

# Studying Lived Experiences in a Fatigued Society Through Observing the Sensory Perception of the World: A Case Study

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**Abstract:** The sociology of the senses delves into the intricate fabric of the Lifeworld, exploring how the senses play a pivotal role in shaping human interactions, particularly among university students. This case study focuses on understanding the relationships between senses, their interplay, and their collective impact on bodily experiences and perceptions of reality in its “qualitative immediacy.” We will examine the symbolic meanings associated with various senses, such as sound, smell, touch, balance (equilibrioception), movement (kinesthesia), temperature (thermoception), and even our sense of time. By investigating these sensory experiences within the social contexts of academia, we aim to unravel the nuanced connections between different senses and how they merge to form a rich tapestry of individual and collective experiences in everyday life. This exploration will concentrate on three key incidents in the lives of students: coming to University and attending classes, staying on campus, going home. We will shed light on the profound implications of sensory experiences for individual and societal dynamics, focusing on the pathic dimension of experiencing the Lifeworld. The pathic dimension refers to the emotional expressions of our feelings in relation to material objects and the bodies of others with whom we interact. By explicating this dimension, we aim to understand more about the transformative effects of bodily and sensual mindfulness. This analysis draws inspiration from contemplative grounded theory and phenomenology.



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## Introduction

The sociology of the senses explores the complex dynamics of the Lifeworld, examining how sensory experiences influence interactions among students in university settings. This research aims to comprehend the connections between different senses, their interrelations, and how they collectively affect bodily experiences and perceptions of reality in its immediate, qualitative form (Dewey, 2002). Senses can offer us direct meanings, often eliminating the need for abstract language and verbal expression (Rochberg-Halton, 1982; Vannini, Waskul, Gottschalk, 2012: 20; Le Breton, 2017).

By exploring the symbolic meanings tied to senses such as sound, smell, touch, balance (equilibrioception), movement (kinesthesia), temperature (thermoception), and time perception, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex interplay of sensory experiences within the social environments of academic institutions. The analysis can be conducted in an interactionist style (Gibson, Lehn, 2020; 2021) by using interactionist categories (Goffman, 1963; de la Fuente, Walsh, 2021) and analyzing involvement in interactions or gatherings while observing the role of the senses, how the atmosphere (in our research context) is framed, and how the structure in which the social situation is produced. However, this paper focuses more on the existential dimension (*pathic*) of the senses' work in co-creating or feeling a particular mood. We want to describe the dominant contents of the expressions about the mood. Our goal is to uncover the subtle relationships between these senses and understand how they combine to create a rich mosaic of personal and shared lived experiences in everyday life. Therefore, we are more interested in the pathic content of the experiences and mood (emotions embedded contextually) than in the form and interactional structure where they emerge.

Mood is a holistic perception of the world. It is objective, unlike feelings we have toward someone or something. Moods determine our being in the world and are more fundamental than sensory and intellectual knowledge (Heidegger, 1996; Galarowicz, 2014). If I feel overwhelmed by something, the whole world is overwhelmed; if I am sad, the entire world is sad. I then exist in unity with the world. Mood coexists with a person; it tunes them into a specific perception of the world and emotional response.

Sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, and estheticians relate mood – often referred to as atmosphere – to space (Thibaud, 2014; 2015; de la Fuente, Walsh, 2021).

Anthropologist Le Breton (2017) argues that the senses play a significant role in constructing our perception of the world. People and their senses are not merely passive receivers of stimuli and emotions, and their understanding of the world does not result from the reception of external stimuli to control their view of the world and actions.

This study focuses on three significant events in students' everyday life: commuting to school, spending time on campus, and returning home. By expanding our knowledge of sensory socialization and how the senses influence the social construction of reality and emotions, we reveal their significant impact on personal and societal dynamics within the emotional dimension of experiencing the Lifeworld (pathic dimension). The senses can be investigated from an external perspective, which is closely related to the formal analysis of interaction structures and interactional order (Cekaite, Mondada, 2020; Gibson, Lehn, 2020; 2021), as well as the analysis of the cultural frameworks that shape them (Pink, 2015). We aim to explore this from the internal perspective of the participants, focusing on how they experience sensing the world. This contemplative approach accentuates the explication of the situated feelings of the participants and reflexivity on the researched situation (Konecki, 2018; 2022; 2023). Contemplative methodology emphasizes the reconstruction of researchers' assumptions in perceiving and analyzing phenomena and their positionality as well as thought processes about knowledge production.

The pathic dimension refers to the emotional expressions of our feelings about material objects and the bodies of the subject and others involved in interactions (van Manen, 2016). The situation and embodiment of reactions both play a crucial role in this dimension. Often, as individuals, we fall into mental traps of illusions (stereotypes, assumptions, clichés), failing to see and feel the experiences and suffering of others as they are and our role in shaping this perception. Moore (1995) states that “[a]ny thing perceived as existing independently of the perceiver can be dereified by recalling the subjective experiences out of which the object was constituted and by apprehending the reflexive connections of the object to its extent” (Moore, 1995: 703 as cited in Konecki, 2018: 40). When we distance ourselves, we lose access to *pathic* feelings.

According to Max van Manen (2016: 267), we understand the term *pathic* in the following way:

Knowledge is *pathic* to the extent that the act of practice depends on the sense and sensuality of the body: personal presence, relational perceptiveness, tact for knowing what to say and do in contingent situations, thoughtful routines and practices, and other aspects of knowledge that are in part prereflective, and yet thoughtful – full of thought” (see also Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Pathic knowledge refers to a form of pre-reflective cognition that is closely tied to emotions and immediate actions. It encompasses the innate bodily responses and intuitive understanding that

occur in the present moment without the need for prior thought or analysis. Pathic knowledge is deeply connected to empathy, as it involves our ability to empathetically grasp and comprehend the emotions and experiences of others, including other living beings. This dimension of knowing strongly emphasizes experiencing and understanding through the contemplation of our feelings and the emotions that arise during our actions.

Phenomenology profoundly influences contemplative research (Bentz, Giorgino, 2016), particularly in applying *epoché* and using imaginative variations to explicate phenomena and their structure. Contemplative research also draws inspiration from Buddhist Zen practices, focusing on the process of minding (Janesick, 2015; Konecki, 2018: 43–53). This material is examined through contemplative coding procedures (contemplative grounded theory is used), where contemplative notes/memos are written alongside the coding and researchers' assumptions. This reflective process is made explicit and continuously analyzed through writing in the style of contemplative grounded theory (Konecki, 2022, see Chapter 2). Contemplation is employed throughout the coding of empirical materials by writing contemplative notes that explore the researchers' connection to the investigated situation, the materials, and the coding. Moreover, we focus on the micro-level perspective, incorporating analysis of the connection between the senses and the positioning of individuals within their social environments.

This article adopts the qualitative and contemplative analytical approach, detailing the characteristics of the sensory experience of one student group in specific physical and social contexts in an academic educational institutions.

## Methodology

We employed contemplative research techniques, including self-observation, self-reporting, and writing contemplative notes based on these reports. These techniques form part of the contemplative research methodology (Konecki, 2018: 229–231; 2022).

