements in my journal, it was clear to me that when devotees say "I do not have a taste for chanting", they do not want to say that they lack taste sensations while they are chanting, as they would when they say that they lack the taste for certain food. What they explained to me that they mean by these expressions is that they struggle to keep their attention fixed on the sound of the mantra, that they are absentminded, that the chanting has become a routinised activity, and that they do not feel enthusiastic about it. This is, then, phenomenologically speaking, a completely different range of actual sensations that one experiences while chanting "without taste" than the ones involved in eating tasteless food. Another "tasteful" phrase that devotees use to express the same lack of taste for chanting is that they find chanting "dry". However, it is important to stress here that devotees do not experience a sense of dryness in their mouths as they might when eating, for example, a piece of stale bread.

Therefore, it was clear to me that the expressions that are related to the sense of taste about experiences, activities, interpretations or anything else other than activities which excite the taste buds on the tongue are only a metaphor, not even a metonymy. Having or not having a taste for chanting is just a representation of experience that is in itself *only like* having or not having a taste for certain food. In phenomenological terms, these two experiences are significantly different as they unfold, as they appear to consciousness, as they are done. It is only under the influence of a culture that chooses to represent aesthetic experiences in terms of taste that devotees will talk about chanting using gustatory phrases.

One could, perhaps, argue that chanting is an activity that involves the tongue very much, and that this might be the reason for choosing to speak about chanting in terms of taste. Whereas that might be so, this can most certainly be ruled out for some other types of experiences that devotees talk about in terms of taste. Devotees will often use the phrase of having or not having a taste for all sorts of devotional activities and experiences where the tongue is far less involved, like reading the scripture, worshipping a deity, cleaning the temple, getting up early and so on. As I mentioned in the previous paragraphs, why and how an individual or a society chooses certain sense metaphors to express values and meanings of particular lived experiences is indeed a question worth pursuing. However, to think that, in a society, the senses referred to by sense metaphors are more experienced in all or the predominant number of individual experiences that these metaphors represent is again – misleading.

CONCLUSION

The phrase "a taste for chanting", as used by devotees in the Hare Krishna movement provides a compelling example of sensory representationalism and its limitations, particularly when viewed through the lens of phenomenology and critiques of Howes's

sensory anthropology. The use of "taste" in this context is a metaphorical construct deeply embedded in the cultural and theological framework of Indian aesthetics, particularly *rasa* theory. It represents a refined emotional and spiritual state, rather than a literal sensory experience tied to gustation. This highlights a key point in the critique of sensory representationalism: the conflation of metaphorical representations with lived, pre-reflective sensory experience.

Howes's representationalist bias becomes clear when we consider his characterization of Indian aesthetics as a "tasteful source" for phenomenology. This statement conflates the metaphorical use of taste in Indian cultural representations with an assumption that taste, as a literal sensory modality, holds a privileged place in lived experience. However, as shown in the example of chanting, the lived experience of devotees is not primarily mediated through gustatory sensations. Instead, it is auditory (hearing the mantra) and kinesthetic (engaging the body and voice in the act of chanting). The metaphor of taste serves as a cultural representation to describe and interpret these experiences, not as a direct sensory modality through which they are primarily lived.

This critique aligns with Ingold's challenge to sensory anthropology's representationalist tendencies. Ingold argues that focusing only on the symbolic and cultural representation of sensory experiences overlooks the embodied, pre-reflective engagement with the world. In the case of chanting, the lived experience of the practice – its rhythms, sounds, and emotional resonance – is what makes up its phenomenological reality. The metaphor of taste is a secondary layer, a cultural elaboration that frames and communicates this experience within a specific theological and aesthetic discourse.

In conclusion, the phrase "a taste for chanting" illustrates the divergence between the lived sensory experience and its cultural representation. While the metaphor of taste provides a meaningful way for devotees to communicate their spiritual engagement, it does not reflect the phenomenological reality of their experience. This example reinforces the importance of attending to both the lived and represented dimensions of sensory and cultural practices, offering a nuanced critique of Howes's sensory representationalism and its application to Indian aesthetics.

The main thrust of this article is that whereas it is reasonable to accept that there are native phenomenologies, like the Indian theophilosophical school of Sāṃkhya, it is erroneous to assume that these native phenomenologies give precedence to a particular sense according to a culturally specific sensory order. There are no phenomenologies that prefer a particular sense; there can only be phenomenologies that use different sensory representations to talk about what appears to the consciousness. Therefore, we cannot claim that people in cultures with a sensory order, as understood by Howes and Classen and as different from our Western occulocentric order, value their senses differently because they spend more time using different senses than Westerners. Whereas it is possible to conceive of groups that use a particular sensory register more than some other group of people, such claim can only be made by studying lived sensory engagements, not merely

sensory representations, which is exactly what both Pink and Ingold argue for. In that sense, Howes's criticism of phenomenology is unfounded, and his representationalist conception of sensory order does not have to be congruent with lived realities. As discussed before, Classen's and Howes's accounts are more concerned with the way in which meanings are conveyed through the senses, as opposed to the ways in which meanings are invested in the senses when people experience them.

Furthermore, if we take phenomenology to mean the study of what appears to consciousness, as the study of the nature of experience and knowledge, then it is obvious that there are many "indigenous" phenomenologies across the globe, like in Buddhism, Hinduism or Japanese traditions. They can all be compared to the phenomenology as conceived by Husserl and his successors in the West. Therefore, any field that sets out to study cultural sensorial engagements without any recourse to their subjective dimension, the "indigenous" phenomenology and its points of connection with Western phenomenology theory of perception is seriously hindered because to ignore lived experience is to risk missing the very texture of what makes human life meaningful.

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SENZORNI REPREZENTACIONALIZAM U ANTROPOLOGIJI OSJETILA: PRIMJER INDIJSKE ESTETIKE

U radu se kritički promišlja reprezentacionalizam unutar antropologije osjetila na primjeru indijske estetske teorije. Senzorni reprezentacionalizam odnosi se na ideju prema kojoj se osjetilna iskustva prvenstveno shvaćaju kao mentalne reprezentacije vanjskog svijeta, što nerijetko rezultira izjednačavanjem neposredno proživljenog osjetilnog iskustva s njegovom mentalnom slikom ili pojmom. U članku se tvrdi da je senzorno-reprezentacionalistički pristup snažno prisutan u radovima Constance Classen i Davida Howesa, ključnih autora unutar antropologije osjetila. Polazeći od postojeće literature iz antropologije osjetila, uvida iz indijske estetike te vlastitih terenskih istraživanja fenomenologije religijskog iskustva u gaudijskom vaišnavizmu autor pokazuje da je takvo shvaćanje pogrešno jer poistovjećuje fenomenalno iskustvo s njegovom diskurzivnom medijacijom.

Ključne riječi: senzorni reprezentacionalizam, indijska estetika, *rasa* teorija, antropologija osjetila