On Rocks, Walks, and Talks in West Africa: Cultural Categories and an Anthropology of the Senses

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ABSTRACT *In southeastern Ghana, among Anlo-Ewe-speaking people, a five-senses model (of sight, touch, taste, hearing, and smell) has little relevance for theorizing about how we know what we know. Instead, Anlo people invoke a domain of experience called* seselelame *(literally "feel-feel-at-flesh-inside") that links sensation to emotion, disposition, and vocation. This article explores cultural models that govern sensory and other immediate bodily experiences in Anlo-Ewe worlds. Language analysis is interwoven with cultural interpretations of walking and talking, and attention is given to child socialization strategies that kinesthetically instantiate Anlo-Ewe moral codes.*

One day, in the middle of a nearly two-year stretch of fieldwork in southeastern Ghana, I drove my car over a rock in the center of the compound in which I lived. A jolt shot through my body as if I had been struck by lightning. Immediately upon entering the house, I told my husband about the experience. He laughed at me and stated, "I told you that rock was a *legba*!" I recorded this incident in my field notes but promptly repressed or forgot about it.

A month later, I was in Accra, visiting members of the extended family of Anlo-Ewe people in whose ancestral home we resided in the southern Volta Region. Somewhat out of the blue, Kodzo and Kwami observed that my husband and I had a habit of taking our car into the compound (as their brother had directed us to do), and they wondered if we had ever driven over that inconspicuous stone protruding out of the sand in front of Grandma's house. I was mortified by the question. I hesitated, but then admitted that I normally tried to avoid it but had recently run the right tire

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smack over the center of the rock. I remembered the lightning bolt through my body; I remembered my friend Raphael telling me that Nyigbla, the god of war, never hesitated to strike mercilessly into a group of people holding a conversation, only to take out the single offending individual—bang, he was dead. While these thoughts were racing through my mind, Kodzo and Kwami had shifted to speaking in an animated tone (and in Ewe) and were trying to figure out to what extent I was culpable. Finally they turned to me and said, "Never mind. As for you, you didn't know what it was. Nothing needs to be done. But now that you know, just don't run over it again." I was not exactly clear on what I *now knew,* but when we left their house my husband said, "I told you that rock was a *legba*!"

I went to see Raphael the next day and told him everything. He said that the jolt of lightning I had felt was a clear instance of *seselelame* (an Anlo-Ewe term for "feeling in the body"), and he was startled by my (foolish, in his view) response, which was to ignore the feeling I experienced when driving over the stone.

I have puzzled over this incident for several years. It was one of those small moments of "aha" during fieldwork that nonetheless proves extremely difficult to write about. It provided insight into how Raphael, Kodzo, and Kwami (as well as other Anlo-Ewe people) might think and feel about certain experiences, but it seemed impossible to disentangle this event from issues of the supernatural and from problems of "observer subjectivity" (cf. Stein 2000:349) or questions about whether an ethnographer's feelings can be used as an index for what "the other" might be known to experience and perceive. Recently, however, ethnographers have begun to acknowledge their own "countertransference" and have begun to explore and make use of the notion that one's own "embodied feeling informs the researcher about deep elusive social realities" (Stein 2000:349). In this article I use some of my own experiences in tandem with those of Anlo people themselves, along with discussion of seselelame, to explore the nuances of this cultural category. I do this as a means of beginning to unpack their cultural model for immediate bodily experience, and to ask how sensory experience fits into a more general Anlo-Ewe understanding of *how we know what we know.* This unpacking is aimed at exploring the implications of cultural variation in sensory orders and sensory experience.

In the southeastern corner of Ghana, bordering Togo, lies a stretch of land surrounding the Keta Lagoon that is known as the Anlo homeland. Anlo is a dialect of the Ewe language and also refers to a subset of Ewe speakers who inhabit the southern portion of the Volta Region of Ghana. In addition, many Anlo and Ewe speakers reside in Accra as well as other areas in West Africa, and individual Ewe speakers and their families have also migrated to locations in Europe, North America, and elsewhere. The

coastal area from Anyanui to Keta or Kedzi, and north of the lagoon to Anyako, is typically considered the heart of Anlo-land, and Anlo-Ewe speakers have inhabited this area for more than 300 hundred years. Between 1992 and 1995, I spent approximately 20 months conducting ethnographic research among Anlo-Ewe people in both Accra and the Anlo homeland.

In addition to that initial period of fieldwork in Ghana during the mid-1990s, I have continued communicating with Anlo-Ewe people (some of them in Europe and the United States) about this topic of seselelame. So while my study includes the perspective of a wide range of Anlo-Ewe individuals, some of the most insightful and quote-worthy comments or reflections about seselelame (included in this article) have come from multilingual "informants" or people whom we would probably also have to say are "multicultural." It could be suggested that their exposure to cultural worlds beyond the Anlo-Ewe locale, and their fluency in both Ewe and English, might be a handicap or a source of contamination in our efforts to understand a cultural category such as seselelame. Instead of that view, however, I have chosen to listen closely to their thoughts about seselelame, as I think they are uniquely situated to reflect on the similarities and differences between a domain we think of as *sensing*, and their own historical category that they refer to as *seselelame*. The reasons why Raphael (mentioned in the anecdote recounted earlier and a key informant) was troubled by how I discounted sensations of immediate bodily disturbance when I ran the car tire over the rock will be explored as I describe a cultural category called *seselelame*.

SENSING AND EPISTEMOLOGIES

In many Western epistemological traditions, a distinction is made between feeling (otherwise considered affect, sentiment, or emotion) and sensation (deemed physical stimulus from an extrasomatic object). In turn, the senses are usually defined in these traditions as the organs that provide us with information about the external world and that function to create representations in the mind. This means that hearing, sight, touch, taste, and smell are considered by many to be the only true senses, and they are treated as five distinct modes of experience.

