plicit and implicit manipulation by a culture that bombards us with overt and covert forms of persuasion. It enables us to challenge pressures that drive us toward obsessive conformity embedded in deranged obsolescence. In a culture in which technology and media are continually forcing further acceleration and profoundly re-structuring the aesthetic, the social, and the self in the process, the semiotic aesthetic enables us to re-conceptualize time. To re-establish connection. To rediscover kairos.

References:


Sensory Questions

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Consider the domestic rose. In 1625, Francis Bacon wrote extensively on how to maximize the pleasure of smell in a garden, while in 1896, Alicia Amherst wrote of the astonishment a medieval European would experience in a contemporary garden, finding the forms and colors of the roses bewilderingly developed, but the all-important odor gone (Classen, 1993, pp. 26-36). In the intervening years, scent had been expunged from experience and significance; it was relegated to conceptual insignificance as well. Kant thought it pointless to cultivate the sense of smell, while Darwin and others argued that declining ability to smell was a hallmark of
advancing evolution, increasing cultural sophistication, and, for some, mental health (Classen, et al. 1994, p. 89).

Europe's focus on sight has been on the rise for centuries, and may well correspond with typographic culture. McLuhan (1964, p. 76) points out that print initiated a visual culture of information, in contrast to the sonic culture of oral traditions, and Conley (1992) shows how the visual character of printed texts (i.e., typographic spacing, etc.) participates in generating their meanings. Meanwhile Edgerton (1980, p. 190) maintains that the print revolution, far from replacing an image culture with a text culture, actually initiated a new, and more widely shared, image culture.1 Barbara Stafford's work documents the role of visual imagery in the development of medicine (1991) and in the physical sciences (1994). Apparently, EuroAmerican culture has been tending toward scopocentrism for centuries, hardly a recent trend that can be attributed to electronic technologies or assigned to the post modern.

Although our culture is changing dramatically, it may not be becoming "more visual," or even, perhaps "more imaginal." Electronic culture (cinema, television, and the world wide web) are not more visual than print culture; rather, they are more auditory and, at least sympathetically, more kinesthetic.2 Perhaps we ought to be considering the consequences of multisensory thinking and of the rise of multisensory culture, coupled perhaps with a certain decline in the visual, rather than focusing on the rise of visuality and the notion "visual culture." Contemporary work in the anthropology of the senses indicates that the sensorium is complex, interconnected, and malleable. The senses interpenetrate and transform one another, so that how and what is seen is affected by how what is heard, and felt, and so forth, not only in any given moment of experience but also in habits of perception. (McLuhan, 1964; Ong, 1967; Howes and Classen, 1993). When sense ratios change, as they are in our own experience, the totality of the world as experienced and conceived is affected.

The habitual and customary interaction of the senses common to a culture, or to a social location within a culture, affects the totality of the perceptual world and, ipso facto, of the conceptual world, as well. Furthermore, the senses vary from culture to culture, and, within an individual culture they vary from social location to social location. For example, in contemporary EuroAmerica, sight predominates, but among the Temiar of the Malaysian rain forest, sound and kinesthesia take the sensory lead (Roseman, 1991); for the Brazilian Kalapalo, sound makes evident and organizes the
primary experience of the world (Basso, 1985, passim, see, e.g., p. 311). To the Tzotzil of the Chiapas highlands of Mexico, heat is the key to perception (Classen, 1993b, p. 126), while the Andaman islanders follow their sense of smell, literally sniffing out the truth (Classen et al., 1994, p. 97). The sensorium varies within a cultural trajectory over time, as well, as we have discovered from considering smell, sight, and the rose. Within a culture, perception may vary according to social location; in some cultures distinguishing, e.g., men from women (Irigaray, 1980, p. 101) and children from adults (Howes and Classen, 1993, p. 271).3

The utility of "visual culture" may be minimal, without a lot of specification. The same message (e.g., an image, or a television commercial, or a movie) is not at all the same to different people. This is not just a matter of interpretation, but of experience: the world and the sign or symbol vary with the sensorium. Thus, all three elements of the semiotic triad are affected by sensory difference. Study of/in the arts contributes this to semiotics: media are messages, and the senses have reasons of their own. These reasons, although not mediated, permeate and provide experiential justification for reasons and rationalities. Though the semiotic triad often seems to hover, spirit-like, over the world of phusis, it does not, in fact, escape from the trenchant materiality of human existence.

Perhaps this lies at the core of our contemporary experience: the reasons of our senses are changing, in two senses: a change in the ratios among our senses and their interactions; and a change in the forms of reason or logic that make sense to us. The discussion above suggest that, while the ratios among our senses within our sensorium are transforming, we are not becoming more visual. Rather, perhaps we have increased our reliance on auditory and kinesthetic information, or, even better, on multisensory information. This makes it seem as if we are also less textual (whether we are or not) for texts proper neither move nor are they heard. In the "visual" arts, this increase of sound and movement corresponds to a rise in works making use of performance, environments, mixed media, and time, including, of course, sound art.

