What's this Smell?

Shifting Worlds of Olfactory Perception

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Der vorliegende Beitrag skizziert in seinem ersten Teil das Langzeitinteresse am Geruchssinn sowie dessen kulturelle und wissenschaftliche Verankerung in der modernen chemosensorischen und neurowissenschaftlichen Forschung. Der Essay zeigt dabei das breite Spektrum der Beschäftigung mit geruchlichen Phänomenen und Erkenntnisinteressen auf. Die Vernetzung reicht von Philosophie und Linguistik via Chemie, Biologie und Medizin bis hin zu Historiografie, Anthropologie und nicht zuletzt Parfümerie als ästhetische kommerzielle Praxis. Dabei sind immer wieder kulturhistorische, überblicksmäßige Zusammenfassungen der Geruchswelt entstanden, meist von Einzelnen aus persönlicher, idiosynkratischer Perspektive verfasst. In den 1980er Jahren, mit Patrick Süskinds *Parfum* als literarischem Startschuss, nimmt das populäre Interesse an Düften zu – und die Literatur antwortet darauf. Die Diskussion von Geruchsphänomenen findet Eingang in verschiedene Medien, nicht zuletzt in das sich rasant entwickelnde Internet und dessen Blogkultur. Auch das weltweit wachsende Parfümgeschäft mit seinem Werbebedarf bildlicher und textlicher Art ist ein wichtiger Bestandteil dieser globalen Entwicklung, die den Sinnen eine zunehmend wichtigere Rolle zuschreibt. Im Rahmen literarischen Schreibens der letzten Jahre lässt sich eine neuartige Erzählform ausmachen, die hier *perfumoirlogue* genannt wird und in ihrer Grundform einen auktorialen Reisebericht eines weiblichen Autors auf der Suche nach einem persönlichen Duft darstellt. Die Beschreibung dieser Form und ihrer Abwandlung erfolgt im zweiten Teils des Essays anhand einiger Beispiele und Analysen.

> You know, in order to exist, everything alive has to have a smell.
> (Mikhail Shishkin, The Light and the Dark. Trans. by Andrew Bromfield. New York 2014, p. 8.)

> Interviewer: »What do you think of e-books and Amazon's Kindle? – Ray Bradbury: »Those aren't books. You can't hold a computer in your hand like you can a book. A computer does not smell. There are two perfumes to a book. If a book is new, it smells *great*. If a book is old, it smells even better. It smells like ancient Egypt. A book has got to smell.«
> (The Paris Review, No. 192, Spring 2010)

> The forming of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present.
> (Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1848)

It was common in the past to begin almost any kind of writing about the sense of smell outside the sciences with a summary rhetorical gesture that olfactory perception is our most mysterious, most understudied and least appreciated sense. This still happens – but it is no longer quite true.[1]

[1] Even the press release in 2004, when the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine went to

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Over the past three decades or so work in cultural studies from historiography and anthropology to literature; in the natural sciences from biological, chemistry and medical research to psychology, the neuro- and behavioral sciences; in the vast realms of popular culture, and even in legal studies has in fact shown tremendous interest in the senses in general and the olfactory mode in particular.[2] These thirty years have produced a vast number of books and treatments on a wide range of manifestations of the sense of smell both scholarly and popular, fictional and non-fictional. To this needs to be added the even broader embedments of olfactory perception in perfumery, the world of scenting and fragrancing and its aesthetics, advertisement and design or the emergence of scent bars, the growing number of small-scale craft-based perfumeries, and the ramifying field of aromatherapy.[3] This essay sketches the widening olfactory strand of the broader narrative of the postmodern sentient as well as sensual human being. This being itself came into its own by the 1980s as a physical and social-psychological phenomenon, complete with the support industries of spa, fitness and wellness centers and accompanying health-food crazes. Theories, histories, and personal narratives were not far behind, from the *bona fide* scholarly to the downright wacky.

The essay comprises two movements. The first is contextualizing, the second interpretive. The first provides a broad-brush sketch of extra-literary research into the sense of smell, such as in the natural and social sciences; the second zooms in on literature. The first takes the reader up to the early 1980s – and continues implicitly into the present as new research findings are added; the second kicks into high gear in the early 1980s, as by that time the olfactory field had been sufficiently plowed for literature to take root in it and blossom. In fact, the growing olfactory knowledge provided by the natural and social sciences, followed by its spreading as *popular* knowledge, is construed here as a stimulus for literature to draw on and add its own perspectives. Beginning with high creativity and vivid imagination, the rising tide of scent-focused writing combines fictional, autobiographical, scholarly, scientific, historical and anthropological elements, mixes up genre conventions, and adds to the popular romance and fantasy in innovative ways. The double-arched schematics of this essay is therefore just that: schematic. Fictional olfactory writing has existed long before the 1980s, of course, and this essay will take note of prominent older instances. But it will become clear that by the early 1980s, knowledge about the sense of smell across disciplines began to fuel a new literary imagination.

The inherent tendency of everything olfactory to spread and insinuate itself into spaces, times, and memories connects the two parts of this essay. While its transgressive interdisciplinarity helps to explain historically the fragmented and decentered manifestations of olfactory perception as object of cultural studies, it is also a central reason for

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Richard Axel and Susan Buck »for their discoveries of ›odorant receptors and the organization of the olfactory system‹« begins with this gesture: »The sense of smell long remained the most enigmatic of our senses«; www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/medicine/laureates/2004/press.html

[2] In a recent overview of the field of sensory studies, the Canadian anthropologist David Howes, one of the pre-eminent social-science and cultural studies researchers in sensory issues, speaks of a »sensory turn in contemporary scholarship«; David Howes, The Expanding Field of Sensory Studies; Online at: www.sensorystudies.org/sensorial-investigations/the-expanding-field-of-sensory-studies/.

[3] See for instance the richly illustrated volume: Richard Howard Stamelman, Perfume: Joy, Obsession, Scandal, Sin: a Cultural History of Fragrance from 1750 to the Present. Principal photography by Michael Freeman. New York 2006.

the very fascination this sensory modality holds in postmodernism. In everyday culture, the gamut of odors, stenches, scents, perfumes, and aromas, both real and discursive, plays out in fields from cosmetics and perfumery to odor abatement and emissions regulations;[4] from urban planning, sanitation, and hygiene to medical issues such as odor hypersensitivity, allergic reactions or anosmia; from aromatherapy, the lure of pheromones, infallible attraction, and sexuality to the stench of death from rotten corpses; and from linguistic peculiarity to exuberant literary renderings of the odoriferous in, say, J. K. Huysmans's *À Rebours* from 1884 or Patrick Süskind's *Perfume.* This 1985 novel, in fact serves, with a grain of salt, as this essay's *Engführung* of accumulated scientific and cultural olfactory knowledge and its spreading literary manifestations.

Thus it is literature and literary analysis to which the cultural-historical arch leads up, offering by way of introduction also a *catalogue raisonné* of work in olfactory perception, unavoidably selective, yet broad enough to offer a meaningful overview of the unfolding of a field of disciplines that has put the olfactory at the center. The essay proposes an explanatory conceptual framework for the present heightened interest in smells and the timeframe of its emergence. In fact, it proclaims the emergence of a new genre, the *perfumoirlogue*, a hybrid form of predominantly female writing about smells.

I. The Historical Contextual Arch

1. Historical, Cultural, and Popular Cultural Manifestations of Olfactory Perception

Three avenues of inquiry dominate modern historical approaches to the sense of smell: histories of scented materials and their uses, originating in religious practices, cosmetics, or perfumery; histories of the senses as such, their physiological functioning, adaptations, changing thresholds, predilections, etc. in response to socio-cultural developments; and topical histories, e.g., social histories, that draw on a given modality in order to concretize their subjects' life-worlds and experiences and highlight specific aspects within the overall account. But questions have been raised since antiquity about the senses and their functioning, with answers often more speculative than observational. In the fourth century BC Aristotle's *De anima* and *De sensu* addressed matters of perception quite extensively; even early molecular models (»atomism«) were put forward, for example by Lucretius in *De rerum natura* in the first century BC. Jean-Pierre Brun, a French historian and archeologist, recently provided a rich, illustrated account of the perfume-making infrastructure in antiquity.[5] When in the fourth century AD Augustine elaborated in his *Confessions* on the sensory temptations that haunted him, he played down the powers of smell – yet admitted to possibly underestimating them: »I am not much troubled by the allurements of odors. When they are absent, I do not seek them; when they are present, I do not refuse them; and I am always prepared to go without them. At any rate, I appear thus to myself; it is quite possible that I am deceived.«[6] With this dismissal of odor Augustine helps

[4] For an illustrative example, see the EU regulatory push for perfume ingredients, as reported in *Die Zeit*, September 5, 2013, online at: www.zeit.de/2013/36/parfum-verbot-allergiker-chanel-no5

[5] Jean-Pierre Brun, The Production of Perfumes in Antiquity: The Cases of Delos and Paestum. In: American Journal of Archaeology 104 (2000) 2, p. 277–308.

[6] Augustine, Confessions. Book 10, Chapter 32. Trans. by Albert C. Outler [1955]; online at: www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/augustine/textstrans.html

establish the broad pattern in Christian Europe of devaluing the body and the senses generally and the chemical senses in particular, a view that carries into the enlightenment and holds throughout the history of aesthetics until very recently.[7] Kant's distinction between three modalities that are »more objective than subjective,« provide »empirical *intuitions*,« and contribute »more to the *cognition* of the external object than they stir up the consciousness of the affected organ« and two »lower« senses, taste and smell, that »are more subjective than objective,« cements this lasting division among the five senses.[8] The fact that the chemical senses require material, molecular intake and their (artistic) creations are subsequently consumed in the process of perception makes them unsuitable, in the Enlightenment understanding of aesthetics, for being considered among the arts. Indeed, the culinary arts and perfumery have never fully transcended the status of mere *crafts*. As Kant goes on to answer his own question, »Which organic sense is the most ungrateful and also seems to be the most dispensable?,« he points to smell: »It does not pay to cultivate it or refine it at all in order to enjoy; for there are more disgusting objects than pleasant ones (especially in crowded places), and even when we come across something fragrant, the pleasure coming from the sense of smell is always fleeting and transient«.[9] Although excluded from aesthetic theorizing, the sense of smell nevertheless served important cognitive functions, notably in the medical field, broadly construed. The information contained in body odors, for instance, was long used in medical diagnosis, and trained practitioners were able to identify many diseases by the characteristics of the patient's body odor, breath, urine or feces. It is a practice that has largely fallen into disuse in modern Western medicine. During the late Middle Ages and into the 17th and 18th centuries, plague doctors, depicted in their aromatics-filled beak-masks, were operating along the then-cutting edge of hygienic-medical knowledge, the miasmatic theory of contagion that directly connected smells, contamination, and disease. This presumed causal nexus was subsequently overcome by the germ theory of disease in the later 19th century.

As for olfactory pleasure, there has always been perfumery. From the European perspective, perfumery was long considered exotic, and »the scents of Arabia« meant more than just a turn of phrase. The cosmetological extravagance and excess, as reported of Cleopatra, for instance, helped shape a deeply orientalist view of the subject.[10] And Nefertiti is so dashingly made up that nobody would blink encountering her today on a crowded city sidewalk, an elegant lady passing by *en route* to her salon. We cannot say whether she wore perfume or not, but would we be surprised if she did? Eugene Rimmel's 1865 *Book of Perfumes* is a grand and beautifully illustrated

[7] However, see François Quiviger, The Sensory World of Italian Renaissance Art. London 2010. In his study, »Quiviger [takes] into account all of the five senses in his analysis of works of art, in a context of multiple sensory stimuli, many of which were meant to tune the mind to a certain state and thus facilitate particular emotions and associations that would imbue the paintings with meaning,« writes Mikael Bøgh Rasmussen in a review of Quiviger's book, continuing that »[t]hus the reader gets a fine introduction to the medieval and Renaissance conception of how the senses worked«; Mikael Bøgh Rasmussen, A Cross-Sensory Approach to Renaissance Painting. In: The Senses and Society 7 (2012) 1, p. 123–125.

[8] Immanuel Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View. Trans. and ed. by Robert B. Louden. Introduction by Manfred Kuehn. Cambridge 2006, p. 46.

[9] Ibid, p. 51.

[10] »Orientals« is still an established class of perfumes, next to »chypre,« »citrus,« »floral,« »fougère,« and usually a few others.

mid-19th-century account of the »exotic« history of perfumery that he presents in twelve chapters. Beginning with the »physiology of perfumes« and ending on »materials used in perfumery« he organizes his historical overview by ethnicities, describing the perfume and cosmetics customs of »the Egyptians,« »the Jews,« the »ancient Asiatic nations,« and by geographical, epochal and cultural standards, as in »the uncivilized nations« or the »Far East«.[11] A few years earlier, in 1857, G. W. S. Piesse had published another, more technical and trade-focused grand narrative of the perfumery of the time, his famous *The Art of Perfumery*.[12] And recent historical research, recognizing the natural raw materials and ingredients for perfumery and cosmetics as valuable trade goods, investigates the routes along which they were transported as perfumistic analogues of the Silk Road.[13] These wide-ranging works have been complemented by more disciplinary thematic histories, such as the work of Giuseppe Squillace, an Italian historian of Greek antiquity.[14]

While musings about the senses are not uncommon in historical writings, a history of the senses, despite Marx's mid-19th century insight into their social constructedness, has taken longer to come about. Alain Corbin's masterful *Le miasme et la jonquille* (1982) is doubtless one of the founding scholarly texts in this genre and has provided a touchstone over the past three decades for historical research into olfactory perception. It is central to the organization of this essay, too.[15] As a social historian in the tradition of the *Annales* School, Corbin pursues in this work olfactory phenomena as a narrative of changing sensibilities. Closely tied to the background of developments in hygiene, urban planning, and medical progress, he convincingly shapes his multi-faceted inquiry into the manifestations of this sense and the evolution of its *social* functions into a broader history of the development of social sensitivities and perceptual thresholds.