In Anlo-Ewe cultural contexts in West Africa, however, a discrete category delineating these five sensory functions is not a tightly bounded or particularly meaningful way of classifying experience or theorizing about knowledge. Instead, in an Anlo-Ewe model, sensations caused by a stimulus from external objects are epistemologically related to sensations that stem from internal somatic modes (referred to in technical terms as *intero-receptors* or *interoceptors* that govern balance, movement, and

proprioception), and they are also grouped or associated with affective states. Furthermore, sensations may also be linked to dispositional conditions and with vocational qualities inscribed within the self. In other words, Anlo cultural traditions do not seem to have a "theory of the senses," as we define this domain. But they do seem to have a coherent and fairly complex theory of inner states that links sensation to emotion, disposition, and vocation, and that many Anlo speakers refer to as *seselelame* (feeling in the body, flesh, or skin). Thus, while there are some striking similarities between a Western folk model and an Ewe folk model, there are also some intriguing differences. Here I will draw from the frameworks of cultural phenomenology and cultural psychology to elucidate the significance of *seselelame*.

A fundamental assumption in cultural psychology is that, as Markus et al. have suggested, "psychological processes are not just 'influenced' but are thoroughly culturally constituted, and as a consequence, psychological processes will vary with sociocultural context" (1996:859). While not denying that there may be certain psychic universals within the human species, cultural psychologists argue that general "psychologists may be prematurely settling on *one* psychology, that is, on one set of assumptions about what are the relevant or most important psychological states and processes, and on one set of generalizations about their nature and function" (Markus et al. 1996:858). The present article aims to address some of those sociohistorically constructed generalizations about the nature and boundaries of what we refer to as "the senses" and sensory experience, while simultaneously describing another cultural way of depicting how sensation relates to perception, meaning making, and bodily modes of knowing.

Within cultural psychology, studies of emotion provide an impetus for posing similar questions about the cultural grounding of sensation. For example, Richard Shweder asks, "What is the generic shape of the meaning system that defines an experience as an emotional experience (e.g., anger, sadness, or shame) rather than an experience of some other kind (e.g., muscle tension, fatigue, or emptiness)?" (1993:418). This can be transposed into an inquiry about the cultural psychology of the senses by exploring *the generic shape of the meaning system* that defines an experience as sensory. For example, why are balance and kinesthesia "sensory" in one cultural meaning system while classified as postural, locomotive, or motor skills in another? In addition, Shweder asks, "what is the role of everyday discourse and social interpretation in the activation of emotionalized and somatized meanings?" (1993:418). In terms of the senses, we can probe the same issue about how sensory meanings are socialized or acquired, and we can ask, What is the role of everyday practices and discourse in this process?

This article begins to address these questions by first examining the problem of cultural categories. What is deemed "sensory" in one meaning system does not necessarily translate directly into another cultural world, and this article works to elucidate the ways in which Anlo speakers conceptualize a range of immediate bodily experiences. In addition to outlining the general parameters of their particular cultural category of seselelame, thus, I will describe two specific dimensions of seselelame that fall outside the boundaries of a five-senses model: *azolizozo* or *azolime,* which denotes both a kinesthetic sense and the development of moral disposition; plus *sesetonume,* which refers to sensations related to speech as well as a more general category of "feeling in the mouth." Finally, I will revisit the event with which I opened the article and explore how the same object might be perceived as a stone by some while others perceive it as a spiritual guardian of thresholds—referred to as a *legba* in Anlo-Ewe worlds.

In a discussion of countertransference, Stein observed that "knowledge via the senses is especially powerful when it takes the observer by surprise. . . . One knows not with disembodied thought, but with one's entire body—one's whole being" (Stein 2000:367). While I now agree with this notion of knowledge articulated by Stein, at the time I drove my tire over the stone I was in the habit of resisting most inclinations to attend to such direct sensory experiences. That is, my own socialization in mainly Euro-American contexts predisposed me to discounting direct experience. In addition, although anthropology claims participant-observation as its major methodological tool, the "participation" side of the equation is often suspect. In the minority still are ethnographers such as Paul Stoller who argue that the agency of the "sensuous scholar" is to be included (with its complexities and errors of judgment) and that our scholarship benefits from "lending one's body to the world" rather than aspiring to consume the knowledge of the world (Stoller 1997: prologue). There are days when I interpret my experience driving over the rock as a moment of grace, a moment of unmerited assistance in my task of understanding Anlo sensibilities, for I was living in a land where stones are often not what they seem. Here I will try to provide a taste of the ways in which living with Anlo-Ewe people and learning about seselelame opened the door to an ontological mode containing some subtle but interesting contrasts with a way of being steeped in a tradition that reifies a five-senses model.

CULTURAL CATEGORIES AND THE DOMAIN OF "FEELING IN THE BODY"

In the 1920s, Diedrich Westermann compiled an Ewe-German dictionary that was subsequently translated into English, and the term *sense* was rendered in Ewe as *sidzenu* (Westermann 1973:214). When I first arrived in Anlo-land in the early to mid-1990s, I tried to use this term to

refer to a domain of experience that includes hearing, touch, taste, smell, and sight but soon found myself in the middle of a massive problem of translation. *Sidzenu* did not mean that set of experiences, nor did it refer to an indigenous category of immediate bodily experiences that were meaningful to the people with whom I worked. *Sidzenu* instead meant something along the lines of "thing recognized" (*dzesi:* to note, observe, recognize; *nu:* thing) and therefore implied a somewhat mentalistic and cognitive (rather than embodied) process or phenomenon. In addition, within the network of Anlo-speaking people with whom I worked, no one ever proposed or even passively agreed to the word *sidzenu* as a translation for the English word *sense.* I soon came to realize that one discrete lexical term for "the senses" did not seem to exist in the Anlo-Ewe language, and the problem of terminology and translation soon blossomed into an issue that centers around a much thornier problem of cultural categories and ways of organizing experience.

