



# Sensuous Scholarship (Contemporary Ethnography)

*Paul Stoller*

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## **Sensuous Scholarship (Contemporary Ethnography)** Paul Stoller

Among the Songhay of Mali and Niger, who consider the stomach the seat of personality, learning is understood not in terms of mental activity but in bodily terms. Songhay bards study history by "eating the words of the ancestors," and sorcerers learn their art by ingesting particular substances, by testing their flesh with knives, by mastering pain and illness.

In *Sensuous Scholarship* Paul Stoller challenges contemporary social theorists and cultural critics who—using the notion of embodiment to critique Eurocentric and phallogocentric predispositions in scholarly thought—consider the body primarily as a text that can be read and analyzed. Stoller argues that this attitude is in itself Eurocentric and is particularly inappropriate for anthropologists, who often work in societies in which the notion of text, and textual interpretation, is foreign.

Throughout *Sensuous Scholarship* Stoller argues for the importance of understanding the "sensuous epistemologies" of many non-Western societies so that we can better understand the societies themselves and what their epistemologies have to teach us about human experience in general.

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