



Senses and Society

THEMATIC GROUP NEWSLETTER

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The Tendrils of Cognition. (Detail) Hans Kristo, 2024.

Note from the
Newsletter Editor

PAGES 2-5

Profiles

PAGE 8

Upcoming Events

PAGES 9-10



PUBLICATION HIGHLIGHTS

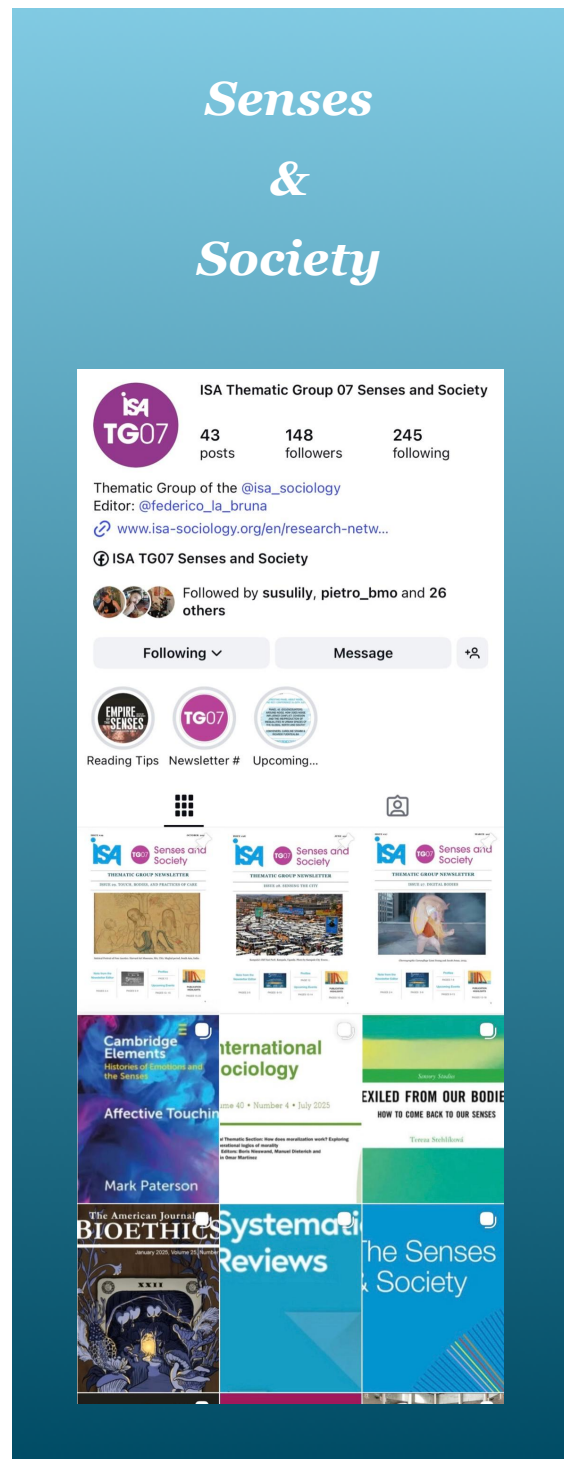
PAGES 10-15

Editorial Note

Welcome and welcome back to the TGo7 Senses and Society Newsletter. I am delighted to announce that, over the past few months, the number of our members has increased, a sign that our work is yielding excellent results.

2025 has undoubtedly been an exceptionally eventful and challenging year for our group, beginning with our substantial involvement in the ISA Forum of Sociology. The Rabat event introduced us to new researchers who have engaged with our themes and enabled us to meet scholars of the senses from every corner of the globe. At the same time, the Forum also represented an opportunity for reflection on the path we are taking as a research group. Not least, we view the Forum as a moment of encounter and community-building: it allowed us to further strengthen our fruitful collaboration with WG8, RC54, and TG12, with whom our objects of study partially overlap, giving rise to insightful and multifaceted observations, and with whom we share, above all, a collaborative and peace-oriented approach to research. In dark times marked by conflict and war, hope and collaboration become more necessary than ever for our professional well-being and for the scientific community as a whole.

A quick reminder: since autumn 2023, the official TGo7 Facebook and Instagram pages have been active. Follow us to stay informed about TGo7 activities. Please note that since the beginning of the year, all communications should be directed to our institutional address: isa-tg07@isa-sociology.org. Kindly update your records accordingly.