The absence of one clear term or an obvious category for what is commonly understood by many Westerners as "the senses" (hearing, touch, taste, smell, and sight) meant that interviews with a wide spectrum of Anlo speakers (from highly educated people who spoke both African and European languages, to individuals who had little exposure to either formal schooling or European languages) resulted in nearly as many configurations of sense-data as numbers of people interviewed. One informant suggested that senses could be called *nusenuwo* (*nu:* thing; *se:* to hear, feel; *nuwo:* things), which means roughly "things with which you can hear or feel things." Later he expanded the designation to *nutila nusenuwo* (*nuti:* exterior; *la:* flesh [*nutila:* human or animal body]; *nu:* thing; *se:* to hear; *nuwo:* things), which can be translated as "bodily phenomena with which you can hear (or feel, taste, smell, understand, and obey)." Sensing in general was also described as *nusiwo kpena de mia nuti hafi mienyaa nusi le dzodzom de mia dzi,* which can be translated as "things that help us to know what is happening (on) to us." Sensing was expressed by yet another Anlo person with the phrase *aleke nese le lame,* which means "how you feel within yourself" or "how you feel in your body." But the expression that seemed to be used most frequently was the very complicated and polysemous term *seselelame.*

Seselelame amounts to a culturally elaborated way in which many Anlo-Ewe people attend to and read their own bodies while simultaneously orienting themselves to objects, to the environment, and to the bodies of those around them. While it is difficult to make a direct translation into English of the term *seselelame,* since it refers to various kinds of sensory embodiment that do not fit neatly into Euro-American categories or words, we can think of it roughly in terms of "feeling in the body" or in terms of the literal translation of "feel-feel-at-flesh-inside." On one hand, it seems

to refer to a specific sense or kind of physical sensation that we might call tingling in the skin (sometimes a symptom of impending illness), but in other instances it is used to describe sexual arousal or even heartache. In other contexts it refers to a kind of inspiration (to dance or to speak), but it can also be used to describe something akin to intuition (when unsure of exactly how you are coming by some information). Finally, it is also discussed as a generalized (almost synesthetic) "feeling through the body" and was proposed by some informants as a possible translation for the all-encompassing English term *sense*.

Seselelame is reminiscent of what Thomas Csordas has referred to as "somatic modes of attention" (1993). He uses this phrase to point us in the direction of "culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others" or "culturally *elaborated* attention *to* and *with* the body in the immediacy of an *intersubjective* milieu" (1993:138–139). Moreover, Csordas suggests that,

> Because we are not isolated subjectivities trapped within our bodies, but share an intersubjective milieu with others, we must also specify that a somatic mode of attention means not only attention to and with one's own body, but includes attention to the bodies of others. Our concern is the *cultural elaboration of sensory engagement,* not preoccupation with one's own body as an isolated phenomenon. [Csordas 1993:139, emphasis added]

Using the notion of "somatic modes of attention," how are we to understand an Anlo-Ewe phenomenon they call *seselelame*? Is it one sense or many? Is it the category of sensing in general or a specific sensory field? More fundamentally, is it even a "sense" at all, or is it better glossed as intuition, inspiration, emotion, or bodily knowing?

Here I would like to examine these questions in light of Csordas's discussion of the "poverty of our anthropological categories for going . . . further in understanding what it is to attend to one's body in a mode such as that described above" (1993:147). He suggests that social scientists have a tendency to rely on the sole categories of "cognition" and "affect," even when these groupings fail to do justice to a great deal of embodied and intersubjective phenomena (Csordas 1993:147).[1] While Csordas is referring to the ethnographic descriptions he provided from Catholic Charismatic healers and Puerto Rican spiritist mediums, the point applies equally to this discussion of sensory perception and experience among Anlo-speaking people in that a phenomenon such as seselelame is both cognitive and affective—but cannot be confined to either of these categories as it encompasses or addresses even more varieties of experience. Following Csordas (1993:147), four additional categories of intuition, imagination, perception, and sensation will be used here to explore Anlo-Ewe accounts of seselelame.

We tend to think of perception as cognitive and sensation as physical, but seselelame seems to simultaneously transcend and bridge that supposed

divide. In learning and employing the Ewe language, I usually translated the verb *se* or *sese* mainly as "hearing" or "feeling" (although in certain contexts it could be used to mean "tasting," "smelling," "understanding," "obeying," and also in reference to "knowing, hearing, or comprehending a language"). But an Ewe linguist recently suggested to me that *se* could actually be considered a basic perception verb, and he then translated the term *se-se-le-la-me* as "feel-feel-at-flesh-inside." So if *se* (in very broad terms) is "to perceive," we could also render *se-se-le-la-me* as "perceive-perceive-at-flesh-inside"—suggesting that seselelame then houses both the cognitive function of perception, as well as the somatic phenomenon of sensation (inside the flesh).

In addition, *seselelame* is also used in connection with certain emotional states. As one informant explained (in English): "You can feel happiness in your body, you can feel sorrow in your body, and you can feel other things, like cold. *Seselelame* describes all of these things because it is 'hearing or feeling in the body.' 'Mesi le lame' is what we say. So from that we just made a verbal noun: *seselelame.*" And in a later part of the interview he referred to the experience of going to the theater: "You go and watch it, and you feel something inside. You hear music, see the actors act very well, and you feel something inside. You applaud, get up and dance, or shout something. That is a feeling and it comes through seselelame."

Another informant, Elaine, described the range of ways she thinks about experiences of seselelame in the following discussion.