Younger historians such as Mark M. Smith have taken up Corbin's approach. Even if not writing the history of a particular sense, they make the point that drawing on specific modalities provides additional information and descriptive depth in support of an intended historical narrative. Smith explicitly makes a point of reading historical documents – in this case of racial interaction and slavery in the US south – for their concrete, sensory, physical dimension, including smells. The integration of such information on sensory perception into (social) historiography provides a startling concretization of the life-worlds discussed and in Smiths capable hands generates convincing and strongly olfactory-tinged accounts of race relations in the United States.

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[11] Eugene Rimmel, The Book of Perfumes. With Above 250 Illustrations by Bourdelin, Thomas, etc. London 1865. The eponymous cosmetics firm, founded by Eugene's father, still exists today, http://rimmellondon.com

[12] George William Septimus Piesse, The Art of Perfumery [...]. Philadelphia 1857; available online in a facsimile version at: https://archive.org/stream/artofperfumeryme00pies#page/n5/mode/2up. The full title serves as a veritable content summary: *The Art of Perfumery and the methods of obtaining the odors of plants, with instructions for the manufacture of perfumes for the handkerchief, scented powders, odorous vinegars, dentifrices, pomatums, cosmetics, perfumed soap, etc. to which is added an appendix on preparing artificial fruit-essences, etc.*

[13] See for instance, Anna Akasoy/Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, Along the Musk Routes: Exchanges Between Tibet and The Islamic World. In: Asian Medicine 3 (2007), p. 217–240.

[14] His most recent study on the topic of perfume in ancient and classical Greece is *I giardini di Saffo: profumi e aromi nella Grecia antica* (Rome 2014).

[15] Alain Corbin, Le miasme et la jonquille: L'odorat et l'imaginaire social, xviii[e]–xix[e] siècles. Paris 1982 (German: *Pesthauch und Blütenduft*, 1984; English: *The Foul and the Fragrant*, 1986).

Holly Dugan's phenomenological history of smells in Early Modern England is another case in point.[16]

In line with Corbin's inquiry, where the sense of smell is more than a mere provider of historical information and becomes itself the subject of historiography is Robert Jütte's *A History of the Senses*.[17] What informs inquiries like his in principle (and there are many available now) is Marx's insight that human perception in all its forms is not »natural« but socially constructed. Jütte states this quite categorically by insisting that »there can be no such thing as a natural history of the senses, only a social history of human sense perception.«[18] This puts him squarely in conflict with Diane Ackerman's widely read book, explicitly titled *A Natural History of the Senses*, which, appearing quite early on the rising tide of new-age writing on holistic living for the well-to-do, helped shape the very genre.[19] Ackerman thus represents a third approach to sensory perception, popular over the past three decades, namely ›science-light‹ writing about new-age forms of self-indulgence. The genre represents the postmodern urge for a »return-to-nature« or at least to the »natural« in a neo-romantic vein of self-discovery and self-improvement, with the senses and subjective experience acting as the main interface. Spa-culture, wellness studios, bio-psychological self-help cures, better eating, yoga, aromatherapy and many other efforts toward a more organic and holistic lifestyle shape this trend that at times veers into the esoteric and the mystical.

The publications associated with this pampering approach to the senses often result in poetically written vignettes that integrate history, science, myth, and basic knowledge of perfumery and aromatics into an appealing soft-contour narrative. The inside jacket text of Ackerman's book speaks to this relaxed view on genre and author qualifications: »Poet, pilot, naturalist, journalist, essayist, and explorer, Ackerman weaves together scientific facts with lore, history, and voluptuous description. The resulting work is a startling and enchanting account of how human beings experience and savor the world.« This postmodern *naturalist* is a far cry from the naturalist of the early modern period, the scientist-philosopher *Naturforscher* who stands at the outset of disciplinary research when the very objects of study, their categorization and methodologies of inquiry, together with the tools and instruments to investigate them, still had to be worked out. Haller and Linnaeus come to mind or Buffon and A. v. Humboldt and, operating later in an already increasingly disciplinary world of sci-

[16] Mark M. Smith, Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History. Berkeley 2007. Specifically on race: M. M. S., How Race Is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses. Chapel Hill 2006. Holly Dugan's study is another example of the »odoriferous turn« in historiography and anthropology; Holly Dugan, The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England. Baltimore 2011. The phrase »odoriferous turn« is Laura Iseppi De Filippi's in her review of Dugan's book. In: The Medieval Review 2013; online at: https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/15264/13.01.08.html?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

[17] Robert Jütte, A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace. Trans. by James Lynn. Malden 2005 (German original: Geschichte der Sinne: Von der Antike bis zum Cyberspace. München 2000.

[18] Ibid., p. 9.

[19] Diane Ackerman's *A Natural History of the Senses* (New York 1990) is one of the many *popular science* books on things sensory, including the olfactory, that came on the market in the 1990s. Ackerman's own US website, www.dianeackerman.com, describes her as a »Poet, essayist, and naturalist.« Nevertheless, the popular, often trans-medial impact of her writings should not be underestimated.

ence, Darwin. In between these 18th-century scholars and Ackerman in the late 20th century we find, to give just one example, a man like Roy Bedichek (1878–1959), a Texas educator and naturalist, whose posthumous book *The Sense of Smell* (1960), is a lovely example of the writing that for so long was typical for the topic of olfaction.[20] It is naturally interdisciplinary because it lives in and between the diverse disciplines that embrace olfactory phenomena; it is learned and broadly read, wide-ranging in time, space, characters, and issues; it is personal and even idiosyncratic; it is autodidactic and, as so often, exhibits a sense of poetry and a way of looking at the world that is unique to the writer. It can be said that these aspects, in varying degrees and combinations, characterize humanist and literary olfactory writing to this day.

Even before Bedichek, there was, in a similar vein save for different personal accents, the work of Dan McKenzie, a Scottish medical doctor.[21] In 1923 he summarized the olfactory knowledge of the time in his engaging book *Aromatics and the Soul* – another attempt at an olfactory overview, driven entirely by individual interest, transdisciplinary inputs and, as most such accounts, personal motives. McKenzie's book includes the usual broad array of anthropological concerns, historical questions of olfactory knowledge, various functions of the sense, the biomedical facts about the processes of perception as they were known at the time, taxonomy issues of the olfactory materials and, intriguingly, an »undulatory theory of olfaction« that combines molecular vibration (more on this below) with a vision-analog wave model as possible stimuli of the olfactory epithelium.[22] In a display of British quirkiness, he added all sorts of social commentary, often witty, humorous, and tongue-in-cheek, notably around stenches, the finer points of human body odors, and sex, all the while adhering to the polite constraints that Victorian society placed on such matters. Books that summarize the »state of the art« in olfactory perception, although not generally as literarily engaging as Bedichek's and McKenzies's, have appeared periodically, usually setting out from one discipline but quickly ramifying into others in order to provide a fuller picture of their far-flung, subjectively perceived fields of inquiry. Gustav Jaeger's *Die Entdeckung der Seele* is an extreme case in point. For him, a zoologist and medical doctor, smell is not only a phenomenon that spreads across disciplines; it rather seems that life itself is a function of the olfactory, including the spiritual: the soul, for Jaeger, *is* odor.[23]

The genre of sensory writing that Ackerman has popularized is in many ways the postmodern reincarnation of these earlier individually accented compendia of things olfactory. Over the past couple of decades a slew of books, magazine articles, and

[20] Roy Bedichek, The Sense of Smell. New York 1960. The »naturalist« label stems from his first book, *Adventures with a Texas Naturalist* (1947). Dan McKenzie, *Aromatics and the Soul* (below), shares some features with Bedichek's book: it follows an individual, slightly idiosyncratic urge to understand and order, even if primarily for the author himself, the intriguing world of odors.

[21] Dan McKenzie, Aromatics and the Soul. London 1923.

[22] Ibid., p. 129.

[23] Gustav Jaeger, Die Entdeckung der Seele. Leipzig 3., stark verm. Auflage 1884. The discourse on the physical localization and materiality of the soul and the functions of the brain is a recurring issue in nineteenth-century science, with participants such as Emil du Bois-Reymond, Friedrich Fischer, Eugen Schmidt and others. On du Bois-Reymond, see the recent article by Gabriel Finkelstein, Emil du Bois-Reymond on »The Seat of the Soul.« In: Journal of the History of the Neurosciences 23 (2014) 1, p. 45–55. Jaeger was the only one – and not uncontroversial among colleagues – to practically equate the soul with olfaction.

above all websites on perfumery and scent applications have emerged, including lively blogs that often review books or perfumes. Some of this writing is unabashedly commercial, some self-promotional; much is advisory and consultative. Another segment is more holistic, life-style and wellness oriented, where olfactory issues (aromatherapy) are just one of the many elements of sensorily enhanced living. More often than not such texts are written by female authors and aim at a female readership, providing advice on the creation and useful or artful deployment of what one might call an olfactory aura or a *gestalt.*[24] Mandy Aftel's *Essence and Alchemy* belongs here, with its emphasis on natural perfume and natural ingredients.[25] The 2007 book, *The Scent of Desire,* by the psychologist of smell, Rachel Herz, that pursues the role of olfaction in a wide range of psychological, instinctual, and affective manifestations, from sexual desire to food cravings to in-group/out-group odor perception, falls into this category, too.[26] *Scent: The Mysterious and Essential Powers of Smell,* by Annick LeGuérer, a French cultural anthropologist, is even wider ranging. It is also more scholarly, focused on socio-historical and humanistic concerns, and significantly less ego-centered than some of the other publications in the field.[27] In confirmation of what I said at the outset, all three titles, by Aftel, Herz, and LeGuérer (like many others) emphasize the »mysterious« dimension of olfactory perception – Le Guérer explicitly, Aftel via the evocative term »alchemy,« and Herz in her subtitle, »Discovering Our Enigmatic Sense of Smell.«

2. Olfactory Perception and the Sciences

The two science domains that centrally investigate olfactory perception are chemistry, providing the analysis of the objects of perception, the molecules that smell; and the biological-medical sciences that investigate the perceptual apparatus and its workings. Together they form the multidisciplinary field of chemosensory studies that also investigate taste. There are related fields and specialties, of course, such as the neurosciences, themselves multidisciplinary, or psychology, shading into anthropology, the social sciences, and linguistics, fields that often use human subjects in experimental setups. Apart from determining how the sense of smell works as a neurophysiological phenomenon, a persistent problem in chemosensory research has been odor classification. Linnaeus, the great Swedish botanical taxonomist of the 18th century proposed an organization of the odoriferous spectrum in seven categories in 1752: aromatic, fragrant, ambrosial, musky, alliaceous, hircine repulsive, and nauseous, that echoed in numerous subsequent classificatory attempts. Late in the 19th century, Hendryk Zwaardemaker invented the olfactometer, a sophisticated tool for odor quantification and qualification; and early in the 20th century, Hans Henning proposed a »smell prism« whose six corners represented key odor classes – a modification of Linnaeus's

[24] Just a few examples: Ingrid Dieterssen, Lust am Duft: Ein Parfüm-Ratgeber. Bern, Stuttgart 1995; Luca Turin/Tania Sanchez, Perfumes: The Guide. New York 2008. Innumerable blogs combine the commercial, the informational-critical, and the chatty to varying degrees, such as: www.fragrantica.com, www.yesterdaysperfume.com, www.alyssaharad.com, http://boisdejasmin.com, or www.nstperfume.com.

[25] Mandy Aftel, Essence and Alchemy: A Natural History of Perfume. Layton 2008.

[26] Rachel Herz, The Scent of Desire: Discovering Our Enigmatic Sense of Smell. New York 2007.