I hope you will enjoy this issue.

In this issue

For the past two years, our newsletter has been published at the beginning of the year in a reduced yet essential version, intended to keep readers up to date with recent developments and to prevent the late-May issue from becoming overly demanding. In this issue, as always, readers will find a thematic focus—on this occasion, the relationship between the senses and cognition—explored through an editorial commentary and a selection of suggested readings.

Beyond these updates, the News and Opportunities section features a call for Expression of Interest for early career researchers. You will not, however, find a section devoted to the first TGO7 congress. This is because we have decided to release a separate communication dedicated exclusively to our event. In the meantime, we can anticipate that we are currently working on the organisation of a hybrid event, both on-site and online, to be held in Vietnam in the second half of 2026. This event is of great importance to us, not only because it will be our first meeting outside the framework of an ISA Congress or Forum, but also in light of our broader growth strategy. Indeed, organising an event of our own—which, as I will explain in more detail in future communications, will include both a conference component and a workshop for early-career researchers—represents a symbolic step towards achieving working group status.

As always, this issue includes the Profiles section, a recurring feature that introduces members of our group and their research interests, strengthening the sense of community we have fostered since the group's inception. Thus, [I kindly encourage our new members, early career scholars, and anyone interested to submit a brief description of their academic path, current work, and interests](#) (by sending an email to tg07.sensesandsociety@gmail.com).

Senses and Cognition

This issue addresses a long-standing but still unsettled question in the sociology of perception: how sensing and cognition are entangled in the ordinary production of social reality. Rather than treating the senses as pre-cognitive channels or cognition as a purely abstract process, the contributions featured in the Publication Highlights session of this issue start from a shared premise: perception is already structured, oriented, and meaningful, while cognition unfolds through sensorially organised environments, routines,

and practices. From this perspective, knowing is not something that happens after sensation, but something that takes shape within it.

References:

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- DeNora, (2014). Making sense of reality: Culture and perception in everyday life.
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The theme of this issue was inspired by a presentation we attended during last summer's Forum, in the joint session of TGo7 and WGo8 *Affect, Emotions, Feelings, Senses, Sensibilities: Conceptual Consistencies and Inconsistencies*. In this presentation, entitled *How Does Normality Feel Like? The Case for Unmarked Emotions*, Lorenzo Sabetta argues for the often-neglected realm of ordinary, low-intensity affect that underpins everyday experience and frames more intense emotions, highlighting the conceptual importance of emotional regularity and calm states for the study of perception. Building on this premise, everyday situations are made intelligible through patterned modes of attention, habitual perceptual orientations, and tacit forms of recognition that rarely rise to the level of explicit awareness. Much of social life is thus sustained not by moments of heightened intensity or disruption, but by relatively stable perceptual-cognitive states in which bodies, objects, and situations feel "as expected." These states provide the background against which difference, novelty, and salience can emerge at all.

Classic phenomenological accounts of perception (Merleau-Ponty et al., 2013; Schutz, 1967) already pointed to this continuity between sensing and understanding, emphasising that experience is never given as raw data but always appears within horizons of anticipation, familiarity, and practical relevance. More recent work at the intersection of sensory studies (Dubois et al., 2021), sociology of knowledge, and cognitive science has extended this insight, showing how perception is calibrated through social learning, linguistic categories, and shared repertoires of meaning. What is noticed, ignored, foregrounded, or taken for granted depends not only on individual

capacities, but on collectively organised sensory-cognitive regimes.

Research on olfaction, ritual experience, and everyday environments makes this especially visible. Smells, atmospheres, textures, and rhythms rarely impose meaning on their own; instead, they become cognitively consequential through processes of attribution, comparison, and stabilisation that are deeply social (Cerulo, 2018). Sensory experience, in this sense, is neither exceptional nor dramatic by default. It is repetitive, often subdued, and largely unmarked—yet precisely for this reason, it plays a crucial role in sustaining attention, shaping memory, and anchoring expectations over time. Engagements with neuroscience (Villers-Sidan, 2019) and contemporary theories of perception (DeNora, 2014) further complicate the picture, suggesting that cognition itself is trained and modulated by the sensory environments in which it unfolds. Rather than opposing social theory and brain science, these approaches invite a dialogue around how perceptual regularities, attentional habits, and environmental cues contribute to learning, anticipation, and orientation. Cognition appears less as a sequence of discrete decisions and more as an ongoing adjustment to sensorially structured worlds.

