

The Senses and Memory

Edited by
Chanelle Dupuis
Brown University

Series in Sociology



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Foreword

Hsuan L. Hsu

University of California, Davis, United States

As a literary scholar, I often return to two very different points of reference for the dynamic and compelling entanglements between memory and the senses. Marcel Proust's madeleine exemplifies how remembered smells and tastes can remain "a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest...[bearing] in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection" (Proust 1934, 57-8). In *Beloved* (1987), Toni Morrison offers a more expansive account of involuntary memory that can transcend the scope of individual lives and generations

If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.... Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. (Morrison 2004, 43).

Proust and Morrison's novels describe vastly different scenarios: on the one hand, a joyous recollection of childhood memories while sitting down for tea; on the other hand, an account of material sites of traumatic "rememory" haunted by slavery and infanticide. When read together, they illustrate both the profound sensorial dimensions of memory and the uneven consequences of these sense-based memories for differently situated subjects and communities.

To the extent that memory is entangled with sensory experience, it is located outside our brains, distributed across the affectively charged textures, landscapes, and atmospheres of our everyday lives. Memory takes place in bodies, but also in space and time: as we learn from these essays, it is mediated by the songs, colors, and scents sustained through amateur bird-breeding; the synaesthetic effects evoked by stories and poems; the hybridized seasonings of a postcolonial kitchen, the specific sounds and smells recalled by individuals walking through a Hong Kong market; the cold breeze that triggers a past trauma; the shape and texture of Italian ceramics; the unruly sensory hauntings of atrocity trials that exceed the narrow parameters of legal proceedings. This collection's stunning

range of case studies demonstrates the affordances of research methods attentive to the complexities of sensory experience: its individual and cultural variations, its nonlinear temporalities, its opacities and incommensurabilities, its susceptibility to suggestion, its tendency to elude or exceed verbal description.

The Senses and Memory offers a fascinating cross-section of scholarship on the interconnections between place, memory, materiality, and sensorium. These connections are increasingly vital—and endangered—in our contemporary moment, when projects of colonization, sensory “bureaucratization” (Jones 2006, 15), digitization, agnotological erasure¹, marketing, gentrification, climate control, mass culture, and sensorial prohibitions endeavor to homogenize and rationalize sensoria. Struggles over public space, monuments, material culture, and infrastructures are, among other things, struggles over sensory habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 72-95) and collective memory.

Working across a striking range of disciplines and cultural contexts, the contributors to this volume interrogate diverse cultural and material sites where sensorial memory is enacted and contested, including private homes, public heritage sites and memorials, collective performances, museums, abandoned buildings slated for urban redevelopment, and digital remediations of live events. They contribute to scholarly conversations that interrogate how memory relates to topics such as multimodality, new materialisms, trauma, and technology. They explore how methodologies—including participant observation, literary criticism, visual analysis, and immersive and embodied fieldwork—can attune both researchers and their subjects and students to the shifting textures of memory and sensation.

For me, reading these essays brought into focus the importance of the senses—and of aesthetics as a study and practice of the senses—as a site of social, political, and environmental struggle, and of interpersonal and cross-cultural encounter. While critiques of the rational, disembodied, universal subject at the heart of Enlightenment “common sense”² elucidate what is at stake in efforts to hierarchize and rationalize sensory experience, it is also vital to attend—as many of these essays do—to “uncommon senses,”³ or “illiberal” (Chuh 2019, 22) sensory encounters that resist or refuse liberalism’s sensorial norms. What are the implications for memory studies of Jacques Rancière’s

¹ On “agnotology,” see eds. Proctor and Schiebinger; for a discussion of intersections between agnotology and sensory studies, see Spackman (2023, 13-14).

² David Lloyd, for example, argues that racist discourse is “determined by an aesthetic philosophy that founds the idea of a universal common sense and its space of articulation, the public sphere” (2018, 91).

³ This phrase echoes the framing of the biennial sensory studies conference, *Uncommon Senses*, convened at Concordia University.

understanding of aesthetics as a “redistribution of the sensible” (2013, 40, 42) that unsettles arrangements concerning who/what is perceptible and who/what is not? Reading memory through the slippery, fluid, subjectively inflected, unpredictable, and sometimes difficult-to-verbalize mediation of the senses, the essays that follow make a powerful argument for the ethical and political potentialities of unruly memories that can exceed the parameters of AI algorithms, courtroom proceedings, and the ocularcentric and dehistoricizing sensory predispositions of commercial social media and urban development. In a conjuncture marked by climate crisis, neo-Fascist and settler colonial assaults on history and public memory, and the sharp increase of virtual interactions in the wake of Covid, these essays raise provocative questions about what kind of future we want, and how we might dwell on what the philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2017) terms “the scent of time”—a slower, sensuous experience of temporality that refuses capitalism’s ecologically devastating drives towards speed-up and virtualization.

