



Senses and Society

THEMATIC GROUP NEWSLETTER



Self-Fulling-Ego act III (2017; detail). Marco Giordano Edinburg. Picture by Ruth Clark

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Editorial Note

Welcome to the twenty-third issue of the Newsletter of the ISA TGO7, "Senses and Society". This edition brings several updates, starting with our new newsletter editor, myself, Federico La Bruna. Our newly elected president, Dr. Mark Paterson, is stepping down from the role of editor after six years of outstanding contributions to our thematic group. These changes are part of a broader changeover in the Group voted during the last business meeting at the XX World Congress of Sociology in Melbourne last Summer, as I will report later in this Newsletter (page 8).

Despite the leadership transition, it is my intention to uphold the motivations that have thus far underpinned the publication of this newsletter: facilitating communication among the group members, providing a continuous update on publications that can be of interest, enriching the study of the senses, and offering the opportunity to relay discussions and plans of the Thematic Group to those who did not have the chance to attend meetings physically. This newsletter and all previous ones remain available on the TGO7 page of the ISA website ([click here](#)).

I would like to use these final lines of the editorial note to provide an overview of what you will find in this newsletter and to summarise the editor's approach. Following this note, you will find two greeting messages that that I really wanted to be reported here in full and without editing, from the former president, Dr. Kelvin Low, and the newly elected Dr. Mark Paterson. This will be followed by a brief report on the World Congress and a summary of



Senses & Society in Melbourne





Ben Lyall (Monash University)



Kelvin Low (NUS)

the business meeting in Melbourne during the same event. Finally, after highlighting some upcoming events of interest, you will, as always, find the Publication Highlights section (page 10).

I reaffirm my commitment to adhere to the principles that have guided this newsletter thus far, and I would like to add that, for the time being, I do not see a need for any change in the communication style. However, considering our shared desire for growth within our group, as evidenced in the World Congress report (page 6), I will propose a minimum of three issues each year to be published in fall, winter, and spring. I hope more space will allow us to focus more on specific themes, opening the possibilities of inspiring each other.

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

Please feel free to email me (federico.labruna@unimi.it) with any relevant news, publications, or calls for papers that fellow Group members could benefit from.

Federico La Bruna

Newsletter Editor of TGO7

Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan; Department of Cultures, Politics and Society, University of Turin.

Presidents' Greeting Messages

From the former president Kelvin Low (NUS):

TG07 Senses and Society of the International Sociological Association was co-founded by Devorah Kalekin-Fishman and myself in 2011/12. Together, we worked and proposed to establish the thematic group in order to contribute towards widening the ambit of sensory scholarship through sociological perspectives and beyond.

Since then, I was twice elected and served as President (2012-2023) of the group and also assumed the role of newsletter editor (2012-2018). Along with key members of the TG board, we steered forward with collaborations, dialogue, and conference organisations with the ISA over the past decade.

Our TG participated in the association's quadrennial congresses (2014; 2018; 2023) and bi-annual forums (2012; 2016) – in between workshops that we had also organized in Singapore and Germany to further expand the scope of sensory studies which by now has burgeoned considerably. This journey has been nothing short of gratifying and challenging, and I am elated to have been supported by several like-minded scholars and friends.

It is now time to hand over the responsibility and what a pleasure indeed to do so in the good hands of the new President, Mark Paterson (University of Pittsburgh) and Noorman Abdullah, Vice-President (National University of Singapore). They are ably supported by Sneha Annavarapu, secretary/treasurer (National University of Singapore), and Federico La Bruna, online communication manager (Università degli Studi di Milano). A renewal of leadership is always a valuable thing and I am confident that the new stewards of TG07 will continue to proliferate interest and stentorian scholarship in sensory inquiries in the years ahead.

Thank you and signing off with my best wishes,

Kelvin E.Y. Low.



From the newly elected president Mark Paterson (University of Pittsburgh):



As the new President of TGO7, I wanted to take this opportunity to thank the outgoing President, Kelvin Low, for everything he has done so far. As explained in the previous newsletter, he co-instigated the group in 2011 with Devorah Klein-Fishman, and was sole newsletter writer and editor until I took over in Spring 2018. We thank Kelvin for his sterling service and energy for all those years, keeping the group going from strength to strength. He is not leaving entirely, though, and remains on the Board.

