



# Senses and Society

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## THEMATIC GROUP NEWSLETTER

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Missing the sense of smell, Engin Akyurt 2020. From *Horizon*, EU Research Magazine.

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Editorial Note

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ISA World  
Congress 2022

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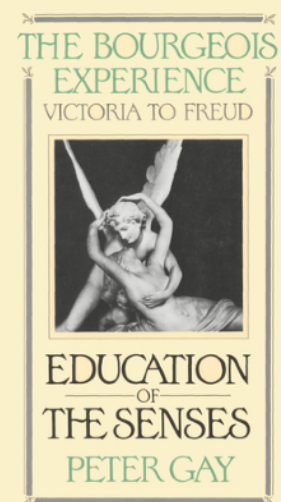
**PUBLICATION  
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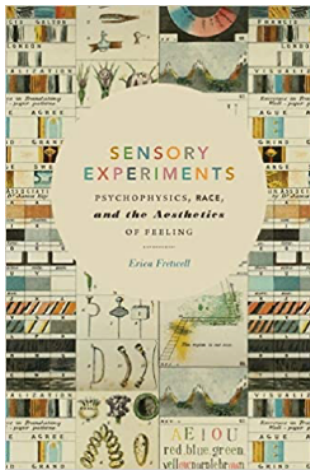
## Editorial Note

Just as some of the industrialized countries of the Global North were beginning to lift COVID restrictions, and the colourful signs of Spring in the northern hemisphere were becoming increasingly visible and fragrant, the astonishing build-up of military forces, and then the inevitable brutal invasion by Russia of Ukraine, has been in our thoughts now for weeks. Scenes of displacement on a vast scale from Kyiv, Mariupol, and other Ukrainian cities to neighboring European countries (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia) and further afield are in the news, at the time of writing close to 3 million people. People who had, until only a few weeks ago, homes with decorations, bills and trinkets on the fireplace, jobs with commutes, and school runs as part of daily routines with children. Tremendous upheaval for those who flee, and a fearful reckoning for those who stay and fight. Among us academics, us students of humanity in various specialized forms, there are those who are much better equipped to weigh in on this, to speak to the very real issues of migrancy, displacement, authoritarianism, and war. It is at times like this, therefore, that studying the senses might seem a far stretch from the large-scale upheavals, and decidedly bourgeois.

True, an argument can be made that historically the study of the senses is complicit with bourgeois morality. Well-known works in the field include Alain Courbin's *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the Social Imagination* in 1982 on odour, smell, and French society; and in literature the first volume of Peter Gay's *The Bourgeois Experience* is subtitled *Education of the Senses* (1984). More recently, Erica Fretwell's *Sensory Experiments: Psychophysics, Race, and the Aesthetics of Feeling* (2020), which featured in TGO7 newsletter #19 as a publication highlight, reminds us that the famous psychophysics experiments on the senses and their discrimination in the laboratories in Germany set up racial hierarchies which were then pursued further in the United States, that the science of the senses is rooted in colonial and racist practices which cemented the values and sensory hierarchies of whiteness in Civil War era America and its aftermath. Yet Fretwell's book also exemplifies the social and

*Grief, empathy,  
and the  
restoration of  
hope in Europe*





political relevance that has been present in other areas of sensory scholarship, and the capacity for the senses to be at the heart of empathic processes. Fretwell celebrates some of the more artistic experiments in hybridity, for example multisensory experiences of cooking, composing synaesthetic symphonies, or novels bravely dealing with issues of miscegenation and mixed racial identities which offered the reader new possibilities for understanding the sensory worlds of the other. An outside of the bourgeois sensory domain. In other words, outside of psychophysics were bold multisensory and cultural experiments she terms ‘psychophysical aesthesis’ which, by evoking another person’s experience through rich sensory description, fostered forms of empathy.