Taken together, the works discussed in this issue encourage a shift away from exceptionalist accounts of perception and cognition. They draw attention to the quiet, continuous processes through which social actors remain attuned to their surroundings, navigate familiar situations, and sustain a sense of normality. In doing so, they suggest that the sociology of the senses is also, inevitably, a sociology of cognition—one concerned not only with how we feel and perceive, but with how social reality becomes thinkable, stable, and livable in everyday life.

If you miss the Newsletter issue #29 on "Touch, Bodies, and Practices of Care": don't worry! You can investigate what sensory atmospheres are and how they can be a tool for understanding society through our senses [here](#).

Don't forget there are some active links (clickable URLs) in this Newsletter, especially useful for the 'Publication Highlights' section ([page 10](#)).

Please feel free to email me (isa-tg07@isa-sociology.org) with any relevant news, publications, or calls for papers that fellow Group members could benefit from.

Federico La Bruna

Newsletter Editor of TGo7

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News and Opportunities

Call for Expression of Interest

Sensory Studies for a More-than-human World early career development network (deadline February 13)

"We invite expressions of interest from early career scholars – especially doctoral students and ECRs who are not in permanent employment – to apply for a place on a development network attached to the AHRC Curiosity project 'Sensory Studies for a More-than-human world'. We are looking for people based anywhere in the world whose research sits at the intersection of sensory studies and the environmental humanities or in the field of sensory ecology and who feel that they would benefit from regular peer mentorship and access to a broader network of scholars working in those areas. Meetings of this network will be held online on a monthly basis across the eighteen-month duration of the funded AHRC project. Hosted by Dr Andy Flack (Associate Professor of Environmental and Sensory History at the University of Bristol, and project Principal Investigator), and with contributions from project co-investigators Nathan Morehouse (Cincinnati), Mark Paterson (Pitt), and Victoria Bates (Bristol) the monthly network meetings will provide space for participants to share work-in-progress with interested peers. In return, participants will commit to commenting on others' work, too.

To apply for a place, please send an expression of interest of up to 300 words - indicating motivations for participation in the network – to andrew.flack@bristol.ac.uk by 13 February 2026, 5PM BST.

New Book Series

We are pleased to share that a [Call for Proposals](#) is now open for the new book series Environment, Senses and Emotions, published by [University of Exeter Press](#) and edited by Tatiana Konrad (University of Vienna). Below you can find the full description of the call.

"Environment, Senses and Emotions aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of how environmental crises are represented, perceived and understood through the senses and emotions and the human impulse to make sense of the world. Books in this series enhance understandings of environmental crises, engaging with these crises' sensory and emotional dimensions, highlighting this emerging area as important to a number of research disciplines. The series also promotes more-than-human perspectives and analyzes how stories narrated by plants, animals and other more-than-human or multisensory accounts of ecological interactions shape and convey environmental knowledge. The series welcomes edited collections and monographs written by scholars, practitioners, activists and thinkers

who address environmental crises, broadly understood from natural disasters and local problems to global issues, and who explore these crises' sensory and emotional dimensions, including eco-anxiety, eco-guilt, eco-shame and solastalgia, among others. The series welcomes contributions from the Global South and prioritizes decolonial perspectives, examining structures of power and subjugation related to activism, justice and ecological well-being."

To become a member of TGo7

You're interested in sensory scholarship. You read this Newsletter. So why not become a member of our thematic group?

What are the benefits? You are already on a mailing list and receive a triannual Newsletter. But becoming a member means you get to shape an agenda in sensory scholarship, propose international events, and get to pitch ideas for conference sessions at ISA. We need your ideas and your energy. The bigger we become as a TG, the more we can do, and we can then help younger scholars attend future conferences and events. With membership of TGo7 you can also join our Board and help steer our activities and priorities.

Interested in joining?

It is no longer possible to become a member of TGo7 without paying ISA registration fees. being part of a RC/WG/TG now is possible only for ISA members. Below, you can find how to become a member of TGo7 with a minimal contribution.