The Elections that occurred in the TGO7 Business Meeting in Melbourne have meant a healthy injection of younger blood, and it is exciting to have more early career researchers on board. Myself, as former Vice-President, was voted President. Noorman Abdullah, previously Secretary-Treasurer, is now Vice-President, and his old post is now taken by Sneha Annavarapu (NUS). Our 'Online Communications Manager' and new Newsletter Editor is Federico La Bruna. And, with some Board Member departures, we have three new Board members: Sarah Maslen (University of Canberra), Catherine Earle (RMIT), and Clara Cirdan (LSE). Thank you to outgoing Board members Florence Figols (Concordia University), William Gibson (UCL), Mariangela Mihai Jordan (Cornell), Devorah Kalekin-Fishman (University of Haifa), and Alexandre Marchant (ENS Cachan) for your years of involvement.

The panels that the TGO7 Program Committee (Kelvin, Noorman and myself) put together went well. They spanned 5 days, from 'The Political Life of Sensation' on Monday to 'Experiencing Silence and Expanded Time: Other Sensory Pathways and Knowledge' on Friday.

As new President, I would love to see the group expand from a Thematic Group with a handful of panels to a Research Group, which will increase the number of panels and the finance available for sponsorship of events and workshops in other places. There is no shortage of interest in the senses. If anything, the number of new publications and panels for conferences on the senses around the world is growing. Our newsletter gets sent to around 240 scholars around the world. The issue will be to get more scholars to engage with ISA Forums and Congresses around the world. Having been to the biggest sociology conferences this year, ASA in Philadelphia, and ISA in Melbourne, only months apart, I have to say that ISA is a much more globally welcoming organization, and the more scholars that find this out, the better! If you have ideas for workshops or events of interest to our group, particularly if you are based in the Global South, do talk to me or any other member of the group and maybe we can help make it happen.

Enjoy the new Newsletter, everyone, and thank you so much to Federico for taking over our regular group publication.

Mark Paterson, University of Pittsburgh

President of TGO7 Senses and Society.

TGo7 at XX ISA World Congress of Sociology, Melbourne



Mark Paterson, University of Pittsburgh.

This summer, the XX World Congress of Sociology took place in Melbourne. The World Congress culminated in a great success our thematic group took part of in front of the global academic community. Scholars from diverse backgrounds converged to engage in inspirational dialogues, fostering cross-cultural understanding and enriching the sociological discourse about the senses and the sensorial. Our Thematic Group actively participated by presenting five panels: "The Political Life of Sensation," "Excursions in Sensory Studies: Teaching, Doing, Writing," "The Sense of Data and the Data of Sense: Bodies, Technologies, Spaces," "Translating Sensory Experience," and "Experiencing Silence and Expanded Time," along with "Other Sensory Pathways and Knowledge."

These main events facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration, promoting innovative research and policy solutions. The Congress showcased the vitality of our Group in sociological

inquiry through several aspects and themes. Notably, there is a growing focus on the interaction between technology and the senses and an interest in techniques and methodologies involving creative processes. The meeting this summer yielded a positive report, indicating willingness and interest in replicating and enhancing our involvement in the upcoming forum in two years. In addition, it is worth noting a shared interest in the passage from Thematic Group to Working Group, with an eye towards attaining the status of Research Group in the near future. This strategic move aims to enhance our group's capabilities, expand our communication reach, and secure additional funding opportunities.



The committee elections have certainly brought about many changes within the group, although key individuals in this project have redirected their efforts to other roles. In fact, while there has been an emphasis on individual contributions by new members, there remains a strong belief in the values and motivations that have brought TGO7 to this point. There was good participation from the audience, who followed the presentations with interest.

Above Left: Noorman Abdullah, NUS. Below right: Sneha Annavarapu (NUS), Jean Duruz (University of South Australia), Clara Cirdan (LSE) and Kelvin Low (NUS). Photos courtesy of Kelvin Low.



New Committee 2023-2027

President	Mark Paterson, University of Pittsburgh, USA
Vice-President	Noorman Abdullah, National University of Singapore, Singapore
Secretary-Treasurer	Sneha Annavarapu, National University of Singapore, Singapore
Newsletter Editor	Federico La Bruna, University of Milan, Italy
Elected Members	Clara Ciedan, London School of Economics, United Kingdom
	Jean Duruz, University of South Australia, Australia
	Catherine Earl, RMIT Vietnam, Vietnam
	Emma Felton, University of South Australia, Australia
	Sarah Maslen, University of Canberra, Australia
	Kelvin Low, National University of Singapore, Singapore

Above is a table displaying the composition of the new committee elected in Melbourne during the business meeting. This committee will remain in office until the next elections at the upcoming World Congress in 2027. Below is a photo of the committee taken after the business meeting in Melbourne. From left to right: Kelvin Low, Federico La Bruna, Catherine Earl, Noorman Abdullah, Mark Paterson, Sneha Annavarapu, Jean Duruz, and Sarah Maslen.



