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Bodo Kubartz

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SCENT AND THE CITY: PERFUME, CONSUMPTION, AND THE URBAN ECONOMY¹

*Bodo Kubartz*²
Department of Geography
University of Oklahoma

Abstract: In human geography, and economic geography in particular, research has traditionally focused on economic activity that is productive and has regarded production and consumption as distinguishable spheres. This study puts that focus into perspective, challenges it from a cultural economy perspective, and characterizes the production and consumption of perfumes in an urban economy. Perfumes serve as an example to claim that the spheres of production and consumption blend, and that the production and consumption of perfumes reflexively fuel and are fueled by the register of passion in an urban emotional economy. The study also seeks to add insights concerning the challenge of spatializing and illustrating the cultural economy of cities. [Key words: cultural economy, urban economy, fragrance industry, passion, perfume.]

The urban economy has been reconceptualized from a cultural economy perspective in an effort to rethink the economy and provide different explanations of current capitalism beyond orthodox (economic) theory (Amin and Thrift, 2002, 2004, 2007). The cultural economy consists of economic activities wherein the creation of sign-values through symbolic and esthetic attributes, in contrast to use-values, is central; this distinguishes cultural from manufacturing or service industries (DeFillippi et al., 2007). The creation and maintenance of symbolic and esthetic attributes are often co-creations of producers and consumers (Allen, 2002; Amin and Thrift, 2004). However, where and how these co-creations occur is underinvestigated. This study has two goals. First, it examines how production and consumption blend, using the example of the fragrance industry. And, second, it examines the production and consumption of perfumes in order to better understand passion in the urban economy.

The urban economy is not a predetermined physical site of production or consumption, but serves as an exemplary site to understand the challenges of production and consumption in a cultural industry (Amin and Thrift, 2007). Passion is a central register³ for the

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²Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Bodo Kubartz, Department of Geography, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, 73019; telephone: 405-325-8995; fax: 405-325-6090; email: kubartz@ou.edu

³Amin and Thrift (2007, p. 153) focus on power, moral judgment, metaphors of market, and passion as registers of the cultural economy that “reveal about what counts as the urban ‘economic’, but also how their repetition in a daily urban fabric centrally implicates them in the making and ordering of the economy in general.” Amin and Thrift (2007, p. 147) present—just like an organ in music—the analogy of “registers of economic drive, orientation, and order” that actually co-determine current capitalism, but have only been put into focus in heterodox studies.

cultural economy of cities and this particular sector. Amin and Thrift (2007, p. 147) stress passion as a force that mobilizes and sustains “drive-in contemporary capitalism,” and they trace the concept of passion back to the work of Baruch Spinoza and Gilles Deleuze (Amin and Thrift, 2002, 2007). Essential components of the concept are (1) that passion drives people’s engagement with the world, (2) human imagination and emotion always exist together with rational decisions, and (3) that cities serve as examples of places of passions through their movement, different potentialities, and intensities of life. However, passion as a general driving force is not restricted to urban economies or particular goods. Passion emerges out of cognitive unconscious processes and develops at an instinctual level (Amin and Thrift, 2002).

Amin and Thrift (2007) introduce the concept of the urban emotional economy to show that passion drives urban capitalism. Accordingly, the fragrance industry and its perfumes provide an appropriate case study for researching passion. Consumers develop a personal understanding of a perfume in geographic proximity and specific situations. This individual understanding is developed through such activities as strolling, sniffing, and shopping, and individual attachment evolves out of affection for a perfume. Producing, distributing, and consuming perfumes contribute to the emergence of passion in the urban economy. The aspect of distribution—through retailing—has been stressed as significant (Pratt, 2004). Different actors and processes contrast the spheres of production and retailing; however, retail environments are places where a perfume becomes recognizable for consumers. Thus, retailing is co-constitutive for branding and marketing. This relates to the ontological and epistemological question as to how to approach a perfume: rather than an entity in a cognitive form that can be analytically known, perfumes come in an esthetic and visceral form (Lash and Urry, 1994; Allen, 2002). Producers use the materiality, materialization, and relationality of perfumes as a multisensory good—they unify visual, haptic, olfactory, and symbolic characteristics—in order to make consumers passionate (Allen, 2002). However, inasmuch as passion entails a cognitive unconscious and instinctual process, the planning and accounting for the success of products in this industry is particularly challenging for producers. This study will show that the cognitive unconscious process of becoming passionate has to do with the visceral nature of a fragrance.

The ultimate result of passion in urban economies is the formation of urban emotional economies in “complex rituals of desire, love, greed, want, and envy” (Amin and Thrift, 2007, p. 156; also Gherardi et al., 2007). My concern is with how and where passion in an urban emotional economy develops, and how urban economies are characterized as landscapes of passion. An investigation of passion through sensual experience within an urban emotional economy sheds light on the challenges of productive and consumptive logics in the fragrance industry. Furthermore, it discusses the spatialities of passion in geographic proximity and across distance (Amin, 2002; Pratt, 2004; Murdoch, 2006).

This is a conceptual study that represents a part of a larger project that investigates spatialities of knowledge in the fragrance industry. It is based on information from the industry and academic scholarship, and is supplemented by corporate interviews. In total, 69 semistructured interviews were conducted with personnel from the fragrance industry (mainly with middle-management employees of producers of perfumes as well as creative and marketing/sales personnel of fragrance suppliers). The interviews were conducted between January 2007 and April 2008 in Paris and New York. The remainder

of this article is organized as follows: (1) the literature on production and consumption in cultural industries is surveyed, and the case of the fragrance industry and perfumery is introduced; (2) the characteristics of production and consumption in the industry are reviewed; and (3) the practices and spaces of production and consumption of a perfume are discussed. A concluding section follows.

PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION IN URBAN ECONOMIES

Studies of the cultural economy can be differentiated according to their interest in the economic and organizational structures and processes in cultural industries (i.e., how culture is produced) and the increased culturalization in the economy (du Gay and Pryke, 2002b; see also general introductions to cultural economy approaches in du Gay and Pryke, 2002a; Amin and Thrift, 2004). Researchers of the cultural economy intend to understand and conceptualize the production and consumption of symbolic and esthetic values for the meaning of commodities. The literature on the cultural economy is informed by studies of commodities. Those studies challenge the traditional analytical connection between consumption and culture on one hand and production and economy on the other (Jackson, 1999). The mosaic of the cultural economy is assembled by different cultural industries (Scott and Power, 2004; Amin and Thrift, 2007). Cultural industries have grown to be of economic significance (Lampel et al., 2006; Lash and Lury, 2007). Economic geographers to date have examined such cultural industries as multimedia/film production (Scott, 2005), fashion (Rantisi, 2004; Crewe, 2005; Rantisi et al., 2006), advertising (Grabher, 2001, 2002), and music (Power and Hallencreutz, 2004; Scott and Power, 2004). Products and services in cultural industries challenge the clear separation of a productive and consumptive sphere (music and art are examples that question where production ends and consumption starts, and who is productive and consumptive). Even with the focus on cultural industries and commodities, the aspect of consumption and its relation to production has been somewhat neglected (Grabher et al., 2008).

However, it is crucial not to solely focus on consumption (Pratt, 2004; Goss, 2006; Amin and Thrift, 2007). First, the characteristics of the *relationships* between production and consumption in urban economies need to be addressed. The importance of commodities as constituents of material culture in urban economies and the economic relevance of cultural industries in cities argue for research on productive, distributive, and consumptive links and blends in these environments. And second, neither should consumption be understood as particularly bound to urban economies nor that it is more important in such environments. The discussion to date suggests that production and consumption of consumer goods describe multiple geographies and mobilities.

Economic and urban geographers analyzed cities as locations where cultural industries and creative talent agglomerate. In cities, cultural industries constitute communicative social interaction and economic significance (Scott, 2000a, 2000b; Florida, 2002; Rantisi, 2004). Florida (2002), for instance, stressed the significance of the creative class for the success of an urban economy, and case studies have focused on clustered and localized urban cultural industries to show the importance of geographic proximity. This understanding of urban economies has been criticized, however. First, an interest in creativity is still biased toward production (Pratt, 2004). Second, the focus on spatial proximity as

crucial for cultural industries in cities leaves “other geographies” unrecognized. Critiques target the understanding of cities as bounded spaces (Thrift and Olds, 1996; Amin and Thrift, 2007). Furthermore, critics address urban economies as projections that bespeak the significance of global cities as sustaining islands in transnational business networks, urban economies as repertoires of cultural assets that are crucial for the new knowledge-intensive capitalism, and “the city” as a materialized cultural good in itself (Amin and Thrift, 2007, pp. 151–153).

Certain human geographers have criticized the symptomatic and representational interpretations of urban economies and the instrumentalization of spaces more generally (Amin, 2002; Murdoch, 2006). They claim that cities are not pre-formed space but entities of change (Thrift, 2004; Paterson, 2006; Amin and Thrift, 2007). Amin and Thrift (2007, p. 145, italics added; see also Amin, 2002; Amin and Thrift, 2004) go so far as to point out that

... each segment of the economy is conceived as a *topological ordering* influenced simultaneously by abstract rules, historical legacies, material practices, symbolic and discursive narratives, social and cultural habits, material arrangements, emotions and aspirations.

Consumption is an enabler of social interaction and a practice that facilitates and regularly reconstitutes urban socioeconomic landscapes.

The focus on cultural industries in human geography has been on commodities that address vision and hearing (exceptions include Porteous, 1985; Rodaway, 1994). Cultural anthropologists have pointed out that these two civilized senses are morally constructed and equated with masculinity, economic rationality, the mind, and modern capitalism. The three lower senses of taste, touch, and smell are aligned with femininity, irrationality, and the body (Synnott, 1993; Classen et al., 1994; Classen, 1998; Howes, 2003). Research is needed on the interactions of multiple senses to enhance the understanding of capitalist productive and consumptive logics. Commodities produced by cultural industries involve the human body as a site of encounter. The consumption of flamenco, for instance, characterizes the importance of specific senses and personal skills, and varies in its appearance according to regional communities and the ways of consuming and shaping this cultural practice (Aoyama, 2007). Thus, consumers can shape and change the appearance of the consumed entity.

The fragrance industry and perfumery have long histories (Morris, 1984; Roudnitska, 1991; Newman, 1998; Aftel, 2004; Fortineau, 2004). With the institutionalization of chemistry in the 19th century, the laboratory emerged as a key site where professionals analyzed, described, composed, and reconstituted the components of scents (Morris, 1984; Newman, 1998). Modern chemistry enabled a reorganization according to industrial logics of independence from natural resources, quality standardization, and price determination. Coco Chanel and François Coty, for instance, are innovators who represented a new approach to perfumery through usage of natural and synthetic materials (Newman, 1998). The success of their long-lasting scents (e.g., Chanel No. 5) coincided with other changes in the industry spanning the turn of the 20th century and ensuing decades. This included the linkage of fashion, luxury, and fragrances as well as the interrelation of scents, brands, packages, images, and changing modes of fashion (Morris,

1984; Aftel, 2004). Perfumes are often designed to be mediums of memories and mirages. The specifics of the sense of smell enable or resemble echoing memories and situations in time-spaces (a meeting, a particular place, a person, a state of mind). Scents evoke emotional reactions. The sense of smell, as the literature on the psychology of odors describes, is a sense that is memorized in a specific situation (van Toller and Dodd, 1988). However, memorizations are not cognitive, and a scent works like a palimpsest with weak associations instead of clear memories. Thus, the aroma of a perfume creates associative emotional geographies. Such a characterization applies to the concept of passion. The question becomes one of how producers of perfumes enable personal attribution of a noncognitive, instinctual good as well as appeal for the masses. Perfumes have become economically viable, particularly for mass brands (cf. Power and Hauge's [2008] discussion of brands and branding).