> *seselelame* can be a pain or a pleasure. I can feel pain in the body; I can enjoy another thing in the body. Somebody might be—excuse me—holding my breast and then I feel, you know, I enjoy it. So that's *seselelame*. . . . *Lame* is the flesh, in the body. "Lame vim": "I'm feeling pains in my body." Oh, "leke nye dokome dzidzo kpom": "I am happy." "Nye lame koe dzidzo kpom": "I am happy within myself." *Sese* is hearing—not hearing by the ear but a feeling type hearing. . . . Yes, *seselelame* means feeling in the body but *esia kple to* means with the ear. Same spelling, same pronunciation, but different meaning. "Esia?" "Do you hear?" "Esi le lame?" "Do you feel it in your body?" . . . Before you know that you are not well, you have to feel something in the *lame*. . . . You wake up and then you feel that, "Oh, I'm not fine." That means that you are feeling something inside you. "Seselelame deve. Nye meli nyuie egbe o. Seselelame ema." [Which means:] "There is an aching, painful feeling in my body. I'm not well, not feeling fine today. That (is that) feeling in my body." . . . Sometimes you feel tiredness or a headache; you feel it through your body—*seselelame*. It's through the body that you know you're not fine.

These discussions reveal that painful and pleasurable sensations, emotional inspiration, and physiological indications of illness are all considered experiences that fall within a category of seselelame. They can often blend together in people's experience, or in their ideas about experience. So while different words might be employed in different Anlo-speaking contexts to distinguish certain phases of experience such as sensation, cognition, and imagination, attention to the connections seems to be valued,

and *seselelame* is often used as the meta-term for many if not most of these inner states of being.

This point is illustrated in the following quote from an interview with Raphael in which he explained how seselelame, *sidzedze,* and *gomesese* are related (though slightly different) experiences or phenomena.

> If you say *sidzedze*—in this case we are relating it to the various senses that we have mentioned in the Western sense [hearing, touch, taste, smell, and sight]—so if you say *sidzedzenu* we mean in effect that you have actually taken the thing to mind or you have actually observed the situation, analyzed it and realized that no, this is the thing. . . . In every level of the senses you can use it. Because it is like I said: You observe and then you analyze the situation with your brain to find out why that sensation, why that seselelame? [For example:] They say that this lady has been knocked down by a car. The man, her husband, is a good friend of mine. Your sense will tell you that you have to visit them and express sympathy. Your brain has quickly worked and actually told you your sympathy is called for at that point in time. So we would say you have realized it yourself. So it [seselelame] is just like sidzedzenu—it [sidzedzenu] is an advanced form of seselelame. . . . *Gomesese* is "•bderstanding" . . . and is also not too different because when you have a sensation—some source of seselelame—you must analyze and understand what that thing can create within you or within the other inmates of the house. So it is a message, an external message, that you get and you have to—in a way—analyze it properly.

Raphael's explanation demonstrates the close links among sensation, perception, emotion, cognition, and so forth and indicates how seselelame is best understood utilizing numerous categories or analytic tools. Defying the divide between physical sensation and mental processes of perception, cognition, and imagination, seselelame is an indigenous category that bridges and transcends domains that in other cultural traditions might function as oppositions. Raphael also comments that one must analyze and imagine what the "messages" (messages that might otherwise be called sensations, emotions, and intuitions) create within you and within the other people in the house—revealing the intersubjective characteristic of seselelame or how it is a way of "attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others" (Csordas 1993:138–139).

One way to explore the kinds of phenomena that fall within the category of seselelame is to look at the larger class of words to which sense terms belong. As the Ewe language evolved from the closely related languages of Yoruba and Fon, there appears to have been an encoding of a perceived relationship among experiences of sensation, emotion, disposition, and vocation, such that sense words such as *hearing, tasting,* and *seeing* seem to belong to a larger class of words beginning with the prefix *nu-* (the morpheme *nu* meaning "object" or "thing").

For example, the following sensation terms begin with *nu-: nusese* (hearing), *nulele* (touching), *nukpokpo* (seeing), *nudodokpo* (tasting), and *nuvevesese* (smelling). In addition, some words denoting emotions or

affective states begin with *nu-*, such as *nuxaxa* (grief, sorrow), *nugbenugbe* (pain, rage, being beside oneself with anger or joy), *nublanuikpokpo* (compassion, mercy, commiseration), and *nudzodzro* (longing, desirous, covetous). Furthermore, certain dispositional states attributed to persons also begin with *nu-*, for instance, *nuvowola* (a person who sins or commits evil), *nuvela* (a person who is economical or miserly), *nubiala* (a person who begs and asks for things), *nunyala* (a person who is wise and knowing), and *nublanuito* (a person who is deplorable, miserable, or unfortunate). Finally, many vocational descriptors also begin with *nu-: nufiala* (teacher), *nutula* (blacksmith), *nutola* (tailor), and *numela* (potter).

While this language analysis is meant to be suggestive rather than definitive, there seems to be a social interpretation implicit in this grouping, perhaps pointing to an archaic notion of links among sensing, affect, dispositions, and vocational qualities. In reflecting on these relationships, one informant suggested that he could "throw more light on the issue of disposition (a person's natural qualities of mind and character/tendency) and vocation" with some examination of "Anlo cultural logic" (Elvis Adikah, personal communication, August 10, 2001). He explained that "a unique but integral part of Anlo cultural philosophy is the belief not only in reincarnation but also destiny. It is believed that people were fated to have particular dispositions and sometimes even vocations. For instance, I know . . . a good number of . . . people who were believed to be the reincarnation of their grandparents."