Upcoming Events

12th International – Senses&Sensibility 28/11/23 – 1/12/23 • Malaga – Lisboa

"Senses & Sensibility (S&S) Conference is a biannual international conference in design organized by UNIDCOM/IADE since 2003. S&S aims to be a platform to bring together people who are passionate about design and believe design practice and design research can play an important role in society. Usually, S&S takes place in the autumn of odd years. Along its existence, it has been held in different venues thanks to the partnerships with diverse



universities and other entities. The three/four days long conference consists of several workshops, paper sessions and social / cultural events. Invited renowned guest speakers complement each day with a keynote address."

Congreso Internacional "Ciudades Sonoras. Música, Sonido, Ruido en Entornos Urbanos (1500-1800)" 23/10/23 - 25/10/23 València

"The Congreso Internacional "Ciudades Sonoras. Música, Sonido, Ruido en Entornos Urbanos (1500-1800) aims to bring together national and international experts to analyze and debate the role of music in the communicative processes of urban contexts in the Old Regime. The congress will address possible forms of reconstruction of these communicative processes, their subjects, and their modalities. This includes topics such as sound perception and listening, the intellectual and sensory response of inhabitants, and the reconstruction of soundscapes."



Publication Highlights

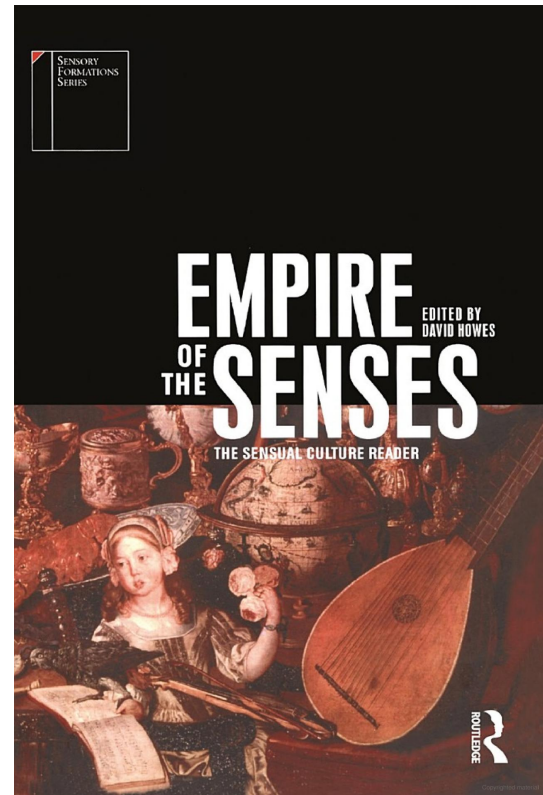
David Howes. (Ed.) Empire of the senses: The sensual culture reader. Routledge, 2021.

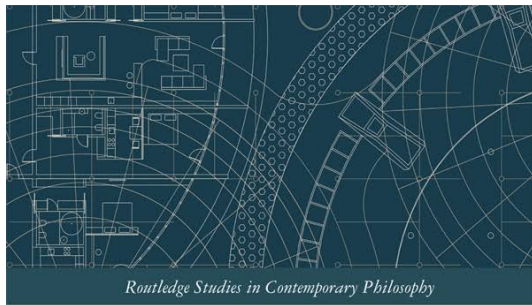
Let's reopen the "Publication Highlights" section with something I wouldn't call a novelty but a classic. Two years ago, Routledge released a new edition of "Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader," edited by David Howes, which remains an exceptionally important classic for the development of the discourse on senses, perception, and the sensorium. I believe this is one of those texts worth revisiting over time to enrich our internal dialogue on the theory of senses and perception. Below, I provide the book description offered by the publisher.

"With groundbreaking contributions by Marshall McLuhan, Oliver Sacks, Italo Calvino and Alain Corbin, among others, Empire of the Senses overturns linguistic and textual models of interpretation and places sensory experience at the forefront of cultural analysis. The senses are gateways of knowledge, instruments of power, sources of pleasure and pain - and they are subject to dramatically different constructions in different societies and periods. Empire of the Senses charts the new terrains opened up by the sensual revolution in scholarship, as it takes the reader into the sensory worlds of the medieval witch and the postmodern mall, a Japanese tea ceremony and a Boston shelter for the homeless. This compelling revisioning of history and cultural studies sparkles with wit and insight and is destined to become a landmark in the field."