Manufacturing companies typically initiate the creation of a perfume. Manufacturing in this case encompasses the central functions of marketing and branding (Lash and Urry, 1994; du Gay and Pryke, 2002a). The significance of these functions has to do with shifts in the characterization of a perfume. Historically, discussions centered on the exchange value of perfumes, which were examples of conspicuous consumption and co-constitutive elements of the fantasy of the rich (Veblen, 1994). The aspects of class, smell, and the determination of good and evil were intertwined (Classen, 1998). However, a perfume has become an expressive and experiential good, entailing a shift from use and exchange values toward sign-values after 1945 (Baudrillard, 1998). Aspects such as marketing, branding, and image creation have become central to the production of perfumes. Producers of perfumes are involved in the creation of a variety of fragranced commodities, including lotions, deodorants, hair care products, soaps, candles, air fresheners, detergents, and softeners. Fragmentation is widespread as far as the producers of perfume are concerned, and in 2004 the top five producers accounted for only 37% of total sales by value (Briney, 2006).⁴ They are organized according to different brands and usually have licenses from designer or fashion houses to produce fragrances for a specific period of time (Passariello, 2007; Burr, 2008). Producers, in turn, draw on the work of a number of suppliers (e.g., fragrance suppliers, packagers, advertisers) in order to develop a new perfume.

The focus here is on major manufacturers of perfumes and such central functions as marketing and branding. The latter coordinate the configuration of the different parts of a perfume, which is a challenge because material and symbolic components of a perfume require a holistic understanding across the range of human senses (Allen, 2002). The composition and symbolism of a perfume make it a source and constituent of passion and an entity for investigation. Scents are examples of interaction in geographic proximity: the consumption of fragrances takes place "on the ground," is contextual, and cannot be separated from the surroundings. The particularity and, indeed, the uniqueness of this case study is that the sense of smell challenges the interaction between producers and consumers in a nonverbal and nonvisual but "olfactory economy."

⁴These five firms are L'Oréal, Estée Lauder, LVMH Moët Hennessey Louis Vuitton, Procter & Gamble, and Avon.

One challenge lies in the composition of a fragrance. Consumers become attached to a perfume without being able to document why, and the language they use remains very personal due to a lack of a coherent, uniform language to describe scents (Burr, 2008). These characteristics determine under what circumstances producers of perfumes work. They experience a high degree of uncertainty in coming up with new fragrances, and find it difficult to anticipate and understand why fragrances are successful or fail. They address these challenges by creating, targeting, and maintaining the attraction of different consumer groups; producers try to link consumer groups with new products and new brands in order to keep them loyal (Burr, 2008). Thus producers try to rationalize creative processes, whereas consumers cannot proactively talk about their wishes because of the intangible nature of scents and the lack of a language to clearly communicate in. Economic action of consumers, fueled by the register of passion, overwhelms these rationalized processes on a regular basis. The sense of smell challenges producer–consumer relationships. While the increased importance of marketing and branding documents mainstream approaches to bind consumers (Power and Hauge, 2008), the olfactory economy works through a combination of the symbolic part of a brand and the elusive, evanescent aspect of a fragrance. The olfactory economy is therefore a part of the urban emotional economy, and characterizes the emergence of passion at a cognitive unconscious and instinctual level.

THE RECOGNITION OF THE CONSUMER

Mainstream Views of the Consumer

Producers of perfumes conceptualize consumers according to rational mechanisms, calculations, and processes of qualification and requalification (Callon et al., 2002; Lury, 2004). Since World War II, international producers of consumer goods have integrated consumer research and used demographics in order to create consumers and markets (Thomas, 2007). Consumer groups, consumption patterns, and purchasing behavior are linked to age, income, gender, ethnicity, and location. Consumer tests run throughout the development process and all product characteristics are tested (fragrance, bottle, package, images, shapes, and colors). Target group creation, panel testing, and consumer research are recurring practices (Thomas, 2007). In the past, none of the major manufacturers ran consumer tests, but today a product must pass them at several stages in order to be launched.

Qualification and requalification include “processes through which qualities are attributed, stabilized, objectified and arranged” (Callon et al., 2002, p. 199). Qualification through standardization, which refers to the attachment of a consumer to a product, is a recurring engagement of the supply side with the demand side. In order to qualify a product for consumers, suppliers have to requalify it on a regular basis to attract new consumers.⁵ Advertising or retailing changes along with the multiplication of lifestyles. This corresponds to increases in target groups to match lifestyles with numerous new and

⁵“The supply side and ... professionals of qualification ... constantly try to destabilize consumers, to extract them from routines and prompt them to re-evaluate the qualities of products, hoping that that requalification might be favourable to them” (Callon et al., 2002, p. 206).

requalified fragrances. Furthermore, with the creation of idealized customers, trends in perfumery are created. Ethical products, for instance, are documented as resulting from “consumer pressure”: environmental conscience is guided by the dictum to screen ingredients, remain safe, and be ethically conscious.

Including the Consumer?