Together, the essays collected in this volume make a compelling case for memory studies and sensory studies as interconnected fields that demand innovative, interdisciplinary approaches to research and pedagogy. Just as they elude state efforts to present reductive, official versions of history and collective memory, embodied memories exceed the bounds of academic disciplines and methodologies. The topics and research questions featured throughout *The Senses and Memory*—which span a range of social and historical contexts, as well as material and representational mediations—propel these essays across multiple disciplines including anthropology, narrative, material culture, legal studies, architecture, psychology, media studies, philosophy. The volume will no doubt help energize future collaborations that expand on the interdisciplinary connections and insights developed here.

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Contributors

Editor

Chanelle Dupuis is a PhD student at Brown University in the French and Francophone Studies department. Her research is focused on sensory studies and, more particularly, smell studies. She works on the representation of odors in twentieth and twenty-first-century French and Francophone novels. Her current dissertation project examines the role of smell in dystopias in relation to environmental change, nonhuman lives, technologies of smell, and descriptions of atmospheres. Her areas of interest include memory studies, the environmental humanities, Québécois literature, perfume culture, anosmia, linguistics, and graphic narrative studies. She recently published an article titled “Smell and Resistance: Writing to Denounce in Charlotte Delbo’s memoir *Auschwitz and After*” in Volume 1, Issue 1 of the journal *Alabastron*. An active member of the sensory studies community, she runs a website called Smell Studies (www.smellstudies.com), which hosts a smell studies blog and an international working group composed of young scholars from a variety of disciplines.

Authors

Andrew Kettler taught as an Assistant Professor and Early American History Fellow at the University of Toronto from 2017 to 2019 before serving as an Ahmanson-Getty Fellow at the University of California, Los Angeles, during the 2019-2020 academic year. He is currently serving as an Assistant Professor of History at the University of South Carolina-Palmetto College. His first monograph, *The Smell of Slavery: Olfactory Racism and the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, 2020), focuses on the development of racist semantics concerning miasma and the contrasting expansion of aromatic consciousness in the making of subaltern resistance to racialized olfactory discourses of state, religious and slave masters.

Andrew Milne is a Lecturer in philosophy at the University of Western Australia. He is the author of *Nietzsche as Egoist and Mystic* (Palgrave, 2021), a book which situates Friedrich Nietzsche’s religious thought in the context of his own avowed intellectual ancestors – namely, Heraclitus, Empedocles, Spinoza and Goethe – and argues against attempts to understand Nietzsche’s views through the lens of Christian or Buddhist mystical traditions. Milne has broad interests in the history of ideas and has written on a range of thinkers, including Maynard Keynes, Henry Miller, Stanley Cavell, and Susan Sontag. He has forthcoming work on Louis Armstrong and political correctness.

Annick Le Guérer is an anthropologist and philosopher who works to give smell the appreciation and attention it deserves. She is a member of the LIMSIC, associated with the University of Burgundy, and a member of the scientific committee of the Osmothèque. Her books and exhibitions analyze the reasons the olfactory has been discredited for centuries by the vast majority of philosophers, scientists and even, more recently, by psychoanalysts. She endeavors to highlight the considerable role odors play in communication, the sacred, therapeutics, literature and the arts. She is the author of *Les pouvoirs de l'odeur* (François Bourin, 1988, Odile Jacob, 1998, 2002, 2014), which was translated into *Scent: The Mysterious and Essential Powers of Smell* in 1992 (Random House). Her other books include *Sur les routes de l'encens* (Garde-Temps 2001), *Le parfum des origines à nos jours* (Odile Jacob, 2005), *Quand le parfum portait remède* (Garde-Temps, 2009), *L'Osmothèque* (Garde-Temps, 2010), and *Le parfum et la voix* (Odile Jacob, 2022).

Benjamin Thorne is an interdisciplinary scholar with main themes of interest within socio-legal studies, transitional justice, and critical theory. One area of focus for him is the connections between memory, transitional justice, and legal atrocity archives. Related, Benjamin is the author of the recently published monograph with Routledge, *The Figure of the Witness in International Criminal Tribunals: Memory, Atrocities and Transitional Justice* (2022). More generally, Benjamin is interested in questions around visuals, sounds, as well as the broader sensory field, in how people experience law and justice, particularly in the international context. Currently, Benjamin is conducting collaborative research exploring the role visual arts can have as a form of justice for victims of sexual violence committed during conflict. Furthermore, he is working on research through artistic expression, exploring themes of memory, human senses and legal archive material, which has been published in the *Law and Humanities Journal* (2021).