He went on to explain that the way a family could determine the ancestor who was returning in their child was through:

> The manner of crying (when he was a child), resemblance, his gait (or style of walking), his birthmark, and even his disposition. It follows that many such ones have a predisposition to certain developments. In this respect, if the ancestor was a mild, boisterous, cranky, saintly, or mournful sort of person, [the reincarnated individual] is expected to be the same. And even sometimes his vocation, be it hunting, divination, blacksmithing, or fishing. . . . this philosophy is manifested in *Megbekpokpo na devi* and the *Dzonusasa* (i.e., a ritual marked with libations and tying *gblotsi* and *hloku* beads on the wrist of the infant believed to have reincarnated). Furthermore, a number of Anlo proverbs lend credence to the beliefs that people were fated to have particular dispositions or inclinations. [Elvis Adikah, personal communication, August 10, 2001]

Adikah offered two proverbs as examples. The first—"Akaga ledo megbea akoli (adukpo) o"—means, "A diseased vulture never parts company with the rubbish heap." He interpreted this to signify that "since fate (destiny) has decreed that a vulture should be a scavenger on a rubbish heap, so shall it come to pass even if the vulture is incapacitated by sickness. In the same way, if [an individual] is fated to have a mild or saintly disposition (azolime or *nonome*), or to be a blacksmith, so shall it be." The second proverb—"Menye tsimalemale tae adexe mumuna do o"—means, "The mudfish is odious by nature, but never because he does not bathe." He concluded

with the reflection that "typical qualities and characteristics of a person" are the result of destiny, and "fate or destiny can be translated among Anlos as *Se* or *Ese.*" In this notion of se we find both the roots of "feeling in the body"—seselelame—as well as the socioreligious phenomenon of destiny, fate, or reincarnated soul. This further reinforces the idea that there are links among the four domains of sensation, emotion, disposition, and vocation; or that in their social interpretations, bodily sensations and bodily ways of knowing link up to emotional or affective and dispositional dimensions of personality, and also connect with vocational issues, or the work in which a person is occupied or engaged.

Here we should return to one of the central questions posed at the beginning of the article, stemming from work on the cultural psychology of emotion (Shweder 1993:418): What is the general form of a meaning system that defines an experience as sensory rather than an experience of some other kind? Is sensing limited to *hearing* a sound, *seeing* a face, or *tasting* pepper? Or does sensing also encompass experiences such as balancing one's body as one sits on a stool, taking strides as one moves down the road, intuiting that some event is about to happen?

The notion of a five-senses model revolves around the external senses (hearing, touch, taste, smell, sight) and discounts our reading of internal feelings that arise from balance, kinesthesia, and proprioception. Furthermore, in this model the five senses are distinguished from emotion states such as anger, happiness, sadness, disgust, or surprise. When Anlo-Ewe people invoke the phrase or the term *seselelame* (feel-feel-at-flesh-inside), the experiences they include can range from physical sensations and emotional reactions to feelings they attribute to more generalized dispositions (often considered to be a condition or a result of se—destiny or fate). Their summary notion of this domain, seselelame, treats sensation, emotion, disposition, and vocation as a continuous stream in a domain of bodily experience rather than as separate entities. There is an orientation toward integration in this model, which resists the separations and distinctions reified by a five senses approach. An ethnographic exploration of disposition and kinesthetic sensations, in the following section, will further develop this point.

SESELELAME AND THE WAY WE WALK

Aaron and Kobla never seemed to go straight to the well when their mother sent them to fetch water. I often observed them "horsing around" as they made their way through the compound and out the gate to the community well in the village where we lived. One day, as I watched them running in circles, chasing each other, walking backwards, and swinging their buckets to and fro, I heard their mother shouting in a distressed voice something about how they were walking *lugulugu.* My ears perked up

when I heard that adverb, *lugulugu,* as I had recently begun making a list of different kinds of walks or styles of comportment. I already knew that one could *zo kadzakadza* (walk like a lion),[2] or *zo minyaminya* (walk stealthily, as if eavesdropping), or *zo megbemegbe* (walk backwards, leaving deceptive footprints). As Kobla's mother shouted at them from behind her kitchen wall, I watched them darting from one side of the compound to the other, swaying perilously on the outer edge of a foot, feigning to nearly fall down, and evidently imitating their mother's charge that they were moving lugulugu on their way to the well.

Many people considered azolizozo—movement, walking, or kinesthesia—to have sensorial qualities, and they wanted this phenomenon included in my writings about their sensorium. In addition, several informants had been insisting that I include "morality" among the senses that Anlo-Ewe people held dear. Morality had sensorial qualities, they explained, because of its close association between kinesthetic sensations (in azolizozo or movement) and dispositional feelings (in azolime or one's moral character). Both concepts share the root *zo*—to move or walk. Kobla and Aaron's mother's accusation of her sons' lugulugu approach to getting water from the well seemed like an opportune incident to probe for the logic behind these associations.

I began by asking Elaine, my research assistant, what *lugulugu* really meant. She explained that while a word such as *zo lugulugu* referred in the first instance to bodily motions such as swaying, tarrying, dawdling, or moving as if drunk, it could also be used to refer to a person's character. In response to a daughter's statement that "Kofi is the man I want to marry," Elaine explained that parents might discourage the young woman with the retort, "Tsyo! Ame lugulugu!" The expression reveals the parents' perception that Kofi was a lugulugu man: a person who did not simply move in a tarrying or dawdling fashion, but a person who was not serious—an aimless, irresponsible fellow.

So, were eight-year-old Kobla and ten-year-old Aaron already hopelessly lugulugu? I wondered if a person begins walking lugulugu first and then becomes a lugulugu person or vice versa? In response to my inquiries about this, Kobla and Aaron's mother (along with several other caregivers in our compound) made it clear that they had to be vigilant about the possibility of either. That is, a child could develop either a kind of lugulugu cognitive orientation or lugulugu somatic tendencies, but either way it would permeate other domains of personality. So in the process of fetching water from the well, when Aaron and Kobla were consistently "going this way and that," fooling around, distracting each other from the task, and stirring up trouble, the concern this evoked in their caregivers was that the phenomena that was embodied in these displays would begin to dominate their character. The logic expressed was that if you move in a lugulugu

fashion you experience sensations of lugulugu-ness and begin thinking in a lugulugu way and become a lugulugu person, which is then evident to others from the way your lugulugu character is embodied in your lugulugu walk. Or, if you consistently think in a lugulugu way, you would also move in a lugulugu fashion and basically develop into a lugulugu person. Clearly, the specific case of a kinesthetic phenomenon called *lugulugu* shows how analytic categories of language, cognition, sensation, perception, culture, and embodiment are not experienced in discrete stages at the phenomenal level or from the existential standpoint of being-in-the-world. Seselelame, I would suggest, as a model of how we process information, capitalizes on synesthetic modes of knowing.