Self-reports (first-person perspectives) involve observing and describing personal experiences during various activities or periods of inactivity. We chose the methodology to get inside the contents of lived experiences based on the sensual perception of the world. In order to gain the first-person perspective and effectively understand and describe phenomena, we must develop the ability to concentrate and observe ourselves, in this case – our senses. Self-observation entails directing our attention toward the workings of our mind, acknowledging our current thoughts, and recognizing how our body (senses) responds to external stimuli, including the emotions experienced in specific situations. This practice lets us deeply contemplate the contents of experiences and reconstruct the essential aspects of phenomena, objects, or situations (Konecki, 2018: 230). In this project, we can further explicate the somatic work involved in sensing and making sense of the world.

When writing self-reports, we focus on capturing the moments in which we encounter the phenomenon, including the surrounding space and contextual factors. The description should be highly detailed, capturing the entirety of the situation while also effectively expressing our feelings.

The third technique we employed in our contemplative studies is “contemplative note.” Through this technique, we revisit our thoughts and emotions, making the description more specific to the context of the place and situation of self-observation. This reflective practice aims to discern which categories arise from the external world, from our cultural and scientific assumptions, and which ones stem from our direct experience. Furthermore, we explore the emotions and bodily sensations we experience while coding or interpreting the empirical materials.

It is essential to acknowledge that mastering self-observation and writing contemplative notes about self-observation requires time and practice. Engaging in meditation, *hatha* yoga, *tai chi*, and Christian or Muslim prayers – among other mind and body techniques – can be beneficial in this context. We can learn to be mindful of our senses and how they collaborate in experiencing the lifeworld. Perceptual learning occurs throughout our entire lifespan (Gibson, 2024). We should also emphasize the **significance of writing** in phenomenological and contemplative research. Writing is a valuable tool for documenting and illuminating the observed events and the workings of our minds (van Manen, 2016).

In this paper, we will explain and interpret the auto-reports that we had received from the sociology students (14 students, 13 women, and 1 man; the University was located in a big city) who were studying at the Master’s level in the last year. They all were of middle-class origin. They were enrolled in the course “Sensory Perception and Emotions: Contemplative Sociology in the Study of Sensory Perception of the World” during the summer semester of the 2023/2024 academic year. The research lasted three months, from March to the end of May. Fourteen students participated in the research project as part of the class. The students gave their informed consent to participate in the research. They have also permitted me to use their self-reports and quote them in a publication. There was no association between the students’ grades and their agreement to provide the auto-reports for analysis and quotation. They could refuse it without consequences (one student refused to include the self-reports in the publication). The researcher-teacher made an explicit declaration about this. The documents produced by the students were anonymized. All quotes in the paper are from female students, and when they are from the male participant (one man took part), it is indicated. Cooperation with the students took place in a friendly atmosphere and was highly effective. They made 46 self-reports, and I created 19 contemplative notes about the self-reports after the discussion with the research participants. The students were taught about the contemplative techniques of research. They learned to do self-observation and self-reporting about their sensing the world. Primarily, we had practiced the perception of scents and sounds. They were also taught the self-observation of the sense of taste and touching. The students observed their bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts that emerged during the three situations collectively chosen to study everyday life. The first situation focused on the morning routine of **getting up and going to school**. This was important as it revealed the physical and mental state of being in the morning, which can influence one’s mood for the entire day. We aimed to identify the senses that recognize and contribute to these mood feelings.

The next situation examined the experience of **being in the university** through the senses. We explored which senses were most significant in the university experience. To conclude the day, I investigated the students' experience **traveling home** from the university. This situation involved transitioning from a formal and demanding institution that required work and effort to study and stay within its buildings and classrooms. We aimed to identify the senses that had been predominantly activated during this transition in the city (Low, Kalekin-Fishman, 2018; Konecki, 2023).

If we use the pronoun 'we' in the paper or generalize it in our summaries or descriptions, it should be clarified that these conclusions pertain to the research group and myself (as I had similar experiences to the students). However, the descriptions of lived experiences and the conclusions drawn from them serve as exemplifications of Byung-Chul Han's theory of the 'burnout society,' which we refer to as the 'fatigue society' (see Conclusion of the paper).

## Getting Up – a shared challenge

Waking up in the morning is usually a challenging experience. It affects not only students, but also lecturers and myself personally. Therefore, I can empathize with the students in this morning's struggle. The morning typically begins with a waking sound, such as an alarm clock or, for example, a dog's barking. Waking up is thus linked to the activation of the sense of hearing and also touch, which in the following case is a touch of closeness and a sign of bonding. **The alarm clock is our call to return from the world of dreams to the lifeworld, and it can be associated with irritation.**

I was in a deep sleep phase when a dog's quiet barking woke me up. The twilight in the bedroom made it difficult for me to wake up. Pleased that he (the dog) managed to wake me, he jumps onto the bed, walks over me, and licks my face in greeting. I wake up, and the initial impression of irritation caused by the sudden awakening fades. Now, already happy, I begin to play with him.

**Waking up is a process.** It does not happen suddenly; we gradually enter daily life with the help of our senses, which reveal the physical conditions of waking life. An essential sense in the morning wake-up process is **the sense of thermoception**, as we start to feel coldness. This sensation accompanies various activities we perform. Additionally, there is a noticeable difference between the indoor temperature and the outside temperature:

I feel a chill all over my body and try to get dressed as quickly as possible, but my clothes are cold too – sweatpants, socks, and a sweatshirt (put on over my pyjamas). A shiver runs through me. I feel the heaviness of my body, my 'stiff bones' after the night... Next, I call my pet, who, eager to go outside, starts jumping around, making it difficult to put on his harness. I feel irritated, but eventually, I manage to do it. Then, I put on my coat, scarf, and winter boots. I feel even more irritated due to the number of clothes I have to wear and the season's frustration. We go outside. Immediately, I feel the temperature difference. The wind is blowing. I'm cold. I attach



the leash to my dog, and we leave the yard. The happy pet tugs slightly but successfully does his business, and after ten minutes, we return home. I'm freezing and stiff. I quickly undress and get back into my pyjamas. I wash my hands; initially, the cold water numbs my fingers. Soon, I feel pleasantly warm from the water and soap. I dry my hands with a soft towel. I return to bed and fall asleep for another hour and a half.

I opened my eyes before any sound came from the alarm clock; the phone's vibrations woke me up. I turned it off without looking at it; my body knew where the phone was. I felt my body sinking into the mattress, and when I focused on it, I felt like I weighed a ton. The quilt felt like it weighed a ton. I lay there, feeling my body waking up, regaining its function, as blood flowed to my feet and hands. I could smell the vanilla oil from the humidifier, the scent of fabric softener from the clothes hanging next to the bed, and the remnants of my strong perfume in my hair. It was too hot, but my hands were ice cold.

I heard pigeons walking on my balcony, which raised my blood pressure; I had to get up and chase them away. **I felt my body was tired** [all emphases – K.T.K.], I hadn't rested well, my eyelids were heavy, and my back was tense.