Outpourings of empathy abound in these most brutal of times. The number of ordinary households in the UK and Europe offering to home the displaced Ukrainians is heartening, rising up to the challenge of restoring hope to those who are grieving for the lost routines and sensory safety of their former homes, the devastation of their homeland. As one of my doctoral students at the University of Pittsburgh has been exploring recently in her work on the United Methodist Church, an inevitable inflection point after some time from feelings of collective *grief* in the wake of almost unimaginable change and upheaval is the restoration of *hope*.

A sense of hope, then. We look forward to the next ISA meeting which features in the ‘**News**’ (p4). After the cancellation of all TGO7 panels for the meeting in Porto Alegre in 2021, TGO7 aims to restore the hope that some of us can be physically present in Melbourne in 2023. Appropriately enough, given world events, the conference theme will resonate: ‘Resurgent Authoritarianism: The Sociology of New Entanglements of Religions, Politics, and Economies’. And for the **Publication Highlights (pp.5-7)** there are a healthy number of publications to celebrate.

As usual, do feel free to email me ([paterson@pitt.edu](mailto:paterson@pitt.edu)) with relevant news, publications, or calls for papers that fellow members could benefit from.

**Mark Paterson**  
**Vice-President of ISA TGO7**

## News and Events

**The XX ISA World Congress of Sociology will be in Melbourne, June 25 - July 1, 2023.** The theme is ‘Resurgent Authoritarianism: The Sociology of New Entanglements of Religions, Politics, and Economies’. Undoubtedly some of us will meet there. For those who had submitted a paper for the cancelled TGO7 sessions for the previous 2021 congress in Porto Alegre, we encourage you to resubmit your papers. For those who proposed paper sessions, we hope you will resubmit session proposals, too. For more details about the conference, see p.5 of this newsletter and the ISA World Congress website:

<https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/conferences/world-congress/melbourne-2023> Here are the relevant deadlines:

- May 2-31, 2022: Submission of proposals for Thematic Group Sessions
- July 1-September 30, 2022: Abstracts submission
- December 2, 2022: Notifications of acceptance
- March 22, 2023: Registration deadline for participants

**Therefore, if you wish to propose sessions for TGO7 please do so by the deadline of May 31, 2022.**

**The Uncommon Senses III: Back to the Future of the Senses** conference took place virtually on 6-9 May, 2021. It was great to see some of you there, and to see inventive papers and rich panels all devoted to the senses. It was a great advertisement for the disciplinary diversity that sensory scholarship enjoys now. Let’s hope that ‘Uncommon Senses IV’ isn’t too far away.



# XX ISA World Congress of Sociology



**Resurgent Authoritarianism:**  
*Sociology of New Entanglements of  
Religions, Politics, and Economies*

Melbourne, Australia | June 25-July 1, 2023  
Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre  
[www.isa-sociology.org](http://www.isa-sociology.org)



**The global rise of authoritarianism, as well as populism, xenophobia, and racism, makes our task as sociologists more crucial than ever. This dilemma is assisted by the gradual symbolic thickening of public culture through combinations of extreme nationalist and religious fervor.**

A special interest of our Congress is how to disaggregate the Western, but also sociological, assumption of secularism as inherent in modern society and at the same time analytically dissociate the state from religion. While this separation is still a crucial pathway toward democracy and citizenship, the process needs to be problematized. We particularly look forward to discussing the promising avenues of inquiry within sociology and related disciplines about what have been termed 'post-secular societies' and 'multiple secularities'.

Thus the XX ISA World Congress of Sociology will focus on how sociologists worldwide can (and do) contribute to the understanding of the resurgent authoritarianism and analyze the new entanglements of religions, politics, and economies. It will also focus on how sociologists engage (physically and critically) in the formidable social movements we are witnessing today in different parts of the world and in a renascent civil society.