The point is that in terms of a cultural logic found among many Anlo-speaking people, there is a clear connection or association between bodily sensations and who you are or who you become: Your character, your moral fortitude is embodied in the way you move, and the way you move embodies an essence of your nature. We should not mistake this consciousness as simply about people *seeing* the child walking lugulugu and thinking that he was wayward, but, rather, informants were quite clear about the sensations the child would experience in the body and then the imaginative structures that would develop in the mind and would be perceived by all involved as a culturally constituted and objectified phenomenon called *lugulugu*.

Perhaps we have a similar cultural logic in our own folk epistemology in Anglo-America. For example, in searching for a translation for *lugulugu,* the term *wishy-washy* comes to mind. Many English-speaking Americans probably believe that if a person feels wishy-washy day in and day out, then the person might actually carry himself with a wavering sort of comportment, and in general have an indecisive character. Intuitively, then, we can appreciate their concern. In Anlo-Ewe contexts, however, there is a striking elaboration of associations among movement, kinesthetic sensations, and moral character that deserves a closer look.

ONOMATOPOEIA IN RELATION TO COMPORTMENT AND GAIT

One notable feature of *lugulugu*—as well as other kinds of movement adverbs—is their typical reduplicated form. In addition, "walks" (which also index one's sense of morality) are symbolized with what Westermann described as "picture words (onomatopes), which attempt to express by their sound the impression conveyed by the senses" (1930:107). The Anlo-Ewe language therefore reflects the belief that movement, walking, or kinesthesia has a distinctively sensory quality. And this, I would suggest, helps to explain why azolizozo (movement) and azolime (dispositional

feelings) fall into the cultural category of seselelame (feeling in the body) for so many Anlo-Ewe people.

Repetitive constructions or instances of reduplication are pervasive in the Ewe language (e.g., Ameka 1999; Ansre 1963; Sapir 1921:76–78; Westermann 1930). Ansre suggests (1963:128) that eight out of every 100 words spoken in Ewe are reduplicated terms, and in a much more recent study, Ameka indicates (1999:78) that Ansre's estimate about reduplication is probably too low. Furthermore, Samarin makes a fascinating observation that in the written version of a particular Ewe-language play there are few ideophones, but when he attended a performance, "the actors adlibbed by adding ideophones to the prepared script" (Samarin 1967:35). This undoubtedly added a sensory quality to the experience of the play that the performers felt moved to include.

In "The Power of Words in African Verbal Arts," Philip Peek suggests that "too often we have allowed our literate analytical heritage, recording methods, and concerns about texts and contexts to obscure the primacy of the oral nature of verbal art" (1981:42). He then argues that verbal art forms in African contexts should not be treated simply as "oral translations" we commit to paper. "We must continually remind ourselves of the limits of literacy and the hazards of exclusively literate scholarship. For many cultures that we seek to understand, hearing is believing" (Peek 1981:42–43). Samarin's experience of noting few ideophones in the written text, but then hearing many when the actors performed the play, is a good example of the difference between exploring certain characteristics of African languages in a literary venue and actually experiencing the speech itself. When one hears and experiences Anlo-Ewe speech, the significance of the sounds and tones of the language are readily apparent—as Samarin implies. We will return to this point in a later discussion of "speech" as a sensory mode.

Ideophones have been described as "vivid vocal images or representations of visual, auditory and other sensory or mental experiences" (Cole 1955:370). They have also been defined as sensory nouns and as words that describe sound, color, smell, manner, appearance, state, action, or intensity (Cole 1955:370). Evans-Pritchard defined ideophones as "poetry in ordinary language" (1962:143). While not intending to take up the linguistic debate about what precisely the ideophone is or does, little disagreement exists over the notion that ideophones intend to evoke sensorially that which they represent. Indeed, when I witnessed Kobla and Aaron swaying and tarrying and swinging, and I heard their mother shouting "lugulugu," I experienced a very visceral (rather than merely intellectual) realization of what was going on—which takes us back to the issue of reduplication specifically in the arena of movement or "walks."[3]

Earlier I mentioned that while I was in the field I began to compile a set of Ewe terms indicating styles of comportment, and if we combine the number of "movement modes" that I noticed (Geurts in press) with a list prepared by Westermann (1930:107–109), it is fair to state that there are more than 50 terms in Ewe representing different kinesthetic styles—from *zo bafobafo* and *zo bulabula* to *zo kodzokodzo* and *zo lumolumo* (with the respective gloss for each being: the brisk movements made by a small man when he walks; walking without looking where one is going; walking with the body stooping forward; the hurried running of small animals, such as rats and mice [Westermann 1930:107–109]). The sheer number of ways one can talk about essentialized kinetic modes alerts us, on one level, to the significance of this domain in Ewe cultural worlds. The fact that many of these are reduplicated terms, onomatopes, or ideophones (see Westermann 1930:107) indicates a kind of "performative elaboration" (Csordas 1993:146) of the sensory dimension of azolizozo (movement) and azolime (moral essence). Or, as Sapir commented in relation to reduplication: "the process is generally employed, *with self-evident symbolism,* to indicate . . . plurality, repetition, customary activity, . . . added intensity," and so forth (1921:76, emphasis added). And so, *with self-evident symbolism,* Ewe speakers refer to kinesthetic experiences, styles of comportment, or simply "the way you walk" with language and attitude that is saturated with sensory valuation.

SPEECH AS A SENSORY FIELD

If it is difficult for many Westerners to allow for movement or kinesthesia to be classified as like phenomena with hearing, touch, taste, sight, and smell; it is even more difficult for us to fathom adding "speech" to this domain. But many Anlo-Ewe speakers do include speech as a kind of "sense" or sensation, and here I will attempt to lay out their reasoning for such a categorization. First, just as sensing in their language is conceptualized with a more general term, *seselelame* (feeling in the body), speaking too falls within a broader category of experience they call *sesetonume,* which means "feeling in the mouth." This (sub)category includes sensations involved in eating, drinking, breathing, regulation of saliva, sexual exchanges, and also speech.