- 1) Log in at <https://members.isa-sociology.org/login>.
- 2) If you do not have an ISA membership account, you need to register (free) here: <https://members.isa-sociology.org/register>. Enter your biographical information.
- 3) If you do not have an ISA membership, you need become a member by following the instruction at: <https://members.isa-sociology.org/my-affiliations>. Within the same process you will be able to join also the RC/WG/TG you are interested in.
- 4) In case you already have an ISA membership, on the same page (<https://members.isa-sociology.org/my-affiliations>), will appear the button for 'Affiliate to RC/WG/TG'.
- 5) This will bring up invoicing details for 'Update affiliation'. Scroll down for the list of research councils, with TGo7 towards the bottom. Check that box.
- 6) You can then enter payment data (credit card). The standard option is \$20 for 4 years, but if you need a discount, e.g. because of student status, and that option does not come up on the form, do contact the ISA team (isa@isa-sociology.org)

Profiles

Satomi Yamamoto, Ph.D. (syamamot@seinan-gu.ac.jp)

Satomi Yamamoto is a Professor of Sociology and English Communication, Department of Foreign Language Studies, Seinan Gakuin University, Japan

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6924-6801>

"My research applies a phenomenological, sensing-based lens to public life, exploring how people attune to changing temporal and sensory rhythms in everyday settings. One strand focuses on the phenotype of fear and my book project, *The Carp Divide*, examining how humans and nonhumans are entangled in ecological risk and how these interactions shape daily life, community responses, and temporal experience. A second strand explores grace without teleology and the market of continuity, drawing on practices such as adult ballet to show how continuity, balance, and calm can be cultivated without reliance on linear progress. I look forward to connecting with TGO7 members with shared interests in sensory sociology, ecology, or temporal attunement."



Sunwoo Kim (skim003@gold.ac.uk)

Sunwoo Kim is a PhD researcher at Goldsmiths, University of London (final stage). His research examines how everyday anonymity, isolation, and loneliness are sensorially experienced and negotiated in officetels (high-rise residential units for single-person households) in the Seoul Metropolitan Area. Using an ANT-informed lens alongside sensory ethnography, he explores how everyday non-relations and non-encounters are configured through spatial arrangements and technologies (e.g., corridors/lifts, keycards, CCTV, parcel deliveries), as well as through residents' sensory practices of attunement, avoidance, and ongoing adjustment. By tracing how co-presence is managed without direct interaction, his work highlights how "being alone" is organised as an everyday accomplishment in contemporary vertical urban living.



Upcoming Events

Beyond Seeing: Fashion at the Intersection of Inclusion and Innovation, • Sensory Practices in Disability Arts and Everyday Life Lecture Series • 06 March 26 • Online - Concordia University, Montreal

Concordia University is offering a webinar led by Irma Jokštytė-Stanevičienė, a journalist and broadcaster focusing on disability, accessibility, and inclusive culture, and Vidmina Stasiulytė, a researcher, senior lecturer, and artist whose work brings together experimental aesthetics, sonic expression, and social inclusion. Registration is available [here](#). A description of the talk follows.



"This lecture presents insights from the international research project Beyond Seeing (2017–2018), initiated by the Goethe-Institut Paris in collaboration with ESMOD Berlin, Institut Français de la Mode (Paris), La Cambre (Brussels), and the Swedish School of Textiles at the University of Borås, together with organizations for the blind and visually impaired. Irma Jokštytė-Stanevičienė and Vidmina Stasiulytė together with other project participants explored how fashion can be designed, experienced, and communicated beyond visual perception, focusing on touch, sound, movement, and other sensory interactions. Drawing on interdisciplinary workshops, collaborations between designers and visually impaired participants, and the outcomes showcased in the final exhibition at La Villette, Paris, the lecture highlights innovative design methodologies that challenge the visual dominance of fashion and propose more inclusive, multisensory approaches to fashion design and education."