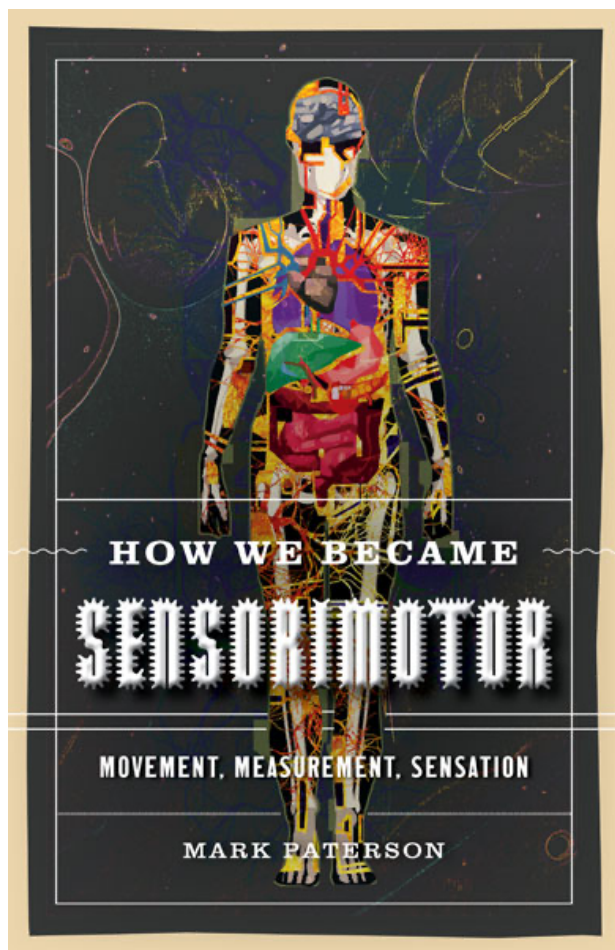
The XX ISA World Congress of Sociology in Melbourne, Australia, June 25-July 1, 2023 will be in hybrid format. Important deadlines if you are proposing a paper session (panel) or a paper are on p.4 but for more details: <https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/conferences/world-congress/melbourne-2023/deadlines-2023>

## **Program Coordinators for XX ISA World Congress 2023 are:**

Mark PATERSON, [paterson@pitt.edu](mailto:paterson@pitt.edu) (Vice-President)

Noorman ABDULLAH, [socnooa@nus.edu.sg](mailto:socnooa@nus.edu.sg) (secretary-Treasurer)

Kelvin LOW, [socleyk@nus.edu.sg](mailto:socleyk@nus.edu.sg) (President)



**Mark Paterson, *How We Became Sensorimotor: Movement, Measurement, Sensation.* University of Minnesota Press. 2021.**

The years between 1833 and 1945 fundamentally transformed science’s understanding of the body’s inner senses, revolutionizing fields like philosophy, the social sciences, and cognitive science. Mark Paterson provides a systematic account of this transformative period, while demonstrating its substantial implications for current explorations into phenomenology, embodied consciousness, the extended mind, and theories of the sensorimotor, the body, and embodiment.

“Opening a new chapter in the archaeology of knowledge and the body, *How We Became Sensorimotor* charts how the inchoate mass of sensations within the bodily interior became the focus of increasingly intensive scientific inquiry from the mid-1800s onwards. To read this deeply touching book is to come to know one’s innermost self from a rigorously empirical and objective yet intimately familiar angle.”

