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Call for Papers:
Sensory Sociology &
Aesthetic Sociology
A special issue on the
politics of perception



Sansesociologi og æstetisk sociologi – et temanummer om perceptionens politik

(for English see below from page 5 onward)

Med afsæt i sansesociologien – og i fornyet kontakt med den oprindelige betydning af æstetik som *aisthesis*, dvs. sanseperception – søger vi artikler, der kaster nyt lys over sansningens socialitet og socialitetens sansning. Sansesociologi og æstetisk sociologi betragtes her som to sider af samme sag: Begge kredser om, hvordan det sanselige og det æstetiske gør sociale relationer mulige og meningsfulde.

Sansning har ikke altid været en eksplicit disciplin i sociologien, men den har været et vedvarende grundtema i klassiske analyser. Georg Simmel viste i sine essays om sociologisk æstetik, om måltidets former og i *Sociology of the Senses* fra 1907 (1969), hvordan sociale relationer hviler på sanseindtryk og æstetiske kategorier (Simmel, 1997; de la Fuente, 2000, 2007). Hos George Herbert Mead (1938) og John Dewey (1934) er sansning og handling uløseligt forbundet: Erfaring er et kropsligt og meningsbåret engagement i verden. William James (1983) understregede, at følelser og perception er indlejret i sociale sammenhænge, og Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) beskrev krop og perception som grundvilkår for social eksistens. Disse klassiske positioner danner et fundament for en sansesociologi, der længe har eksisteret implicit, men kun sjældent er blevet gjort til en selvstændig analytisk akse (se undtagelser hos sociologer som Synnott, 1991, 1993; Vannini, Waskul & Gottschalk, 2012).

Antropologen David Howes har fremhævet, hvordan Karl Marx allerede i *Økonomisk-filosofiske manuskripter* fra 1844 satte sanserne i centrum: “Man is affirmed in the objective world not only in the act of thinking, but with all his senses” (Marx, 1987: 108, cited in Howes, 2003: 200). Inspireret af Feuerbach og Fourier kritiserede Marx det industrielle samfunds borgerskab for at afstumpe sanserne – og pegede på muligheden for en frigørelse, hvor sanserne kunne udvikles frit (Howes, 2003, s. 202). Denne linje blev videreført af Walter Benjamin, der med flanøren beskrev storbyens overflader og sanseindtryk som både dragende og fremmedgørende og samtidig diagnosticerede fremvæksten af en æstetiseret konsumkultur (Benjamin, 1973; se også Howes, 2003, s. 204). I dag genfindes dette perspektiv i analyser af æstetisk kapitalisme, hvor sanser og æstetiske former er selve drivkraften i værdiskabelse og social differentiering (de la Fuente & Murphy, 2024; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005).

Som Vannini, Waskul og Gottschalk bemærker, var det først i 1990'erne, at sociologer på begge sider af Atlanten for alvor begyndte at udforske sansernes rolle (2012, s. 12). Det såkaldte 'cultural turn' legitimerede nye emnefelt som kropssociologi, følelsessociologi, mad, musik og kunst – og i denne kontekst udvidede Anthony Synnott (1991, 1993) og Gary Alan Fine (1996, 2003) perspektivet til også at omfatte sanserne. Howard Becker (2000) og Norman Denzin (1996) bidrog samtidig til at åbne sociologien mod visuelle og narrative metoder. Dermed blev sansesociologien koblet til en bredere bevægelse mod en mere sanselig sociologi.

Over de seneste årtier har antropologien udviklet et modent felt om sansernes kultur og politik (Stoller, 1989; Howes, 1991, 2003; Classen, 1993, 1997; Pink, 2006; Bille & Sørensen, 2007), mens sociologien kun sporadisk har artikuleret sit bidrag. Samtidig er sansestudier vokset frem som et levende tværdisciplinært felt (Bull et al., 2006). Vannini, Waskul og Gottschalk understreger, at "humans sense as well as make sense" – sanserne er grundlag for personlighed, social praksis og kulturel mening (2012, s. 15). I forlængelse af Zerubavel (1991, 1996) kan sanserne forstås som organiseret gennem sanselige fællesskaber: sociale fællesskaber, hvor koder, ritualer og perceptionens politik bliver til. Parallelt hermed har Sumartojo (2018) vist, hvordan sanse- og affektive erfaringer på mindstesteder kan undersøges gennem visuel etnografi – et eksempel på, hvordan tværdisciplinære tilgange kan berige studiet af atmosfære og sansning.