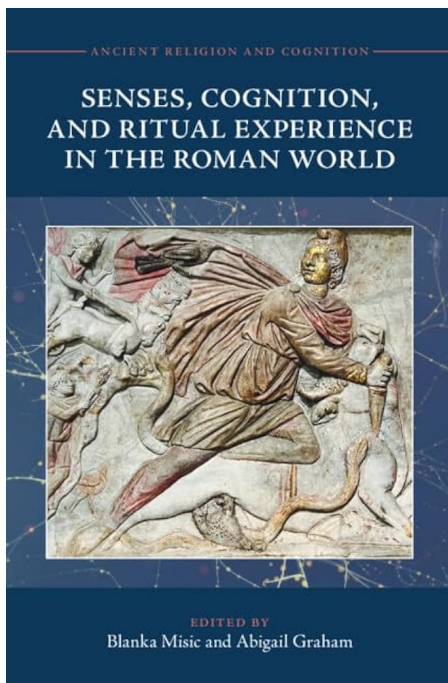
Disordering Language: The Poetics of a Body in Movement, • Sensory Practices in Disability Arts and Everyday Life Lecture Series • 03 April 26 • Online - Concordia University, Montreal

Within the same seminar series, Concordia University is also offering a webinar led by Cai Glover, a Montreal-based dance artist, choreographer, and artistic director whose work foregrounds the poetics of movement, language, and embodied identity. Registration is available [here](#). A description of the talk follows.

"In his talk, Cai will describe, and gesticulate towards, a creative process that is intent on developing a Deaf-conscious approach to art making. Rather than build choreography using techniques of dance established by institutions inaccessible to Deaf people, Cai creates with an embodied expression of poetics through the transposition of sign language into movement. Blurring the boundaries between signing, poetry, and physical motion, his work offers an example of how disability and sensory experience can shape new aesthetics of movement and communication. Cai will demonstrate how he has built choreography from the pulse of imagery and feeling without relying on musical input for rhythm. Cai's creations are a prioritizing of the gestured and the danced word form; moving more deeply into a 3 dimensional language; the signing and signifying body and exploring its potential for new expression."

Publication Highlights

Abigail Graham and Blanka Misic. (Eds.) Senses, Cognition, and Ritual Experience in the Roman World. Cambridge University Press, 2024.



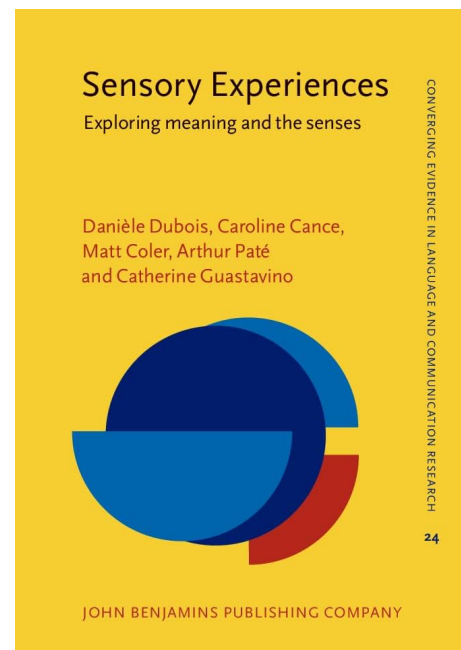
In light of this issue's focus on the entanglement of sensing and cognition in the ordinary production of social reality, the first publication I would like to highlight is **Senses, Cognition, and Ritual Experience in the Roman World**, edited by Abigail Graham and Blanka Misic. The volume advances this theme by demonstrating that sensory experience in ritual contexts is never merely perceptual, but is cognitively organised through shared environments, practices, and expectations. By foregrounding embodied participation and collective meaning-making beyond elite textual accounts, it bridges sensory studies, cognitive approaches, and the sociology of religion, offering a compelling illustration of how perception becomes socially intelligible and memorable through patterned, sensorially structured worlds. Below, I provide the publisher's description.

"How do the senses shape the way we perceive, understand, and remember ritual experiences? This book applies cognitive and sensory approaches to Roman rituals, reconnecting readers with religious experiences as members of an embodied audience. These

approaches allow us to move beyond the literate elites to examine broader audiences of diverse individuals, who experienced rituals as participants and/or performers. Case studies of ritual experiences from a variety of places, spaces, and contexts across the Roman world, including polytheistic and Christian rituals, state rituals, private rituals, performances, and processions, demonstrate the dynamic and broad-scale application that cognitive approaches offer for ancient religion, paving the way for future interdisciplinary engagement."

