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Review of the book *Los sentidos del cuerpo: Un giro sensorial en la investigación social y los estudios de género*. Center for Gender Research and Studies, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Mexico City, 2019.

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Abstract

This collective endeavour is a recent contribution that, according to the foreword writer and international figure of renown in sensory sociology David Howes, makes a remarkable contribution to the maturation of the sensory turn in social sciences. For Howes this is a book that expresses solidly the consolidation of a stance regarding what he considers an appropriate study of the body, emotions and senses; i.e. understanding them as constructions and configurations produced by a constant interrelation between people and the material and social world surrounding them. Howes takes up on the review of work lines that he considers fundamental for the maturation of the sensory turn as axes that in one way or another are present in the different contributions to the book. The Canadian researcher highlights the adequate handling of the methodological strategies and the high grade of theoretical sophistication in each chapter.

Keywords

Sociology, sensory turn, emotions, senses, artefacts

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Reseña del libro *Los sentidos del cuerpo: Un giro sensorial en la investigación social y los estudios de género*. Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios de Género, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Ciudad de México, 2019.

Resumen

Este esfuerzo colectivo es una contribución reciente que, según David Howes, autor del prólogo y referente internacional en sociología sensorial, confiere una madurez notable al giro sensorial en Ciencias Sociales. Para Howes se trata de un libro que expresa con solidez la consolidación de una postura respecto a lo que él considera un estudio adecuado del cuerpo, de las emociones y de los sentidos; es decir, entenderlos como construcciones y configuraciones que se producen por una interrelación continua entre las personas y el mundo material y social que las rodea. Howes se encarga de analizar aquellas líneas de trabajo que considera fundamentales para el desarrollo del giro sensorial como aquellos ejes que, de una manera o de otra, están presentes en las distintas aportaciones de libro. El investigador canadiense destaca el manejo adecuado de las estrategias metodológicas y la sofisticación teórica de gran calidad de cada capítulo.

Palabras clave

Sociología, giro sensorial, emociones, sentidos, artefactos

“This volume highly contributes to our understanding of the varieties of the sensory experience within a society”

David Howes. Center for Sensory Studies. Montreal-Canada

This collective endeavour is a recent contribution that, according to the foreword writer and international figure of renown in sensory sociology David Howes, makes a remarkable contribution to the maturation of the sensory turn in social sciences. For Howes this is a book that expresses solidly the consolidation of a stance regarding what he considers an appropriate study of the body, emotions and senses; i.e. understanding them as constructions and configurations produced by a constant interrelation between people and the material and social world surrounding them. Howes takes up on the review of work lines that he considers fundamental for the maturation of the sensory turn as axes that in one way or another are present in the different contributions to the book. The Canadian researcher highlights the adequate handling of the methodological strategies and the high grade of theoretical sophistication in each chapter.

The works present in the book share, as said by the publication coordinator, the premise that through our bodies and our senses we make sense of the world. A body historically and socially located, mediated by sex, gender and class; a body that learns how to sense and make sense; in other words, a body that feels in relation with others; reciprocal (a)effects that imply

sensations, meanings, affections and emotions (Sabido, 2019, p. 19). Just like the foreword writer, Professor Sabido highlights in her presentation fundamental matters for the sensory turn such as the phenomenology of perception, social performativity, anthropology of senses, sensory ethnography, and sensory perception, while revisiting a wide variety of subdisciplines associated with this turn such as the sociology of senses, cognitive sociology, sociology of emotions, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, and theoretical feminist perspectives.¹

In addition to these theoretical-methodological coordinates, the binding axes of this book are an outcome of former collective academic experiences and exchanges, particularly in the research seminar *Giro Sensorial en la Sociología: Cuerpos, Sentidos y Género* (Sensory Turn in Sociology: Bodies, Senses, and Gender) held between August and December in the Center for Gender Research and Studies of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and a research symposium about the sensory turn in May 2018. These axes point fundamentally towards the following:

- The interdisciplinary horizon of sensory studies based on the question of how to tackle perception. One of the bases for answering it is, and precisely referring to Howes, the sociability of the sensation premise, i.e. assuming perception as something conditioned by the biographical trajectory and the social positions. The

1. For further details about the theoretical and methodological lines associated with the sensory turn and rescued by Professor Sabido, please refer to her article *Georg Simmel y los sentidos. Una sociología relacional de la percepción* (Georg Simmel and the senses. A relational sociology of perception).