Initially, the body reacts automatically by turning off the alarm. However, the heaviness makes itself known, and the sensation of the body's weight and the blanket becomes overwhelming. Full wakefulness is achieved gradually, with the feeling of, for instance, blood circulation in the feet and hands or the coolness in the hands. Sensory perceptions such as smells emerge, and the sense of hearing is reactivated. The senses awaken slowly and in a specific sequence (hearing – touch – smell, temperature sense, and hearing again). Yet, all these sensory experiences are overshadowed by the overwhelming feeling of **bodily fatigue**, a complete awareness of being tired.<sup>1</sup> Mornings are associated with an interesting phenomenon of **the sensory grounding of waking up**. Sometimes, loud sounds or intense smells (e.g., coffee) are needed to wake up. There can also be a phenomenon of sensory substitution, where the sense of hearing can be replaced by the sense of touch, as seen in the example below. Another interesting phenomenon is the escape from silence. Bombarding oneself with sounds (or other stimuli) is a natural part of daily routine, but it also contributes **to sensory fatigue** (de Rijk, Schreurs, Bensing, 1999; Tomasino et al., 2022; Zombek, Sorokin, 2023). However, music is essential in introducing the student to the everyday-life mood of practical activities and working (de la Fuente, Walsh 2021), "[...] loud music pulled me out of my drowsiness":

I put on headphones to drown out the silence in the house. I turned on the water for coffee and, looking out the window, waited for it to boil. I realized I wasn't using my hearing to know if it was boiling. I wasn't listening for the whistle; I had headphones. I realized that I touch the kettle's

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1 Tiredness can be linked to the compulsive pressure to be active in various domains of life in contemporary society, both at work and in so-called "leisure" time. We face pressure for achievements and individual success. There is no respite from this; everyone is their slave and exploits themselves (Byung-Chul Han, 2015).

handle every morning to check if it has started boiling, feeling for vibrations. Only the smell of strong coffee and loud music pulled me out of my drowsiness.

Waking up in the morning is often associated with conscious bodily sensations: the body feels heavy and there are sometimes sensations of swelling. Environmental stimuli and their sensory reception are essential, and these are linked with emotions (the pathic dimension): the unpleasant taste of toothpaste, annoyance at the sound of the alarm clock, and the pleasant sight of a car. There are also sounds and various events in the surroundings – the partner’s snoring, the neighbor’s footsteps, or the loud sound of a key in the door (according to Böhme, 2000, it is *acoustic atmosphere*). **What reaches the senses affects the narrator’s well-being and co-creates the mood of the situation.**

Every activity the narrator performs is connected to the reception of sensory stimuli. This is due to the focus on the conscious reception of these stimuli as outlined by the research task in our project. Nonetheless, almost every morning activity has its counterpart in bodily sensations (sensory receptors).

Observing bodily sensations also highlights **the importance of the sensory aspects of daily life** after leaving the house and during the drive to school: the cold after exiting the building, the sound of turning the key, the feeling of the plastic steering wheel under the fingers, the tactile sensation of the smoothness of the steering wheel. **The lifeworld here is perceived primarily through sensory experience, not through thoughts or concepts:**

The first thing I feel is the cold and the annoying alarm clock, which will ring at least thrice, so I turn it off. I roll onto my side and hear my boyfriend’s steady snoring. I feel the warmth and the texture of the blanket on me. My eyes start to close, and then the alarm rings again. In the hallway, I hear the neighbors’ footsteps. My body feels heavy, and the last thing I want to do is get up. When I hear the alarm for the third time, I get up. I feel heavy and swollen. I go to the bathroom and wash my face with cold water; it feels cold but pleasant. I brush my teeth, tasting the strong, unpleasant flavor of the toothpaste. It’s time to go to class. As I leave the building, the cold seeps into me. I hear the loud sound of turning the key, which echoes through the hallway. I walk to the car – I like its sight; it’s yellow and easily noticeable. I get into the car; it’s cold but will warm up soon. I automatically press all the important buttons, feeling the plastic under my fingers and the smoothness of the steering wheel. I drive to college through narrow streets and then onto the main road. I drive the same route I always choose. I still feel the heaviness in my eyelids.

**Irritation and sleep deprivation become apparent.** However, the return to reality happens slowly and is associated with the smell of coffee and the observation and touch of other living beings (e.g., animals). The senses are at work in the specific **context of the morning getting up (touching, coldness, smell); we can call this contextualization “entwinement,”** i.e., “the interplay of sensory experience with diverse cultural and contextual resources, which, in turn, inform and play on people’s sensory experiences” (Gibson, Lehn, 2021). Therefore, feelings and emotions are entwined as calming after petting the companion animal:



The ringing alarm clock irritates me. I feel my eyes are puffy and tired. The warmth of the blanket makes me not want to get up. I wait for the snooze sound while feeling the wrinkled sheet, which also irritates me. I try to get comfortable but simultaneously feel that I won't fall back asleep and that lying there won't change anything. Getting up, I feel the cool air and open the windows, but it's raining and cloudy, which doesn't improve my mood... I feel tired and unmotivated, but after a while, I wake up, and this feeling passes as I start preparing for the day. The smell of coffee reaches me from the kitchen, and I immediately crave it. As I leave the room, the dog runs to me, barking happily and asking for petting. I sit with him by the wall and pet him. I feel the cold tiles, which send a shiver through me. I change position and squat. Petting him calms me; I feel his warm body and notice that despite my efforts, I didn't manage to trim the hair around his eyes evenly. As I get up, I feel a pain in my knee, which cracks a moment later.

**The world of practical actions (working life)** reveals its force immediately upon waking. Waking up in the morning is also associated with thinking about what we must do that day. The time is checked, but simultaneously, there is a need for background noise. Our world is a constant noise of varying intensity:

Waking up doesn't let me determine what day of the week, Tuesday or Wednesday. I don't know if I need to jump out of bed or if I still have time – complete disorientation. I reach my hand out from under the warm blanket and feel the cold in the room. I check the time and am immediately distracted by a flood of thoughts. With the cold on my face, I analyze what I need to do. I pull myself out from under the blanket and turn on the first film I find on my phone to hear some background noise. I get up and start my day.

Extreme situations, such as illness, also amplify negative emotions. Feelings of pain, helplessness, frustration, and discouragement as well as irritation emerge:

[...] at 5:37 a.m., not because of exhaustion or worries, but due to perhaps the worst thing, illness and a fever reaching almost 40 degrees. Upon opening my eyes in the morning, I feel overall weakness and fatigue instead of feeling rested and refreshed. My body temperature affects my physical and mental abilities, making even the simplest tasks more difficult. Upon waking in such a situation, the emotions accompanying me include frustration and discouragement. The fever makes normal functioning difficult, and my well-being is poor, leading to feelings of helplessness and irritation... In the early morning, my body was burning up, and I can even say I didn't know where I was. I felt terrible, and my body refused to cooperate, especially when it came to getting up and walking to the cabinet for pain and fever medication. However, I managed to mobilize myself and cover that, albeit short, distance. On my way back, I hit the desk, causing a few bruises and even more muscle pain than before.