[27] Annick LeGuérer, Scent: The Mysterious and Essential Powers of Smell. New York 1992 [French original 1988].

system: flowery, fruity, putrid, spicy, burnt, and resinous.[28] John Amoore refined an odor classification that had been developed by Linus Pauling and was based on molecular shape; but there also existed a counter-theory that suggested molecular vibration instead of shape as the key characteristic in determining how a substance smells. A contemporary perfumer like Jean-Claude Ellena has his own classificatory system, »based around nine categories of odors.«[29] As for terminology, he insists that »[f]or the professional ... the vocabulary of odors no longer brings to mind the image of the source but a mental picture of the odor. The perfumer thus invents the object of his science.«[30]

Vibrational theories constituted a minority among the »approximately 50 theories of odor [that] have been proposed in the last 100 years.«[31] Malcolm Dyson and Robert Wright had been early proponents in the 1930s and 1950s, respectively, before vibration was supplanted, seemingly for good, by the shape model. However, vibration was brought back with considerable fanfare by the biophysicist Luca Turin in a paper published in 1996.[32] The fanfare arose less from the paper itself than from a book published *about* Luca Turin and the fate of his paper, told as a scholarly cabal. The author, Chandler Burr, is himself a colorful figure in the contemporary olfactory-literary world, the self-styled *New York Times* scent critic, author, and curator of the Department of Olfactory Art at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, a tireless promoter of perfumistic enlightenment as well as pop-cultural sensationalism – or bromide, as the case may be.[33] Turin is a perfume analyst, and both he and Burr are linguistically and conceptually creative reviewers of, and writers about, contemporary perfumes.[34] Whatever the final verdict on the molecular determinants of odor classification may turn out to be, for the pragmatists of the chemical senses, Michael Edwards's *Fragrance Wheel* for perfumery and Anne Noble's *Aroma Wheel*, developed primarily for wine tasting and oenological description,[35] have emerged as serviceable tools of the trades.[36]

Contemporary output of science research into olfactory perception is massive and quintessentially trans-disciplinary, certainly when aimed at an audience even slightly broader than the handful of specialists in each of its fields. The 1982 book by Trygg Engen, *The Perception of Odors*, may serve as an example. Engen, a Ph.D. in psychology, specializing in olfaction, became a prominent sensory psychologist. His book is typical for the wide-ranging account that starts from anatomy and physiology, moves on to language issues, odor recognition and memory, proceeds to characteristics of olfactory substances, and from there to hedonics, synesthetic phenomena, and on to special prob-

[28] Hans Henning, Der Geruch. Leipzig 1916.

[29] Jean-Claude Ellena, Perfume: The Alchemy of Scent. New York 2011, p. 36.

[30] Ibid., p. 38.

[31] Ernst Theimer (ed.), Fragrance Chemistry: The Science of the Sense of Smell. New York, London 1982, p. 45.

[32] Luca Turin, A Spectroscopic Mechanism for Primary Olfactory Reception. In: Chemical Senses 21 (1996) 6, p. 773–791.

[33] Chandler Burr, The Emperor of Scent: A Story of Perfume, Obsession, and the Last Mystery of the Senses. New York 2002.

[34] We mentioned Turin's and Tania Sanchez's *Perfume: The Guide*, above (note 24).

[35] See Fragrance Wheel (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fragrance_wheel) and the website for the Wine Aroma Wheel: http://winearomawheel.com

[36] Michael Edwards is also the author of the annually appearing *Fragrances of the World* industry handbook. 2014 marks the thirtieth edition of this important trade publication.

lems such as anosmia, odor illusions, associations, and habituation.[37] Work similar to Engen's has become typical for the broad-based American undergraduate textbooks, often tomes of 500 pages or more, used in chemosensory studies, psychology, the neurosciences, or anthropology. While focusing on scientific aspects of sense perception and cognition, such books usually also include a section on the historical development of the kind of inquiries they themselves represent. Michael Serby's and Karen Chobor's *Science of Olfaction* is a good example. Illustrated with graphs and tables, richly annotated, and with extensive bibliographical references, it provides in part one a »historical perspective,« in part two the »basic science of olfaction,« broken down into molecular, biochemical, neuroanatomical, learning and memory, and sex differentiation aspects, among others, and in part three »clinical issues« of various kinds.[38]

Other comprehensive and generally collaborative work in olfaction may be more specific, such as the thick volume, *Fragrance Chemistry*, edited by Ernst Theimer, mentioned above. Beginning with the »physiology of vertebrate olfactory chemoreception,« it addresses the contested field of odor theory and classification and odor stimulant structure before moving on to various groups of chemicals and their olfactive properties. Twenty years after Theimer, an international authors' collective published *Olfaction, Taste, and Cognition.*[39] Combining and updating Theimer and Serby and Chobor in many ways, the book still addresses the multidisciplinary world of olfactory perception in similar categories and claims to present »the first multidisciplinary synthesis of the literature in olfaction and gustatory cognition, [...] conveniently divided into sections, including linguistic representation, emotion, memory, neural bases, and individual variation« (back cover). In a revealing gesture across the many approaches to olfaction, the book, authored entirely by scientists, is dedicated to the great 20th-century perfumer, Edmond Roudnitska (creator of *Diorissimo*, among other pathbreaking scents). But the mother lode of chemosensory knowledge is doubtless Richard Doty's *Handbook of Olfaction and Gustation*. With its third edition forthcoming, it reflects the very growth of the field over the course of its recent history: the first edition, from 1995, contained 800-some pages; the second, from 2003, had over 1100; and the third edition (New York, Wiley-Liss, scheduled for 2015), will have over 1200 pages.

[37] Trygg Engen, The Perception of Odors. New York 1982. Rachel Herz's obituary for him – he died in 2009 – on the American Psychological Association website gives a hint at the rich interdisciplinarity of his work: Engen »was the brilliant and pioneering father and founder of the psychological study of olfaction. His work spanned the basic psychophysical measurement of odor sensation; olfactory perceptual development; the role of language, context, and expectation in odor experience; environmental air and odor perception (e.g., sick building syndrome); the formation of odor hedonics; and, most important, his main pursuit, odor memory«; Rachel S. Herz, Trygg Engen (1926–2009). In: American Psychologist 65 (2010) 4, p. 294; online at: http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/amp/65/4/294/

[38] Michael J. Serby/Karen L. Chobor (eds.), Science of Olfaction. New York, Berlin 1992. A year earlier, Laing, Doty, and Breipohl had published their physiology-centered account of the state of the art of olfactory perception. Opening with the statement that »[t]he human sense of smell is vastly underrated,« they note that their book »is a consequence of the rapid expansion of research on the sense of smell,« and that it was »the great diversity of information gained in recent years from scientists in many disciplines« that inspired them to publish their work. D. G. Laing/R. L. Doty/W. Breipohl (eds.), The Human Sense of Smell. Berlin, Heidelberg, New York 1991, p. v.

[39] Catherine Rouby et al. (eds.), Olfaction, Taste, and Cognition. Cambridge 2002.

3. Olfactory Perception and Anthropology

The social-science analog to the natural-science multidisciplinarity of olfactory research is anthropology. Anthropology has become a royal road to the study of the sense of smell thanks to its internal diversity of approaches and a strong sense of temporality. Many of its historical or even evolutionary insights can be recontextualized and analyzed in cultural and literary studies. Just how multidimensional an anthropological, even zoologically approach to smell can be is elegantly expressed in Michael Stoddart's preface to *The Scented Ape.*[40] The zoologist at the University of Tasmania set out to write »a review of what was known about the biology of human olfaction«; but he soon realized »that since the subject deals with our own view of the odorous world, and our own contribution to it, and that our own reactions to it were overwhelmingly emotional, it was impossible for me not to straddle the divide between biological fact and subjective human experience.«[41] The resulting book emerged »from a standpoint on the safe ground of comparative zoology« but integrates »what is critically recorded about human aesthetic and cultural perceptions of the scented world alongside facts and hypotheses supported by experimental investigation.«[42] The conclusion of his research, a lucid example of the transdisciplinary reach of olfaction, harks back to the book's title: »When all the trappings and affectations of civilization are stripped away, we are merely scented apes.«[43]

Broadly based in cultural anthropology, the Center for Sensory Studies in Montreal, led by David Howes and Constance Classen, has been a driving force for anthropological approaches to olfaction and, I should say, the role of sensory studies in a cultural-historical context beyond anthropology narrowly conceived. The pair's *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell,* published in 1994, together with Anthony Synnott, provides an intermediate summary of the state of knowledge of the senses then;[44] their joint *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society* elaborates on the ubiquitous role of perception in (modern) cultures; and both of them are volume editors in the just-published six-volume set, *A Cultural History of the Senses.*[45] David Howes is also the founding (and continuing) editor of the pioneering social-science journal *The Senses and Society* that started publication in 2006.[46]

I want to bring a few more strands of this science and culture narrative up to that sensory turn in the early 1980s that Howes diagnosed in his 2013 overview essay, mentioned above, before turning to its materialization in the humanities and literature. Kelvin Low, for one, leans toward sociology and ethnography and the role of odors in identity formation and inter-ethnic interaction.[47] Jim Drobnik pushes olfac-

[40] Michael Stoddart, The Scented Ape: The Biology and Culture of Human Odour. Cambridge 1990.

[41] Ibid., p. vii.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Constance Classen/David Howes/Anthony Synnott, Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell. London 1994.

[45] David Howes/Constance Classen, Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society. London 2014; D. H./C. C. (eds.), A Cultural History of the Senses. 6 vols. New York 2014; see www.bloomsbury.com/uk/a-cultural-history-of-the-senses-9780857853387/

[46] The Senses and Society; www.bloomsbury.com/uk/journal/the-senses-and-society/

[47] Kelvin Low, Scent and Scentsibilities: Smell and Everyday Life Experiences. Newcastle 2009.

tion into the space of art and exhibits.[48] And Sissel Tolaas *is* a scent artist – and multi-talent in the field of olfaction. While in the early days of the Internet, searching for »smell,« »olfaction,« »scent,« or similar key terms led straight to research in the sciences, the number of humanities hits has vastly increased over the past three decades. For one, commercial websites, usually of cosmetics and perfume businesses, are now legion.

In the 1980s, two more tools for olfactory investigation emerged, one molecular-analytical, the other cultural-conceptual. The first is the headspace technology for odor capture and analysis, the second the notion of the *smellscape*. This concept, both in concrete spatial terms and ideationally, provides shape and coherence to real-world olfactory phenomena. The term was coined in 1985 by the Canadian geographer J. Douglas Porteous in a wide-ranging and suggestive article eponymously titled.[49] And while the idea of the smellscape has become established in recent cultural studies (as have other »-scapes« – Porteous uses the term *soundscape* too), the term itself can still not be found in most dictionaries. The *idea* and the *concept* of something like an »olfactory landscape« signaled that smells were beginning to be envisioned as a *field* in cultural and historical research. Paul Rodaway's notion of »sensuous geographies,« presented in his 1994 book by the same title, offered a hedonistic complement to the pragmatic »smellscape.«[50] His thinking suggests the conceptualization of a *smellscape* as an epistemological framework with a hermeneutic and aesthetic orientation that structures rural and urban landscapes and public and private spaces alike from the angle of smells and the modes of their perception; it helps in analyzing and interpreting them. There is inevitably also a temporal dimension to smellscapes and how they are perceived, due to varying intensities, and the lingering, fading, reemergence, etc., of odors.[51] Rodaway points out that there are two modes of perception involved. The first is »a kind of passive encounter with odours in the environment [...]. If these odours are innocuous or familiar, we soon forget or ignore them.«[52] The second is a more active mode that involves

> exploratory behaviour which is excited by certain odours, intensities, associations or memories. This exploratory olfaction tends to focus in on specific smells, rather than attempting to compose an overall smellscape. The two styles of olfaction suggest that the spatial structure discerned by olfaction is not so continuous, integrated and clear as the visual, auditory and tactile space.[53]

An illustrative example of the cultural-historical use of a smellscape, both as concept and geography, is found in Christoph Neidhart's *Russia's Carnival*, his analysis of the radical political change that came with the end of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's, including the various »sense-scapes« of the country:

> Speaking of a country's smell might be problematic [...]. Nevertheless, few people who have traveled the Soviet Union would deny a scent of ›socialism‹ common to the whole

[48] Jim Drobnik, The City, Distilled. In: Madalina Diaconu et al. (eds.), Senses and the City. Vienna 2011.

[49] J. Douglas Porteous, Smellscape. In: Progress in Physical Geography 9 (1985) 3, p. 356–378. This is a treasure trove of ideas and literary examples of instances of olfactory perception.

[50] Paul Rodaway, Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place. New York, London 1994.

[51] Chapter 10 of J. K. Huysmans' *À Rebours* is the literary epitome of this.

[52] Rodaway (note 50), p. 69.

[53] Ibid.

> of Soviet Russia and even to the republics, despite their historic and ethnic otherness. The Soviet Union's smell was hard to describe [...]. Socialism had its particular stench and characteristic dust. The houses smelled of cabbage, of wet socks and sweat; the backyards reeked of diesel and trash, and sometimes of coal. Even the vastness of Siberia's far north, the tundra, smelled of oil.[54]

Confirming Neidhart's impression and validating his sense-based cultural-political inquiry, Ian Frazier, a repeat traveler to Russia, notes a smell not dissimilar from Neidhart's right upon arrival at the airport in Moscow:

> On the floor at the foot of the stairs was a large, vividly red spill of liquid – possible raspberry syrup, possibly transmission fluid. I tried without success to pick up its smell. Instead I was hit by the smell of Russia, one I've encountered often since, all over that country. The components of the smell are still a mystery. There's a lot of diesel fuel in it, and cucumber peels, and old tea bags, and sour milk, and a sweetness – currant jam, or mulberries crushed into the waffle treads of heavy boots – and fresh wet mud, and a lot of wet cement.[55]

By the 1980s, important questions about the sense of smell had been asked, some answers found, and fields of research laid out. The contours both of concrete local and broad intellectual smellscapes, integrating historical, social, and natural-science elements, came into view. In the humanities the rise of *New Historicism* as an academic institutional change open to accommodating, even facilitating the growing interest in the senses and perception validated interpretations that integrated a multi-voiced discursive context for added hermeneutic depth. This paradigm shift created a climate in which, among other things, olfactory research in literary, theoretical, and philosophical directions could grow. My own *The Smell of Books*, with its roots in the late 1980s, was the first book-length study of the sense of smell in a literary context and is both interdisciplinary and comparative.[56] Since then, numerous analyses and interpretations have emerged, both as articles and books.[57] Before adding to this body of research with the proclamation of the new hybrid genre of the *perfumoirlogue*, one key dimension of writing, the textual level, down to the very lexicon, requires consideration. The more so as ongoing neuroscience research points to the complexity in the brain's processing of olfactory stimuli, their link to the language centers, the emotions, and memory – all key dimensions of literature. Porteous, in his seminal article, points out the importance for literature, especially travel literature and memoirs, of some peculiarities of olfactory perception, by saying that »almost all literary description of smells (with the important exception of childhood memories which are distanced in time rather than space), are the work of non-residents.«[58]

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[54] Christoph Neidhart, Russia's Carnival. The Smells, Sights and Sounds of Transition. Lanham 2003, p. 1.