Because we tend to conceptualize speaking as an "active externalization of data" and we think of sensing as a passive receipt of stimulus from something outside our body, and because we think of speaking as learned and sensing as innate (Classen 1993:2–4), we tend to emphasize the distinctions between these bodily experiences. But Anlo speakers emphasize similarities and relationships in the experiences of speaking, eating, kissing, and so forth and call these all *sesetonume:* feeling in the mouth. An

example of the links between speaking and a certain kind of illness may help to demonstrate further the sensorial aspects of speech.

While I was in Ghana, I attended about 15 births, and in this context I often witnessed the effects of something Anlo-speakers referred to by using the term *enu,* which translates as "mouth." In cases where labor pains were severe, when there was a delay in labor, or in the face of various complications during birth, the attending midwife usually sprayed the woman's abdomen with saliva and brushed it with a twelve inch whisk, in an effort to discard the causes of enu. *Enu* is the term for a category of spiritual sicknesses (referred to as *gbogbomedo* and distinguished from *dotsoafe,* which are commonplace illnesses) that includes a host of afflictions to pregnant women and diseases that can kill children or render them deaf and dumb. The cause is deemed bad will or enmity among household members or kin. Contrary to what we might expect, however, it is not the meaning of the words expressing malice or malevolence that causes someone to fall ill but, rather, the sensory power contained in the sounds themselves.

The most common meaning of the word *enu* is simply "mouth," but it also refers to "opening, entrance, edge; contents, quantity; effect" (Westermann 1973:177). Pregnant women and other vulnerable adults can be seized with enu because of disrespectful, wicked, or evil things that pass through the mouths of people in the household. In fact, through sesetonume (feeling in the mouth) one can absorb one's own bad speech, and so speaking is believed to be one of the primary forces involved in the etiology of enu. Children, on the other hand, are not believed to contract enu from their own sesetonume, or feelings in the mouth, but rather through bodily absorption of the physical power of the words.

Stoller has pointed out that for the Songhay of Niger, as well as in many West African contexts, speech is believed to have a power or energy independent of its referential quality (1989:122). Words are not only information or knowledge but also sound, so in addition to their meaning, words have a physical force that operates not only at the site of the ear and mind but throughout the entire body. Peek has made a similar observation: "When we investigate beliefs concerning sound in African cultures, we find that human speech is frequently conceived as a tangible entity" and that "auditory space is perceived as a physical field" (1981:21). The Anlo term for speech and talking *(nufofo)* contains the morpheme *fo,* which means to strike, beat, blow—symbolizing the dynamic power ascribed to the words themselves. As a scholar of the neighboring Fon people has stated, "Critical to the activation potential of speech is both its transferential nature and its potent social and psychodynamic grounding" (Blier 1995:77). The "transferential nature" of nufofo (speaking) includes more than imparting meaning or "mental ideas," for in enu, speaking is one of

the culprits in the transference of emotional and physiological disturbance, especially to children. In the presence of an acrimonious verbal exchange, it is not simply the meaning of the dialogue that causes children and pregnant women to fall sick but, rather, it is perceived as a phenomena of seselelame (feeling in the body), and the animosity and rancor is transferred to their bodies in part through the striking action of the sound of speech itself. This reinforces the local cultural logic that "speech is irreversible; that is its fatality. What has been said cannot be unsaid, except by adding to it" (Blier 1995:76–77).

So it is not simply the hearing of an argument and the consequent psychological effect that is at stake here but, rather, the notion that once speech containing animus is externalized, adults can absorb their own anger through sesetonume (feeling in the mouth) and children absorb the rancor through seselelame (feeling in the body, flesh, or skin). Clearly, the proverb "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" would not ring true in this cultural setting. There is a level of direct experience and integration (in this cultural model of how experience occurs and how information is processed) that makes it somewhat different than what I earlier called the "five-senses model." That is to say, the five-senses model creates the illusion that we experience the world through distinct, separate modes of hearing, touch, taste, sight, and smell. It suggests to us that words can be experienced simply as meanings entering our minds through the ear, and it discounts the import of the sound itself. This is not to say that Euro-American English-speaking people do not pay attention to the tone of voice in which someone delivers a message but, rather, that our intellectual model for how we experience speech lacks the theory of sensory integration that we find in the Anlo-Ewe category of seselelame, which suggests that the word itself (independent of a psychological processing of its meaning) has the sensory power to change a person's state of being.

CONCLUSION

Now that we have explored how *walks* and *talks* help further our understanding of Anlo-Ewe cultural categories and an anthropology of the senses, it is time to return to *rocks,* and to my experience of driving over the stone in the center of our compound. I recently came across several written versions of a trickster story called "Yiyi kple Kadzidoe" ("Spider and the Squirrel"). Both sources attribute this story to Ewe speakers, but it may be a tale that has circulated more generally throughout Africa. Nonetheless, in Ewe worlds Yiyi is the Trickster (Ananse in Ashanti contexts) who figures prominently in West African psychology and lore.