I en dansk kontekst fremstår Henning Bech og Niels Albertsen som centrale skikkelser. Bech analyserede, hvordan bylivet, køn og seksualitet gennemtrænges af æstetiserede overflader og blikke – byen fremstår dragende, netop fordi den er "for meget", for tæt og for stimulerende (Bech, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2005; se også Wøldike & Poder, 2024). Bechs sociologi viser, at perception ikke blot er en individuel erfaring, men en social kraft, der former hierarkier, muligheder og atmosfærer. Albertsen har på sin side bidraget til at etablere atmosfære som en sociologisk kategori (Albertsen, 1999, 2013, 2016). I artiklen 'Urbane Atmosfærer' (1999) beskriver han, hvordan sanser og stemninger udgør bylivet, og hvordan atmosfære må forstås som noget, der eksisterer mellem mennesker og omgivelser – hverken rent subjektivt eller rent objektivt. Med inspiration fra Gernot Böhme (1993, 1995) understregede Albertsen, at atmosfære er afgørende for, hvordan arkitektur, byrum og socialitet opleves, og han pegede på nødvendigheden af en æstetisk sociologi, der rækker ud over den klassiske kunstteori.

Ole B. Jensen har også bidraget med væsentlige indsigter, særligt gennem udviklingen af mobilitetssociologien. Selvom hans arbejde ikke eksplicit placerer sig inden for sansernes sociologi, har hans analyser af mobilitetsdesign og “dark design” vist, hvordan ‘affordances’ og atmosfærer strukturerer social differentiering og skaber det, han betegner som “atmospheres of rejection” (Jensen, 2023a, 2023b). Parallelt har antropologiske studier fremhævet, hvordan lys og materialitet former atmosfæriske erfaringer i hjemmet og byen (Bille & Sørensen, 2007; Bille, Bjerregaard & Sørensen, 2015; Bille, 2019). I samarbejde med Siri Schwabe har Mikkel Bille yderligere vist, hvordan urbane atmosfærer præger hverdagslige erfaringer og relationer (Bille & Schwabe, 2023). Hvor Bille og Schwabe fokuserede på brugernes oplevelser af byen, har sociologiske studier undersøgt, hvordan urbane atmosfærer designs (Stenslund, 2022). Tilsammen viser disse bidrag det dobbelte fokus i dansk forskning på både de oplevede og de designede dimensioner af urbane atmosfærer. Hertil kan også nævnes Christian Borchs bidrag, som har udfoldet atmosfære- og affektteori i relation til arkitektur, organisation og byrum (Borch 2010, 2014; Borch & Kornberger 2015).

I forlængelse af disse sociologiske og antropologiske perspektiver har filosofiske og designorienterede studier udforsket, hvordan sansning og æstetik kultiveres og praktiseres. Carsten Friberg har argumenteret for æstetisk dannelses rolle i formningen af affektive relationer, smag og kritisk bevidsthed om verdensforhold (Friberg, 2021). Parallelt har Stine Louring Nielsen undersøgt lysets sensoriske og atmosfæriske potentialer, både begrebsligt og empirisk. Sammen med Friberg og Hansen har hun studeret, hvordan farvet belysning former menneskelig tilstedeværelse og erfaring (Nielsen, Friberg & Hansen, 2018). Med afsæt i dette har Nielsen yderligere vist, hvordan belysning i sundhedsmiljøer praktiseres gennem kropslig opmærksomhed, idet jordemødre anvender kromatisk lys til at stemme fødsels- og omsorgsatmosfærer (Nielsen, 2022).