Danièle Dubois et al. Sensory Experiences. Exploring Meaning and the Senses. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2021.

Against the backdrop of this issue's exploration of the intertwined nature of sensing and cognition, *Sensory Experiences: Exploring Meaning and the Senses* by Danièle Dubois and colleagues stands out as a foundational contribution. The volume develops a situated cognitive approach that understands sensory experience as inherently meaningful, socially organised, and mediated by language, challenging reductive accounts of perception as mere information processing. By examining how perception, meaning, and cognition emerge across different sensory modalities and practices, the book offers a rigorous framework for analysing the sensorial conditions through which social reality becomes intelligible. Below, I provide the publisher's description.



"Sensory Experiences: Exploring meaning and the senses describes the collective elaboration of a situated cognitive approach with an emphasis on the relations between language and cognition within and across different sensory modalities and practices. This approach, grounded in 40 years of empirical research, is a departure from the analytic, reductive view of human experiences as information processing. The book is structured into two parts. Each author first introduces the situated cognitive approach from their respective sensory domains (vision, audition, olfaction, gustation). The second part is the collective effort to derive methodological guidelines respecting the ecological validity of experimental investigations while formulating operational answers to applied questions (such as the sensory quality of environments and product design). This book will be of interest to students, researchers and practitioners dealing with sensory experiences and anyone who wants to understand and celebrate the cultural diversity of human productions that make life enjoyable!"

Karen A. Cerulo. Scents and Sensibility: Olfaction, Sense-Making, and Meaning Attribution. American Sociological Review, 2018.



Focusing on olfaction as a privileged site where perception, cognition, and social meaning intersect, Karen A. Cerulo's **Scents and Sensibility: Olfaction, Sense-Making, and Meaning Attribution** offers a compelling contribution to the themes of this issue. The article demonstrates how sensory experience is never neutral but is cognitively and culturally organised through shared classificatory schemes and interpretive routines. By tracing how

smells are decoded, stabilised, and mobilised in social interaction, Cerulo shows how sensorial cues become meaningful within patterned perceptual-cognitive processes that sustain social boundaries and relations. Below, I provide the abstract of the article.

"How are smells invested with meaning and how do those meanings structure interactions and group relations? I use cultural theories of meaning-making to explore these questions, situating my inquiry in the world of commercially marketed perfumes. Using blind smell tests in focus groups, I examine how individuals make sense of certain fragrances absent direction from manufacturers or marketing materials. I find that most participants can correctly decode perfume manufacturers' intended message, target users, and usage sites. I unpack the role of culture in these initial classifications of smells, and later, in how participants apply those evaluations to reify social boundaries and reproduce social relations—especially with reference to race and class. I also identify two cognitive mechanisms—embodied simulation and iterative reprocessing—illustrating how these mechanisms facilitate a dynamic interaction between practical and discursive modes of consciousness in deciphering smells. Finally, I elaborate the role of sociocultural location in olfactory meaning-making. People in all locations may be familiar with public olfactory codes, but social position influences how participants think about, interpret, and apply those codes in meaning-making."

Noha Abbassy, Momen El-Husseiny & Sami Shaker. Smell-walking as a cognitive mapping tool: investigating the smellscape of Syrian food for placemaking in Cairo's outskirts Urban Design International, 2025.

By foregrounding olfactory perception within the study of urban cognition, *Smell-walking as a Cognitive Mapping Tool* by Noha Abbassy, Momen El-Husseiny, and Sami Shaker speaks

directly to this issue's concern with sensorially organised modes of knowing. The article demonstrates how spatial understanding and processes of placemaking emerge through embodied, multisensory practices, rather than being grounded in vision alone. Through the methodological deployment of smell-walking, it shows how cognition is shaped by sensory routines, memory, and affect, and how ordinary perceptual encounters participate in the ongoing production of meaningful urban environments. Below, I reproduce the abstract of the article.

"Cognitive mapping is central to urban design. As a pioneer of cognitive mapping, Kevin Lynch focused his work on tangible visual elements while only acknowledging other intangible attributes. In an attempt to bridge the gap between Lynch's cognitive mapping tools and sensorial studies, this paper explores smell-walking as a method of cognitive mapping in the context of Cairo. Through a designed smell walk experiment, 25 participants documented their immediate sensations, past experiences, and memories evoked by the smells of Syrian food practices in an open market situated at the edge of El-Rehab, a gated community on the outskirts of Cairo. This pilot study is a step forward in renewing The image of the city by displaying a smell map, participants' cognitive image, smellscape, and placemaking narratives. It concludes with the collective cognitive perception of a hybrid smellscape that triggers hunger, happiness, and nostalgia."

