

INTRODUCTION

ROB VAN GINKEL AND ALEX STRATING

I think that it is time for a change if we want to gain deeper insight in, on the one hand, the contemporary quest for the sublime (in the sense of ‘delightful horror’ as it crops up, for instance, in the consumption of neo-mythological movies replete with sex and violence and in the popularity of extreme forms of recreation) and, on the other, in concrete manifestations of the abject in a plethora of contexts such as (civil) wars. In order to develop a greater sensitivity for the meaning of these different forms of what in Dutch may be called ‘Demonie’, especially in the allegedly civilised Western world, the fantas(ma)tic representations and depictions of writers, playwrights, pop-musicians and filmmakers, among others, can very well function as sensitizing signposts. At the same time they can also become interesting objects for anthropological study.

– Jojada Verrips (2001:343)

This volume of essays is a tribute to Jojada Verrips on the occasion of his valediction from the University of Amsterdam. He has inspired the contributors to this book, and many more – students, colleagues and friends alike – who have benefited from his untiring and illuminating critical take on anthropological and other matters. Although a *liber amicorum* usually puts the protagonist on a pedestal, we will not indulge in such flattery alone. Our goal is to honour Verrips by focusing on some of the themes of his work. We have asked the contributing authors to submit articles on two interconnected themes that are at the core of his recent publications. In so doing, we have opted for a volume whose parts are thoroughly integrated and shed new light on some of the key issues in which Verrips has shown a keen interest and with which he has been grappling for some time. Therefore, we intend this book to be much more than an occasional *Festschrift* and have made it hinge on a solid linchpin.

This linchpin is based upon a conundrum that is of vital importance in what might be termed 'Verripsian anthropology.' One of the things he takes issue with is that the social sciences – including anthropology – predominantly deal with order, not disorder or chaos. Verrips makes a strong point of the fact that social scientists tend to overlook the wild, uncivilized, transgressive and abhorrent elements of human existence, while they ought to devote systematic attention to this dimension, since it is intrinsic to the human condition, the flipside of what is usually dubbed 'civilization.' In his view, culture is an ideational system consisting of (partly) shared knowledge, values, perceptions, collective fantasies, myths, ideologies and so on. The received social science view is that this ideational system – or in Verrips's terminology 'mindscape' – brings about order and structure in society. However, Verrips argues that through classification and evaluation of others, such representations can also lead to disorder and destruction. Through classification faraway and nearby 'others' may be role models (divinization) or identified as like (inclusion, solidarity). However – and this is the neglected aspect – it can also lead to radical exclusion via processes of dehumanization (inferiority and denigration) and, in a mimetic or real sense, elimination and extermination (destruction). Thus, a number of contributions look at how people are excluded, dehumanized and defined as the ultimate 'Other' – whether they be, for instance, (purported) terrorists, enemies, illegal immigrants, ethnic minorities or victims of witchcraft. 'Wildness' may, however, also be a theme played with as constitutive of selfhood and pleasure.

It is in various forms of radical inclusion and exclusion that sensorial sensations and experiences, language (for instance metaphors), fantasies and art – to mention but a few phenomena – play a vital mediating or even causal role in bringing about order *and also disorder*. Verrips advocates an anthropology that systematically devotes attention to the importance of *all* the senses in such meaning-making acts: the total sensorial experience of the world and people's sensitive knowledge of it. In addition, he is also fascinated by the matter of why and how particular sensorial sensations are subdued or repressed. One of the issues that has been addressed in recent scholarship on the senses is which sense is dominant: seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling or feeling. Perhaps in line with the alleged ocular-centrism of the West, vision has often been ascribed supremacy. People's percep-

tion and experience of the world are believed to be filtered predominantly through the eye. In Verrips's perspective, however, touch – usually ranked to be the 'lowest' of the senses – appears to be a more important mediating sense. In encountering the physical and social worlds they inhabit, people are literally 'touched' in multiple ways. Several of this book's authors focus on the kind of sensuous experiences people have when engaging in, for example, dance events and festivals, when watching films or dealing with material objects and human excreta, or when gazing at 'nature.'