Erzsébet Fanni Tóth, Vice Dean for International Affairs at Sigmund Freud University (SFU), Vienna, directs the Institute for Transgenerational Trauma Transfer Research. Her interdisciplinary background encompasses psychology, cultural anthropology, and sociology. Tóth's research focuses on migration, trauma, identity, and gender, with particular emphasis on transgenerational trauma in Central Eastern European contexts. She is actively involved in international research projects addressing societal challenges. Besides her academic career, Tóth is an experienced public speaker, disseminating her research at international conferences and workshops to various audiences. Her recent book "beszÉLJ!" (in Hungarian) addresses transgenerational trauma for adolescent audiences, exemplifying her commitment to bridging academic research and practical application. Tóth's scholarly contributions extend to qualitative research methodologies and the intersection of culture and

psychotherapy, positioning her as a strong voice in psychotherapy science and trauma studies.

Fernanda Barreto Alves is an Assistant Professor in International Relations at Lusíada University (Porto, Portugal) and a researcher at the Center for Legal, Economic, International and Environmental Studies (CEJEIA). Additionally, she is a Guest Assistant Professor at the University of Coimbra and a researcher at the Center for Global Studies at Open University, Portugal. Currently, she is pursuing a postgraduate specialization in Collective Memory, Human Rights, and Resistances at CLACSO (Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales). Fernanda holds a PhD in International Relations from the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), with a thesis titled “Memory matter(s): Assembling memorials in post-genocide Rwanda.” She has also been a Visiting Research Fellow at the Department of Political Science/Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University (2010) and a Visiting Researcher at the Center for African Studies at the University of California, Berkeley (2014-2015). Her current research interests include gender and security studies; sexual abuse and exploitation in peacekeeping operations; sexual violence as a weapon of war; identity/difference and genocide; migrants, refugees, and forcibly displaced persons; transitional justice; memorialization and transgenerational memory; affect and emotions in International Relations; storytelling and autoethnography; and assemblage theory and Actor-Network Theory (ANT).

Helen Shaw is an independent scholar and writer based in London, UK, specializing in the intersections of art, design, and visual culture, with particular emphasis on ceramics and civic identity. Her PhD (2018) investigated Albissola, Italy, as a pivotal center for avant-garde ceramics, focusing on artists such as Asger Jorn, Lucio Fontana, and Wifredo Lam, as well as movements including Futurism and CoBrA. She has contributed scholarly analyses on various artists, including the Danish artist Sonja Ferlov Mancoba and American sculptor John Mason. Her current research centers on civic design and public art in Britain and Europe from 1900 to the present, culminating in a forthcoming monograph that examines the cultural significance of ceramics in shaping civic identity through twentieth-century tiles, architecture, and urban design.

Hsuan L. Hsu is a Professor of English at the University of California, Davis. His research areas include nineteenth and twentieth-century U.S. literature, Asian diasporic literature, race studies, cultural geography, sensory studies, and the environmental humanities. He is the author of *The Smell of Risk: Environmental Disparities and Olfactory Aesthetics* (NYU, 2020) and *Air Conditioning* (Bloomsbury Object Lessons, 2024), and he serves as Book Review editor for *Senses and Society* and an editorial board member for *Multimodality and Society*, the

Journal of Transnational American Studies, and *Venti: Air, Experience, Aesthetics*. He is currently working on a book that considers how artists and writers have experimented with smell as a medium of sensorial worldmaking.

Jieling Xiao is a Reader in Architecture and Sensory Environment at Birmingham School of Architecture and Design and co-director of the Urban Cultures research cluster. Her research on smellscape and soundscapes explores from a spatial design perspective with a focus on human experiences and well-being in everyday living. She is the lead editor for Frontiers Research topic on “Smells, wellbeing and the built environment”. She is a member of the UKRI Interdisciplinary Assessment College and associate editor for Springer Nature for the *Journal of the Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*.

Linda Kopitz has studied at the University of Leipzig, Germany, and the University of Miami, USA, and holds a Research Masters in Media Studies from the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Her research – situated between urban studies and media studies – explores the entanglement between real and virtual environments in imagining sustainable futures. She is currently working as a Lecturer in Cross-Media Culture in the Netherlands and continues to freelance as a Creative Director and writer in the arts and cultural sector. Bringing together her academic and editorial work, she is the editorial assistant for the NECSUS Journal of Media Studies and an assistant editor for the European Journal of Cultural Studies.

PerMagnus Lindborg is a researcher in sound perception and a sound artist. Fellow with *Arctic Circle* (2023); Principal Investigator for *Multi-Modal Hong Kong* (GRF 2023-25); commissioned/selected for *ACL* (New Zealand 2022), *ArtScience Museum* (Singapore 2021), *Osage* (Hong Kong 2021), *CubeFest* (Virginia 2019), *Moderna Museet* (Stockholm 2008); *Centre Pompidou* (Paris 2003) etc. Publications in *Applied Acoustics*, *Frontiers*, *JAES*, *Leonardo*, *Organised Sound*, *PLoS One*, and *ICAD*, *ICMC*, *SMC* etc. Created *DACA Conference on Data Art for Climate Action* (2022) and *Soundislands Festival* (2013-17). Vice-President of ICMA and Associate Professor at the School of Creative Media at the City University of Hong Kong.