Mornings are not an easy experience for students. Transitioning from the world of sleep to the daily grind requires effort and a stimulation of various senses, such as hearing (music), smell, or taste (coffee). At night, our senses are in a state of rest; if we are tired and sleep-deprived, this rest is

insufficient, making the morning wake-up and getting out of bed require more effort and time. The competitive, work-driven society must contend with the society of fatigue (Byung-Chul Han, 2015; Rosa, 2019). These various aspects of collective life exist within us and manifest at different intensities during different life stages and daily rhythms. The society of fatigue is not an abstraction; it is a genuine experience for individuals, an experience that manifests in various places, such as our bed – the space intended for rest. However, the desired rest does not always occur.

## Going to school

**Attending school evokes solid sensory experiences.** Leaving home for school is associated with a temperature change, as there is a perceived difference in temperature between indoors and outdoors. Students often try to isolate themselves from their surroundings, and their sense of hearing is directed by their mind, which decides what sounds their body will perceive. The sense of smell also influences their olfactory attention to a scarf scented with perfume. Listening to music through headphones isolates them from their surrounding. It can be “side involvement” or disinvolvement from possible conversations, while the main involvement of traveling to school is maintained (Goffman, 1963: 43). Music and the cold can regulate the pace of their walk, with a fast pace warming them up:

25 minutes before classes start, I gather the necessary items: headphones, phone, mineral water, and laptop. I pack everything into my bag. I put on my jacket, scarf, and winter shoes. I say goodbye to my dog, and then I leave. It’s cold outside. I put on my headphones and hood. I play music and activate the noise-canceling mode, so I can’t hear the city. The smell of smog and smoke annoys me. I bury my nose in the scarf, which smells like me and perfume. It’s a pleasant smell. I walk quickly, driven by fast music singing in my mind. The pace is also influenced by the cold – the faster I walk, the more my body warms up, and the faster I reach the university. My misfortune is almost always encountering red lights at pedestrian crossings. It annoyed me, but I started accepting it and focusing on listening to music. I cross Pomorska and Kilińskiego streets. I arrive at the university and go to the lecture hall. I take off my headphones and start hearing the buzz of the faculty.

After the morning preparations and waking up, it is time to leave home for school. However, during the journey to school, fatigue is felt. The journey is uncomfortable; the tram shakes the body and the sun shines strongly. Travelers try to isolate themselves from their surroundings, from their noises and smells. There are pleasant moments, such as the view of sunlit tenement houses, but **fatigue is still felt** at the end of the journey to school. And this is just the beginning of the day:

I step outside and take a turn to get onto the street. The sun is shining; I feel the warmth on my neck and feet. My face already hurts from squinting at the brightness; I need to relax the muscles in my face and lower back. I’m annoyed by the long wait for the green light at the crosswalk, and shortly after, the signaling melody irritates me. I stand at the bus stop, facing away from the sun. I feel thirst and fatigue in my feet. I get on the tram and sit facing backward, which causes

discomfort due to motion sickness. I take a sip of sparkling water, which pleasantly tingles my palate. An annoying man sits before me, playing music at full volume. The tram shakes, trembles, and sways me from side to side. My hair keeps brushing against my face. I can only smell my perfume on the scarf with my nose. There are a lot of people around me. The sun is glaring, but it's still a moment of rest for me as I sit and try to relax my feet by curling them. I feel the pulsation throughout my body. I play a game, blocking out the stimuli with my headphones, but occasionally, someone squeezes beside me, pushing and leaning on me. It gets hot and sleepy in the tram. I get off at the stop, feeling the temperature difference despite the sunny weather. The sun illuminates the tenement houses; it's a pleasant sight. People pass by me. I smell the stench of cigarettes and an unpleasant odor from the courtyard gates. A sip of water, I feel, scratching my palate. I tactfully avoid pedestrians as I reach the pedestrian crossing. I feel **tired** [bolded by K.T.K.]. I enter the faculty building and skip the stairs, taking the elevator instead.

The noise of the machines coming at me from different directions and in varying degrees mixes with the sounds of cars, buses, and trams. [...] The first thing I notice is the mixture of various smells, from the smell of sweat through exhaust fumes to the scent of perfumes of the people standing next to me. At this stage, I slowly start to feel nauseous and have thoughts pulsing in my head. I am not sure if it's the smells or motion sickness.

**The overwhelming noise** is also associated with **information overload** from which students want to escape:

When on one side I hear about what's trending on 'TikTok' and on the other about problems with varicose veins or the spine, I feel greatly overwhelmed, both acoustically and informationally. In such circumstances, I often wear headphones with noise-canceling options, but they don't even help much.

## At the university – mainly scents

The university building can evoke various sensory experiences. The students specifically **focused on the sense of smell as the dominant sensory experience** in our research space. While the sense of sight is also important, it is often taken for granted and not given much thought. Our bodies naturally navigate through familiar spaces, with our vision working in sync with our movements. However, paying attention to scents can provide a more impactful sensory experience, especially when we consciously choose to perceive our surroundings in that manner, as was the focus of our research.

### Smelling the past

Smells sometimes **remind us of past events**; even when they are unpleasant now, they can evoke memories of enjoyable experiences from the past. Being present with our senses can simultaneously mean being in the past. In the following self-report, the narrator smells chlorine and is transported

back to pleasant morning swim practices from her past. For a moment, her sense of sight and spatial orientation is switched off, and she finds herself in the correct lecture hall, with the awareness of a specific smell in the background:

The chlorine smell hit me on the third floor, where I had my classes. It was unpleasant for my nostrils but not for my mind. It brought back memories of swim practices. My walk to the classroom became automated; my body knew where to go and how not to stumble while I immersed myself in the memory of morning practices, the smell of chlorine, and the pleasant coolness of the pool water... For that brief moment, my body was in two places at once – I heard my footsteps echoing off the department walls while almost feeling the water and chlorine on my skin. It's fascinating that my mind could transport me nearly 15 years back with just one stimulus. I was so focused on this memory that I overlooked it when I arrived at the correct classroom.

***The smell of the university is often linked with the scent of other people, their clothes, perfumes, food, and consumed products.*** Additionally, lecture halls usually smell like gym rooms, with the scent of sweat. The restrooms, on the other hand, smell of old urine and cleaning products. Overall, the smell of the university is very varied; no single scent is always associated with this place, and there is no generalized smell. The scents are connected with spaces at the University, and what is interesting is that they are not associated with the categorization of people or social class categorization. Many particular smells become noticeable in specific locations due to the presence of past and present people who carry these smells. The scent comes from people. Refurbished rooms generally do not have a strong scent. **Memories from the past are again very significant**, influencing the sensory perception of similar spaces where we currently spend time (see below the self-report):

For me, the smell of the university is the smell of other people, not the space itself. They are the ones who give the rooms their scent. Someone has sweet perfume; someone else has a more bitter fragrance. Someone smells of sweat; someone hasn't washed their shoes in a long time. Some eat tangerine, some chew mint gum, and some eat sausages. Sometimes, the classroom is musty and smells like a gym after PE, with sweaty boys who run around in damp socks. The restrooms smell unpleasant and of old urine and cleaning products. All of this is the result of people. When I smell the walls, the building itself smells a bit like wet concrete. I don't notice the smell of the flooring unless it's linoleum – then it has the 'gym' smell described above. Everything is too renovated for me to get a good sense of it – like fresh air, whose scent is different every time and brings back various memories and moments from the past.