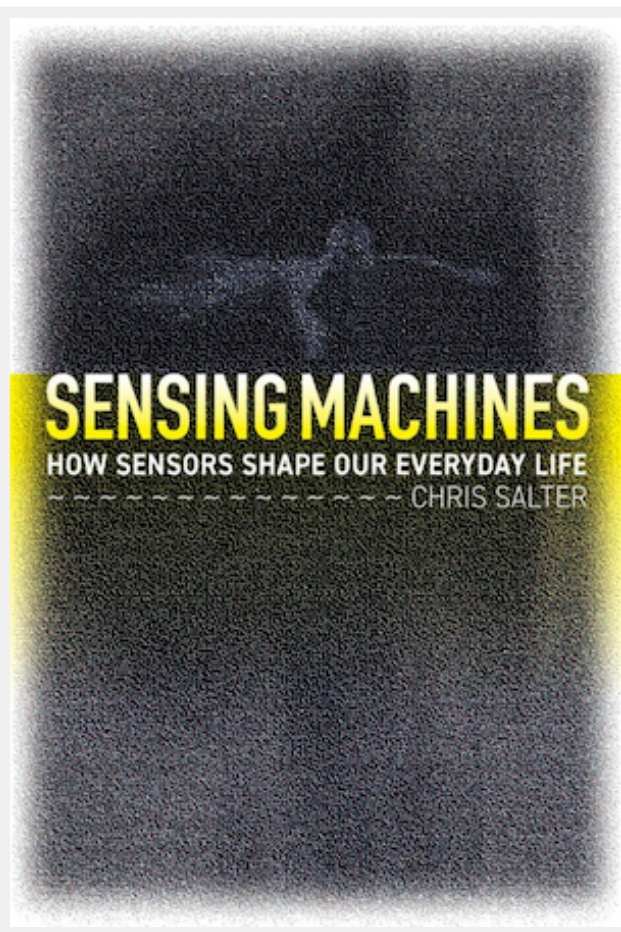
- *David Howes.*

**Chris Salter, *Sensing Machines: How Sensors Shape Our Everyday Life.* MIT Press. 2022.**

Sensing machines are everywhere in our world. As we move through the day, electronic sensors and computers adjust our thermostats, guide our Roombas, count our steps, change the orientation of an image when we rotate our phones. There are more of these electronic devices in the world than there are people—in 2020, thirty to fifty billion of them (versus 7.8 billion people), with more than a trillion expected in the next decade. In *Sensing Machines*, Chris Salter examines how we are tracked, surveilled, tantalized, and seduced by machines ranging from smart watches and mood trackers to massive immersive art installations.

“From artificial neural networks and androids to teamLab’s borderless reciprocity, Salter explores our desire for control while grounding cybernated machines in the perception devices of the past. Revealed are the arts and sciences of total sensorial immersion operating in experience culture.”

- *Barbara Maria Stafford.*





***Venustas: The Architecture of Delight (VAD)*, an ongoing topical collection of the journal *Springer Nature Applied Sciences***

*Venustas: The Architecture of Delight (VAD)* provides a platform for research and innovative design focused on sensory experience and well-being in architecture. It envisions the development of a new architectural aesthetic, grounded in everyday human sensory experiences, while providing positive contributions towards resolving the key social and environmental challenges of our time. VAD welcomes perspectives from psychology, aesthetics, design, engineering, building science and the social sciences, and invites research papers, position papers, review articles, opinion pieces, and case studies presenting innovative approaches.

The editor, Boon Lay Ong, is keen to develop sensorial approaches to architecture, and David Howes is on the editorial board. For more details and submission instructions: <https://www.springer.com/journal/42452/updates/18614734>

**Olga Sabido Ramos, *Los sentidos del cuerpo: un giro sensorial en la investigación social y los estudios de género*. Centro de Investigaciones y estudios de género, UNAM. 2019.**