One of Verrips's favourite questions to ask his students and colleagues is: 'What's the system in the madness?' Of course, it is a query that is – or ought to be – basic to any type of thorough ethnography and grounded theory. Along with his focal shift towards the wild sides of the West and the role of the senses, another question began cropping up: 'What's the madness in the system?' It is to these dimensions that the present volume is devoted. The editors have suggested to the authors that the modes and manners of imagination, classification, sensitization and representation as outlined above should be the book's common denominator and that they address them in an ethnographic, a conceptual and/or a theoretical sense. Our proposal has met with enthusiasm and we are confident that we have succeeded in bringing together an intriguing and thought-provoking set of articles. Although firmly revolving around the pivotal issue, it is clear that some authors tend to emphasize 'the wild sides of the system' dimension, whereas others deal in more depth with the aspect of sensorial sensations. We have therefore decided to divide the book into two parts. They are preceded by an exploration of Verrips's anthropological work, which will also make it clear in more detail how the themes of 'wildness and sensation' interconnect.

An overview of his oeuvre shows that Verrips's biography and his anthropology are intimately connected. His Calvinist roots led to an ambiguous combination of fascination for and repulsion of orthodox Protestantism. This ambivalence inspired him to study religious worldviews and relations in a village very near to the one in which he was born and raised, an early instance of 'anthropology at home' in the Netherlands. Verrips's anthropological research probably constituted a way of coming to terms with Calvinism, or so van Ginkel argues in this preliminary chapter. Early on, Verrips was dissatisfied with the prevalent dichotomous reasoning in social science, notably the Cartesian body/mind split and other duali-

ties such as other/self, object/subject and uncivilized/civilized. Many of his publications seek to overcome these binary distinctions and his examinations explicitly depart from a materialist point of view. In the 1980s, Verris began staking out new fields of inquiry. Feeling ill at ease with the predominant social science view of societal processes in the West being seen as evolving towards growing rationality, social and self-control (or 'civilization'), he started to develop an anthropology of the 'Wild (in the) West' – that is, seemingly bizarre, violent, disorderly, chaotic and uncivilized phenomena that he considered integral but neglected dimensions of Western societies. In addition, he examined magical-mythical modes of conceptualization and representation in the West, particularly in regard to material culture. Increasingly, this interest has also led him to study the role of the senses in perceptions, imagery and metaphorical and discursive representations of the world we inhabit, and all sorts of embodied phenomena. The authors of this book all relate in one way or another to these issues.

Part I, entitled 'Double-Edged Swords: Wildness and Civilization – Radical Inclusion and Exclusion,' deals predominantly with the wild, and often horrible, sides of what have been dubbed civilized societies and particularly their body politic. The three initial chapters of Part I deal with radical policies and practices of inclusion and exclusion in or emanating from the USA, whose current hegemony as a world power is largely uncontested. These policies and practices are firmly based on fears and fantasies about 'others,' who either need to be eliminated (as in the case of 'terrorists') or expelled ('illegal immigrants'). In his chapter, Joseba Zulaika compares the states of exception that were commonplace in Francoist Spain with the policies of the current American war on terror. Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib and the Patriot Act have come to symbolize the exceptionality of counter terrorism. Agamben's notion of *homo sacer* – whose killing is not homicide, nor can he be sacrificed – is applied to the terrorist. Zulaika argues that the discourse created around the tabooed figure of the terrorist plays a key role in justifying exceptional policies. The chapter concludes by questioning, with such authors as Arexaga, Derrida and Žižek, whether terrorist states of exception imply the end of politics as we know it.

In his contribution, Hans Vermeulen also reflects upon some aspects of modern warfare, in this case the war in Iraq. The study of research on war-

fare soon reveals that instead of wildness, there is another, related concept that one encounters much more frequently. This is the notion of the 'barbarism' or 'barbarization' of warfare. Both concepts are used in opposition to 'civilization.' This raises the question of how wildness and barbarism relate to each other. In exploring this puzzle, Vermeulen focuses on mechanisms in modern warfare that create a physical, social and moral distance to what is going on in places where the war is actually fought, and in situations where people are involved in killing or torturing the 'terrorist' enemy. It is particularly in the last situation that wildness may occur. Wildness, it would seem, is promoted by a general process of the barbarization of warfare.