URBAN DESIGN *International*

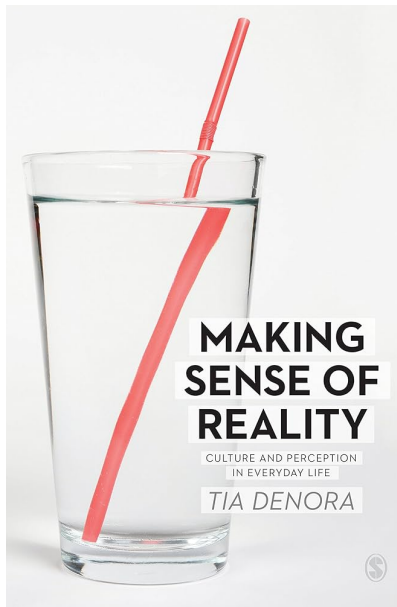
Volume 27
Number 2
Summer 2016



Tia DeNora. Making Sense of Reality Culture and Perception in Everyday Life. SAGE Publications Ltd, 2014.

Shifting the focus from specific sensory modalities to the broader question of how social reality is produced and sustained, *Making Sense of Reality: Culture and Perception in Everyday Life* by Tia DeNora provides a key conceptual anchor for this issue. The book examines how realities are not simply perceived or known, but actively accomplished through culturally embedded, sensorially mediated practices that organise attention, interpretation, and action. By foregrounding the role of objects, technologies, and embodied routines in shaping what comes to count as "real," DeNora offers a nuanced account of how perception and cognition operate together in the ongoing production of cultural order and everyday worlds. Below, I provide the publisher's description.

"What is reality and how do we make sense of it in everyday life? Why do some realities seem more real than others, and what of seemingly contradictory and multiple realities? This book



considers reality as we represent, perceive and experience it. It suggests that the realities we take as 'real' are the result of real-time, situated practices that draw on and draw together many things - technologies and objects, people, gestures, meanings and media. Examining these practices illuminates reality (or rather our sense of it) as always 'virtually real', that is simplified and artfully produced. This examination also shows us how the sense of reality that we make is nonetheless real in its consequences. Making Sense of Reality offers students and educators a guide to analysing social life. It develops a performance-based perspective ('doing things with') that highlights the ever-revised dimension of realities and links this perspective to a focus on object-relations and an ecological model of culture-in-action."

On the shoulders of giants

M-Marsel Mesulam. From sensation to cognition. Brain, 1998.

Concluding this selection, we turn to the On the Shoulders of Giants section with M. Marsel Mesulam's seminal article From Sensation to Cognition. In this contribution, the focus shifts explicitly to the biological foundations of the relationship between sensing and knowing, offering a neuroscientific account of how sensory information is progressively integrated into cognitive processes through hierarchically organised and reciprocally connected cortical systems. Including this work allows us to deliberately cross the conventional boundaries between sociology and neuroscience, inviting dialogue rather than separation between social theory and brain science. In this case, only a portion of the article's extensive abstract is presented below.



"Sensory information undergoes extensive associative elaboration and attentional modulation as it becomes incorporated into the texture of cognition. This process occurs along a core synaptic hierarchy which includes the primary sensory, upstream unimodal, downstream unimodal, heteromodal, paralimbic and limbic zones of the cerebral cortex. Connections from one zone to another are reciprocal and allow higher synaptic levels to exert a feedback (top-down) influence upon earlier levels of processing. Each cortical area

provides a nexus for the convergence of afferents and divergence of efferents. The resultant synaptic organization supports parallel as well as serial processing, and allows each sensory event to initiate multiple cognitive and behavioural outcomes. Upstream sectors of unimodal association areas encode basic features of sensation such as colour, motion, form and pitch. More complex contents of sensory experience such as objects, faces, word-forms, spatial locations and sound sequences become encoded within downstream sectors of unimodal areas by groups of coarsely tuned neurons... (Continue)"