This view of the consumer is overly general and led by confidence in statistics, and the aim of this section is to present three examples that demonstrate why this understanding is shortsighted. In the first place, market tests are simplistic because they ask verbal questions about another sense. They reveal more about the marketer because “somehow the world of one has to be translated for the world of the other, and this is the task besetting both [consumer] and marketer” (Malefyt and Morean, 2003, p. 11; see also Allen, 2002). The tests reveal very little about the olfactory wishes of consumers. This is an important characteristic of the olfactory economy: unlike many other cultural industries, the lack of an ability to communicate affects both consumers and producers of perfumes. How do you articulate what you are longing for when you lack a common ground of understanding and language? Nonetheless, fragrance tests produce feedback of what is presented and lead to the reproduction of fragrances (Thomas, 2007).

Second, the creation of target groups and the economic attraction, because of the significant profit margins involved, have led to an overproduction of perfumes. Actors in the industry bemoan this trend but are not in the position to change it. Leading manufacturers support multiple brands, with each creating multiyear development plans. New brands are regularly added to the portfolio, and manufacturers of perfumes reach many target groups through the diversity of their brands and products. The connection to retailers is crucial. Contracts with the manufacturers include the launch of a specific number of perfumes annually. Retailers promote novelty on the shelf to remain attractive to consumers. Thus, retailers and producers of perfume push consumption, with producers hardly accounting for effects on the consumer. Psychological work has shown the significance of bonds between smells, memories, and places (Herz, 2007). The quantity of new perfumes has loosened the sensual relationship with a perfume and weakened the historic characterization and understanding of perfume as a luxury good. Confusion becomes a characteristic and component of passion.

Third, scientific analyses of customer responses as an aspect of monitoring takes place in simulated and hypothetical environments. A focus on consumption in retail environments is often not implemented, and the moods and emotional situations of consumers are rarely addressed. The customer remains a fairly static, unemotional, and nonrelational robot. As a result, the making of perfumes has become largely reactive rather than integrative.

New Approaches to Address the Consumer

Perfume manufacturers address these challenges by providing additional information for the consumer. A. G. Lafley, CEO of Procter & Gamble, speaks about “learning journeys” (Elliott, 2006, p. 8), with brand creation transformed into a participatory task for producer and consumer. The following three examples show how perfumes as branded

goods change their appearance through brandscaping, brand mediation, and the connection to other signifiers.

First, retail environments change. The goals of the retailers differ from those of the producers of perfumes. Yet retail environments are co-constitutive in the construction of a perfume for a consumer, and marketers speak about product and retail points of difference as relevant to distinguish products and brands. The uniqueness of a product can be orchestrated in its particular environment. Retail environments are redefined from places of consumption to places of understatement and cool (see the discussion of the “spatial turn in retail” in Pratt, 2004). Retail environments integrate different genres and are reconfigured as a multidedicated bar, laboratory, art gallery, or café (Friedman, 2006; Passariello and Dodes, 2007; Ryan, 2007). These reinvented retail spaces—particularly flagship stores of fashion houses such as LVMH, Prada, or Gucci in major cities—are intended to enhance the overall image of the brand. Unmaking and redefining such atmospheres belongs to the area of brandscaping—a site of struggle between the intentions of the brand owners, brand licensees, and retailers in urban economies (Lury, 2004; Power and Hauge, 2008). The shopping experience is aided by functions such as a “brand advert, shrine, and lifestyle representation” (Ryan, 2007, p. 16); being with the brand and understanding it in an atmosphere that is reinvented to be noncommercial is considered to provide opportunities to interact beyond purchases. Retail environments are reinvented as less obtrusive and commercial. In addition, accessibility in specific stores, a few cities, or particular countries make products valuable. Marketing uncovers this as “artificial scarcity.” Value creation emerges through the regulation of access. This describes a new strategy that contrasts the connotation of mass consumption and relates to the maintenance of brands (Lash and Urry, 1994; Power and Hauge, 2008). A brand becomes a justifier for a purchase; a brand is not the arbiter of whether or not a specific product is considered a luxury (Danziger, 2005). Brandscaping is an intercorporate strategy of local, national, and global matter that determines the ways of how and why brands are recognized and shaped.

Second, brands reach out within and through media. This is not a new trend, but how they are propagated differs. Branded goods become virtual media objects with a biography (Lury, 2004; Lash and Lury, 2007). They are mobilized through different channels and in different forms whereby image becomes matter and matter image (Lash and Lury, 2007). ICT technologies enable global reach (in contrast to orthodox technologies such as magazine, bus, or poster ads). Two examples are presented.

The first example is the Internet. Calvin Klein’s (a brand belonging to Coty Prestige) recent launch of the perfume *cK in2u* targets the so-called tech-savvy generation of bloggers and online social networkers. The creation of “buzz” for the perfume is an eye-catching aspect of the product: beyond the typical ads in magazines, retail spaces, and online forums, a webpage was designed to allow registered users to create an online profile and build a community similar to those of other social networking websites (*whatareyouin2.com*). It enables users to send in short videos and to win a prize for the best video. Furthermore, *cK in2u* is the first perfume that has been launched in the virtual world of *Second Life*. Virtual bottles can be bought that release virtual fragrance bubbles. Furthermore, there is a “what are you in 2?” photography and gallery contest in *Second Life*. Perfume is released from its olfactory characteristics to become only a virtual flask in *Second Life*. Viral marketing invites people to engage with the brand.

The second example is that of Chanel No 5. In 2006, media channels reported the release of a new movie featuring Nicole Kidman, and the showing of its trailer was announced in major newspapers and magazines. The trailer was shown during a movie break on one of the major TV stations in France; with its dramatic music and its glamorous scenery of nighttime New York as background, it presented a romance involving a struggling writer who falls in love with the world's most famous woman. However, rather than introducing the new film with Nicole Kidman, the piece, a typical two-minute-long trailer, featured the new representative of Chanel No 5. The video is full of signs and signifiers of Chanel—the logo and the black dress, for instance—mingled and mixed to appear in the trailer. But it is not clear what the piece is: Is it a short film, a trailer, a commercial? Genres mix in branding.