[55] Ian Frazier, Travels in Siberia. New York 2010, p. 19.

[56] Hans J. Rindisbacher, The Smell of Books: A Cultural-Historical Study of Olfactory Perception in Literature. Ann Arbor 1992.

[57] Louise Vinge's earlier book, *The Five Senses: Studies In a Literary Tradition* (Lund 1975) is, despite its title, a study in motifs or topoi; it studies the five senses, both verbally and in images, and their structuring and epistemological function in texts, rather than engaging the senses in narratives.

[58] Porteous (note 49), p. 358.

4. Olfactory Perception, Language, Linguistics, and Theory

Smell's tendency to breaking down boundaries between disciplines in the sciences extends to literature. Olfactory writing thrives on the transgressiveness of its modality that spans high and low, elite and popular, surface and depth, genres and categories, ramifying into all matters of human concern. It can safely be said that the sense of smell has become a guiding modality in postmodern writing. Yet its rise is part of a broader phenomenon: the emergence of the *body* in literature. As Ralf Hertel notes in 2005, »If the 1960s and 1970s were the age of the text, the 1980s and 1990s frequently focus precisely on what is not text: the reader and the author« – and, we can add, their bodies and their senses.[59] In this light, the important essay collection by Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf, published in 1984, is timely indeed, even if ironically so; for what they claim in the title, *Das Schwinden der Sinne*, is about to end and senses and body to make quick and deep inroads into contemporary writing and literary analysis.[60] While these authors look back, C. L. Hart Nibbrig's wide-ranging discussion of the body in German literature, *Die Auferstehung des Körpers im Text* just a year later looks forward. Although leaving the olfactory realm aside, he provides evidence of the phenomenological shift that marks the mid-1980s as writing closes in on the borderlands of body, senses, and text.[61]

In the broader European context, the French thinkers Michel Serres and Dan Sperber are important theoretical voices. Michel Serres's *Les cinq sens* (1985) turned out to be another, in some ways prophetic landmark in the field of sensory perception.[62] In its somewhat paradoxical, because extremely language-centered, argument for (a return to) the primacy of direct sensory experience and a more physical manner of existence without the flattening intermediary of linguistic conceptualization, Serres's book challenged dominant hermeneutic patterns. Its warning of the linguistic strangling of experiential reality has become only fully visible in retrospect. Its salience lies in the fact that it appeared at the very moment when language itself was increasingly deconstructed into *data* by means of the concurrent meteoric rise of the personal computer and subsequently the Internet with its ongoing pressures on sensory experience: »The computer world takes the place of the observed world; things we know because we have seen them give way to the exchange of codes. Everything changes, everything flows from the victory won by the table of harmony over the tableau of seeing.«[63] Formulated here for vision, Serres's diagnosis of loss is corporeally and sensorially comprehensive:

> It takes a body and senses to create a culture. Language or artificial intelligence produce a sub-culture, for want of a body. [...] *Homo sapiens*: he who knows how to taste. Sagacious: he who knows how to smell. All of these things are vanishing under the weight of logic and grammar, dreary and insane when they deny themselves bodies.[64]

[59] Ralf Hertel, Making Sense: Sense Perception in the British Novel of the 1980s and 1990s. Amsterdam, New York 2005, p. 19. The novel he analyzes for its use of the sense of smell is Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1983).

[60] Dietmar Kamper/Christoph Wulf, Das Schwinden der Sinne. Frankfurt/M. 1984.

[61] Christiaan L. Hart Nibbrig, Die Auferstehung des Körpers im Text. Frankfurt/M. 1985.

[62] Michel Serres, Les cinq sens. Paris 1985.

[63] Michel Serres, The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies. Trans. by Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley. London, New York 2009, p. 50.

[64] Ibid., p. 234 f.

It can be argued that the visual and terminological pragmatics of Edwards's *fragrance wheel* and Ann Noble's *aroma wheel*, while providing a welcome degree of linguistic standardization, confirm Serres's wariness about language burying sensory experience. Yet the puzzling phenomenon of the rather poor link of the sensory phenomena to language in both chemical senses, although more vexing for the sense of smell, has proved to be a key factor in the high creativity in their literary use. This nexus has been noticed and investigated experimentally in identification and naming experiments, as reported in many of the olfaction and gustation handbooks mentioned above, as well as from the perspective of linguistics and the philosophy of language. Dan Sperber, in 1974, summarized a central problem of the linguistic encoding of olfactory experiences thus:

> Smells have two noteworthy properties, one to do with the way they are conceptualized, and the other with their place in memory. Even though the human sense of smell can distinguish hundreds of thousands of smells and in this regard is comparable to sight and hearing, in nine of the world's languages does there seem to be a classification of smells comparable, for example, to colour classification. Ethno-linguists systematically describe colour classifications, often containing several hundred terms ordered under a small number of basic categories. [...] We would search in vain for a similar work on smells; perhaps this is a sign of lack of imagination on the part of scholars, but more likely it is because there is nothing for such a work to be about. Certainly, terms and expressions are not lacking to designate smells, but they almost always do so in terms of their causes and their effects. Their cause: the smell of wet grass, a putrid smell, an animal smell, etc.: their effect: a nauseating smell, a heady perfume, an appetizing smell.[65]

Expanding Sperber's diagnosis into German historical linguistics, Artur Kutzelnigg adds in a 1984 article to the lack of categories the further problem of the changeability of olfactory terminology by diagnosing its impoverishment over time as words change or vanish and their semantic fields shift or shrink.[66] Together, the two authors thus present the linguistic variant of the phenomenological difficulties around olfactory categorization and taxonomy mentioned earlier.[67] Outside the chemical and biomedical sciences, where work on olfaction is focused on investigating the structure of fragrance molecules and the neurobiological machinery to perceive them, the world of olfaction is trans-disciplinary, even invasive. Everything about »smell« appears not as a well-defined and self-contained domain, but as strands across a spectrum of human endeavors and academic inquiries whose central concerns are often not primarily olfactory. The good thing is that in literature, the very deficiencies encourage, in fact, require, linguistic creativity, generally of a metaphoric, quintessentially poetic type, in metonymy and simile, when attempting to do justice to the complexities of, say, modern perfumery. With the fragrance and aroma wheels providing a rudimentary categorical-taxonomic backbone, both perfume and wine reviewing have become linguistically enormously creative fields, exuberant, even fanciful in their wrestling with the elusive terminologies for scents, wines, and spirits. In short, they have become poetic, a veritable literary sub-genre of their own. Turin's and Sanchez's *Perfume: The Guide*, mentioned above, is full of illustrative examples.

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[65] Dan Sperber, Rethinking Symbolism. Trans. by Alice Morton. Cambridge et al. 1975, p. 115 [French original 1974].

[66] Artur Kutzelnigg, Die Verarmung des Geruchswortschatzes seit dem Mittelalter. In: Muttersprache 94 (1984) 3–4, p. 328–245.

[67] Practicing perfumers, such as Ellena (see above), develop both systems of categorization and naming – and practice them; Ellena (note 29), p. 35–42.

Avery Gilbert, a smell expert, sensory psychologist, and olfactory consultant, points to another language issue around the olfactory as it oscillates between an object of scientific study and a subject in popular media. There exists a deep cleavage between the way the »sense of smell [is] portrayed in the mainstream media (›Seven Ways to Drive Him Wild with Your Perfume!‹)« and

> the way scientists see it (›Multivariate Analysis of Odorant-Induced Neural Activity in the anterior Piriform Cortex‹). The magazine version – breezy and chatty – sails merrily past new discoveries just emerging from the laboratory. The official scientific version – formal, dense, and dry – hides some very cool new stories. I know people are fascinated by the hows and whys of odor perception.[68]

Gilbert emphasizes the extremes of smell's textual spectrum by juxtaposing the high science of lab reports and the »low brow« infotainment in popular lifestyle and fashion magazines. But between these poles lies a wide array of texts that aim precisely at mediating between them. They do so by mixing various proportions of the scientific and the popular, the breezy, even trashy and the scholarly. We have listed examples in section one, by writers whose primary concerns were in social, scholarly, or popular science fields, with the literary and aesthetic a secondary consideration. Above all, their writing was non-fictional. For the second part of this essay, we will shift the balance – toward fantasy and synesthesia. A strategy both aesthetic and cognitive that bridges the gap between registers for writing about smells, synesthesia is a phenomenon frequently deployed in the verbal rendering of olfactory perception. Charles Baudelaire's poem *Correspondances* (*Les fleurs du mal*, 1857) or Huysmans's *À Rebours* (1884) are exemplary for the transfer of (olfactory) sensory impressions into the vocabulary of other senses, notably music.

Twenty years after Sperber, research that links odor identification and learning with the presence, absence, and the types of verbal clues provided in experiments, has taken up and broadened his question of how odor perception, memory, and linguistics are related. *Memory for Odors*, a slim 1995 volume on issues of cognition, addresses »how sensory experience relates to memory.«[69] In light of the fact that »[i]n odor memory experiments [...] recognition, rather than recall, is the retention measure of choice because odors obviously cannot be produced as the target of memory retrieval,« the investigation of the verbal function in these processes is crucial.[70] Appropriately, then, this book in cognitive psychology opens with a bow to literature, Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. In *Olfaction and the Brain*, a collection of essays on neurobiology and pathology of olfactory perception, Mikisha Doop and co-authors provide another instance of the link between fiction and science, language and the brain.[71] Their contribution opens with a long quote from Süskind[72] and calls the »madeleine incident« in Proust »one of the most frequently quoted passages of literature,« explicitly linking smell and (literary) text.[73]

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[68] Avery Gilbert, What the Nose Knows: The Science of Scent in Everyday Life. New York 2008, p. xi–xii.

[69] Frank R. Schab/Robert G. Crowder (eds.), Memory for Odors. New Jersey 1995, p. vii.

[70] Ibid., p. 3.

[71] Mikisha Doop et al., Olfaction and Memory. In: Warrick Brewer/David Castle/Christos Pantelis (eds.), Olfaction and the Brain. Cambridge 2006, p. 65–82.

[72] Ibid., p. 65.

[73] Ibid., p. 66.

The inherent »semiotic disorder« that derives from the porousness of olfactory-linguistic signifiers toward the worlds of signifieds and memories, is characteristic of olfactory writing with its high incidence of comparative rhetorical structures (»the smell of . . .,« it smells like . . .«). But this linguistic pattern also sets the reader free – a situation that may well have made writers of positivist, world-ordering 19th-century realist novels hesitate before assigning olfaction any significant role in their written worlds. Sex, for instance, as the animal *ur*-experience, and the erotic as its civilizational superstructure, provocatively tied to the olfactory by Sigmund Freud in 1930, have a high potential as driving forces of fictional plots. And on more than one occasion smell in fiction has been used to roll back a novel's civilizational landscape to before the key moment that Freud identified in *Civilization and its Discontents,* by postulating a shift of sexual signaling from the olfactory to the visual modality. It dethroned smell as the lead sense in sexual attraction, and we began to fall in love at first sight and no longer at the first whiff of the female in heat, easing a bit the male-as-smeller and female-as-smelled dichotomy. But in literature, of course, that idea could be brought back. The identification of pheromones in 1959 and subsequent intriguing, although not always conclusive, socio-sexual studies (for instance, McClintock's on menstrual synchrony), together with other startling olfactory phenomena (around recognition/identification of body odors, for instance) created untold narrative possibilities.[74] Once the olfactory had been identified as a (often unrecognized or unacknowledged) driving force of human behavior, the literary and critical worlds became more willing to give it a try in pursuit of new *Erkenntnisinteressen.* All it took was the spark of a few books to set the olfactory fires burning. While it would be wrong to say that it was only now possible for writers to use the sense of smell in any meaningful way – writers had done that forever – only now was the time ripe for such work to move center stage and be noted, analyzed, critiqued, and appreciated in ways that provided context, comparative frameworks, historical embedment, linguistic and scientific backing, and aesthetic theorization that generated new insights. A much broader discourse on the sense of smell became possible, and the widening scholarship helped to integrate olfactory writing into literary discussions of genres, epochs, and themes and to focus on specific functions of olfactory instances in each case. The literary spark was Patrick Süskind's 1985 novel *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer.*

II. The Literary Arch

> Modern scholarship is indeed a wonderful thing. I think I'll stick to fiction:
> it's much clearer.
> (Gillian Bradshaw, The Alchemy of Fire. Sutton 2004, p. 247.)