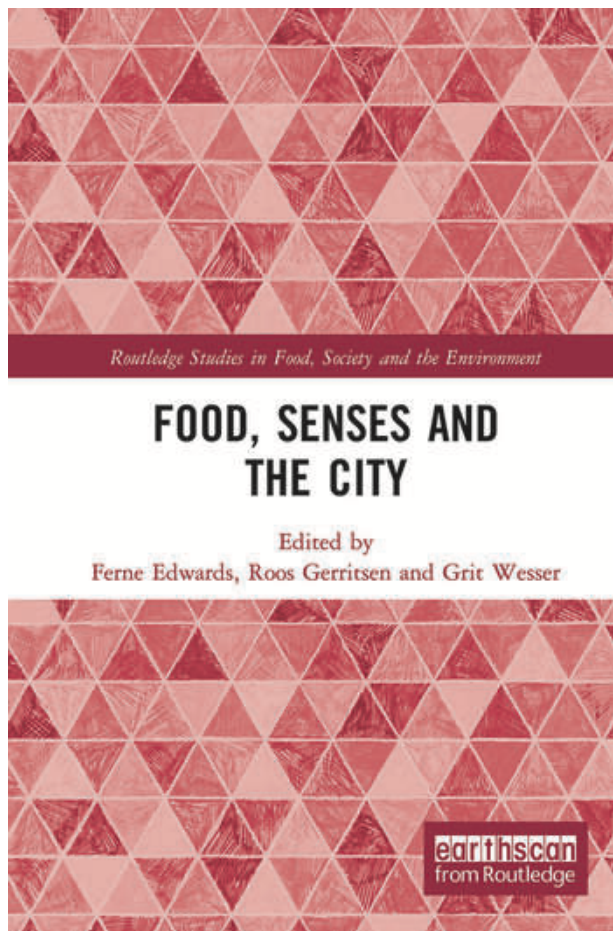
La publicación de *Los sentidos del cuerpo* se podría interpretar como un signo de “madurez” o consolidación del giro sensorial en las humanidades y las ciencias sociales. Da fe del hecho de que el campo de los estudios sensoriales —un término que abarca la investigación de la historia, la antropología y la sociología de los sentidos— se ha convertido en un tema con un alcance no solo internacional, sino intergeneracional. Además, el alto nivel de sofisticación teórico y metodológico del trabajo de las y los jóvenes sociólogas y sociólogos con el que [aquí dentro] nos encontramos es un buen presagio para el futuro de este campo.

Olga on Simmel and the senses in English:

2020: ‘The Metropolis and Nose Life. Sensory Memories, Odors and Emotions’, *Simmel Studies* 24(2): 63-89.

2017: ‘The senses as a resource of meaning in the construction of the Stranger: an approach from Georg Simmel’s relational sociology’, *Simmel Studies* 21: 15-41.





**Ferne Edwards, Roos Gerritsen, Grit Wesser (Eds.) *Food, Sense and the City*. Routledge, 2021.**

Featuring 14 contributors from around the world, this work explores new understandings of how people live in cities and how we can better understand cities through sensing food. This book is based in a social science, with a strong anthropological approach, drawing on rich primary data to analyse themes of nostalgia, home-making, belonging and new urban imaginaries. TGO7's very own Member-at-Large writes the endorsement:

"This collection, rich in nuance, offers both visceral and intellectual pleasures. Shaped by diverse and sensitive ethnographies, *Food, Senses and the City* provides insights into the challenges of our times. Questions of belonging, gentrification, sustainability, humanity and authenticity, for example, emerge through the less usual prism of sensing knowledge in city spaces. Often the approach is vested in "entangled objects" – "the damp vegetal smell" of steamed tamales in Mexico, the deliciousness of greasy meat in a Romanian market. Such objects, similar to Seremetakis' iconic disappearing peach, allow reflections on how we live and eat together, now and in the future."

- Jean Duruz.

**Celmara Pocock, *Visitor Encounters with the Great Barrier Reef: Aesthetics, Heritage, and the Senses*. Routledge, 2020**

Drawing on archival and ethnographic research, the book describes how visitors have experienced the Great Barrier Reef through personal embodied encounters and the mechanisms they have used to understand, access and share these experiences with others. Illustrating how such experiences contribute to a knowledge of place, Pocock also explores the vital role of reproduction and photography in sharing experiences with those who have never been there. The second part of the book analyses visitor experiences and demonstrates how they underpin three key frames through which the Reef is understood and valued: the islands as paradise, the underwater coral gardens, and the singular Great Barrier Reef. Acknowledging that these constructs are increasingly removed from human experience, Pocock demonstrates that they are nevertheless integral to recognition of the region as a World Heritage Site.