After finishing classes and leaving the room, the cafeteria smell is no longer noticeable. There's a smell similar to that in Building A – stale and 'old,' which reminds me of my high school, which was unrenovated for many years. When I descended to the ground floor, I smelled fresh air near the door and stepped outside.

## Smelling the space

Various scents characterize the department buildings. **Moving through different spaces provides sensory information, with each area having its distinct smell** (see: Vannini, Waskul, Gottschalk, 2012: 108). Cafeteria scents (cakes and coffee), courtyard smells (cigarette smoke), and the scent of renovated buildings are notable. The smells also relate to the passing people, such as the sweet smell of perfume. Furthermore, a characteristic feature in student descriptions is the stuffy sensation upon entering lecture halls, often without precisely identifying the scent. An interesting phenomenon is **the comparison of smells**, such as exhaust fumes and the scent in a lecture hall, and assigning them values of better or worse scents:

After a moment, someone opens a window, likely because the smell in the room bothers more than just me. The room slowly fills with a draft of cool air. There's a slight smell of exhaust fumes, but it's better than the scent in the room.

Some students are susceptible to smells and describe them using negative adjectives and terms. Generally, these are smells of staleness, causing unpleasant sensations in various places (especially in classrooms). Consequently, **places are associated with specific smells**. If we were to describe the university's smell briefly, it would be that **"the university stinks"** (see the following quote):

When we enter a small room, we are immediately repelled by the stuffiness and the smell of sweat. The room hasn't been aired out. We quickly open the windows. After a while, the room fills with fresh air, but due to the season, I feel the cold and get goosebumps. One of the students asked to close the windows.

Students also **perceive noise** at the university. Some are very sensitive to sounds, which they perceive as noise. However, not only noise but also silence contributes to fatigue. Entering the home allows one to assess what was burdensome at school and during the return home – it was the noise. Returning home feels like returning to a haven of silence:

We had to do a group task, and I was happy. I knew it would help me focus on the class. A terrible noise started, with students talking, shouting, laughing. I tried to calm my thoughts and focus on the task...

During breaks, students would leave the rooms, and it would start getting noisy. It was okay for me, the constant silence from the early morning was overwhelming me... Later, I increasingly couldn't focus on what the Professor was saying. Another 30 minutes passed very quickly. I no longer had the strength to get up from the bench and go to the bus...

I enter the apartment, take off my shoes. I smell coffee again. I know that I am in a place where I can be myself, rest away from the noise.



## The overwhelming scent mixture

An interesting phenomenon is **the overwhelming sensory effect of a mixed scent**. In the hallway, a blend of many scents emerges, each distinguishable yet collectively merging into **an overpowering aroma**. What is essential here is the space where the scents are mixed up, i.e., corridors:

In the corridors, a mix of all kinds of smells reappears. I can't focus on any particular scent; there are too many. Someone is eating *kabanos* (dried sausage), and I can smell its distinctive aroma. Another person drinks hot chocolate, and I can detect its sweet fragrance. I smell various perfumes, sweat, and the gingerbread scent of my hand cream. My nose is overwhelmed by this mixture of scents; it's just too much for me.

Entering the university, the scents of chemicals, people's perfumes, and stale air blend. The cafeteria's food smell, particularly pizza, often hits us even on the third floor. When we enter classrooms, we notice the unpleasant odor of stagnant air and lingering smells from previous classes. It's often unbearable until a window is opened. Throughout the university, a mix of the scents from all the people attending classes dominates.

A scent can be overwhelming and is an **element of the mood of being overwhelmed**. It is somewhat primal compared to our psychological state, yet it can evoke a specific **emotional mood**. This can be a mood of being overwhelmed or discomfort. Physical sensations, such as a scratchy throat or itchy skin, can be decisive in evoking a particular mood. Scents (already present before we enter a given space) – overwhelming scents – come from the chemicals used to clean various utensils and places and other people's perfumes. With their scents, others become elements of the mood of being overwhelmed. **The multitude of these overwhelming scents can create a mood of being overwhelmed**. It could be summarized in the following way: "These are not my scents but those of others, and they overwhelm me":

I enter the department through the entrance of Building D. The street noises fade as the door closes. Immediately, I am assaulted by an extremely distinctive smell – a stuffy and overwhelming aroma filled with unpleasant notes. I feel heaviness in the air and dryness, making breathing hard. This overpowering scent causes discomfort, making my throat feel parched. I swallow hard. My neck starts to itch slightly... And then, a perfumed student exits the restroom, and the sweetness of her perfume intensifies the feeling of being overwhelmed.

However, when confronted with unpleasant smells, students are not passive; they "negotiate" or "fight" with the physical environment for their well-being. The scents seem to be beyond the control, although **sensory perceptions (unpleasant ones) trigger protective actions**. This could involve covering the nose against the unpleasant smell of cigarette smoke or opening windows to air out a stuffy room. Thus, sensory perceptions act as an initial warning system for regulating our physical and psychological well-being:

Entering Building A, I immediately smell the cigarette smoke from students smoking outside. I cover my nose with my scarf because the odor irritates me...

### **Fatigue from studying**

An interesting phenomenon is **the association of a scent with personal fatigue**, bringing the theme of exhaustion back into focus. In the following quote, a student ironically describes their olfactory perceptions and concludes with a statement about their burnout from studying. The theme of being tired from studying appears often among the students:

All these scents, though diverse, blend into a harmonious symphony, creating the university's unique atmosphere, full of inspiration, learning, and growth opportunities. But in reality, as soon as I walk through the department doors, I immediately feel like I want to turn around and head home to my warm bed. This place has drained every emotion I had when I first came here. After almost five years of studying, I am mentally and physically exhausted, and it only worsens when I think about having to come back here again.

### **Returning home**

Returning home involves experiencing various sensory signals and emotions in different space. These experiences often occur during the journey and return home, where the senses of smell, touch, hearing, and sight frequently combine and complement each other. Returning home often comes **with fatigue**, as indicated by our bodies. Proprioception, which informs us about muscle tension and the need for rest, plays a significant role. A deeply tired body experiences and perceives reality with intense vividness. **The theme of fatigue frequently appears in self-descriptions**, from getting up in the morning to returning home:

Climbing the stairs to my home, I felt again how tired my body was. My bag weighed me down, preventing me from smoothly ascending the steps. I felt each leg lift, my right hand supporting me by clutching the handrail. The lack of sleep was increasingly noticeable. The four-story building felt like Mount Everest to me.

Students often **feel a sense of relief upon returning home**. This is due to the fatigue at the university, the sensory overload from studying, and the commute. These include intense sensory stimuli, such as noise and the smell of exhaust fumes. These stimuli are so **overwhelming** (and create the mood of being overwhelmed) that we eventually get used to them – e.g., the noise – while at home, we struggle with the silence. To mask it, we turn on a sound-emitting device:

After a day full of challenges and responsibilities, I looked forward to the relief and joy that soon returning to my cozy place would bring. Climbing the stairs in the building, the sound of my footsteps echoed. I enter the apartment and immediately turn on the TV to drown out the silence in the empty room.