In German literature in the 1980s, *Perfume* marked the arrival of postmodern writing, the resurfacing of engaging, imaginative, fictional narration, the good, intelligent page turner – after years of *neue Innerlichkeit,* the often self-centered, inward-looking and not particularly thrilling »new subjectivity« narratives that had dominated the previous decade. *Perfume* was enthusiastically received and over the years became a multi-million bestseller. It was translated into dozens of languages and, in 2006, turned into

[74] Martha McClintock, Menstrual Synchrony and Suppression. In: Nature 229 (1971), p. 244 f.

a feature film, directed by Tom Tykwer.[75] By placing the sense of smell at the center thematically, using it to drive the plot and motivate central characters in an allusive, densely intertextual historical-fictional narrative, Süskind forced the academic literary establishment to grant popular literature some respect. *Perfume* turned the sense of smell into a literary topic after it had been a scientific object of inquiry for many years. Süskind achieved this almost singlehandedly – although in the broader framework sketched out in the first part of this essay. The instant success of the novel had the startling effect of a bright spotlight going on over the rather dimly lit expanse of smell in literature and the humanities. The light has stayed on ever since, even if it shines more brightly in popular literature and culture than in highbrow writing. Over the past three decades, the sense of smell has become a distinct new note in popular fiction writing. The following pages will provide a limited introduction to this new kind of writing that integrates science and history, alludes to all manners of cultural techniques, and culminates in pastiche and imitation.[76] Knowing French and having lived in the country, Süskind was doubtless familiar with Corbin's *The Foul and the Fragrant* (French original in 1982) and used it both for factual information and social and historical color. Corbin's book was itself already a broadly based take on history. But Süskind likely also drew on another source of inspiration, not historical but narrative: Roald Dahl's short story *Bitch*, published originally in *Playboy* in 1969, when the magazine still had literary aspirations. In the design of its main character, the olfactory chemist Henri Biotte, this story provides a close template for Süskind's Grenouille.[77] In both narratives, the scene is Paris, and the hero is a bit of an asocial loner, driven by one pursuit: the creation of an irresistible fragrance. In *Perfume* he does so in order to inspire love, in *Bitch* to achieve power – a point considered by Grenouille, too, but eventually rejected. Sex, albeit deployed differently, is a prominent presence in both stories; the textualization of scents in formulas also is a shared concern; and both perfumers die after causing considerable mayhem.

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that *Perfume*, with its intriguing description of historical practices and technical devices of perfumery and its far-reaching, free-floating imaginary has become the archetype of modern perfume writing. *Perfume* both gathered together and phrased in popular terms the state of the art of olfactory and perfumistic knowledge and spun it out thrillingly into the realm of fantasy and imagination. In doing so, it furnished matrices that have been taken up and reiterated and in their reiteration varied, expanded, and recontextualized in subsequent olfactory fiction: the figure of the creative genius, the »nose«; the theme of (irresistible) attraction; the single-minded pursuit of a scent – to various ends; the sexual and erotic aspects of smelling; and, an eminently useful fictional device, the *mystery* and *magic* that can still be claimed for odors and their dark, evolutionary powers that authors use to great narrative effect. The balance of fact and fiction and the degree of personal experience and fantasy may vary, but the principle quest by a writer or his/her character for a key scent in pursuit of some visionary goal has become a standard premise

[75] On the reception of the novel, see Rindisbacher (note 56), p. 292 ff.; Werner Frizen/Marilies Spancken, Patrick Süskind. Das Parfum. Oldenbourg Interpretationen. München 1996.

[76] Judith Ryan, in 1990, was one of the first American German scholars to analyze the novel – from the angle of pastiche; Judith Ryan, The Problem of Pastiche: Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum*. In: The German Quarterly 63 (1990) 3.4, p. 396–403.

[77] *Bitch*, together with three other racy stories appeared in book form in 1974; Roald Dahl, *Switch Bitch*. London 1974 (in German it was published as *Kuschelmuschel*, 1975).

in olfactory writing. Only a year after *Perfume,* in 1986, appeared another important scent narrative, *The Name, the Nose.* Part of Italo Calvino's collection of short stories on the five senses, *Under the Jaguar Sun,* the project was left incomplete by the author's death in 1985.[78] *The Name, the Nose* is a masterful, wispy sketch of the world of essential human odors, a triple arabesque of scent tales, repeating in different milieus, separated by eons, the eternal and quintessential story of sexual attraction, of love and death, of Eros and Thanatos. It is the high-literary version of Freud's footnote, as it were, the olfactory pursuit of the female by the male, ending, as life always will, in the stench of death.

These elements sketch out the emerging *literary* territory of olfactory writing to which we now turn. A key observation up front: increasingly this contemporary non-scholarly but also not exclusively fictional, olfactory writing has become a female, perhaps a feminine, even a feminist, domain with perfumery the specific thematic subfield at its center. By »olfactory writing« I mean something different than the use of the sense of smell in fictional, more or less realistic, prose narratives as a simple strand in the description of places, characterization of people, qualification of social interaction, be it between individuals or (ethnic) groups, or as a rhetorical metaphorical device. *That* use of the sense of smell is old, even if it went largely unnoticed in literary criticism until the 1980s, as outlined in the first part of this essay.

Instead, by »olfactory writing« I mean texts where the sense of smell provides an indispensable portion of the atmospherics, is closely associated with one or several main characters, relates to their interest or work, motivates their actions, their thinking, feeling, remembering, etc., and drives, to a significant extent, the very plot. This kind of writing, while fictional, often involves the author's own life-world via her personal interest in, or occupation with, the olfactory, often as a kind of amateur perfumer. Occasionally, such texts may also link to popular science or contain personal health-related incidents, such as Walter Kohl's and Bonnie Blodgett's accounts of their loss of the sense of smell.[79] But the olfactory writing to be analyzed in the rest of this essay, the *perfumoirlogue,* derives a large part of its attraction, both for readers and narrators – with the latter often the author herself – from its imaginative free play. Projection and imagination; longing, desire, and its evanescent fulfillment; self-fashioning and self-empowerment in a new, near-immaterial realm – these are the salient points of the world of scent in texts.[80] Moreover, the *perfumoirlogue* can be seen as a writerly venue that allows women to play to an inherent strength: their overall better

[78] Italo Calvino, Under the Jaguar Sun. Trans. by William Weaver. San Diego 1988 [Italian original 1986].

[79] Walter Kohl, Wie riecht Leben? Bericht aus einer Welt ohne Gerüche. Wien 2009 and Bonnie Blodgett, Remembering Smell: A Memoir of Losing – and Rediscovering – the Primal Sense. Boston, New York 2010, are examples closer to the autobiographical and scholarly, certainly the experiential-autobiographical, pole than fiction and entertainment. These are two first-person accounts of anosmia, the loss of the sense of smell.

[80] The frequent combination of personal experience and expertise with a narrative drive that is simultaneously explanatory, imaginative, inspirational and occasionally pushed on by the very metaphors it generates, makes olfactory writing an ideal genre also for Internet blogs, magazine columns, and other forms of literary-adjacent engagements with smell. The interpenetration of the public and the intimate, anonymity and notoriety, eccentricity and blandness, written in a diaristic style, blending opinion, scholarship, (self)promotion and advertising – these features closely connect olfactory writing and blogging.

performance in all manners of olfactory perception.[81] And it finally counters, at least in a literary genre, the ancient sexual pursuit story with the male the active subject, the female the passive object of olfactory-stimulated attraction. Knowledge about and dexterity in dealing with odors has emerged as a novel venue of empowerment for female writers.

In its purest form the *perfumoirlogue* is an autobiographical narrative by a female narrator/author who sets out on a journey to have a personal fragrance made whose ingredients have to do with her own life and are tied to specific geographies. It involves perfumery as an object of personal reflection and a quest that takes the form of a travelogue. Loosening the autobiographical element a bit, the definition includes books like Jan Moran's *Scent of Triumph* and M. J. Rose's *The Book of Lost Fragrances* and the *Collector of Dying Breaths*, among others, where the trips undertaken and the perfumistic quests are assigned to *fictional* characters rather than the authors themselves. These, however, may still be involved with perfumery outside their writing, as a personal predilection or professionally, as is Moran, »a bestselling author, beauty and lifestyle expert, media spokesperson and industry consultant,« as her website proclaims.[82] And Rose, in an interview with Katherine Neville, remarks that

> Jac [the main character of the two novels discussed here; H. J. R.] wouldn't exist if not for *my* love of scent, and [...] a search I started about ten years ago to find my own ›signature scent‹. This led me deep into the fascinating world of fragrances, how they're created, and I became obsessed with the idea of a woman so attuned to scent that she could be haunted by it.[83]

Many authors are also bloggers with their own websites. Not all olfactory writing is great literature; often it is decidedly popular entertainment, what in German, often disparagingly, is called mere »Unterhaltungsliteratur« by academic critics. While I gladly concede this point, it should not detract from the fact that the growing output of olfactory writing obviously responds to broad reader interest, is immersed in a context of deepening knowledge of and engagement with fragrance, and fulfills certain needs among a predominantly female audience for an esthetic, atmospheric, and psychological content in which the olfactory takes a natural place. Terms such as »fascination,« »magic,« »mystery,« »enigma,« »romance« – accepted generic descriptors, such as in »the romance novel,« the »mystery novel,« etc. – appear again and again in characterizations of this new genre.

1. Perfume, Memoir, Travel

Cathy Newman's *Perfume: The Art and Science of Scent* (1998) may serve as a template for a *perfumoirlogue* that was still mostly informative, the subjective-intimate part minimal, and traveling taking place on assignment for a popular science publication.

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[81] For experimental confirmation of this claim, see Social Issues Research Center, The Smell Report; www.sirc.org/publik/smell_human.html. The fact that women outperform men on a broad spectrum of olfactory experiments is common knowledge.

[82] Moran is also »the founder and creator of Scentsa, the touch screen experiences for fragrance and skincare in Sephora stores in the US, Canada, France, Brazil, Denmark, and Mexico«; janmoran.com.

[83] M. J. Rose, interviewed by Katherine Neville on *Jungle Red Writers*, March 12, 2012; www.jungleredwriters.com/2012/03/katherine-neville-interviews-mj-rose.html (my emphasis; H. J. R.).

Newman's budding love for perfumes »began as a magazine piece for *National Geographic*.«[84] The assignment »was to be a thorough, yet contained trip through the process of creating fragrance« but it »stretched into a year-long inquiry that spilled over the confines of a magazine and into the book you hold.«[85] The destination was Grasse, but her journey began in a Firmenich office on Madison Avenue with the creation of »The Cathy Perfume,« a personal scent.[86] Thus Newman's account exhibits all the elements associated with the *perfumoirlogue* as listed above: the personal narrative, as she »fell in love with fragrance« in the first line of her text; the poetics of the »heavenly« French Jasmine,[87] the »magic« of her travel in pursuit of it, and the »memory« of it that »haunted« her.[88] The association with *National Geographic*, known for its sumptuous photography, highlights another aspect of recent publications on scent, the wealth of beautifully illustrated coffee-table books.[89] From Newman's early version with roots in a journalistic assignment, the *perfumoirlogue* has since become more literary, intimate, and individualistic.

Still in the spirit of journalism more than literature, Celia Lyttelton's *The Scent Trail: How One Woman's Quest for the Perfect Perfume Took Her Around the World* – the title says it all – moves toward increasing the personal and emotional over the general and factual.[90] It is a failure overall, but an interesting stepping stone nevertheless on the way to the fully formed *perfumoirlogue*. In the introduction she riffs on what have become common, science-supported topoi in olfactory writing, veering toward the grand: Smell »evokes memory«; it »also has the power to suppress the rational«[91] and in the narrator's case, »smells transport [her], literally.«[92] She claims »great power« for scents whose »development charts the spread of civilizations, the beginning of science and medicine, the movement of faiths and the link between the ancient, classical, medieval and modern worlds.«[93] Since people, including the narrator, »want a scent which is personal and not packaged,« her quest starts with Anastasia Brozler in London, »a bespoke perfumer, in whose paneled drawing room I began my olfactory odyssey.«[94] Brozler »drew [her] into the world of scent and the magic that smells can conjure up.«[95] This first of a total of nine chapters is thus an opportunity both to spread out before the reader a large number of perfume ingredients, introduce some terminology, and elaborate on their basic characteristics. It ends with a »pyramid formula,« the key notes (top, heart, and base) that will go into her personal

[84] Cathy Newman, Perfume: The Art and Science of Scent. Photography by Robb Kendrick. Washington 1998, p. xvi.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid., p. 3.

[87] Ibid., p. xv.

[88] Ibid., p. xviii.

[89] Interesting in itself as yet another venue showcasing the rise of olfaction, this kind of publication, spanning the gamut from the historical and learned to the contemporary, brand-focused and commercial, is producing stunning visual results. Nevertheless, it cannot be pursued here.

[90] Celia Lyttelton, The Scent Trail: How One Woman's Quest for the Perfect Perfume Took Her Around the World. New York 2007.

[91] Ibid., p. xi.

[92] Ibid., p. xii.

[93] Ibid., p. xi.

[94] Ibid., p. xv.

[95] Ibid., p. 3.

scent.[96] As Brozler sends the narrator also to a color expert in order to establish color-scent correlations, she gives her an opening for a brief discussion of synesthesia. Lyttelton then »set[s] out for the places where these ingredients grow, to meet the people who harvest them and to discover at least some of the secrets of perfume making from the perfumers who ›magic‹ the raw ingredients into scent.«[97] The eight subsequent chapters focus each on a perfume ingredient and the place where it is found, determining the trajectory and main stops of Lyttelton's journey. Thus »Mimosa. Grasse, the Cradle of Perfume,« »Neroli and Petitgrain. Morocco,« and »Damask Rose. Turkey« are such chapter headings. The journey also leads to Italy, India, Sri Lanka, and Yemen and Socotra, in short: places of beauty and exoticism.