Lawrence Taylor also deals with American radical policies of inclusion and exclusion. He takes us to the desert borderland where the United States and Mexico meet; one of the world's most hotly contested landscapes and mindscapes. Among the many groups attempting to define its moral geography are the vigilante Minutemen. In what might be seen as the latest (in the long fantasy history of the US) dramatic performance of 'frontier' justice, these groups use the mythic notion of a morally regenerative 'Wild West' to re-imagine the Nation. Responding to the (inevitable) moral failure of the over-civilized East, they re-enact the private citizen army of Revolutionary days, but in this case their performance recasts the Mexican border as a mythic 'frontier.' Although they decry the failure of the US state to guard this border, they perhaps welcome an opportunity to replace that very state with a body of 'free individuals,' morally empowered by a potentially violent confrontation with the forces of disorder at the edge, and thereby defining themselves and the America they defend.

The next three chapters address issues of inclusion and exclusion through the prism of the notion of 'integration' and related discourses. Taking his cue from Verrips's dictum that the dialectics of inclusion and exclusion are connected with the use and abuse of words and terms, Gerd Baumann argues that 'integration' is a duplicitous concept. He traces a radical distinction between 'integration into' and 'integration with' a whole. One-sided integration into a pre-existing whole implies that the pre-existing whole has no need to change or even justify itself. Conversely, integration with a whole indicates that the pre-existing integral, too, must adjust itself in order to create a newly definable whole whose parts can be integrated with each other. This critique of the duplicitous concept is all the

more urgent as globalization itself has refuted, and indeed economically disowned, all historical fictions about the nation-state as we thought we knew it.

Thijl Sunier picks up the topic of integration by contending that the image of the 'wild' Muslim radical as it appears in the Dutch media mirrors the orderly immigration society envisioned in the integration trajectories. In his article he addresses the question of why images such as the video-will of suicide bombers or the detailed account of the murder of Theo van Gogh are so compelling and why they are shown over and over again. In answering these questions he unravels the particular story that is being told by these events and images. Since September 11, 2001, radicalism and radicalization among Muslims has developed into a discourse with its own presumptions and its own citation community, and above all its own narrative sequence. The present almost obsessive focus of attention on radical Muslims is rooted in the equally strong obsession with ultimate (integration) order.

The way in which conceptual definitions are related to problems of 'order' and 'madness' are central in Frank van Gemert's contribution. In many Dutch cities Moroccan youth groups cause problems because of their criminal activities and their aggressive appropriation of public spaces. Whether these groups can be considered gangs is a matter of definition. Based on American stereotypes, most researchers and policy makers stress that these youth groups are gangs: well-organized groups that can be defined on the basis of structural elements like hierarchy and leadership, initiation rituals and symbols. Van Gemert argues that especially policy makers stress the system in the gang madness, and in so doing attempt to create a rationale to meet political ends. However, ethnographic data and other research findings do not support this interpretation and point in a different direction.

In the following two chapters, the focus shifts away from the West and turns to South America: Suriname and Brazil, respectively. In both chapters the authors deal with wild, primitive and uncivilized aspects of human existence. Bonno Thoden van Velzen and Ineke van Wetering analyse a new witch hunting movement that emerged among the Ndyuka Maroons of eastern Suriname in 2006. Its leadership operates without any form of religious legitimization or traditional political support and exploits a cache of

asocial feelings. The movement is dependent upon the mass mobilization of young Ndyuka men and women and an amorphous group of Maroon city dwellers. Unchecked violence on a scale never seen before appears to add to the attraction of this self-styled Black Jesus movement and paralyzes the traditional political office holders while at the same time galvanizing a younger generation. In this chapter, the authors explore the social and emotional configurations that manifest themselves when these witch hunters are at work.