The second change, in forms of reason or logic, is manifest in the structure of this group, which encourages active collaboration among a number of scholars and calls for integrative work connecting a number of disciplines. This spirit of collaboration and integration expresses formal characteristics of emergent post modern rationality. In fact, the collaborative and integrative urge may
be the result of (rather than a response to) the transformation of our sense ratios (in both meanings) (McLuhan, 1964; Carp, in press).

The modern era was the age of mechanical production and reproduction, of print media and manufacturing economies; modernity was also characterized by analysis. All of these involve division into component elements (letters, manufacturing acts and product parts, conceptual elements), yet in each case there is also a quality of restriction of the components: letters contained in a text, production lines contained by a product, analysis restrained by an argument. Postmodernity may come to be characterized by dispersed and integration. In the postmodern era, mechanisms seem to give way to messages, which are everywhere and nowhere: available at home, office, or on travel, but held at no place. Postmodern media begin with energy, manifest as sound, movement, and light: film, television, computer terminals. These media are inherently multisensory, though they are not polysensory. They are also fundamentally collaborative in the processes required for their creation (See Hauser, 1951, p. 246-250). In this respect, and perhaps in others which McLuhan foreshadowed, they are integrative, rather than analytical.

This dispersed integration (or integrated dispersal) may correspond to "differential space," hypothesized by Henri Lefebvre as the dialectical negation of the abstract space that characterizes both capitalism and the academic structures that flourished in and gave intellectual justification for it (Lefebvre, 1991). The intellectual analysis of knowledge into discrete academic disciplines resembles both the economic division of labor into specialized tasks and the geopolitical division of space into nation-states, which all resemble the artistic analysis of the senses into separate "media."

Our traditional disciplines (both academic and practical), seem to be artifacts of the mechanical era, worthy of study as such, but not of perpetuation in the structure of curricula and discourses. Perhaps we need to move inquiry deeper into connective discourse: studying meaning, medium and praxis as always already belonging to one another, senses (and media) as always already affecting one another, disciplines and inquiries as always already collaborative and multi-disciplinary: an inquiry into sensory culture, the meaning of pragmatics, praxis, and materiality, and a reconfiguring of the arts in relation to a new rationality of our sensoria.
Notes:

"Edgerton believes that "the printed illustration, not the printed word is the reason why the press in the West proved to be an instrument of dramatic change . . . \" (p. 190).

The "receiver" of messages from these media do not, of course, move, but neither do those for dance.

Even when the same sense predominates, it may do so in a different manner, interacting with the other senses and with the world in distinctive fashion. Thus the visuality of the Desana differs from ours (Classen, 1993a, p. 253) and both are distinct from the visuality of the Chewong (Hawes, 1993, pp. 174-175).

"McLuhan (1964) links mechanical culture with the analytic character of alphabetic writing, noting that the Chinese had printing for years, but never developed a mechanical culture, due, he believed, to the pictographical character of their writing system. It is interesting to note the extent to which icons (pictographs) have replaced instructions (alphabetic texts) in the electronic environment."

"I use message rather than information since so many of the messages seem either devoid of information or filled with false or maliciously distorted information."

"In fact, another element worth consideration is the tactile and olfactory poverty of electronic media, especially in the light of gender and class differences in sense rationality."

"This quality of dispersal and integration is evident in the impact of these media on our experience of time (See, e.g. Hauser, 1951, pp. 239-249). "The 20th century discovered quite early on, that temporality is precisely as plastic as the filmic substance itself" (Frampton, 1983, p. 74). To Frampton, it is quite clear that time does not "exist"; it is simply a "condition of our perception of phenomena" (p. 75) and is, therefore, as transmutable as the body, the instrument with which we perceive phenomena. Cinematic time is a nonlinear experience in which one can move in many directions from one moment to the next: ancient Egypt may be contemporaneous with the 22nd century, while simultaneous moments may be spread out across several minutes. This spatialized temporality, which can be directly experienced in film, video, and on the computer, is comparable to the Postmodern use of images, themes, and artifacts from throughout time, without respect for their history."

References:


Irigaray, L. (1980). This sex which is not one. In E. Marks & I. De Courtivron (Eds), *New French feminisms: An anthology*. Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press.


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My paper in the 1998 symposium considered art education and semiotics as domains of knowledge, functioning through spheres of action. I took the approach that art education and semiotics inquiries shared certain essential features; both sought to examine concepts as to their practical bearings and used thought to guide action over time. During the session, I proposed a physical model (see Prism Model, Figure 1) based in light, space, and time. Portentously, the model mirrored individuals' ability to simultaneously track diverse world views; it also organized a figural framework for investigations of art education practice. Each year as colleagues gathered for semiotics in art education symposia at AERA (see contents reported in Arts and Learning Research journals for 1995, 1996, 1997), I was struck anew by the diversity of perspectives in the papers. The epistemological approaches were consistent with research questions addressed in the papers; how-