Third, perfume's phenomenality and its performance change. A number of perfume brands are co-determined by designers and celebrities. The success of a fragrance increasingly depends on the performance of designers and celebrities who are contextualized and remembered across geographic spaces through fashion shows, TV programs, and movies. The cachet of a branded good is shaped by personal performances and representation in those media.

Perfumes resemble other cultural products in their short lifespans. The pressure to perform during limited periods of time or according to seasons governs the perfume's life-period on the shelf, requiring that perfume be constructed as a fast-moving consumer good. This is often missed by consumers because they mainly recognize the most successful perfumes that remain on the shelf. The strategy and tendency of producers to create sequels—just as in the TV and movie industry—is connected to the successful performance of certain products (Burr, 2008). Sequels exist in the form of flankers that are “brand extensions [that] can be money-spinners in their own right (...) or part of an overall branding-strategy [as] another molecule in the brand universe” (Tungate, 2005, p. 146). An example would be the flankers that were developed out of the original *cK One* perfume. Flankers are developed on a seasonal basis such as *ck One Summer*. They allow a reassuring safety of consumer experiences through brand names. Flankers-as-sequels are ways for producers to facilitate continuation of communication and media strategies and thereby create identities. This aspect of *heimat*-creation in products, a decrease in unexpected outcomes, and the decision of producers to present “safe” and expected products to consumers, makes perfumes a commodity rather than an art form (Lash and Urry, 1994; Suchsland, 2007). The historic meaning of seduction—*se ducere* means to be led elsewhere—shifts toward conduction. Passion is prearranged and staged.

Nonmainstream examples also exist that challenge the dominant practices of marketing and branding. Niche producers of perfumes have a longstanding tradition in which a scent, in contrast to a brand, is the center of attention. Niche producers are restricted in terms of sales volume, brand range, and geographic reach. Besides, they hardly conduct market research, and their testing sites mainly include people such as colleagues, family, and friends. At the center of attention is the creation of unique scents, and this demonstrates a different approach toward perfumery. Niche houses present and document their values through scents. A recent example of this is the promotion of the perfume maker as a creator of olfactory art. Niche producers also differ in geographic terms: the location is created to orchestrate difference in order to present a unique product (Malefyt and Moeran, 2003, p. 9). Although the absence from some retail environments in certain parts

of a city is related to and caused by limited financial resources, product quantities, and flexibility of delivery, difference is often purposely chosen. Niche producers present their scents in a unique store with an unorthodox interior design in an unusual geographic location. Gentrified urban neighborhoods, for example, are reported as attractive areas for specific socioeconomic groups, and niche producers are attracted to them. Thus, the complexity of finding an individual scent is imprinted on the urban economic landscape. Places become locales of cool—a trend that started with gentrification but which shows the intricacies of place-relatedness, brand equities, and scent characteristics.

The examples above evince a new strategy of marketers and brand managers to enable consumers to play with, create, and recreate signs and values of brands through different channels. They also show a changing understanding of how to relate to the consumer. Passion for a perfume is transported through brand values and brand equities; a brand is technologically mediated and shaped across spaces. Brands form fickle universes both in product and spatial senses. They are both mobilized through media but made accessible, available, and tangible in specific places. Thus, the “where’s” of presence and intensity and the “how’s” of creating and maintaining passion and desire change. Perfume is presented as a personal luxury but requires experiential meetings on the ground to calibrate mediated knowledge. However, the central focus on the brand by major manufacturers as an opportunity to create passion does not address the significance of scents in their ephemeral and visceral nature. Scents and their understanding by consumers remain a source of openness and economic uncertainty for producers. In the next section, I will discuss the spaces and practices of production and consumption to deal with the intricacies of fragrances. Although producers try to make consumers passionate, the characteristics of fragrances escape such rational planning.

SPACES AND PRACTICES OF PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

The previous discussion focused on how manufacturers of perfumes have visualized and addressed consumers in order to create passion for a branded good. This focus narrowed the discussion to subtle marketing and branding techniques, and I now turn to the specific practices in the making and consuming of a perfume. The spaces of production and consumption of fine fragrances are intertwined with the practices of how and by whom these spaces are constructed; the practices, in turn, delineate and characterize complex and changing spatialities. This is a characteristic of passion in the urban emotional economy. Whereas investments in marketing and branding address the rather conscious and cognitive site of a perfume through the brand, the focus on consumption will unravel the subtleties and complexities that are related to perfume as an esthetic and visceral product.

Spaces and Practices of Production

It is important to develop “meaning” as an imperative engine for economic success out of the combination of different material and symbolic registers (Allen, 2002; Tan, 2007). Meaning helps the consumer to grasp and understand a perfume. Meaning intends that a consumer develops an individual understanding of a perfume; at the same time, a perfume has to allow meaning for a wider group of consumers. Thus the meticulous invention,

engineering, and maintenance of meaning in the fragrance industry are challenges that result from the idiosyncratic relation between different registers. Meaning is often created in or transported into a visual and verbal economy through the signification of the brand. The materiality and limited ability to communicate about scents are problematic. Creative processes are communicated between fragrance studios and corporate offices and the question is how this is done.