The journey home is filled with scents that reflect the state of our bodies. The smell of bread from a bakery triggers hunger, while the unpleasant odor from a brewery induces a gag reflex. This scent is recognized by recalling similar smells from vacations at the grandfather's house. Thus, identifying a smell often relies on its resemblance to previously experienced scents. Although sensory memory involves **short-term memory** (for instance, recalling a scent briefly to identify it), this identification is **connected to long-term olfactory memory**, usually associated with past contexts of experiencing smells, tastes, or sounds. Sensory memory transferred to long-term memory aids in defining currently perceived scents.

Returning home is also filled with sounds such as children shouting, car horns, and ambulance sirens. Similarly, the smell of dumpsters can trigger a gag reflex. Sensory reactions often prompt actions, such as escaping from unpleasant odors, be it the smell of garbage or cigarette smoke. In addition to unpleasant odors, there are also pleasant ones, such as the scent of blooming lilacs. There is **a contrast between scents**; a pleasant smell can overshadow the memory of an unpleasant one from a moment ago. **"Scents interact with each other,"** whereby some dominate and obscure the perception of others. These interactions occur within our bodies and in the sensory system. They are more primal than the following mental process, which analyzes and defines scents.

The scent that greets one upon returning home is fascinating. There are numerous scents and sounds that emanate from the streets. Walking back from the university is a sensory journey in itself. Life, in its essence, is a realm of sensory experiences. Coming home often brings to mind the smell of dinner. **The aroma of a home-cooked meal is also associated with the coziness of home.** The sounds (TV) and scents (smell of dinner) entail "doing home" (see Duffy, Wait, 2013) by the perception of them and acceptance attitude:

Leaving the university after 6 PM, I'm glad it's still light and warm outside. Today was a beautiful, hot, almost summer-like day, and I've missed this weather. I decided to walk home to enjoy it a bit longer. Rewolucji Street, which usually feels crowded with cars and students leaving the department at this hour, is quieter, emptier, and more peaceful than usual. Crossing the street, I catch the delightful smell of food from a Georgian bakery. I immediately feel hungry, and my stomach growls, reminding me I haven't had dinner. As I turn onto Kilińskiego Street, I see a traffic jam and hear the honking of frustrated drivers. Passing a construction site, I see and feel the dust in the air. I try not to inhale it, hurrying to get past. Waiting for the green light, I catch the last rays of today's sun, turning my face toward it and feeling its warmth. I automatically smile. Continuing, I see many cyclists; this is the time of year when they become more numerous on the streets. Reaching the beginning of Franciszkańska Street, I notice a distinctive smell. At first, it's hard to pinpoint, but it reminds me of vacations at my grandparents' house. My grandfather often cooked feed for the animals, and this smell is similar. It wafts from the nearby Łódź Brewery. Is it the scent of processed hops? I'm not sure; it's hard to say. The smell is strong and spreads over the nearby streets. My thoughts about the scent are interrupted by a siren from a blood transport vehicle leaving the blood donation center I'm passing. To shorten my route, I cut through between buildings, regretting my decision as I have to walk past overflowing dumpsters baking in the sun all day. The stench is unbearable, and I feel nauseous, covering my nose as I hurry away from

the awful smell. At a safe distance, I stop to drink some water, still feeling queasy. Continuing, I notice a lilac bush starting to bloom, surprising me as I associate its blooming with May. I approach to see if its beautiful fragrance is already noticeable. I'm happy, as it soothes my nose after the terrible garbage smell. Reaching my street, I hear the distant shouts of children enjoying the weather and playing outside.

A neighbor is smoking in front of my building, and I try to avoid the smoke so it doesn't irritate my nose. The stairwell is stuffy and warm. Entering my home, I'm greeted by the smell of dinner cooking – my favorite, mushroom soup.

During the return home, feelings of irritation may arise due to delayed buses, street noise, and the discomfort of traveling by public transportation (touch, noise, other stories told on the phone):

While my transport arrives on time in the morning, it is significantly delayed in the afternoon. This irritates me due to the increasing stimuli coming at me from all sides and in various forms. The street where I have been waiting for some time is undergoing renovations. The sounds of construction machinery penetrate my ear protection, which consists of headphones, more and more by the minute. At first, the sounds reaching me are as harmless as a small fly buzzing around my head, but over time, they turn into a hard-to-shoo-away wasp...

Sometimes, when I am already exhausted and happen to sit next to someone, any accidental physical contact causes me to shudder involuntarily and feel internal discomfort. On the bus, I often experience a phenomenon I do not fully understand, namely the loud use of phones. Nothing is worse for my comfort in public transport than hearing someone's personal stories or movies when trying to focus on my thoughts even for a moment.

The journey from the university to home can also **be a pleasant experience**. It can be exciting. Listening to music during the commute evokes physical sensations and positive emotions, even if the mood is melancholic, especially when it is felt physically (e.g., goosebumps). The sense of hearing helps to achieve this state. Music can transport us to a world of imagination and momentarily disconnect us from the present without us losing touch with the experience of sound and the body (moving our feet). Thus, we are still connected to this world. It creates the space that we move together with our body, it is like *music asylums* (DeNora, 2013). **The theme of isolation from the surroundings often appears in self-reports in the context of listening to the music.** We are immersed in the lifeworld. Still, sometimes, we enter a different state of consciousness for a moment (suspending concentration on the immediate surroundings), and the perception of sounds, our entire sensory experience, allows us to do so. At the same time, the body keeps us in the lifeworld. The temporary drifting under the influence of music is felt as pleasant, and after this state, there is a complete return to the baseline reality with the perception of sounds from this world:

My body falls into a kind of melancholy. Music makes me tremble when I hear intense sounds from the radio. I feel like I experience every sound with my whole being. Goosebumps appear on my arms, and my mind and body experience intense emotions. I start breathing to the song's rhythm and gently move my feet. Music stimulates my heart to beat faster, creating excitement within me.

I feel lyrics coming out of my mouth. My favorite music piece evokes pleasant feelings in me and transports me to a world of imagination. I escape into an imaginary world under the influence of music. When the song ends, I feel momentarily absent-minded. Instantly, I feel that I am in the car again. My body becomes aware of the surroundings and the changes in sounds around it.

The journey back home is associated with relaxation, a sense of security, and gratitude, especially when one is greeted and touched by loved ones and pets. Petting (as well as seeing animals) evokes particular reminiscences and emotions related to them. A feeling of comfort arises. **The return home has a *pathic* dimension beyond physical displacement in space; it is also emotionally and physically felt in a specific context of touching:**

I enter another room where my mother greets me. Her energetic movements and smile on her face make my arms relax. I feel a surge of happiness and gratitude. My body reacts instinctively, wanting to embrace her tightly. Behind my mother stands my father, who has also welcomed me. He hugs me tightly, and his firm embrace makes me feel safe.