In the second chapter on South America, Mattijs van de Port takes on Verrips's suggestion to face up to the 'primitive' side of humanity rather than shy away from its unsettling presence. He shows that candomblé – the Afro-Brazilian spirit possession cult – came to the attention of the world as an instance of the primitive: in its positive meaning as an uncorrupted expression of humanity, and in its negative meaning as a backward creed. The understandable taboo against mentioning the all-pervading notion of the primitive in candomblé's public history tends to deny the cult its Dionysian leanings. By stressing that the cult is a 'religion-like-any-other' or a 'splendid tradition,' the cult's stubborn insistence that we are not only heirs to Descartes and that there are different paths leading to knowledge is overlooked.

In the final contribution to Part I, Alex Strating returns to the theme of the 'Wild (in the) West' by looking at the double-edged sword of pleasure and violence in Dutch amateur football. Departing from the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga's rendition of play as a specific domain separated from ordinary life, with its own rules and intrinsic goals, he argues that within the realm of play, players derive pleasure from the aesthetics and creativity of the game, the accompanying sensorial perception, the solidarity and camaraderie within the team, the tension and the temporal transformation of roles and statuses. As it is a specific realm, confined in time and space, it allows for an expression of manliness – forms of verbal and physical aggression – that would be unacceptable in ordinary life. Within the confines of the match 'civilized' men can behave like 'wild men.' Contrary to some researchers and football authorities and in line with Verrips's credo that civilization presupposes wildness, the author contends that aggression and violence are not caused exclusively by external circumstances: they are to a large extent part and parcel of the game. In this chapter, Strat-

ing devotes considerable attention to the sensuous and embodied dimensions of football, linking his contribution to the second part of the book.

Part II, entitled 'Making Sense: Materiality, Embodied Experiences and Sensorial Sensations,' is concerned especially with material culture, embodied and sensorial experiences and particularly *aisthesis* and anaesthesia. The first two articles of this part reflect upon the social and cultural meaning of sensorial experiences. Jeremy Boissevain does this by looking at Maltese village feasts as *aesthetic* happenings par excellence. Each year every Maltese parish celebrates one or more religious feasts honouring parish patron saints. Most are accompanied by religious services, processions, parading brass bands, wildly demonstrating partisans and, especially, large quantities of fireworks. Fireworks are central to a feast. They frame the celebration and signal its ritual stages to local participants and neighbouring (rival) clubs and parishes. They are markers of personal, community and class status. Villagers are intensely proud of their feasts and fireworks, but these offend the senses of many middle-class anglophone Maltese suburbanites and foreign residents who look down on the feasts' noisy, crowded, unrestrained folksy ambience. They particularly detest the loud petard salutes that to the delight of the fire workers occasionally shatter windows. Nonetheless, the relative force of their impact on each of the five bodily senses depends very much on the role of the participant, whether parishioner or outsider, Maltese or tourist, active celebrant or observer, villager or suburbanite, fire worker or bands(wo)man. None remain untouched.

Irene Stengs also addresses the theme of *aesthetic* and aesthetic experiences in the context of feasts and parties. In the Netherlands, 'dance parties' form a significant dimension of present-day party and leisure culture. It is estimated that of the two million people who go out each weekend, one million participate in at least one, larger or smaller, dance event. In this chapter – a first attempt towards an ethnographic approach to Dutch dance culture – it is argued that participating in dance culture is a contemporary way of being in the world. Inspired by Maffesoli's ideas on the importance of aesthetics in the construction of modern, albeit ephemeral, communities, the author approaches 'thematic mega dance events' as shared, aesthetic, emotional experiences. This viewpoint implies an explicit focus on the senses and the significance of sensory experiences in the construction

of cultural experience. Dance is a totally embodied and multi-sensual practice, in which personal physical sensual experiences are as important as the sensual messages conveyed and experienced through the bodily proximity of so many others.