Marketers develop new conceptual ideas for a fragrance based on an existing portfolio, the brand's historical trajectory, and market developments. In making a reference to a recently developed scent, a vice president of global marketing at a major fragrance firm articulated the following concept for a scent:

[The concept] was all about being outside, all about being free, it was all about being open, and it was all about sunshine. That is what that [product] brand is about on a very simplistic level. (Telephone interview from New York City with Vice President, Global Marketing, September 2007)

Accordingly, marketers determine a geographic target market. Manufacturers work with market research organizations in order to recognize, create, and supply a potential market. Target markets and consumer groups are invented (see the general discussion in Lury, 2004). Collaborators supply creativity in their individual form as a fragrance, package and bottle design, name, and advertising and promotion. A creative brief is developed based on the general conceptual idea, which enables interaction with collaborators. Brand managers and marketers coordinate the composition of fragrance, colors, shapes, name, bottle, and package of all component parts during the development process. This coordination recurs in every project, and the components of a fragrance are characterized by different attributes and codes (cf. Allen, 2002). For instance, citrus notes are understood as fresh and evoke a feeling of summer. Perfume with significant citrus notes often addresses male users and market tests show that men usually like these perfumes. Thus citrus is socially constructed as a summer note preferred by males. Citrus is attributed by marketers with specific characteristics such as fresh and clean. This characterization finds its way into advertising and media strategies and, finally, to the consumer. The abstraction serves as a vehicle to communicate a perfume to the consumer. The male consumer likes citrus because it is a component in perfumes for males. Accordingly, other product components are categorized and understood by the manufacturers and suppliers, respectively. Nevertheless, the categories vary geographically so that manufacturers have to make sure that consumer preferences in different markets are addressed, because perfumes with citrus notes are understood differently.

The manufacturers of perfumes and their suppliers seek to better understand how consumers approach and relate to a scent. This enables a better understanding of why perfumes might succeed or fail, and establishes a form of language among producers of perfumes and their suppliers. Gobe (2007) described the practice of a fragrance supplier to profile emotional responses to fragrances:

IFF [one of the largest fragrance suppliers] has developed a proprietary, global database that identifies the emotional responses people have to almost 5,000 scent ingredients and fragrances. (Gobe, 2007, p. 49)

This database is used to create “visual narratives that bring to life the new olfactory concepts” (Gobe, 2007, p. 49) because the fragrance supplier intends to make sure that its clients understand how fragrance creations are understood by consumers from an emotional perspective. Producers use this information to adjust a perfume from an olfactory standpoint if necessary and maneuver between the initial concept, the scent, and all other components. Marketers and brand managers assemble a perfume according to these characterizations and “play” between the different esthetic and multisensual registers. This is added by an understanding of how consumer markets differ geographically:

Consumers in France would go into a perfumery (...) and really want to understand the notes in the fragrance. And they are actually able to communicate what’s on the top, what’s on the heart, what’s on the base (...) All Americans’ know is: Is it fresh, is it clean, is it—sometimes they use the word “sexy” or sensual. That is it in terms of their vocabulary. It doesn’t go any further. And when you go against men, they’re actually even more ignorant. (Telephone interview from New York City with Vice President, Global Marketing, September 2007)

This shows the significance of idiosyncrasies among national consumer markets. Thus a fragrance is organized in a symbolic domain “where words, [smells], and images function as an expressive system of signs” (Allen, 2002, p. 50). This domain intertwines the different dimensions in the articulation of a perfume, and the ultimate goal is to present a coherent object. Coherence means the unity of the material and symbolic components as far as the product itself, the product within the brand portfolio, and the product against the target group are concerned.

Retail environments also contribute to construct a perfume, and their organization is connected and intertwined with the production of perfumes. Ubiquity means easy access to retail environments such as airport perfumeries, department stores, or supermarkets (Briney, 2006). Uniqueness implies that retail intentions are guided by the idea of restricting consumption to specific department stores, luxury chains, or unique shops in specific cities and prime locations therein. What degree of accessibility is contributing to increase product sales versus damaging the brand through overexposure? Such strategies translate into how consumers perceive brands (Boorstin, 2005).

Manufacturing and retailing are processes that include not only the production and maintenance of meaning in specific places, but the creation and organization of entities and environments as passion. The relevance of branding and the attribution with sign values describes one register in inventing a perfume as passion. From the perspective of the producers, however, a perfume is a product that communicates specific ideas. However, consumers are also involved in the co-construction and production of values through the understanding of a perfume. The material characteristics of a fragrance are a significant component. In the following section, the focus is on practices and spaces of consumption.

Spaces and Practices of Consumption

The consumption of a perfume should be understood holistically because it integrates the practices of strolling, smelling, purchasing, and using the product. Perfume as a relational good implies a multiplicity of consumptive understandings. An individual

consumer may buy and wear a perfume out of passion for it, or may purchase it as a gift, but people also may become passionate when they smell the scent of a person (Baudrillard, 1998). This lets us differentiate a perfume as a personal good that is made and understood in public. Actually, a perfumed body is understood in public. This has to do with the original impression made by the sensuality of a perfume, the knowledgability of a product by others, and the perfumed body itself (Lash and Lury, 2007).

In the following section, I discuss a perfume in its becoming, a substantialization not only as a product with its own phenomenality (Thrift, 2004) but as an epistemic object characterized by “a lack in completeness of being that takes away much of the wholeness, solidity, and the thing-like character [it has] in our everyday conception” (Knorr-Cetina, 2001, p. 181). This lack of completeness characterizes both the creative work of consumers and the lack of clear signification effects (Allen, 2002). This involves the cognitive unconscious force of passion, and three examples will be discussed that illustrate how and where consumers become passionate. This discussion suggests that the imprint of a perfume through branding and marketing strategies helps to communicate a perfume visually and verbally, and further demonstrates that perfumes communicate through olfaction. The landscape of passion is created by the instinctual understanding of scents, and ultimately speaks to the intricacies of a commodification and mass production of perfumes in modern capitalism.