Nyere danske sociologiske bidrag – delvist inspireret af Bechs og Böhmes æstetiske overflader samt Albertsens idé om atmosfærisk gestikulation – har ligeledes undersøgt, hvordan forskellige rum og materialiteter kan fremkalde beslægtede stemninger på tværs af sanser (Stenslund, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2019). Disse studier inkluderer også omsorgsetiske refleksioner over kunstbaseret social innovation og offentlig styring (Stenslund, 2025).

Det skitserede i nærværende call er på ingen måde udtømmende; feltet rummer en bred vifte af perspektiver, som ikke alle kan nævnes her. Med dette call ønsker vi netop at åbne for nye møder, samtaler og spirende samarbejder på tværs af tilgange.

De fremhævede perspektiver viser samlet, hvordan sansning og æstetik fungerer som sociale kræfter, der former hierarkier, stemninger og handlemuligheder. Denne pointe genfindes også i nyere mikro-sociologiske studier af sansehandicap, hvor hørelse og kropslig kommunikation undersøges som betingelser for social deltagelse (Jepsen, Bengtsson & Pedersen 2024; Jepsen & Pedersen 2025). Dermed peger disse studier på potentialet i en sociologi om sanser til at åbne nye forståelser af omsorg, byliv, bæredygtig socialitet og mere til.

Temanummeret ønsker at samle bidrag, der udforsker **perceptionens politik**: hvordan sanser og perception – forstået som både kropslige indtryk og sociale fortolkninger – indgår i reguleringen, differentieringen og legitimeringen af sociale relationer, økonomiske processer og institutionelle praksisser. Perceptionens politik handler om, hvordan sansning og perceptive former bliver genstand for sociale kampe, normativ regulering og epistemologiske vurderinger – fra kapitalismens æstetiske iscenesættelser til byens atmosfærer og hverdagens mikrointeraktioner.

Mulige temaer – uden at være udtømmende – kan være:

- Hvordan perception anerkendes som evidens i beslutningsprocesser
- Hvordan urbane atmosfærer præger inklusion og eksklusion
- Hvordan konsum og æstetisk kapitalisme former sansepraksisser
- Hvordan køn, seksualitet og etnicitet konstitueres gennem blik, smag, duft, stil og materialitet
- Hvordan sanserne indgår i forestillinger og praksisser om bæredygtighed

Sprog

Temanummeret modtager bidrag på dansk, norsk, svensk og engelsk. For engelsksprogede bidrag gælder særlige retningslinjer, som findes her: <https://dansksociologi.dk/english-language-manuscripts/>.

Vigtige datoer

Frist for abstract (ca. 250 ord) og kort bio (ca. 50–75 ord): 5. marts 2026

Frist for artikler (max 20 sider á 2.400 anslag svarende til ca. 7.000–8.000 ord): 23. juni 2026

Alt indsendt materiale bør følge tidsskriftets retningslinjer. Se manuskript-vejledninger under fanen 'for forfattere' på tidsskriftets hjemmeside: <https://dansksociologi.dk/>

Såvel abstracts som fulde manuskripter indsendes online her: <https://rauli.cbs.dk/index.php/dansksociologi/about/submissions>

For spørgsmål, kontakt temaredaktør Anette Stenslund: stenslund@ruc.dk

Anette Stenslund

Call for papers: Special issue on Sensory Sociology and Aesthetic Sociology – The Politics of Perception

Building on the sociology of the senses – and in renewed contact with the original meaning of aesthetics as *aisthesis*, i.e. sensory perception – this special issue invites contributions that shed new light on the sociality of sensing and the sensing of sociality. Sensory sociology and aesthetic sociology are here regarded as two sides of the same coin: both revolve around how the sensorial and the aesthetic make social relations possible and meaningful.