Two furry balls also come running toward me. Their wagging tails signal that they also want to greet me. It doesn't go without petting. The touch of their warm and soft fur brings me joy and a sense of closeness to them, as well as emotional relaxation. Their presence in the house brings me comfort in difficult moments. Seeing their wet noses, big black eyes, and wagging tails always makes me smile.

However, the smell of staleness from one room changes the mood. The space, together with the senses, creates the mood (Thibaud, 2014; 2015). The suffocating odor causes discomfort and disgust, but at the same time, feelings of guilt arise. The smell comes from the room where the narrator's grandmother, who has Alzheimer's, stays.<sup>2</sup> Sadness overwhelms her, and tension arises, because, initially, the grandmother does not recognize her granddaughter. Despair and helplessness arise here, as nothing can be done in the face of an incurable disease. Memories remain, and nostalgia emerges. Only her voice triggers memories, and the grandmother recognizes the familiar person. Relief comes, even if only for a moment.

In the end, the narrator emphasizes the importance of sensory experiences in life, as they activate specific memory banks associated with them, which is significant for communication and relationships with others:

From the room next door, an intense smell of staleness reaches me. This smell is a mixture of stuffiness and urine. My body recoils the moment the strong odor penetrates my being. It is a suffocating smell that causes discomfort and disgust in me. The smell is so sharp and penetrating that not everyone can endure it, but from my experience, I know that humans can adapt to anything. However, I feel resentment toward myself for having such thoughts.

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2 The smells of old age and illness are not odorless. Society sensitizes us, through socialization, to these smells. The unpleasant odor of aging and illness repels us, causing discomfort, nausea, or other negative sensations. Here, the social structure penetrates our sensory experiences (see Eribon, 2024: 124).



I feel tension and sadness that engulf my body when I see my grandmother in the room. When I see her, my eyes fill with tears. **My muscles tense up, and my body fills with sorrow and sadness** [bolded by K.T.K.]. I see nothing but emptiness in her eyes. There is no joy or hope in them. I hear her asking who I am. It causes me immense pain, and my heart shatters into a million pieces. Once, I was the most important person to her, and now she doesn't know who I am to her. **This pain is so intense that it instantly tightens in my chest** [bolded by K.T.K.]. This sight paralyzes me. I can't cope with the feeling of loss because that's exactly how I feel as if I have lost the most important person in my life. When I see her, the beautiful years spent together come to mind, as we used to watch TV series together and talk about life. I know that it will never come back.

I greet her. When I start talking to her, I hear, 'Mary, is that you? I recognized you by your voice.' When I speak to her, certain areas of her brain unlock, and she starts remembering who I am, but it's temporary. At that moment, I realized how vital sensory experiences are in a person's life. Even though she didn't recognize my silhouette, my voice has imprinted in her memory forever.

During the journey back home, the walking mode, body movement, and relative isolation from practical activities allow for deep reflection. **The body relaxes, and contemplation of various issues begins:** events from the past, achievements, and plans for the future. Emotions and nostalgia arise: longing for friends, gratitude for acquired knowledge and education:

The first element of this journey is usually a sense of relief. After an intense day of classes, exams, or projects, I feel unimaginable relief knowing that I can return to my shelter and home. It's where I can detach myself from stress and dedicate time to rest... Besides reflecting on the past, the journey back also provides an opportunity to contemplate the present. It is often a time to plan the next steps and set new goals. I can think about how to utilize my free time, improve in chosen areas, or build relationships with others.

However, the journey back is not always easy. Sometimes, it is accompanied by feelings of sadness or anxiety. I may feel nostalgia for my college friends, the university atmosphere, or the independence that life away from home provides. These are normal feelings, but they can be challenging to overcome.

During the return home, a reflection on the sensuality of everyday life and its rhythm may also arise. The return can be relaxing and contemplative. The senses allow one to appreciate daily life and realize the repetitiveness of daily rhythms (sunset, "street lights," the smells coming from cafes, etc.) Being in the world is grounded in sensing the world. The return home prepares one for complete relaxation, which will occur there. Relaxation is the sign of the process of "doing home":

After finishing my classes, I leave the faculty and head to Piotrkowska Street for a 30-minute walk toward home. Piotrkowska, bustling with life, is full of colors and sounds. Step by step, I pass shops, cafes, and restaurants that tempt me with the smells of freshly brewed coffee, baked cakes, and aromatic dishes. As I walk by, I hear the murmur of conversations, the laughter of children playing in playgrounds, and the sounds of street musicians playing various instruments. The

sun slowly sets, painting the sky in warm shades of orange and pink. The streetlights begin to flicker, and the city prepares for the evening shift in rhythm. Walking, I feel the gentle chill of the evening air, which refreshes after a whole day spent within the university walls. Strolling down Piotrkowska, I can momentarily detach from daily duties and enjoy the moment, observing the city's life that never slows down. When I reach home, I feel satisfied with a well-spent day and look forward to the moments of relaxation. Every journey to and from the university is full of small, sensual experiences that give rhythm to my everyday life.

## Conclusions

We should consider who described to us the sensory impressions related to studying. They were mainly female students in their 5<sup>th</sup> year (only one male student), most already working, writing their Master's thesis, and taking their final exams. They belonged to the middle social class. The preparations for a new stage of life can cause anxiety or fatigue.<sup>3</sup>

Our research is based on a small group of participants. While it is difficult to generalize our findings in the sociological sense, we can, through the case study, illustrate the process of sensing the world and making sense of it. Although generalization is impossible, we can still draw some useful, albeit contextually embedded, conclusions from the research. The conclusions are based on the explicating of the individuals' lived experiences. Our analysis shows that sensory impressions from daily life prepare students for actions, guide their actions, warn them of dangers, and allow them to perceive a certain mood. The sensory foundations of actions in the lifeworld begin from waking up. Daily life is filled with sensory impressions that also construct their personal mood, whether they are sad or joyful, in a mood of mourning or relief. Mood as an ontological category precedes personal moodiness, but is also connected with it. The mood of the school is already there before we arrive. The smells and noises are already there, waiting for students. This reception often makes us feel overwhelmed (I feel the same as students in this regard); it is **a mood of being overwhelmed**. There is too much of everything: smells, noise, information, and learning. This mood is connected with another mood, namely **the mood of fatigue**. It has already been built from early morning and perhaps even during previous days, months, and years. Returning home is a relief, and overall fatigue is more noticeable. The touch of animals, the smell of dinner and certain dishes, the scent of coffee, and the atmosphere of the home all allow us to partially escape from the overwhelming mood. The senses are **"contextually embedded"** (Gibson, Lehn, 2021), and so is the mood. The students participate in "doing home" with their senses and experience the "home mood" of relaxation and warmth. Not only is the local orderliness of interactions and actions created at the micro level to produce social facts (Fele, Liberman, 2021: 46, in an ethnomethodological interpretation), but the mood of the home or festive joy is also locally generated or maintained (in a contemplative sociology interpretation).

3 For comparison, I checked the sensory impressions of several 3<sup>rd</sup>-year sociology students, and they were not as pessimistic as those of the 5<sup>th</sup> year. However, due to the small number of self-reports, I did not develop a comparative analysis in this regard.