Tony Cheng, Ophelia Deroy, and Charles Spence. (Eds.) Spatial senses: Philosophy of perception in an age of science. Routledge, 2021.

In this case as well, the text in question is reissued by Routledge a couple of years ago. The choice to include texts that are a few years old in the "Publication Highlights" stems from the need to not only focus on the latest releases but also to suggest texts that, based on the presentations, debates, and dialogues that took place a few months ago at the World





SPATIAL SENSES
PHILOSOPHY OF PERCEPTION IN
AN AGE OF SCIENCE

Edited by
 Tony Cheng, Ophelia Deroy,
 and Charles Spence



Congress in Melbourne, appear to be of interest. "Spatial Senses: Philosophy of Perception in an Age of Science" is a text first published in 2019 and brings with it a splendid example of how various sociologies can communicate. The study of space and the senses intertwine in a multi-part text that guides us into a profound reflection on spatial perception. Below, I provide the book description offered by the publisher.

"This collection of essays brings together research on sense modalities in general and spatial perception in particular in a systematic and interdisciplinary way. It updates a long-standing philosophical fascination with this topic by incorporating theoretical and empirical research from cognitive science, neuroscience, and psychology. The book is divided thematically to cover a wide range of established and emerging issues. Part I covers notions of objectivity

and subjectivity in spatial perception and thinking. Part II focuses on the canonical distal senses, such as vision and audition. Part III concerns the chemical senses, including olfaction and gustation. Part IV discusses bodily awareness, peripersonal space, and touch. Finally, the volume concludes with Part V on multimodality. Spatial Senses is an important contribution to the scholarly literature on the philosophy of perception that takes into account important advances in the sciences."

Sarah Maslen, *Hearing like a musician: Integrating sensory perception of self into a social theory of self-reflexivity*. Social Psychology Quarterly, 85(1), 2022.

The third reading recommendation in this issue is an article by Sarah Maslen, published in the early months of last year. Through the study of classical music teaching strategies, the author sheds light on mechanisms of transforming perception to align one's self-perception with how others perceive them. This excellent article prompts us to reflect on the relationship between external stimuli and perception in a dialogue that takes us from the inside to the outside of the self and vice versa. It's a fascinating read where the balance between theory and empiricism yields results that also help us contemplate how we can best handle the subjects of our researches. Below, I provide the abstract of the article.

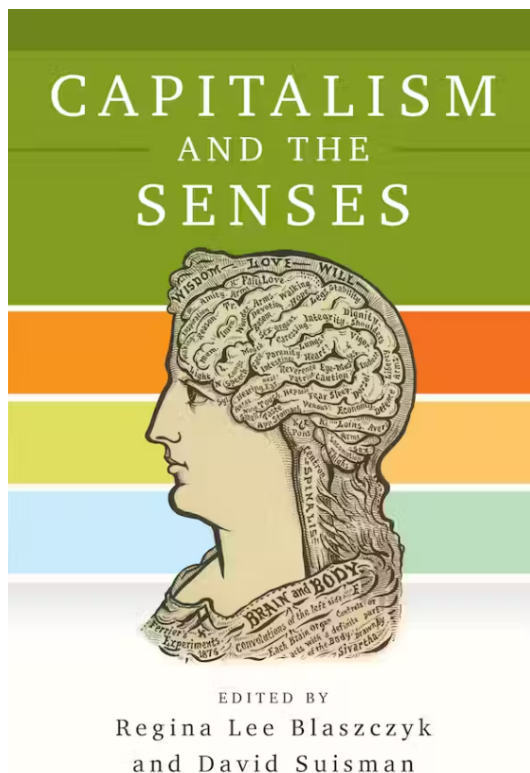
"In Mead's philosophy, we develop and present ourselves in anticipation of an audience, taking the role of other to "see" ourselves as we will be seen. But what we see when we take the position of other is not in fact what the other sees of ourselves. It is only the visible side of our experience that the other can grasp, leaving hidden our interior experiences. This article speaks to this conundrum left by Mead's writing, presenting the training of musicians as a strategic site for showing why we need to go beyond Mead in social psychology, adding what Merleau-Ponty shows us of how we work on the invisible side of our experience. This research examines how classical music teachers work with students to deliberately transform their inner experience of their sound to align their self-perception with how others perceive them."