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assumption of a relational position is another component of this axis. Relationism here refers to the necessity of the blurring of pairs like body-mind, nature-culture, and most importantly the one referred to as sensation as a physical faculty and perception as an intellectual one. Sensory perception, thus, involves body and mind. The last element of this axis points towards not only exploring analytical possibilities beyond visioncentrism but also including the internal senses such as the vestibular, nociception, proprioception, kinesthesia, and thermoception.

- Sociological coordinates arising from two analytical levels, the interactive and the dispositional. The first one points towards the relational character of senses, recovering some postulations by Simmel, Goffman, Synnott, and Le Breton, among others. The second one refers, mostly based on Bourdieu's theoretical proposal, to learning mechanisms for selecting aspects of our surrounding world.
- Crossings between the Bourdieuan proposal and Asia Friedman's cognitive sociology. Habitus notions, perception filters, senses education, and somatic work are resources pointing towards identifying processes for making sense of what is perceived.
- The relation between sensory perception, material culture, and practice, especially in how knowledge is evidenced in the body through a particular relation with the material world. Here is highlighted the problem of the conscience of a craft in the body and the premise that performing a craft is making gender (Sabido, 2019, p. 29).
- Methodological strategies and considerations about the research process itself as a sensory experience from different approaches for recognising the sensory character of fieldwork.
- The need for including, alongside the theoretical and methodological reflections, the ethical and political implications and considerations of the different participatory methodologies employed.

With these axes properly established, the outcome of this publication is a book with 17 chapters and 7 sections that we will briefly introduce.

The first three chapters are part of the section titled *Reflexiones, niveles y categorías analíticas para la investigación socio-corporal* (Reflections, levels, and analytical categories for social corporeal research). In the first place, Carolina López Pérez exposes the crossing between Niklas Luhmann, Erving Goffman, and Asia Friedman with her piece of writing *Percepción sensible y expectativas sociales genéricamente diferenciadas* (Sensible perception and social expectancies differentiated by gender). There, López rescues the sociological coordinates from the corporeal and sensory perspective of the three authors for answering how

perception is modelled and how it influences interactions when senses are the mediums used by those implicated to mutually notice each other, emphasising the operation that allows the distinction between male and female bodies (López, 2019, p. 48). Furthermore, López suggests, based on those theoretical coordinates, a work line for understanding the mechanisms by which indigenous, poor, or rich bodies are noticed.

In her chapter *Género en clave sensorio-afectiva* (Gender from a sensory-affective perspective), Priscila Cedillo starts from the statement that genders are rooted in bodies as a sensitive disposition. The question for how that effect is produced is the intention of her contribution, and by doing so she defies the common explanation of gender being a social construct. Elements of dispositional sociology and approaches from perception from the social sciences are enriched by the notions of sexed habitus, sociation by a body-to-body imitation, and somatic work, thus proposing an epistemological and theoretical-methodological guide for the study of sex identities (Cedillo, 2019, p. 68).

Lastly, in the chapter *El amor corporizado y el giro sensorial. Espacios, sonidos y artefactos en la percepción sensorial del cuerpo amado* (The embodied love and the sensory turn. Spaces, sounds and artefacts in the sensory perception of the loved body), Olga Sabido Ramos and Adriana García Andrade propose a study of the love bound from a material dimension, that is, starting from the principle that the couple's sensory perception is not only performed with the senses but also through places where their reciprocal (a) effect takes place and also through the artefacts present (Sabido & García, 2019, p. 85). Supported in the proposal of embodied love within the sensory turn, and also in a Simmelian perspective regarding how bonds have a sensory dimension that presupposes a space and material condition that conditions perception, they present recent findings regarding their research.

The next three chapters are part of the section *Género en clave sensorial* (Gender studies from a sensory perspective). In the first of them, *Navegar entre los saberes del oficio de la pesca: un acercamiento desde las emociones y el ámbito corpóreo sensible* (Navigating among the sets of knowledge of the fishing craft: an approach from emotions and the sensory corporeal realm), Carolina Pérez González associates the categories of gender and labour (Peláez, 2019, p. 132), thus pointing out that the body, sensitive and emotional dimensions are fundamental for the learning of sets of knowledge and for performing crafts. Based on the body, senses, and emotions relational triad and revisiting Richard Sennett's postulates, Peláez holds that the reproduction and acquisition of a craft, in this case a maletype craft, is mediated, precisely, by gender issues. Likewise, artefacts and nonhuman entities typical of the craft, hurricanes for example, are also part of her analytical proposal.