However, this embeddedness can also have a **macrosocial meaning**. Sensory impressions from waking up in the morning and returning home from university clearly indicate signs of physical fatigue, which leads to mental fatigue. This fatigue is part of the existential situation of the students who participated in the project. We could comment on this following the theory of Byung-Chul Han (2015), namely **that students live in a burnout society**. Contemplating how we sense climate change, such as through our thermoception, can enhance our understanding of our systemic involvement in this issue. When we perceive how our bodies react to temperature and that we are tired, we recognize that this goes beyond individual sensory reception. We are part of a global society where our decentralized existence means that local actions contribute to global effects. For example, our air conditioning has a role in climate problems, affecting less affluent regions worldwide (Schultz, 2023: 16–17).

The constant effort associated with studying, working to earn a living, and technological fatigue from the flood of information and often the need to process it creates a mood of fatigue. **Fatigue is the primary mood** with which the research participants engage in their daily lives. This mood precedes our actions. It can be connected with excessive noise, scents, and crowdedness (as when they live in the city), multitasking if they use smartphones all the time during other activities, or mental overwork when they receive a lot of information in a short time. There are more reasons for mental fatigue. We can also refer to hypermodernity as being rooted in hyperconsumption. Hypermodernity can be characterized by “collusion between the temptation toward excess and the means to achieve it. We must acknowledge that if the temptation is this intense, it is surely because our era has provided ample means to achieve it and actively promotes it” (Cournut, 2005: 64 as cited in Vannini, Waskul, Gottschalk, 2012: 154). Fatigue can result from these *abundant means*, as we are constantly urged to choose, change, and buy in order to achieve more and more.

Tiredness could be seen as a tool of destruction of the lifeworld and “we-relationship”: “I-tiredness, as solitary tiredness, is worldless and world-destroying; it annihilates all reference to the Other in favor of narcissistic self-reference” (Byung-Chul Han, 2015: 36). Of course, one can adopt such a pessimistic view, but sensory awareness and its contemplation can allow one to escape from this iron cage of permanent fatigue. Complete exhaustion can be a good moment to pause and transform. Our hyperactivity cannot cause this change; rather, it reinforces the reality of fatigue (Crary, 2013: 116). Often, we do not perceive the situation we have found ourselves in. Crary, following J.P. Sartre, calls this “practico-inertia” (Crary, 2013: 116). Another useful Sartre term here is “seriality” (Crary, 2013: 116), i.e., the repetition of certain activities that do not add anything new to our lives but obscure its essential features, such as the fact that the more active we are in the system (we work more), the less awareness we have of what our activity causes. Only an outside perspective on the system – i.e., a contemplative suspension of daily perceptions, our isolation, alienation, sensory tiredness **overwhelmed** by the effects of civilization, and reaching out to the sensibility of the body – can question this practico-inertia and open up to the Other. Contemporary society experiences sensory saturation through sensory consumerism promoted by advertising (Vannini, Waskul, Gottschalk, 2012: 156), as well as the effects of environmental devastation and deteriorating living conditions. Products are expected to provide pleasure, while headphones, computer games, and TV sets

– constantly improving their quality – isolate us from others. The artificial noise of the city and permanent night-time lighting alter our sensory perception of the world (Eklöff, 2024) and cause sensory fatigue.

**Sensory awareness and the mindfulness associated with it allows us to realize what is happening to us, with our body, emotions, and mind.** Our research shows how we can investigate the fatigue society. Researching the sensory dimension through contemplative method provides deep insight into the essential features of tiredness as well as the existential and social conditions from which it emerges.

If we become aware of this, the next step should be reflection and reaction to this existential macro-crisis. The reaction is, of course, related to conclusions resulting from a deep reflection on this state. We can focus on ourselves and escape from the world and social bonds, or change something in our lives, deny the current routine, seriality, and perspective of seeing the world. Change is ultimately related to our decision and answer to the question: What to do in such an existential situation? Is fatigue an inalienable feature of the society we live in? Does the Other have no chance to appear in our self-reflection due to the mood of fatigue in which we exist?<sup>4</sup>

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4 "Tiredness enables the human being to experience singular calm [Gelassenheit], serene not-doing. It is not a state in which the senses languish or grow dull. Rather, it rouses a special kind of visibility. Accordingly, Handke speaks of 'candid tiredness,' which grants access to long and slow forms that elude short and fast hyperattention: 'My tiredness articulated the muddle of crude perception . . . and with the help of rhythms endowed it with form – form as far as the eye could see' (29). All forms are slow. Each form is a detour" (Byung-Chul Han, 2015: 32).

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## Cytowanie

Krzysztof T. Konecki (2024), *Studying Lived Experiences in a Fatigued Society Through Observing the Sensory Perception of the World: A Case Study*, „Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej”, t. XX, nr 4, s. 274–297, <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8069.20.4.13>

## Badanie przeżyć w społeczeństwie zmęczenia poprzez obserwację percepcji sensorycznej świata. Studium przypadku

**Abstrakt:** Socjologia zmysłów bada złożoną strukturę świata życia, analizując, w jaki sposób zmysły odgrywają kluczową rolę w kształtowaniu interakcji międzyludzkich, szczególnie wśród studentów uniwersytetów. Niniejsze studium przypadku koncentruje się na zrozumieniu relacji między zmysłami, ich wzajemnym oddziaływaniu oraz ich zbiorczym wpływie na doświadczenia cielesne i postrzeganie rzeczywistości w jej „jakościowej bezpośredniości” w określonym kontekście społecznym. Autor analizuje symboliczne znaczenia związane z różnymi zmysłami, takimi jak słuch, zapach, dotyk, równowaga (ekwilibracja), ruch (kinestezja), odczuwanie temperatury (termorecepcja), a także czasu. Badając te doświadczenia zmysłowe w kontekstach społecznych środowiska akademickiego, dąży do rozwikłania subtelnych powiązań między różnymi zmysłami oraz tego, jak łączą się one, tworząc bogatą mozaikę indywidualnych i zbiorowych doświadczeń w codziennym życiu. Niniejsza eksploracja skupia się na trzech kluczowych wydarzeniach z życia studentów: podróży na uczelnię i uczestnictwie w zajęciach, pobycie w budynkach uczelni, powrocie do domu. Autor odkrywa głębokie implikacje doświadczeń zmysłowych dla dynamiki indywidualnej i społecznej, koncentrując się na patycznym wymiarze doświadczania świata życia. Wymiar patyczny odnosi się do emocjonalnego wyrażania naszych odczuć w relacji do materialnych obiektów i innych osób, z którymi wchodzimy w interakcje. Poprzez wyjaśnienie tego wymiaru autor dąży do lepszego zrozumienia transformujących efektów cielesnej i zmysłowej uważności. Niniejsza analiza czerpie inspirację z kontemplatywnej teorii ugruntowanej i fenomenologii.

**Słowa kluczowe:** socjologia zmysłów, świat życia, ciało, przeżycia, kontemplacyjna teoria ugruntowana, fenomenologia