In explicit acknowledgment of its hybrid journalistic-literary-autobiographical nature, Lyttelton's story includes a number of text boxes, inserted into the (longer) personal narrative as explanatory vignettes on technical, material, conceptual, and historical aspects of perfumery. These separate information capsules amount to a kind of primer on perfumery. One is on »Enfleurage«;[98] »Alembics: a Short History« is another;[99] »The Origins of Perfumery« a more extensive third,[100] and »Renaissance Beauty Treatments« a fourth.[101] There is also a glossary of technical terms and an index. *The Scent Trail* is an odd book that complements its personal narrative not, as does Newman's, with aesthetically pleasing, evocative, mood-enhancing photography but counterbalances it with material and technical facts. But not only does this form emphasize Lyttelton's avowed inexperience in the world of scents, the story, too, rarely engages the reader and Lyttelton appears as a surprisingly uninspiring narrator of her own history and travels. Neither the people she meets nor the places she visits, promising as they all are, come to life. Her scent quest fails to convey to the reader what the narrator claims for the *scent* itself, namely that it »encapsulates distant lands, and its aromatic composition is filled with stories.«[102] The crucial conversion in olfactory writing, of odors into text, of scents into language designed to reach a pinnacle of evocation, association, even transportation along the unpredictable paths of desire and imagination never happens. The writing remains pedestrian and only a reference to one of the purple passages of all olfactory writing, J. K. Huysmans's *À Rebours* in the epilogue gives a hint of the potential of the story:

> I thought about my two years of traveling and the thousands of miles that I'd covered; now those miles were compressed into one little flacon, [...] infused with the spirit of place or, more to the point, places. It allows me to revisit all the countries I have loved and still love, without moving. I can relive all those old emotions and rekindle old loves without leaving my cottage in the Pennines, just as Des Esseintes in Huysmans's *À Rebours* re-created the scents and smells of places so that he would not have to travel to them.[103]

While this passage (certainly in its full length) does conjure up the fascination that envelops everything olfactory, it is not great literature; and Des Esseintes is misunder-

[96] Ibid., p. 15.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid., p. 33.
[99] Ibid., p. 56.
[100] Ibid., p. 86–91.
[101] Ibid., p. 143 f.
[102] Ibid., p. 104.
[103] Ibid., p. 282 f.

stood: he may worry about the inconvenience of traveling but he truly exults in creating the world out of scent in a grand gesture of imagination and representation in chapter 10. And although only a fictional character, Des Esseintes *is* a perfume expert. In fact, before launching into his creative project, he sketches out a veritable French history organized into olfactory epochs. In contrast, in *The Scent Trail*, the magic of times and places caught in a bottle, the memories associated with them, the dreams of exclusivity, wealth, and a hint of the power over these things by owning them in that precious essence just never feel authentic.

2. Scent and Seduction

Denyse Beaulieu's *The Perfume Lover* comes closer to creating that magic – even if at the price of personal (over)exposure.[104] While both authors collaborate with well-known contemporary perfumers, Brozler in Lyttelton's case, Bertrand Duchaufour in Beaulieu's, and both develop a scent in the course of their collaborations that simultaneously help structure the plots, this is where the similarities end. While the difference in urban centers – London in Lyttelton's case, Paris in Beaulieu's – is a minor variant, the key difference, in a nutshell, is this: Lyttelton's is the story of a *personal* scent; Beaulieu's, as the subtitle implies, is a *personal* history of scent. Lyttelton pursues a *scentimental* education, as it were, in search of the authentic; for Beaulieu »scent« is a collective noun, incidental, an infinity of possibilities. This difference makes her story flirtatious, seductive, sexy, whereas Lyttelton's is earnest, honest, and essentialist. She is in search of an identity smell whereas Beaulieu, theatrical and in-your-face, boldly declares: »I am a scent slut.«[105] Both authors are fully visible through the transparent narrator positions of their texts, but they tip the scales of *prodesse et delectare* in opposite directions. One practical reason for this: Beaulieu, in contrast to Lyttelton, is an expert in perfumery. Her knowledge makes her a smart sophisticated writer whose linguistic capabilities produce enlightening, often pithy, elegant formulations. The same cannot be said of Lyttelton. And as different as their approach to scent is, so are their narrative structures.

Lyttelton's trips in search of the ingredients for her scent *become* the story; both her perfume and the narrative arise from the events related. She does have a minimal prehistory of olfactory interest; she traveled »as a child with my archeologist mother« to exotic places and remembers their odors.[106] But the immediate point of departure for *The Scent Trail* is that she »wanted to discover what the fundamental ingredients of scent were and how they were grown and harvested,« a more concrete, exploratory premise than Beaulieu's and, as we shall see, Alyssa Harad's.[107] Beaulieu *takes off* from a story, a vignette really, the description of an erotic night in Seville with a young lover, outside, in the fragrant air of »the longest night of Holy Week.«[108] This is the conceit that sets the plot in motion, namely the development of *Séville à l'Aube*, the perfume to recapture and preserve that night in Seville. Sex is in the air – as well as scent, and Beaulieu highlights this archetypal connection elegantly: »Perfume is to smell what eroticism is to sex: an aesthetic, cultural, emotional elaboration of the raw materials provided by nature. And thus perfumery, like love, requires technical skills and some

[104] Denyse Beaulieu, Perfume Lover: A Personal Story of Scent. London 2012.
[105] Ibid., p. 11.
[106] Ibid., p. xiii.
[107] Ibid., p. xiv.
[108] Ibid., p. vi.

knowledge of black magic.«[109] But many other things are in the air too and flow into Beaulieu's text, which displays deep knowledge of perfumery and its history, a sense of the business of producing and selling scents, together with strong opinions about it all. Her self-understanding as a muse involves her differently, more immediately and emotionally in her story than Lyttelton is involved in hers. Beaulieu adds gossip about the industry's people and events, tidbits on urban bohemian living, and instances of the elegance, glamour, and chic that surround and rub off on her in constant contact with the perfume industry greats. There is much ego and glamour to write about, including her own; and she presents it as the hard-earned result of a long arch of development that took her from her modest origins in Canada to Paris, from the provinces into the center of the global perfume industry and through a large list of literature, from Plato to G. W. S. Piesse, Zola, Corbin, Germaine Greer and many others – perfumers, writers, and philosophers – to the present moment of her writing.

Chapter 23 may serve as an example of Beaulieu's *modus operandi* in moving her narrative forward. Starting out as a tirade against the reformulation of classic fragrances (»vandalized« is her term),[110] Beaulieu laments that »our society has given in to the zero-risk mentality,« in this case with regard to the use of natural ingredients that are rapidly disappearing from the market due to all-pervasive regulation.[111] Personally she is not opposed to synthetics but brings up the case of *Mitsouko*'s reformulation »due to new restrictions on oak moss« as just such an act of vandalism.[112] Up to this point, the chapter is factual, historical, and while partisan, supports its positions. But the »*affaire Mitsouko*« as she calls it, shifts her writing perspective. It »triggered a frantic vintage-collecting phase« and carries her, with *affaire* the operative term, far afield into things rather personal:

> I tried to get hold of as many old bottles as I could afford. I received parcels so regularly I ended up having a short affair with the cute mailman, who'd look at me, barefoot and disheveled in my tatty vintage silk kimono, as though I were fully made-up in a satin marabou-trimmed negligee, and murmur, ›I *love* waking you up . . .‹.[113]

From this confession, which does not exactly sound guilt-racked, she nimbly moves on to the preservation of scents (»If a bottle is kept away from the light and heat, perfume can actually keep for decades«),[114] ending with the philosophical gem that »perfume is a lesson in letting go,« but admitting that *Iris Gris*, another classic, and exceedingly rare, is a scent over which »I'll cry when I empty« it.[115] She knows its history, of course, and felt that »the unsealing of Iris Gris needed a witness and [. . .] invited Octavian Coifan.«[116] With this famous perfumer in attendance, the first whiff of *Iris Gris* provides the opportunity to display erudition and verbal dexterity in describing it:

> What first jumped out of the strip was the peach, as smooth as a Renoir model's downy cheek. Octavian, who'd come equipped, handed me blotters of orris absolute, irone (the

[109] Ibid., p. 11.
[110] Ibid., p. 170.
[111] Ibid., p. 173.
[112] Ibid., p. 174. *Mitsouko*, by Guerlain, came out in 1919.
[113] Ibid., p. 175.
[114] Ibid., p. 174.
[115] Ibid., p. 176.
[116] Ibid., p. 178.

> molecule that develops in orris butter when it ages) and ionones (the violet smell) for comparison. [...] Musky, with raspberry, apricot and leather overtones, the merest touch of a floral heart and a tiny celery note.[117]

From the factual and learned she shifts back to the personal, with a hint of scandal and power – both hers and the perfume's, in fact hers *through* the perfume: »Since that day, ›I'll let you sniff my Iris Gris‹ is the louche-sounding proposition that'll draw any perfume lover into my lair. I'm quite a tease about it and I've kept some people dangling for months before unscrewing that crystal stopper.«[118] Playing up that louche note, she decides to wear *Iris Gris* to »the French Fragrance Foundation gala« that »greatest concentration of perfumers« she'd ever seen. Her plan is designed for the high and mighty of the perfume world to notice her and for the reader to remain intrigued. The former she secures by wearing her rare perfume, the latter by hinting at the potential for serious debauchery:

> My scented wake had to intrigue the pros. The prospect of the best noses in the world diving toward my cleavage or nuzzling my neck was entertaining. So I decided to lavish a whopping 1.5 ml of my precious on my skin and hair. [...] Let's just say that it's a miracle I came back home smelling as divine as I'd walked out: I'd have thought every molecule had been snorted off me.[119]

In this passage and throughout most of the book, one can argue about the balance between the personal and the professional, the intimate and the perfumistic, the author's roles of professional writer, perfume expert, translator, and muse. And too much self-exposure has indeed been a frequent point of criticism in reviews of the book.[120] But it is hard to argue with Beaulieu's credentials in the business and her engaged, smart, provocative writing about it. She is no shrinking violet when it comes to emphasizing one key role of scent: its erotic attraction and gesturing at carnal possibilities.

Beaulieu's writing, her way of using of the *perfumoirlogue*, makes exemplary use of the genre's possibilities that arise from the gray zone where autobiography shades over into fiction. How much of her writing is true? How much is imagination, projection, desire, wishful thinking or well-aimed reader provocation? Writing about scent offers authors possibilities to be romantic and shy, learned and sophisticated, sassy and aggressive in a new field of meaning and evocation. As a field of writing, especially as a territory of textual self-construction, scent is (still) relatively free from the tyranny that dominates the visual. Smell (still) respects both narrative and descriptive idiosyncrasy, with verbal deftness the indispensable tool for tight signifier-signified correlation. It is here that good writers shine in both originality and precision. After all, the universe of smells is invisible and its literary enlightenment a long way off. Chances are that the ambivalent, imaginary, even fantastical, are and will remain an essential part of it. At the root of olfaction's resistance to enlightenment lies its dualistic nature,

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[117] Ibid., p. 176.

[118] Ibid., p. 177.

[119] Ibid.

[120] See, for instance, Thomas Dunckley, in his review from 2012: »Now I'm no prude, but sometimes the relationship between author and reader becomes too intimate. [...] These clunky, and sometimes cringe-worthy hints of the author's sexual exploits become quite tedious with time and I can't help but feel that on occasions they are superfluous to the story«; www.basenotes.net/content/1044-The-Perfume-Lover-by-Denyse-Beaulieu-Book-Review

part essentialist and part semiotic. Tied to the unavoidable materiality of chemosensory perception, yet verbally deployed as an arbitrary and conventional semiotic system of representation, writing about scent turns out to be an ideal medium for self-discovery, self-fashioning, and self-empowerment. It is artistic and wide open to innovation. Olfactory writing is the Moebius loop that pulls linguistic convention through the irreducibly material, objective *and* subjective, reality of odor perception into verbal creation and, through the text on the page, into cognition. It has become a primarily feminine environment.

The way commercial critics describe *Séville à l'Aube*, the perfume, highlights the idea of scent as narrative, perfume as story:

> Séville à l'Aube is the passionate story of a romance during the Holy Week, in the most captivating city of Andalusia. Told by a writer to master perfumer Bertrand Duchaufour, it awakened his senses and lead [sic] to the creation of this stunning soliflore, a sublime orange blossom, alive with contrasts.[121]

Equally on this website:

> A perfumer, a writer. A man, a woman. A perfume, a story: Séville à l'Aube. From an encounter comes this incredible soliflore fragrance, a sublime orange blossom, alive with contrasts. The writer behind the story that inspired Séville à l'aube is Denyse Beaulieu, the author of the noted fragrance blog Grain de Musc. [...] Séville à l'Aube is a perfume filled with passion and desire.[122]

The writer at fragrantia.com even quotes the full Seville episode from the opening pages of Beaulieu's book.[123] The story turns into a perfume turns into a story that advertises the perfume ... This *mingling* transcends the verbal; it truly materializes before turning into text again.[124] The ability of the world of scents to shapeshift between the material and the symbolic is what makes perfumery such a powerful medium for writers and the *perfumoirlogue* its defining genre. But olfactory writing is transgressive in other ways, too, opening literature itself onto the world of celebrity and glamour – a little of which rubs off on the narrator. Popular culture and the Internet are definitely part of olfaction's expanding realm.