Sensing has not always stood as an explicit field within sociology, but it has been a persistent theme in classical analyses. Georg Simmel demonstrated in his essays on sociological aesthetics, on the forms of the meal, and in 'Sociology of the Senses' (1969) how social relations rest on sensory impressions and aesthetic categories (Simmel, 1997; de la Fuente, 2000, 2007). In the writings of George Herbert Mead (1938) and John Dewey (1934), sensing and acting are inseparably linked: experience is a bodily and meaningful engagement with the world. William James (1983) emphasized that emotions and perception are embedded in social contexts, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) described body and perception as basic conditions of social existence. These classical positions provide a foundation for a sociology of the senses that has

long existed implicitly, but only rarely been made into an independent analytical axis (for exceptions see sociologists like Synnott, 1991, 1993; Vannini, Waskul & Gottschalk, 2012).

Anthropologist David Howes has reminded us that Karl Marx, already in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* from 1844, placed the senses at the centre: “Man is affirmed in the objective world not only in the act of thinking, but with *all* his senses” (Marx, 1987, p. 108, cited in Howes, 2003, p. 200). Inspired by Feuerbach and Fourier, Marx criticized the bourgeois industrial society for dulling the senses – and pointed to the possibility of a liberation where the senses could unfold freely (Howes, 2003, p. 202). This line of thought was continued by Walter Benjamin, who through the figure of the flâneur described urban surfaces and sensory impressions as both alluring and alienating, and he diagnosed the rise of an aestheticized consumer culture (Benjamin, 1973; see also Howes, 2003, p. 204). Today this perspective can be traced in analyses of aesthetic capitalism, where the senses and aesthetic forms have become central to value creation and social differentiation (de la Fuente & Murphy, 2024; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005).

As Vannini, Waskul and Gottschalk point out (2012, p. 12), it was not until the 1990s that sociologists on both sides of the Atlantic seriously began to explore the role of the senses. The so-called ‘cultural turn’ legitimized new fields such as the sociology of the body, emotions, food, music, and art – and in this context Anthony Synnott (1991, 1993) and Gary Alan Fine (1996, 2003) extended the scope to include the senses. Howard Becker (2000) and Norman Denzin (1996) further helped open sociology to visual and narrative methodologies. Thus, the sociology of the senses became linked to a broader movement toward a more sensuous sociology.

Over recent decades, anthropology has developed a mature field around the culture and politics of the senses (Howes, 1991, 2003; Classen, 1993, 1997; Pink, 2006; Stoller, 1989), while sociology has only sporadically articulated its contribution. At the same time, sensory studies have emerged as a vibrant interdisciplinary field (Bull et al., 2006). Vannini, Waskul and Gottschalk stress that “humans sense as well as make sense” – the senses form the basis of personhood, social practice and cultural meaning (2012, p. 15). Following Zerubavel (1991, 1996), senses can be understood as organized through sensory communities: social collectives where codes, rituals and the politics of perception take shape. In parallel, cultural geographers

such as Sumartojo (2018) have examined how sensory and affective experience at memory sites can be understood through visual ethnography, demonstrating how interdisciplinary approaches enrich the study of atmosphere and sensing.

In a Danish context, Henning Bech and Niels Albertsen stand out as central figures. Bech analyzed how urban life, gender, and sexuality are permeated by aestheticized surfaces and gazes – the city appears alluring precisely because it is “too much,” too dense, and too stimulating (Bech, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2005; see also Wøldike & Poder, 2024). His sociology demonstrates that perception is not merely an individual experience but a social force shaping hierarchies, opportunities, and atmospheres. Albertsen, in turn, has contributed to establishing atmosphere as a sociological category (Albertsen, 1999, 2013, 2016). In his article ‘Urban Atmospheres’ ([1999] 2019), Albertsen describes how senses and moods constitute urban life, and how atmosphere must be understood as something existing in between people and environments – neither purely subjective nor purely objective. Drawing on Gernot Böhme (1993, 1995), Albertsen emphasized that atmosphere is crucial for how architecture, urban space, and sociality are experienced, pointing to the necessity of an aesthetic sociology that reaches beyond classical art theory. Ole B. Jensen has also contributed important insights, particularly through the development of mobility sociology. While his work does not explicitly position itself within the sociology of the senses, his analyses of mobility design and “dark design” have demonstrated how affordances and atmospheres structure social differentiation and create what he terms “atmospheres of rejection” (Jensen, 2023a, 2023b).