Close Encounters: Relating to “The Thing”

The consumption of dreams. Why do people consume perfumes? Adornment, decoration, dreams, and desires are discussed as aspects that determine the understanding of a perfume and a perfumed body. Regarding adornment (including attraction, seduction, and attractiveness; Simmel, 2004), possessing a fragrance includes its intended dispossession. Others should recognize the scent, and smells are translated into the universe of what is known and experienced. A perfume is an enigma: its smell does not mean that it will be known or considered as nice.⁶ However, the understanding of an encrypted meaning requires the intention and likelihood of decoding it. This is problematic because consumers are not machinistic decoders and a perfume does not have a single meaning. A perfume is open to many understandings (Danziger, 2005), and its meaning is contextualized in a web of objects. The latter extends the characteristics of the scent and relates it to other perfumes, branded goods, and the appearance of the wearer (Baudrillard, 1998). The focus now shifts toward the sense-making processes of consumers to individualize a perfume for consumption and to situate the scent of a person into a web of other expressions. Adornment in this case often takes place as an unspoken process of display and recognition. A perfume serves as an accessory in a different sensorial mode, and can be used as an aphrodisiac that belongs to the “arsenal of seduction” (Drobnick, 2000, p. 40) in order to engage someone’s sexuality. The scent itself makes a consumer passionate, and this rather unconscious attraction contributes to the mystique of a perfume.

⁶Its imbricated history might not be deciphered and recognized as in the case of fashion (also in Baudrillard, 1998; Allen, 2002). This has to do with the materiality of a fragrance that is not visual but visceral.

The characterization of perfumes as emotional goods relates to dreams and desires. Perfumes are manufactured to let consumers dream. This has two implications. First, a degree of narcissism, hedonism, and hallucination is related to the consumption of perfume (Featherstone, 2003). Buying a perfume is part of the construction of identity and illusions, which mix. A perfume connects the body and the self, an illusion of wannabe and the reality of being (Featherstone, 2003). The performing self manages appearance, display, and impressions; a switch from character to personality takes place, and a scent helps to accomplish this. Second, many perfume brands are historicized through fashion designers, artists, or, more recently, celebrities. The purchase of a perfume is a way to connect the consumer with celebrities or designers. Preferences shift from owning to buying and from the fulfillment of a desire to the constant promise of new desires (Bolz, 2002). The scent itself is an agent that evokes the feelings and emotions of consumers.

The store. Shopping for a perfume varies between a focused search and nonrational, impulsive experience (Thrift, 2004). The shopper is motivated to buy a fragrance for many different reasons. A perfume might be a reward, an object of longing, an affordable luxury good, a fetish, an accessory, a trophy, or a gift. The practice of shopping for a perfume is open to many interpretations: shopping is a medium of self-assurance, appearance, a suggestion of style, being cool, consuming something new, and a unique redefinition of the self. Passion is fundamental to the purchase of an emotional good: the consumer purchases and uses a perfume that makes the individual passionate even if the consumer does not know why and cannot coherently explain why the scent is interesting.

The consumption of the aroma of a perfume requires direct encounters (Howes, 2003). The development of consumer capitalism in department stores, which were invented in Paris at the end of the 19th century, has been studied (Zola, 1995; Harvey, 2003; Zukin, 2004; Tungate, 2005; Paterson, 2006). The importance of walking in the city and window-shopping in urban economies has also been discussed. The physical presence of a perfume is relevant because of two tendencies. (1) It is difficult to test and evaluate a scent in its physical absence. Sniffing a perfume can be compared to tasting a wine. Testing a perfume has more to do with sharpening consumers' noses, comparing scents, and being a connoisseur (Danziger, 2005; Roudnitska, 1991).⁷ The pleasure acquired from scents is in smelling instead of buying. (2) It is not all about the perfume that satisfies needs—it is about consumption in the surrounding atmosphere that does (Bolz, 2002).

Perfumes are examples of a geography of sensations and experiences. This is best articulated in Charles Revson's comment on the cosmetic industry (Danzinger, 2007, p. 43): "In the factory we make cosmetics, but in the stores we sell hope." This postmodern version of hope points to a general understanding of what the environment for consumption might be. The department store or specialty shop is a shelter that is "willing" to give hope to a desperate consumer. In contrast, the more critical approach perceives a stroller lured into a store and lulled into a trap (Howes, 2003; Zukin, 2004). These different

⁷Danziger (2005, p. 220) aligns this with the understanding of luxury: "There is luxury on the outside and then luxury on the inside. Ultimately, the more 'insider' the luxury is, the more exclusive it is. If it is more intelligent and takes more expertise to know it, appreciate it, and understand it, then it is a little less obvious and has less mass appeal. Like the connoisseur of wine, you become the connoisseur because you understand the nuance of what is on the inside, in the bottle, not in [sic] the wrapping or outside."

understandings could be alluded to idealized consumer types of savvy people versus “suckers” (Paterson, 2006). “Sucker” consumers as materialists easily succumb to “false needs” that producers create. Savvy consumers possess background knowledge about the products that they buy, and are suspicious of overmarketed and excessively advertised consumer goods. In the case of perfumes, these consumers might not be critical about the scent, but rather object to the advertising strategies to brand the products and target the consumer (Lasn, 2006). Companies try to address this challenge by developing even more indirect methods of communication (Lasn, 2006; Keaner and Pressman, 2007).

Dumoulin (2007) has written about the relevance of retail experience, and Tungate (2005) concluded that stores and shops are ways of communicating. Accordingly, brand imagery differs while the material characteristics of a perfume stay the same. Thus the situatedness of a perfume is important, and the biography of a product takes different paths, whereby it is valued differently according to where it comes from (Lash and Lury, 2007). The emergence of cosmetic and perfumery chains serves as an example. “McDonaldization” in this sector diminishes the specificity and uniqueness of a store and stresses the commodification of perfumes. Reliability and accountability are characteristic when major brands are represented. The physical organization of a store is based on repetition and homogeneity. Encounters with a new fragrance are based on access instead of coincidence, which in turn qualifies passion for a perfume in its sensual stimulation between easy detection and surprise. Creating retail environments of and for consumption imposes a blurring boundary of the productive and consumptive act.