José Torres Ramos, in *Incorporando el mariachismo: una fenomenología del gesto musical* (Incorporating mariachismo: a phenomenology of the musical gesture), proposes an encounter between phenomenology and musicology for analysing the

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incarnated musicality (Torres, 2019, p.152) in musicians and mariachi aficionados. This is, in Torres's words, a study on Mexicanness through the music performativity in which gender, the discursive world, machismo, and aesthetical perception go hand-in-hand.

Meanwhile, Marta Rizo García in her text *Experiencias corporales, emociones e identidad de género. Un estudio con mujeres de distintas generaciones en la Ciudad de México* (Corporeal experiences, emotions, and gender identity. A study with women from different generations in Mexico City) states that the body is a represented and lived relational unity while also related to nature, culture, social learning, physiological issues and incorporated sociations (Rizo, 2019, p. 156), these being the questions relevant for an understanding of the corporeal modellings of the body experiences related by people (Rizo, 2019, p. 172). Analytical categories such as body, emotions, and gender, and interviews with women from different generations, allowed her to identify changes and continuities in the perception of their own bodies.

The section *Sexualidades, erotismos y sentidos corporales* (Sexualities, eroticisms, and corporeal senses) is also composed of three chapters. In *La dimensión sensorial del riesgo sexual en la experiencia de la serodiscordancia en la Ciudad de México* (The sensory dimension of sexual risk in the serodiscordance experience in Mexico City), César Torres Cruz explores that dimension of sexual risk based on the senses (Torres, 2019, p. 198) in the process of incorporation and how it configures in the couple bonds in which one of the integrants suffers from HIV. Torres studies corporeal practices, trying to understand how those bodies build meaning in an interaction that unfolds in domestic and intimate scenarios where biomedical artefacts are also present

Daniela Sánchez, in her chapter *Entre cuerpos, normas y placer: modulación sensorial en una comunidad BDSM* (Between bodies, norms, and pleasure: sensory modulation in a BDSM community), proposes an analysis from the perspective of the sensory in sado-masochistic practices. Recurring to concepts such as somatic work and reflective bodywork, she exposes the learning process for feeling pleasure in these kinds of interactions (Sánchez, 2019, p. 212). Putting particular emphasis on the participating women, she analyses the relation between pain and pleasure in these rituals that according to the author - and stepping out of the vision of these practices as pathological - promote particular types of solidarity and binding ties.

The last chapter of this section, written by Roberta Granelli, is titled *Los sentires "equivocados": legitimidad del cuerpo y de las emociones en la experimentación de relaciones no monogámicas consensuadas* (The 'wrong' feelings: corporeal and emotional legitimacy in the consensual non-monogamous relationships experience). Granelli supports herself in the feminist epistemological tools and sensory sociology by exposing the ways in which the sex-affective practices are generated with

interruptions to normativity patterns (Granelli, 2019, p. 239), and likewise how these events are registered in the body.

The following two chapters are part of the section *La ciudad como experiencia sensorial* (The city as a sensory experience). With the chapter *Las miradas en el último vagón del metro. Sociología del cuerpo y los sentidos en la interacción homoerótica* (The looks in the last metro carriage. Sociology of the body and senses in the homoerotic interaction), Carlos Viscaya analyses ways for manifesting sexualities and eroticisms within this interaction place. Recurring to the Foucauldian idea of sexuality dispositifs and through the notion of techniques of the body by Mauss, he shows how the ways of conducting one's body and disposing one's look are learned and thus proposes a map of the sensory dimensions of these encounters (Viscaya, 2019, p. 255).

Erick Serna Luna, in his chapter *Sentir la ciudad: el habitus de la ceguera y la debilidad visual en la construcción no visual del espacio urbano de la Ciudad de México* (Feeling the city: the blindness and visual weakness habitus in the nonvisual construction of the urban space in Mexico City), exposes a positional reflection located from his weakened vision experience with which he developed a methodological strategy that supports his analysis. Through ethnographies and talks with collectives and associations of people who are blind or visually weakened in Mexico City, he describes techniques and experiences with which people build corporeal and spatial knowledge through a nonvisual perception (Serna, 2019, p. 267).

The section *Sensorialidad y artefactos* (Sensoriality and artefacts) has two articles as well. The first of them, *Repensar la implementación de tecnologías alternativas en clave corpóreo-sensorial: el caso del sanitario ecológico seco* (Rethinking the implementation of alternative technologies from a corporeal-sensory perspective: the case for the dry ecological toilet), by Diana Inés Ramírez, is an analysis of the body as mediator of the natural world through senses, highlighting its role in the incorporation of practices, values, and meanings; a role that she problematises in accordance with current discussions about alternative technologies for populations with no home water system services and the possibility for its use and social acceptance. Ramírez emphasises the assumption of the body and senses as a means for interactive rather than merely receptive knowledge (Ramírez, 2019, p. 307).