Zooming in on vision, Birgit Meyer, Yolanda van Ede and David Howes in their respective chapters explicitly take a critical look at the relationship between vision and audiovisual media. Their contributions tie in specifically with Verrips's work on *aisthesis* and show that it is a contended field of study with wider ramifications for the anthropological project. Seeking to move beyond treating cities as a mere context of life, Birgit Meyer explores the role of audiovisual media in offering imaginaries that transcend the fragmentedness characteristic of urban life. Taking as a point of departure the idea that an intrinsic relationship exists between cinema and the city, she examines the implications of the shift from visions of the city of Accra (Ghana) produced by the state film industry in the heyday of development to the more gloomy visions screened by independent local video-filmmakers since the mid-1990s. It is argued that visions of the city on screen are not mere representations that are subject to a distant gaze, but condensations of actual experiences of and in the city that beckon their spectators. These films should therefore not be mistaken as confined to a virtual world in which viewers are alienated from their bodies, but be understood as thriving on a haptic, visceral dimension. Simultaneously calling attention to the medium of film *and* the senses in the construction of experiences of and in the city, the main concern of this chapter is to point out that, in order to understand how to develop new alleys into urban experience we would be well advised to weave together recent work on cinema and the senses, and on the sensuous dimension of the city.

Yolanda van Ede takes Brian de Palma's film *The Untouchables* as a referential framework for some thoughts on touch and 'un-touch,' and introduces 'cool' as a mediating concept of the two supposedly oppositional approaches in social relations. This chapter is a wink at the style and content of some of Verrips's writing. In a creative and intricate manner the author explores this conceptual triangle with the analogies she draws between the film's narrative and social relationships in the world out there, anthropological fieldwork, and the study of film. These tentative explorations touch upon discussions on the senses, body-mind distinctions, objectification

and subjectification, and attachment and detachment. What are the consequences of touch and untouch in social and media research, both morally and epistemologically? In answering this question she proposes one step from a phenomenological towards an existentialist approach as proposed by Michael Jackson. It basically reads: the 'I think' of Descartes and the 'I can' of Merleau-Ponty ought to be preceded by 'I am.' The acknowledgement, sensuously and consciously, of touch and untouch being part of the same process, is what enables us to have a cool understanding of the world we investigate, and in which we ourselves live.

Whereas van Ede's contribution elaborates upon Verrips's notions of *aisthesis*, and specifically on sight and touch, David Howes takes issue with Verrips's view that screens 'touch.' In his chapter he takes a critical look at certain recent developments in screen theory from the standpoint of the anthropology of the senses. Some theorists hold that the moving images we watch on screens engage 'the whole body' by evoking the non-audiovisual senses of touch and smell and taste in a synaesthetic manner. This construction of the screenic experience is juxtaposed to a series of concrete cases of the modulation of perception in the aesthetic and ritual practices of a range of non-Western cultures. The sensory practices in question are shown to effect an alteration in the way subjects visualize the world, and may thus be compared to the ways in which screens function, but they do so by incorporating as opposed to simply evoking the non-audiovisual senses. The implication is that screen theory needs to acknowledge rather than deny the differential interplay of the senses.

The final contribution to this section on the 'eye' and 'touch' is Suzanne Kuik's moving miniature, in which she explores how the human gaze at a deformed child touches both mother and child. The case she describes shows that the uncivilized gaze is painful and a powerful tool of exclusion.

Milena Veenis's contribution links the previous section on sensorial sensations with the next chapters, which focus on materiality in one way or another. She wonders why Western consumer goods had such power of attraction to most inhabitants of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and why their stories about these goods were so often shot through with sensorial examples. In order to answer these questions Veenis focuses on the materialist promises with which the socialist regime tried to establish a form of hegemony after the Second World War. By addressing the inhab-

itants of the destroyed and hate-ridden country with a call to realize an encompassing form of social harmony through material transformations, an unspoken form of consent between East Germans and the state came about. 'The material' was key to this silent pact: it was the ultimate goal for achieving future happiness, and functioned as a cover-up for social tensions. People's desire for the affluent, wonderful looking and sweet-smelling Western world was a collective fantasy that enabled the inhabitants of the GDR to deny that their bond was more sinister and disturbing than they wanted to acknowledge.