Joseph Bruchac recounted this story in the following way:

> One year there is a great famine. Everyone goes out looking for food. As Yiyi walks along, he comes upon a stone with eyes. But he is so tired that he says nothing. He just sits down under a tree near the stone. An antelope comes along and sees the stone.
>
> "It is a stone with eyes!" the antelope says. Then it falls down dead.
>
> Interesting, Yiyi thinks. He drags the antelope home for dinner. Next day he goes back by the stone. A rabbit comes by.
>
> "What is that?" says Yiyi, pointing at the stone.
>
> "It is a stone with eyes," says the rabbit.
>
> The rabbit falls down dead, too. Yiyi drags it home. From then on, every day, Yiyi goes out and sits by that stone.
>
> One day, though, a squirrel is up in that tree. It sees what Yiyi is doing. It comes down the tree and walks by Yiyi.
>
> "What is that?" says Yiyi, pointing at the stone.
>
> "What is that?" says the squirrel.
>
> "That there," says Yiyi.
>
> "I don't see anything," says the squirrel.
>
> "Are you blind?" says Yiyi, getting angry. "That!"
>
> "What?" says the squirrel.
>
> Yiyi says, "Can't you see? It is a stone with eyes."
>
> Then Yiyi falls down dead.
>
> [1997:21–22]

Earlier I mentioned that in Ewe worlds stones may not be what they seem. A legba, in fact, while it may appear to be a stone, is a spiritual guardian of thresholds. There are *legbawo* (plural form of *legba*) that have been constructed by humans, and these often have more distinctive shape to the face or body than did the one over which I drove the tire. But there are also legbawo that have been placed in their position not by humans but by spirits or gods, and these often merely resemble a rock.

Shweder makes a similar point about *weeds* in his effort to explain cultural psychology's concept of *intentional worlds*. He argues that "Because a weed is a weed is a weed, but only in some intentional world, there is no impersonal, neutral, 'objective,' 'scientific,' independent-of-human-response, botanical, genetic, or 'natural kind' definition of plants that we can specify *in the abstract* or *in general* which ones count as weeds" (Shweder 1991:75). His point is that "intentional things" have no identity or natural reality outside of our perceptions and designations of them as "weeds" or a "legba" or a "rock." He suggests that,

> in some fascinating and important sense, the weeds in our gardens achieve their reality because we are implicated in their existence, and we achieve our reality, at least in part, by letting them become implicated in ours. Our identities interpenetrate and take each other into account. Without us nature knows little of the existence of weeds. [Shweder 1991:75]

How one responds to a particular plant—shall I eat it? sell it? burn it? use it as medicine?—is contingent upon sociocultural context and biosocialization. While all human groups experience and talk about "feeling in the body," the particular version that might cause a person to sense fear when driving over a stone is seselelame.

What do these examples then reveal about the *generic shape of the meaning system* that governs sensory experiences in Anlo-Ewe worlds? Raphael made the point that "when you have a sensation—some source of seselelame—you must analyze and understand what that thing can create within you or within the other inmates of the house. It is a message . . . and you have to analyze it properly." Seselelame, in certain ways, can be conceived of as a way of attending to and processing such "messages"— which include sensations, perceptions, intuitions, emotions, and even imaginations. It is, in the first instance, a category of "feelings within the body"—literally, "feel-feel-at-flesh-inside." But as Raphael makes clear, seselelame goes beyond pure physical sensation.

When I drove my tire over the legba in the center of our compound, I experienced a flood of sensations, emotions, and intuitions that I nonetheless ignored since my "cognitive system" concluded that it was simply a rock. Having been conditioned, throughout my life and in particular through my training as an academic, to dismiss such "feelings" as I had when running over the rock, I was able (or willing) to distinguish the different facets of the experience: (1) the sensation of the car tire in contact with an obstructing object, (2) the startle in my body or a physiological jolt, (3) the intuition that it was taboo in this cultural context to drive over this particular object, and (4) the cognitive conclusion that in the end it was only a rock. Raphael told me that my response was simply foolish. He wondered how I could receive so many "messages" about the significance of this event and still take such a materialist perspective—concluding that it was simply a rock. This would be like Kobla and Aaron's mother thinking, "Oh, it's just a walk," rather than knowing the connections between the sensations of lugulugu and the potential for her sons to turn into lugulugu boys.

In conclusion, *seselelame* represents a cultural meaning system in which bodily feeling is attended to as a source of vital information. Instead of concentrating on distinctions between sensations and emotions, and between intuition and cognition, these experiences (or processes) are often subsumed in one category called *seselelame.* Integration of processes is valued, so that a direct connection is perceived between ways of moving and sensations of motion with how one thinks and the kind of disposition one harbors as a core of one's moral character.

Antonio Damasio (1999) has described similar processes of subjective experiences among Western populations and has argued that there are clear links among bodily feelings, emotions, consciousness, and cognition. I want to make clear, therefore, that I am not suggesting that seselelame will be completely foreign or counterintuitive in relation to experiences that many Euro-Americans might have. But traditional models for *how we think about how we perceive* do indeed contain rather rigid distinctions

between body and mind, between feeling and thought, and seselelame contains little of that dichotomous analysis.

"Probably every cultural category 'creates' an entity, in the sense that what is understood to be 'out there' is affected by the culturally based associations built into the category system" (D'Andrade 1984:91). While the five-senses model has been "created" as a cultural category through the process of more than two thousand years of Western tradition, in seselelame we are confronted with not only the nonuniversality of the five-senses model but with an Anlo theory of the nature of being and an Anlo theory of knowing that thoroughly and completely links knowledge and reason, along with the development of morality and identity, to the body and to *feelings in the flesh.*

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NOTES

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1. For an exception to this, see D'Andrade 1987. This article uses perception, emotion, desire, beliefs and knowledge, intentions and resolutions in exploring a folk model of the mind, not limiting the analysis to the dichotomous categories of cognition and affect.

2. In Westermann's dictionary, *ɔɔ kadzakadza* is translated as "to walk awkwardly, clumsily." However, my informants adamantly disagreed with this gloss and explained that *ɔɔ kadzakadza* is "to walk like a lion." This seems to be reinforced by Westermann's translation of *akadza,* which is "readiness, as for a fight." Informants indicated that lions walk assertively, forcefully, majestically, even exhibiting an air of challenge (as if ready for a fight). In addition, the term *lion* in Ewe is *dzata.*

3. Here I invoke my own experience when hearing the word *lugulugu,* but Ewe speakers report that they themselves experience these reduplicated terms as both humorous and sensorially evocative. They state that they purposefully choose these kinds of terms when they want to drive home a point in a colorful way and summon *feelings* in their audience, in addition to images or thoughts.

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