Performing as a consumer. The informal social interaction and theatrical play that consumers and salespeople perform at the site of purchase is significant. Paterson (2006, p. 177) characterizes that “shopping then becomes about, firstly, *looking* rather than *speaking*; secondly, *entertainment* and *leisure*, thirdly, *desire* rather than *need*; and fourthly, about *woman*.” Zukin (2004, p. 119) describes the development of shopping as a right and rite as well as “a pleasure [and] not a task.” In addition to a purchase, being in a store is a documentation of taste. Consumption in this guise can be understood as “the need to perform an affective identity” (Amin and Thrift, 2007, p. 156). Economies of chance and coincidence characterize these environments (Morris, 1999, as cited in Paterson, 2006, p. 179). Shopping in department stores has enabled the preferred behavior of looking rather than speaking (Paterson, 2006). However, perfume shopping is a practice where looking *and* speaking are associated with smelling. Talking about aromatic impressions, nuances, and preferences with sales personnel is an important social act. Sales personnel help to characterize perfumes. They describe perfumes by borrowing language from other senses because “one can only speak of the unknown as a function of the known” (Roudnitska, 1991, p. 10). The sense of smell is restrictive when it comes to speaking about what is smelled. Scents are often reduced to terms like “fresh” or “sexy” to enable an attribution and assist consumer understanding. The appearance of these sales personnel, who are mainly female, characterize the beauty business as a gendered and gendering environment (Peiss, 2000). In talking about a perfume, sales personnel construct and characterize scents, and these discussions contribute to the emergence of passion.

Thus consumption of perfumes is connected to different places (Amin and Thrift, 2007). Purchasing a fine fragrance is based on a compromise that involves the fragrance,

salesperson, price, brand, atmosphere, current mood, and passion of the consumer. However, the purchase is just one stage in the consumption of a perfume.

Switching Places: From the Stores to the Consumer

Perfumes belong to daily rituals. The use of a perfume reveals a characteristic of creative destruction: whereas personal use means depletion of a perfume it also allows individual characterization and image construction.⁸ The practice of perfuming the body takes place in personal spaces such as the bathroom, and emphasizes the characteristic of a perfume as a personalized good (Peiss, 2000). The adherence of a fine fragrance to a body is mirrored by an odoriferous mobility that echoes the daily routes of its user.

Fine fragrances inhabit bodily spaces. The human body forms the surface of interaction and becomes an individual signifier. Smell signatures contribute to characterizations just like clothes or overall appearance. As these unfold through the movements of bodies in space they affect people who share the routes of a perfumed person. A perfume is volatile and therefore temporal, evaporating and therefore changing, proximate and inescapable but not bound to physical spaces. People that encounter perfumed bodies while walking become passionate through scents. In interaction with others and depending on the particular setting, the instrumentalization of an odoriferous characterization through a perfume brands a person. The use of a perfume can show a sublime understanding of style and also be a sign for understatement. Smell has always been a medium that contributes to interpersonal understanding on a subconscious, emotional level (Classen et al., 1994). However, the contextualization of a perfume into a brand demands olfactory and brand knowledge. A fine fragrance works as an accessory in this regard; whereas shopping is a visible documentation of status and style, the use of a perfume subtly documents a state (e.g., of being cool, trendy, backward, or silent). People generalize and abstract perfumed bodies in order to anticipate shopping behavior, perfume preferences, and the understanding of taste and class. But this remains a weak association because of the complexity of a perfume. The different sensuality and mystique of perfumes reveals only fragmentary information. Passion does not depend on a brand that stands for something but on a scent that communicates in its own language.

CONCLUSION

The urban emotional economy is based on and configured by the register of passion. This article discussed the emergence and general characteristics of passion that accompany the production and consumption of perfume. Perfume is a nonrepresentational and relational good. It is open to individual identification and attribution, and its symbolic and esthetic features create spaces for individual attachment and passion. However, this characterization clashes with the intention and production logics of manufacturers of perfumes, who endeavor to produce successful scents. Producers want to understand, keep, and enlarge the consumer base and market in various and complex environments,

⁸Simmel (2003, p. 239) discusses the mix of destruction and construction in fashion; see also Clarke (2003) and Paterson (2006).

particularly department stores, specialty shops, and the Internet. The focusing of their creative work on brands helps producers to attract and keep consumers. Producers try to premanufacture and package passion, and thereby confront and fuel the tendency and consequences of commodifying perfumes. Moreover, the agency of the consumer's understanding of a perfume is incapable of being anticipated by the producers. In an olfactory economy, passion drives production and consumption through the characteristics of scents. Individualizing a perfume is significant and does not necessarily have to do with such abstracted characteristics as a brand. Thus consumers create values through the individualization of a perfume. Producers and consumers are accomplices and the productive and consumptive spheres blend (Lash and Urry, 1994, p. 15; see also Callon et al., 2002).

Perfumes help to better understand passion in the urban emotional economy because scents, unlike many other cultural goods, cannot be easily verbalized and visualized between producers and consumers and among consumers. Consumers regularly and unexpectedly develop passion in different places, and without being able to document why. This article has presented insights from a cultural industry that is organized according to capitalist realities. However, the centrality of passion in multiple landscapes and the particular case of the urban emotional economy puts the domains of economic rationality and planning against nonrationality and emotions. The focus here has been on urban economies, but other geographies remain to be discussed.

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