The next two chapters zoom further in on materiality, both inspired by Kevin Hetherington's work on how objects refuse to disappear. According to Mélanie van der Hoorn there is within social scientific research still a rather stubborn reluctance firstly to attribute any form of agency to things; secondly, to recognize a multi-sensory materiality that reaches beyond the latter's purely visual aspects and, thirdly, to pay attention to the end of 'thing-ly' biographies and the potential disposal of things. In this chapter she deals with this discrepancy – in particular with regard to architecture – and describes what the taboos consist of as well as discussing the insights of authors who have already taken notice of these issues. A theoretical approach is combined and 'field-tested' against the description of artist Louis Le Roy's so-called 'Eco-Cathedral', a project entirely realized out of used construction material. It is argued that Le Roy's unmediated, very tactile exchange between Man and Material makes his site an excellent laboratory to 'enter the mud of materiality' (to freely borrow a Latourian expression in this matter), and start experiencing something of the above-mentioned agency, sensoriness and the mechanisms at work in the process of recuperation and disposal.

Orvar Löfgren takes Verrips's interest in materialities and sensualities of everyday life and his discussions of our problematic lives with goods and domestic technologies as his starting point. Since today is an era, not of an ethereal cyberlife, but an everyday cluttered with objects and gadgets, Löfgren looks at the hyper-materiality of everyday life and explores processes of motion and emotion in everyday consumption, with a focus on strategies of handling the overabundance of material objects. How is the wealth of material possessions accommodated, made problematic, unproblematic or disposed of as both emotional and physical luggage? Based on an ongo-

ing research project entitled 'Home Made: The Cultural Production of the Inconspicuous,' the author takes us on a tour to locales stacked with often redundant items and shows how we deal with them.

The social, cultural and sensorial dimensions of disposal are the focal point of Sjaak van der Geest's analysis of faeces. He adds a social dimension to Mary Douglas's idea that dirt is 'matter out of place' by arguing that the quality of relationships enlightens us on the experience of disgust towards dirty substances like human and animal excrement. However, experiences of disgust also reveal the 'substance' of social relationships such as closeness and distance, inclusion and exclusion, affection and dislike, trust and fear. Social logic reigns over our senses. A second theme of the chapter is that we meet order and system at the edges of our 'civilization,' in the world of defecation. This order exists in our classifications of clean and dirty, which have a prominently social character. Our social network orchestrates the pleasures and horrors of our senses. The quality of relationships translates itself into intense sensations of clean and dirty, pleasurable and disgusting.

In the final chapter, Rob van Ginkel connects the themes of wildness and the senses through an analysis of the sensory 'consumption' of whales and dolphins. He examines why and how cetaceans have achieved the status of super-animals and how this iconic status has led to anthropomorphizing cetaceans, turning them into a strongly tabooed food item. Europeans who have persisted in hunting and eating this 'non-consumptive subject' have subsequently been dehumanized, as is clear from the fierce opposition targeted against Faroese whale hunters. Although for most Westerners tasting whale meat now boils down to an act of barbarism, this does not mean that whales have been diverted from the commodity path entirely. They are still commodified and 'consumed' in myriad ways, notably through the human gaze, as is particularly evident in marine theme parks and whale-watching tours. While whale gazing provides one way to reconnect with nature, it is in fact proximity and tactility that seem to satisfy people's emotional need to actually get 'in touch' with nature again, cetaceans being symbols of 'the natural' par excellence. Ironically, this is to some extent reminiscent of the total sensorial and bodily engagement of traditional whalers with whales.

As this volume's editors, we are quite confident that the chapters adequately and imaginatively address Verrips's programmatic calls to explore

'the realm of darkness' we find among others and in ourselves, and the sensuous relations between humans and between people and the world they inhabit. The contributions to this anthropology of 'wildness and sensation' show that there is indeed system in the madness and madness in the system. They make it abundantly clear that (Western) 'civilizations' are not so civilized after all and that radical othering is part and parcel of their body politic. Likewise, the sense deemed to be the most civilized of all the senses – vision – does not necessarily take centre stage in people's embodied encounters with each other, animals and objects, not even when it comes to the sensorial consumption of screened presentations. More or less explicitly departing from cues in Verrips's work or taking it as their source of inspiration, the authors address interesting and occasionally unsettling issues that should leave nobody untouched.