Regina Lee Blaszczyk and David Suisman, (Eds.) Capitalism and the Senses. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023.

A formative book that compiles various articles emphasizing the profound political significance we can attribute to the senses and perception. Furthermore, it repeatedly raises

an aspect that is often unexplored: the management or manipulation of sensations, emotions, and atmospheres. Below is the descriptive text provided by the publisher.



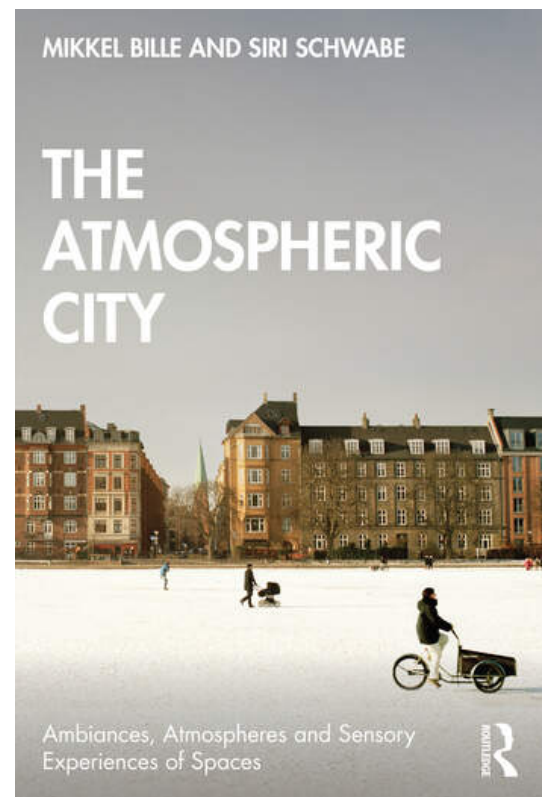
"Capitalism and the Senses is the first edited volume to explore how the forces of capitalism are entangled with everyday sensory experience. If the senses have a history, as Karl Marx wrote, then that history is inseparable from the development of capitalism, which has both taken advantage of the senses and influenced how sensory experience has changed over time. This pioneering collection shows how seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching have both shaped and been shaped by commercial interests from the turn of the twentieth century to our own time. From the manipulation of taste and texture in the food industry to the careful engineering of the feel of artificial fabrics, capitalist enterprises have

worked to commodify the senses in a wide variety of ways. Drawing on history, anthropology, geography, and other fields, the volume's essays analyze not only where this effort has succeeded but also where the senses have resisted control and the logic of markets. The result is an innovative ensemble that demonstrates how the drive to exploit sensorial experience for profit became a defining feature of capitalist modernity and establishes the senses as an important dimension of the history of capitalism."

Mikkel Bille and Siri Schwabe. The Atmospheric City. Taylor & Francis, 2023.

I have been studying urban atmospheres for several years now, and I find that this text provides an interesting and in-depth exploration of the theme of perception and sensing the city. It's a multidisciplinary work that helps us read cities through our perception of them and the sensations that people, places, and phenomena can evoke. Can urban atmospheres exist beyond sensory perception? This text addresses many aspects that could help us answer this question. Below is the descriptive text provided by the publisher.

"The Atmospheric City explores how people make sense of the feelings they get in and of urban spaces. Based on ethnographic fieldwork of everyday life in Copenhagen, Oslo, and Stockholm, it focuses on the atmospheric power of people, places, and phenomena. While the predominant focus of current urban planning tends to rest on economic growth, sustainability, or offering housing, transport, and activities to an increasing number of city residents, this book offers a different take, based on recent discussions in the social sciences about how cities *feel*. It calls attention to the mundane ways in which urban dwellers adapt and adopt their surroundings. It argues that atmospheric cities are characterised by a fundamental porosity that affects how people relate to places. This highlights why some places are sought after while others are avoided. Through concrete examples of people being in and moving through the city, the book shows how people attune and are attuned by designed urban spaces, often at the margins of attention, when they find comfort in the familiar and seek out the unexpected. This book is aimed at researchers, postgraduates, and practitioners interested in urban design and how people make sense of the feelings it evokes. It will be of interest to those in the fields of urban studies, urban



design, planning, architecture urban geography, cultural geography, cultural studies and anthropology."

Helmi Järviluoma, and Lesley Murray, (Eds.) Sensory Transformations: Environments, Technologies, Sensobiographies. Taylor & Francis, 2023.