Rachel S. Herz, PhD, is a neuroscientist and the world's foremost expert on the psychological science of smell. Dr. Herz is a TEDx 2024 and TED 2019 speaker, has published well over 100 original research articles, and received many awards and grants. She is on the faculty at Brown University, has extensive research collaborations with scientists in the US and Europe, is a professional consultant to numerous international companies, and is frequently called upon as an expert witness in legal cases involving the sense of smell. Dr. Herz is also actively involved in outreach, advocacy, and education on scent and taste-food flavor with the leading non-profit organizations in this sector. Dr

Herz is the author of a number of academic and popular science books, including *Sensation & Perception* (Oxford University Press, 2024); *The Scent of Desire* (Harper Collins, 2008); *That's Disgusting* (W.W. Norton & Co, 2012); and *Why You Eat What You Eat* (W.W. Norton & Co, 2018). She is currently planning a new book about scent and the future.

Renata Pękowsha is a visual artist and researcher based in Dublin, Ireland. She is a Government of Ireland Scholar PhD Researcher at the School of Media of Technological University Dublin. Her background includes architectural studies, BDes in craft design (Glass Department, National College of Art and Design in Dublin), MA in critical theories of contemporary art and curating (National College of Art and Design), MA in UI and UX design (Technological University Dublin). She is also a trained shadow puppeteer. Her research interests cover a wide range of visual culture-related topics, including book arts, light installations, digital and analog audiovisual performances and traditional crafts. Her recent process-led research interrogates exhibition-related practices, including expanded multimodal drawing workshop formats, and locates them in the digital context. It employs social collective sensory attention experience as a strategy of moving towards less recognized subjectivities, in an intersubjective process of collective critical inquiry.

Roksana Zgierska is an Assistant Professor at the University of Gdańsk with interests in contemporary narrative theory, transmedia narratology, intertextuality, reader-response theories, and contemporary literature. Her recent projects include exploring the intersection of literary theory and speculative design, examining the narrativity of program music, and investigating intertextual connections within Evelyn Waugh's work. Passionate about understanding evolving storytelling landscapes, she studies how different art forms and media formats synergize to enhance narratives. As an educator, she is dedicated to sharing her expertise and inspiring students to explore the dynamic world of contemporary narrative and literature studies.

Shari Bloom is a PhD fellow in Culture Studies at the University of Southeastern Norway. Her arts-based reflective practice research focuses on the sensorial and spiritual effects of technological encounters with heritage. As an artist, researcher, and educator, she focuses on the ethical and spiritual tensions that occur in an increasingly digitized world. Her PhD project focuses on digitalization, heritage and re-enchantment of the ancestral. She encourages people to philosophize, connect with nature, and express their creativity, instead of relying on technology to do it for them.

Shyama Ramsamy Goomany, awardee of the ICCR scholarship and University Grants Commission JRF Fellowship for foreign nationals, is currently a Lecturer, Programme Manager, and a member of the Research Doctoral Committee at the

Open University of Mauritius, with over 15 years of teaching experience. She has taught English Language, Literature in English, and French Literature at several Mauritian colleges. Dr. Ramsamy Goomany is also a PhD supervisor in Humanities (English Literature), and her research has led her to present papers and deliver keynote speeches at numerous conferences. As a published poet, her collection *Poet's Choice: Volume III* (2015) showcases her poetic talent. Her research interests include postcolonialism, diasporas, deconstruction, reconstructionist theories, identity theories, and Island Literature. Additionally, she is a skilled proofreader, editor, and educator, further enriching her diverse expertise. Dr. Ramsamy Goomany's commitment to fostering academic excellence and advancing literary studies positions her as a key contributor to the field of Humanities. Her research publications cover interdisciplinary topics.

Théophile Robert-Rimsky is a teaching fellow at the University of Aberdeen. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on the local extinctions of birds in France and the exclusion of birds from human-dominated environments, exploring the relations between history and anthropology by looking at how entanglements between rural exodus, industrialization, and new forms of architecture led birds to be more and more excluded from human landscapes. He currently works on animal political theories, looking at the intersection of the social sciences and ethology to propose new methodologies in multispecies studies. He explores ethnographically cases such as seagull attacks in Scotland and pigeon foraging on Parisian café's terraces. His interests are in environmental and multispecies anthropology, human-animal relations, and the social causes of extinction, following cases such as bird-human relations in China, France, and the United Kingdom.

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