At the same time, Abraham Ledesma, in *Nuevas prótesis virtuales: La emancipación sexual de los grupos de diversidad sexual (DS) a través de la mediación de las TIC* (New virtual prosthesis: The sexual emancipation of the sexual diversity groups (SD) through the mediation of the ICTs), (Ledesma, 2019, p. 313), tackles the sociotechnical strategies with which the sexually diverse (SD) individuals constitute, following the Foucauldian assumptions, cyber-sexuality dispositifs. The author, appealing to the sensory turn in sociology, discusses the sensual sexual perception mediated by ICTs and how it configures perceptual schemes for the use of

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prosthetic extensions in sexual interactions, crystallising alternative ways for the erotic experience. The theoretical-methodological component of this work is also a venture for proposing ways to evaluate forms of emancipation from the stigmatisations suffered by this population.

The penultimate section of this book, *Sensaciones, sentimientos y estética* (Sensations, feelings, and aesthetics) starts with the chapter *Implicaciones simbólicas del desollamiento de mujeres en la zona conurbada de México* (Symbolic implications of women skinning in the Mexican conurbations). There, Paola Thompson studies the femicide phenomena by approaching the victim's body as a recipient and processor of ways of violence. Alongside the tracking of news articles and its proposal for defining skinning (Thompson, 2019, p. 339), it sets out considerations based on Merleau-Ponty and Le Breton for a problematisation of the views and perception of those crimes.

The second and last chapter of the section, written by César Ricardo Azamar Cruz, is titled *Aula universitaria y experiencia estética: narrativas del gozo* (The university classroom and the aesthetic experience: narratives from joy). It is a reflection text based on a teaching experience in a course on educational experience and aesthetic experiences that the author was responsible for. The course, with its foundation in an ethnographic-sensory experience, was based on the premise that the aesthetic experience is not only taught from the objective pedagogic strategies, and in his text the author aimed towards its study inside the classroom, recognising, giving place, and narrating ways of feeling in a social-sensory order (Azamar, 2019, p. 352).

The book closes with two chapters and its last section is titled *Experiencias sensoriales, enfermedad y dolor* (Sensory experiences, illness, and pain). In the text *Sentidos y sinsentidos de una enfermedad crónica. Experiencia corporal de los pacientes de diabetes en tratamiento de hemodiálisis* (Senses and non-senses of chronic disease. Corporeal experience of diabetes patients on haemodialysis treatment), Cynthia Méndez analyses the corporeal experience of the sick body, or, as she says, the sensory experience limit of its own existence (Méndez, 2019, p. 382). Elements of the sensory turn and sociology of the senses, specifically in the matters related to proprioception and haptic

perception, allow her to attend to the implications evidenced when the sensory experience is mediated by a chronic illness.

The last chapter is titled *Cuando el cuerpo duele. Una etnografía del proceso de morir* (When the body aches. An ethnography of the process of dying). In it, Velvet Romero García, based on an auto-ethnographic experience, displays considerations relating to perception and sensory perception of when, due to a terminal disease, the body is a source of pain. Assisted by her mother's diary, she analyses the aching body and how that suffering is linked to the orders of gender (Romero, 2019, p. 387). The author takes up on the task of revisiting questions related to the dignified death and pain ethics in which the decisions of those going through those ailments are recognised.

With each contribution made to the book, we confirm what David Howes anticipated. This volume is not only the crystallisation of continuous academic exchange that justifies the calling for visibility of the work made by networks and centres that is usually eclipsed by the tendencies in the international circulation of ideas (Sabido, 2019, p. 21), but also a manifestation, both thought and felt, of individual and collective experiences, joyful as much as painful² that are threaded as pillars and foundations of the book. If body, mind, sensation, and perception, following one of the axes of the sensory turn rescued in this volume, are not just segregated ambits, then we can perfectly fit the statement "thinking hurts" (Sabido, 2019, p. 40). Nonetheless, and just as Professor Sabido has manifested in other places in which we have concurred, based on a collective project just as the one described in this review, we can affirm that "thinking while sustained by a network hurts less".

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2. Here, the mention of a somatic imprint caused by the 2017 earthquake in Mexico City among the seminar participants stands out.

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