3. Perfume, Pleasure, and Sense Making

Alyssa Harad has a PhD in English, as she writes on the second page of her recent and successful book, *Coming to My Senses.*[125] Like Lyttelton, she is new to perfume but more critically (self)reflective in describing the process of being drawn into the world of scents, reluctantly abandoning some of her reservations and resistances, and embracing the self-definitional, theatrical, playful world of the olfactory in connection with writing, in fact initially predominantly as a function of writing! Accordingly, her

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[121] Anonymous; www.artisanparfumeur.com/shop/perfumes/s-ville-l-aube-eau-de-parfum-1035937.html

[122] Anonymous; www.luckyscent.com/product/15288/seville-a-l-aube-by-l-artisan-parfumeur

[123] Anonymous; www.fragrantica.com/perfume/L-Artisan-Parfumeur/Seville-a-l-aube-14639.htm

[124] The subtitle of Michel Serres's *The Five Senses* is »A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies.«

[125] Alyssa Harad, Coming to My Senses: A Story of Perfume, Pleasure, and an Unlikely Bride. New York 2012.

first sentence is »Perfume tells a story on the skin.« She elaborates on this in the next paragraph. »The story a perfume tells is dangerous – and exciting – because it is unabashedly intimate.«[126] In Harad's book the travelogue aspect of the *perfumoirlogue* is more figurative than concrete. Instead her »affair with perfume began as a slow, secret flirtation, carried on late at night by the glow of my computer screen« as she approaches perfume through text.[127] As »a serious, Birkenstock-wearing feminist« she soon is »baffled and not a little embarrassed« at her »sudden passion for reading about perfume.«[128] The link of text and scent, in fact their near identity, is by now familiar; but the subtitle of Harad's book, »A Story of Perfume, Pleasure, and an Unlikely Bride« adds the unexpected element of a bride. What's up with that?

The book is divided into three parts: »Learning how to smell«; »The problem of becoming a bride«; and »Coming to my senses.« The first part tells the story of the narrator's growing interest in perfumes, learning about them, buying some, meeting like-minded people and, almost imperceptibly, developing considerable knowledge in perfumery. The second part juts into this perfume narrative at an angle, as it were. Harad has been living with a man for ten years, and while their running joke had been about getting married after that time, they instead take the preliminary step of getting officially engaged – »Which left me with the problem of becoming a bride.«[129] Just what is the connection between a woman's interest in scents and her perplexity at being a bride? Aware of the strangeness of this juxtaposition, Harad notes that

> it was a long time before I could see any connection between my growing obsession with perfume and my upcoming wedding. In fact, I found it difficult to think about both of them at the same time. Perfume was my secret, sensual, private dreamworld. The wedding was public, hard to grasp, and far off in the future.[130]

What the reader and Harad herself begin to understand is that the engagement as a public announcement has closed down time: the wedding is now in sight, and in the traditional worlds of her Jewish and her future husband's Catholic families, a certain chain of events has been set in motion that must not be departed from. This »hard« structuring of time, determined by decisions and events (what rings to buy, where to hold the wedding, whom to invite, choosing the menu, finding a dress, holding a bridal shower . . .) is paralleled by »soft« changes: intensified family communication, the author's aligning her feminist ideals with the world of more conventional femininity that she all of a sudden sees herself surrounded by, numerous occasions for female bonding, not lastly through her gym routine that she develops, thus confirming the cliché of »the bride slimming down for the big day.«[131] While thus defined by clear borders, internally the period of engagement is a time of transition. At the gym she befriends a young woman, Lynn, who is in the beginning stages of a sex change and will turn into a man named Parker. Identity questions suddenly surround her, not lastly also as regards her own love for perfumery. The engagement-to-wedding transition seems to require a kind of »coming out« to family and friends about her obsession. After agonizing how to do this, Harad turns the traditional bridal shower into a

[126] Ibid., p. 3.
[127] Ibid., p.3 f.
[128] Ibid., p. 4.
[129] Ibid., p. 87.
[130] Ibid., p. 91.
[131] Ibid., p. 134.

perfume orgy of sorts, the apex of a process that started with her invitation, four dense pages of perfume reviews.[132] All the women in her circle engage in increasingly intense, emotional, memoirist discussions and exchanges about their own worlds of scent. The shower is an unruly but happy all-female gathering, where the »cake sat forgotten in the kitchen« and men are superfluous.[133] »I barely noticed when V. [her fiancé, always referred to by this single letter; H. J. R.] and my father arrived and gingerly made space for themselves on the edge of the circle.«[134] Thus the bridal shower, the bonding, the discovery of common, deep olfactory interests, participants' stories and memories, form the culmination of the bridal story in the book. Harad's suggestion of perfumes for bridal gifts had set in motion a comprehensive scent-based reminiscing and associating. The wedding is then barely mentioned. It »was not very different from most weddings.«[135] This intense period of (self)discovery and female bonding can be read as a figurative journey that changes her odorous *gestalt* and its perception by others.

It is in the last part of the book that the author finally »comes to her senses,« after coming out to family and friends as a perfume lover, in fact, by that time, an expert. She decides to »come out« also to the world at large by making contact with well-known perfume writers and bloggers, soon establishing herself among them, making her passion and expertise into a profession. This new role puts her in a position to address the question that was on everybody's mind after her bridal shower, namely what she »was going to do with all that perfume?« and »How many smells should a woman have?« Her answer is indirect and comparative and includes the admission that

> when I open my perfume closet, [...] I sometimes wonder myself. But then I turn around and look at all the books on my shelves. I think of all the hundreds of songs stored on my laptop, and all the art I've looked at and still hope to see. I consider the countless good meals I've eaten and I remember again what I will do with all that perfume. I will wear it.[136]

By claiming for perfumes an aesthetic status equal to that of other artworks and cultural products in her possession, Harad has answered the first question: she will *wear* her perfumes and thereby acknowledge their value and beauty. The answer to the second question, however, triggers a third that *has* no answer: »A woman, I think we can all agree, should smell like herself. But which self?«[137]

»Which self« is indeed the central question behind Harad's »problem of becoming a bride.« Not surprisingly, it is steeped in odors and rests in Harad's realization of being differently »enscented« and the need to acknowledge this to family and friends. Having shared her bed for over ten years with V.,[138] she is no longer a virgin and thus can, neither in the traditional worlds of her and her husband's families, nor in the symbolic order of social values be, or become again, a virgin-bride. The idea of virginity as a scent and its loss as the cause of a qualitative change in a woman's aura,

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[132] Ibid., p. 188.
[133] Ibid., p. 196.
[134] Ibid., p. 197.
[135] Ibid., p. 200.
[136] Ibid., p. 250 f.
[137] Ibid., p. 251.
[138] Only in the acknowledgments at the end of her book does Harad identify »V.« as the writer Vicente Lozano; ibid., p. 256.

the state of *déflorage*, is in Harad's story symbolically represented and tamed as an olfactory transition, a kind of *enfleurage*, the gradual transition of scent from one medium to another.[139] The long middle section of the book details the slow acceptance of change, a period of ambiguity and transformation. The sub-plot of Lynn's sex-change into the man Parker, itself steeped in perfumes, is like an accompanying melody. Another is Harad's realization that her aunt's gift to her of old family jewelry, including »a tangle of rings,«[140] is really just a gift and in order to accept it, she only »needed to wear it.«[141] Wearing one, let alone the whole »tangle of rings« does, however, constitute the symbolic acceptance of and entry into the family tradition. And confusion arises immediately as Harad's pick for her engagement ring from among her aunt's presents falls on her grandmother's *wedding* ring. This upends the proper transition from virgin via bride to the married woman and her aunt is »horrified« at her choice.[142] However, the phrase that she only »needed to wear« the ring foreshadows her decision on the very last page of the book regarding her perfumes. Thus to wear the ring and by extension the whole »tangle of rings« of life times, family history, and memory together with the perfume emphasizes that both need to be »worn,« owned, and accepted. Both are a part of a life, both are things of beauty.

4. Scent Travel Through Time and Space

Loosening the *perfumoirlogue* definition by allowing its autobiographical first-person narrator to be replaced by a *fictional* female main character and adding *fantasy* to the range of genre elements allows us to expand the category to accommodate an additional type of olfactory writing by women. The imagined protagonists in this rapidly growing body of texts are often more olfactorily talented – at times much more so – than any real-life first-person protagonist-author could be, and accordingly, these novels require an ever more radical suspension of disbelief as they add romance, adventure, time-shifting, free association, even reincarnation and other elements of fantastical but popular writing into the *perfumoirlogue*. Our last section can only provide a quick overview.

A good example to start is Gillian Bradshaw's *Alchemy of Fire*.[143] Bradshaw is an acclaimed historical novelist, and this story takes place in seventh-century Christian Byzantium, threatened by an Arab invasion. The central female character is a former royal concubine, Anna, now a successful perfume business owner. Her beautiful daughter Theodosia is of royal descent on her father's side, a fact that Anna has hidden from her; she is in her early teenage years as the story unfolds. Kallinikos, a Christian engineer from Syria comes to town as a refugee; he is working on a weapon against ships, a kind of early-model flame-thrower. In need of distilling equipment, he buys

[139] It is an idea that Süskind plays with in *Perfume*, e.g., when Laure's father speculates correctly (although based in visual rather than olfactory assumptions) that his daughter, as a married woman, »defloriert und womöglich schon geschwängert,« would be of no value to Grenouille; Patrick Süskind, Das Parfum: Die Geschichte eines Mörders. Zürich 1985, p. 265 f. Gustav Jaeger writes extensively of the »Jungfrauenduft« and how a »Frau duftet qualitativ ganz entschieden anders als die Jungfrau«; Jaeger (note 23), vol. 1, p. 187 and p. 192 f.

[140] Ibid., p. 95.

[141] Ibid., p. 101.

[142] Ibid., p. 97.

[143] Gillian Bradshaw, Alchemy of Fire. New York, Sutton 2004. Bradshaw has a degree in classical philology; many of her books are available in German translation.

an old alembic from Anna, and the two become friends – reluctantly at first on Anna's part, who fears for her reputation. Theodosia, who has taken a liking to Kallinikos, helps to bring his invention to the emperor's attention, who is, after all, her uncle. However, the young girl's unreflected rapprochement to the court, the encounter with power, changes her and Anna's lives forever. Her royal ties uncovered, Theodosia is retained at court. Kallinikos finishes his work and equips the Emperor's ships just in time to successfully repel the first major Muslim attack on Constantinople. He and Anna become lovers.

Well drawn, Anna is a strong, determined, yet introspective and cautious character, fully aware of the limits of her life as a woman, especially with her ambiguous past, in an entirely male-dominated world. Her perfume business is the anchor of her tenuous independence, providing her with the cover of respect and a defined role. It takes her a while to allay her fears of subordination to the male and loss of independence that marriage inevitably means for a woman. But Kallinikos is not a »strong« male and lets her keep her perfume shop without interference. In Bradshaw's historical world, the realm of scent is a realm of freedom for a woman. Perfumery is a gender-appropriated occupation; it delivers respectability, social equality, and allows for creativity and solidarity in the all-female seasonal work of enfleurage, distillation, blending, etc. that Bradshaw ably describes. The teamwork of perfume making creates a female space, both concrete and emotional-artistic, in the enclosed sanctum of Anna's courtyard where many scenes take place. Perfumes also serve as possible bribes, as tools of access to members of the court, both men and women – a motif we will find again in Rose's *Collector of Dying Breaths*, below.[144] Anna is lucky that Kallinikos is himself a dreamer, a passionate alchemist in search of the elixir of life, lacking any intention to dominate or subjugate her. Her perfume business expands. The affinities in their trades – from equipment common to both (that brings the two characters together in the first place) to the use of chemicals, focus on processes of transformation, and the touch of magic pertaining to both – are emphasized by the narrator. The story ends on a happy note; Anna is pregnant, and her daughter Theodosia a courtly lady of growing refinement and power.

The plot of *The Perfume Collector* by Kathleen Tessaro is set in London and Paris in the mid-1950s.[145] It features a young socialite, Grace Munro, often a bit ill at ease in London's high society of the time due to her uncertain lineage: she was adopted as a child. Grace receives, out of the blue, a legal notice of a considerable inheritance in Paris left her by Eva d'Orsey, an enigmatic woman, mistress of the wealthy Jacques Hiver, who was the owner of France's largest cosmetic company. Grace has no idea why this woman, unknown to her, would leave her a fortune and begins to search for information about her. The novel ties together two narrative strands: the story of Eva d'Orsey, starting in the 1920s in New York, and the narrative present around Grace in Paris, searching for clues. Tessaro goes one step further than Bradshaw in interweaving historical reality and her fictional tale. Not only do we find specific well researched details (the history of the Warwick Hotel in New York, for example) but real people appear as characters – Madame Zed, a Russian émigré and perfumer for Lanvin in the 1920s.[146]

[144] Ibid., p. 132.

[145] Kathleen Tessaro, The Perfume Collector. New York 2013.