The last two texts included in this newsletter aim to leverage the growing focus on post-anthropocentrism. However, these two texts are quite different. In this first case, the focus is on the dialogue between the senses and technology and how their relationship has evolved over time. The emphasis is particularly on European history, and reading this text also suggests an innovative use of sources. Below is the descriptive text provided by the publisher.

"This book offers original insights into cultural transformations of the sensory with particular emphasis on environments and technologies, articulating a special moment in the



**SENSORY
TRANSFORMATIONS**
ENVIRONMENTS, TECHNOLOGIES,
SENSOBIOGRAPHIES

Edited by
Helmi Järviluoma and Lesley Murray



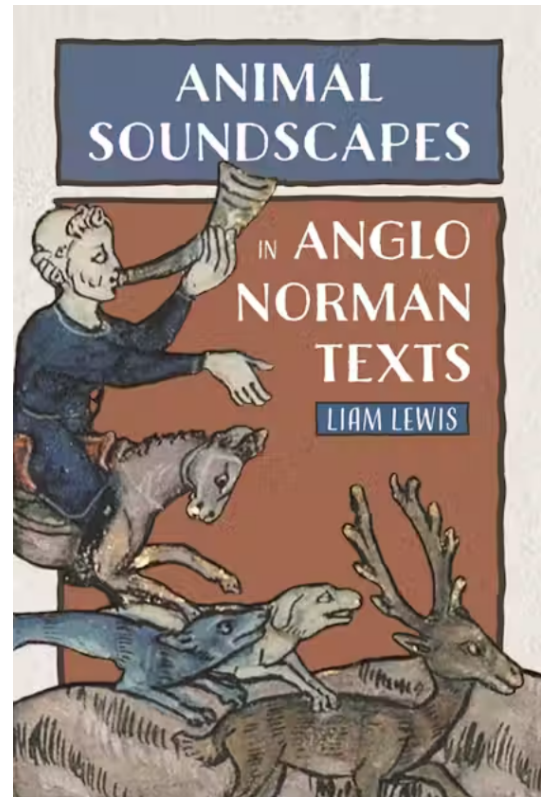
sensory history of urban Europe as people's relationship with their environment is increasingly shaped through digital technologies. It is a much-needed addition to Sensory Studies literature with its firmly grounded empirical and theoretical perspectives. It provides radical and impactful food for thought on sensory engagements with urban environments. After reading the book, the reader will have a profound understanding of the original methodology of sensobiographic walking, as well as transdisciplinary and transgenerational ethnographies in different cultural contexts – in this case three European cities. The book is aimed at a large audience of readers. It is equally useful for social and human scientists and students finalizing their MA degrees or working on their doctoral or post-doctoral work, and essential reading for environmental planners, youth workers, city planners and architects, among others."

Liam Lewis. Animal Soundscapes in Anglo-Norman Texts. DS Brewer, 2022.

In this last text, it's not immediately clear whether the theme of post-anthropocentrism is addressed. In fact, while animals are the subject of study, the methodology remains

anchored in the examination of medieval language. However, by considering an animal soundscape, this book provides an important resource for theorizing sound and animality, granting animals a significant role in the comprehension of nature. Below is the descriptive text provided by the publisher.

"A redefinition of the animal's relationship to sound and language in French texts from medieval England. The barks, hoots and howls of animals and birds pierce through the experience of medieval texts. In captivating episodes of communication between species, a mandrake shrieks when uprooted from the ground, a saint preaches to the animals, and a cuckoo causes turmoil at the parliament of birds with his familiar call. This book considers a range of such episodes in Old French verse texts, including bestiaries, treatises on language, the Life of Saint Francis of Assisi and the Fables by Marie de



France, aiming to reconceptualize and reinterpret animal soundscapes. It argues that they draw on sound to produce competing perspectives, forms of life, and linguistic subjectivities, suggesting that humans owe more to animal sounds than we are disposed to believe. Texts inviting readers to listen and learn animal noises, to seek spiritual consolation in the jargon of birds, or to identify with the speaking wolf, create the conditions for an assertion of human exceptionalism even as they simultaneously invite readers to question such forms of control. By asking what it means for an animal to cry, make noise, or speak in French, this book provides an important resource for theorizing sound and animality in multilingual medieval contexts, and for understanding the animal's role in the interpretation of the natural world. e the conditions for an assertion of human exceptionalism even as they simultaneously invite readers to question such forms of control. By asking what it means for an animal to cry, make noise, or speak in French, this book provides an important resource for theorizing sound and animality in multilingual medieval contexts, and for understanding the animal's role in the interpretation of the natural world."