In parallel, anthropological studies have highlighted how light and materiality shape atmospheric experience in the home and the city (Bille & Sørensen, 2007; Bille, Bjerregaard & Sørensen, 2015; Bille, 2019). In collaboration with Siri Schwabe, Mikkel Bille has further shown how urban atmospheres condition everyday experiences and relations (Bille & Schwabe 2023). Where Bille and Schwabe focused on users’ experiences of the city, sociological studies have examined how urban atmospheres are intentionally ‘architected’ and designed (Stenslund, 2022). Together, these contributions demonstrate the dual focus of Danish research on both the experiential and the design and governance dimensions of urban atmospheres. Christian Borch’s contributions can also be highlighted here, as his work has elaborated theories of atmosphere and affect in

relation to architecture, organization, and urban space (Borch 2010, 2014; Borch & Kornberger 2015).

Intersecting with these sociological and anthropological perspectives, philosophical and design-oriented research has also explored how sensing and aesthetics are cultivated and enacted. Carsten Friberg has argued for the role of aesthetic education in shaping affective relations, taste, and critical awareness of world-relations (Friberg, 2021). In parallel, Stine Louring Nielsen has examined the sensory and atmospheric potentials of light, both conceptually and empirically. Together with Friberg and Hansen, she has investigated how coloured illumination shapes human presence and experience (Nielsen, Friberg & Hansen, 2018). Extending this line of inquiry, Nielsen (2022) has further demonstrated how lighting in healthcare environments is practiced through embodied awareness, as midwives mobilize chromatic light to attune atmospheres of birth and care.

Recent Danish sociological contributions—partly inspired by Bech’s and Böhme’s work on aesthetic surfaces as well as Albertsen’s notion of atmospheric gesticulation—have likewise explored how different spaces and materialities can evoke related moods across the senses (Stenslund 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2019). These studies also include care-ethical reflections on art-based social innovation and public governance (Stenslund 2025).

The overview provided in this call is by no means exhaustive; the field encompasses a wide range of perspectives that cannot all be listed here. With this call, we instead seek to invite new encounters, spark conversations, and encourage the growth of potential collaborations across diverse approaches.

The perspectives highlighted here collectively illustrate how sensing and aesthetics operate as social forces that shape hierarchies, atmospheres, and possibilities for action. This insight also resonates with recent Danish micro-sociological studies of sensory disability, where hearing and embodied communication are examined as conditions for social participation (Jepsen, Bengtsson & Pedersen 2024; Jepsen & Pedersen 2025). Taken together, such studies point to the potential of a sociology of the senses to open new understandings of care, urban life, sustainable sociality, and more.

This special issue invites contributions that explore **the politics of perception**: how the senses and perception – understood as both bodily impressions and their social interpretations – are implicated in the regulation, differentiation and legitimation of social relations, economic processes and institutional practices. The politics of perception refers to the ways in which sensing and perceptual forms become subject to social struggles, normative regulation and epistemological evaluation – from the aesthetic staging of capitalism to urban atmospheres and everyday micro-interactions. Possible themes (not exhaustive) include:

- How perception is recognized as evidence in decision-making processes
- How urban atmospheres shape inclusion and exclusion
- How consumption and aesthetic capitalism shape sensory practices
- How gender, sexuality and ethnicity are constituted through gaze, taste, scent, style and materiality
- How the senses are included in notions and practices of sustainability

Languages

We welcome contributions in Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and English. Special guidelines apply to English-language manuscripts: <https://dansksociologi.dk/english-language-manuscripts/>.

Important dates

Deadline for abstracts (approx. 250 words) and short bio (approx. 50–75 words): 5 March 2026

Deadline for full articles: 23 June 2026

All submitted material should follow the guidelines of the journal. See manuscript guidelines under the tab ‘for authors’ on the journal’s website: <https://dansksociologi.dk/>

Both abstracts and full manuscripts can be submitted online here:

<https://rauli.cbs.dk/index.php/dansksociologi/about/submissions>

For questions, please contact theme Editor Anette Stenslund: stenslund@ruc.dk

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