[146] Madame Zed and the perfume *Mon Pêché/My Sin* are historical. »Mme Zed was an elderly Russian perfumer, who fled before the Revolution. She created the early Lanvin perfumes,

Eva, as a very young maid at the Warwick is at everyone's mercy but claws her way into higher society, even if always just out of its full glamour. She meets Madame Zed, who is a guest at the hotel, and develops a testy relationship with Zed's apprentice and factotum, André Valmont, a French perfumer. After many plot twists, appearances and disappearances of characters over a narration that spans three decades and places from New York to Monte Carlo, Paris, and London, the reader's hunch is confirmed: Eva was Grace's mother. Much of the novel's atmosphere is steeped in scents, literally as well as metaphorically, for instance in the very Süskindian scene at the Warwick, when Valmont smells the adolescent Eva the same way and with the same fundamental insight into the world of odors that Grenouille derives from his crucial encounter with the girl with the mirabelles:

> Suddenly [Valmont] [...] pulled her close, inhaled. At first her natural scent seemed straightforward, simple; the slightly acrid, almost creamy aroma of a child's damp skin. But underneath that, a rich, musky element seeped through, unfolding slowly; widening and expanding to a profound, primitive animalistic essence. The sheer range and complexity of her odour was astonishing. The effect intensely arousing.[147]

As Valmont later recalls Eva's olfactory imprint on him he realizes that

> [h]ere was a story he understood. A song of youth; of burgeoning, ripe sexuality; of frustration and longing [...]. of a nymph and a femme fatal, both trapped in the body of an [sic] graceless young girl. [...] In its velvet glow, the dim landscape of [Valmont's] creative gifts finally came into focus. [...] He had work to do.[148]

Equally important is the discovery by Grace and her Paris lawyer, Mr. Tissot, of a long-abandoned, dilapidated, but still fully furnished perfume store, once owned by Valmont. It is guarded, as it were, by Madame Zed, and the encounter between Grace and her becomes the narrative linchpin for the rest of the novel; Zed provides Grace the full story and the latter leaves her boorish husband Roger and stays in Paris.

The novel creates atmosphere elegantly, contrasting the puritan, sober London with the more sensual Paris where »[e]ven the air smelled more refined,«[149] as Grace notices upon her arrival. The novel can be read as Grace's liberation from her existence in London, including her cheating husband. Thanks to her inheritance, the move to Paris, and the discovery of her own story Grace moves toward a much more physical understanding of the world and herself, a development the novel frames to a significant extent in the realm of scents. Tessaro is great at conjuring up atmosphere – from the cold and sober to the erotically charged and, especially in New York, redolence of sexuality. Grace's decision to live in Paris is both symbolically and narratively convincing.

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although My Sin was composed in collaboration with Firmenich«; http://boisdejasmin.com/2006/04/lanvin_my_sin.html#more-850. See also: www.perfumeprojects.com/museum/marketers/Lanvin.shtml; and: www.ebay.com/gds/My-Sin-by-Lanvin-Perfume-/10000000014597267/g.html

147 Tessaro (note 145), p. 165.

148 Ibid., p. 168.

149 Ibid., p. 65.

5. Pure Pop and Olfactory Transmissions

With Jan Moran's *Scent of Triumph* we step down in the quality of writing toward the clichéd and trite.[150] The author »is a writer and entrepreneur living in San Diego,« as the front matter of the book states. It tells the story of the young, beautiful, talented French-Jewish woman Danielle Bretancourt, descendant from an old perfume-making family, married to the slightly stiff, brittle German glassmaking scion Max von Hoffman, and her travails during WWII. High drama begins on the very first pages, when their ship, *en route* from New York to London is torpedoed by the Nazis and sinks, killing her husband, not entirely inconveniently (and certainly narratively useful) as Danielle had already noticed the handsome young shipping magnate Jon Newell-Grey's »soft breath, musky skin, his hair curling just above his collar. He'd been interested in all she had to say, from her little boy to her work at Perfum Bretancourt, her family perfumery in France.«[151]

In war-torn Europe, she loses her fortune and temporarily her son Nicky who was staying with relatives on her husband's Polish estates, about to be overrun by the Germans; and an evil Nazi cousin, Heinrich, is not absent from this clichéd story. Destitute, Danielle flees for Hollywood, where several beaus are lusting after her and entanglements arise which, to be sure, she enters only for sheer necessity, all the while thinking of Jon. Soon hard days are crowned by commercial success, thanks to her talents in perfumery, fashion, and people skills. After misunderstandings in communicating with Jon have been solved she returns to Europe where the happy end with Jon is inevitable. More than merely a strong character, Danielle is a veritable female superhero who overcomes all obstacles in her path, material, emotional, and moral. There is no shortage of action in this 400-page book, but the characterization is flat despite, in fact because of, authorial overdetermination. The plot is clichéd. Danielle, a »child prodigy of perfumery,«[152] holds rather mundane perfumistic and esthetic views of

> perfumes that spoke to the soul, that were elegant in their simplicity. [...] When she was very young, [...] Mitsouko inspired her. [...] Like a Monet canvas, she hoped her work would also live on, far beyond her years. For like an artist, the true test of a perfumer lay not in the skill with which she blended her materials, but in the imagination. [...] She knew every artist revealed themselves in their art.[153]

The scent that became her financial savior in California is »Chymère, a perfume with a base accord similar to the one she had created for her wedding day.« While developing it at home in Grasse she prophetically notes that »it is my future [...]. Of that I am certain.«[154] In a brief epilogue, we find the reshuffled family living their com-

[150] Jan Moran, The Scent of Triumph. Carlsbad 2012. Besides *The Scent of Triumph* Moran recently authored *Fabulous Fragrances II: A Guide to Prestige Perfumes for Women and Men* (2000). The publisher notes that this »is an updated version of the author's original book, *Fabulous Fragrances* (1994), which is no longer available.« *Fabulous Fragrances II* »is excellent for leisure readers who want to know more about the basics of perfumery, and for those who enjoy the romance associated with perfume.« See: http://www.amazon.com/Fabulous-Fragrances-II-Prestige-Perfumes/dp/0963906542

[151] Ibid., p. 3.

[152] Ibid., p. 6.

[153] Ibid., p. 73.

[154] Ibid.

fortable lives at their Grasse country estate. »Jon smoothed a wisp of hair from her forehead. ›What are you thinking, my beautiful wife?‹ Danielle smiled up at him. ›That I want to capture this moment forever‹« – the novel's last words.

Whereas *The Scent of Triumph*, although implausible, is a »realistic« adventure and romance novel, M. J. Rose's 2012 book, *The Book of Lost Fragrances* is an all-out fantastical tale, in which traces of odor on ancient Egyptian pottery shards from a pharaoh's tomb may have the potential to unlock memories and make time-travel and even reincarnation possible.[155] But it is more interesting and much better written than Moran's story. The plot spans the globe as well as the centuries, beginning in Egypt in 1799, but mostly taking place in »the present« in New York, Paris, and Nanjing. Odors and olfactory perception are both a driving force and permanently in the air, a notable descriptive element, as the author relies heavily on the well-known close association of memory and odor. The story elaborates on that link to the point where memories *become* an alternative reality. Jac L'Etoile is the main female character, together with her brother Robbie, heirs of the old French perfume house of that name, now fallen on hard times. Robbie lives in the L'Etoile family home in Paris as a perfumer, while Jac (whose name derives from »jacinthe,« French for »hyacinth«) prefers New York and her work as a mythologist. He has adopted Buddhism and believes in reincarnation, she attempts to find natural and logical explanations for myths. He is supremely knowledgeable about perfumes, she has a better intuition and nose for them, in fact suffers from frighteningly realistic visions, »memory lurches,« as she calls these episodes, that amount to near past-life experiences, often triggered by scent. The multi-stranded plot is too complex to summarize here, but it does have a contemporary hook: a 2007 Chinese law regulating the incarnation of living Buddhas in Tibet. As Robbie explores the Egyptian pottery shards' connection to reincarnation, he absolutely wants to give them to the Dalai Lama on a visit to Paris, thinking they might somehow help Tibetan Buddhists to identify their spiritual leaders. It is this particular plot element that triggers the involvement of the Chinese mafia, mayhem in the Louvre, chases in the Paris catacombs, trips to Nantes and the Loire Valley and many other occasions for thrill and excitement.

If anything, Rose takes the fantasy element even a step further in her most recent novel, *The Collector of Dying Breaths*; it can be read as the sequel by readers who know the former book but can also be appreciated independently.[156] Two narratives are brought together in *Dying Breaths*. One, set in the 16th century, is the diary of René le Florentin, perfumer to Catherine de Medici, and his pursuit of an elixir that would make reincarnation possible when mixed with the last breaths of deceased persons, captured and stored in bottles; and the other set in »the present,« mostly in Paris and Barbizon. Involving the same characters as *Lost Fragrances*, Jac is central to this novel, too, the more so as Robbie dies early on, poisoned, as it turns out, as a result of the events in the previous book. Jac gets involved with Melinoe Cypros (*nomen est omen*), the overwrought, even dangerous heiress to a wealthy Greek shipping magnate. This »Billionaire Orphan«[157] nearly goes over dead bodies in order to concoct the life-elixir that she wants to apply to old breath bottles in her possession that once belonged to René le Florentin. In fact the basement of her Barbizon country house *was* once le Florentin's workshop. Jac is virtually held hostage to do the lab work, but the story ends in Melinoe's overreach and the conflagration of her estate that kills her.

[155] M. J. Rose, The Book of Lost Fragrances: A Novel of Adventure. New York 2012.
[156] M. J. Rose, The Collector of Dying Breaths. New York 2014.
[157] Ibid., p. 47.

While »fantasy« is an established and popular literary genre, the key difference between Rose's novels and, say, Süskind's *Perfume* – that clearly also has its share of fantasy – lies in their degree of plausibility. Rose's stories are implausible – Süskinds tale, in contrast, is so tightly historically situated and factually supported that it always skims along the edge of the possible, at least not entirely implausible, creating that element of uncanniness that gives its fans their longed-for frisson and its detractors their reasons for calling it creepy. Without the autobiographical first-person experiential anchor of the *perfumoirlogue* proper, literary olfactory writing veers toward the fantastical, and authors relish this tendency. What Moran's and Rose's novels have in common is not only their reliance on the sense of smell for setting, atmosphere, and partly to drive the plot. As perfumery and perfume making are central to both authors, smell's function is much more than ornamental: it is a structural device, and both authors draw heavily on the familiar link of olfactory perception to the mysterious, enigmatic, and allusive. Moran keeps these functions more or less in the realm of the plausible, but Rose takes at least one element of olfactory perception, its memory triggering function, a step further: her subjects do more than remember, they *relive* the past, they become other people or earlier version of themselves. Rose's narratives engage the paranormal, medial, and past-life memories, with scents as the carrying atmosphere.

Literature, it appears, takes precisely the enigmatic and mysterious aspects of olfactory perception that until a few years ago even scientists referenced when describing their field of inquiry for general audiences – and runs with it into the space of the arcane. In a dialectical move, though, olfactory writing also draws on many of the very scientific insights of recent years – but only to push, drawing on factual knowledge, even deeper into the still unenlightened territory of perception, cognition, memory, and emotion. Many authors of olfactory writing, mostly women, as noted, evidently relish the transgressive, near-immaterial, magical qualities of the sense of smell and spread them, as Hegel says of »pure insight,« like »a perfume in the unresisting atmosphere. It is a penetrating infection which does not make itself noticeable beforehand as something opposed to the indifferent element into which it insinuates itself, and therefore cannot be warded off.«[158] Olfactory writing clings imaginatively and irresistibly to the darker side of the knowledge of the sense of smell that science research has begun to vastly expand. That all of the writers discussed in the second part of this essay are actively present on the Internet is more than a coincidence: the internet, too, serves the »silent expansion« and »diffusion« of »pure insight« – more or less, including actual knowledge and facts but also fiction, rumors, and worse – into the near »unresisting atmosphere« of an ever broader public's powers of imagination. Smells may well be the pop cultural unification of Nietzsche's three great stimulants – artifice, brutality, and innocence.

We have seen then that intense work in the sciences on all aspects of olfactory perception led, by the end of the 20th century, to a firmer grasp on that modality. This research is ongoing and will doubtless bring further insights and refinements of our understanding of smells. A shift of emphasis in the 1980s in the humanities and social sciences produced an increasingly interconnected view of the world in New Historicism. It was accompanied by the rise of postmodern literature with its high levels of intertextual references that led either deep into history or networked lightly across the surface of the present. In society at large, a marked interest in the body and the senses, in perception and cognition, in tandem with the rise of the life sciences and their novel

[158] G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit. Trans. by V. A. Miller. Oxford, New York 1977, p. 331.

insights and demands on individuals provided the impetus for a new engagement with ourselves. In this context, olfactory perception, only emerging from under its cloud of unfamiliarity and secrets, has attracted attention and debate in various formats. Literature, history, and anthropology took up this interest and are building on it. The literary works of this early phase of olfactory awakening were creative, stimulating, and highly entertaining. In the decades since then, the writing produced around the olfactory has grown in volume perhaps more than in quality. The very dispersive, contextualizing and associative dimensions of olfaction seem to produce a natural leaning toward the Internet blog – equally dispersive, connective and allusive. Olfactory writers are naturally intermedial, intertextual, and interdisciplinary. They link from what amounts to the dominant material dimension of olfactory perception today, perfumery, with great ease to consumerism, glamour and celebrity – cultural fields that only rarely bend toward literature, narrowly construed. Nevertheless, in its networked mode, olfactory writing, significantly overlapping with writing on perfumery, reflects widespread popular interest.

In *literary* terms the most compelling among the recent olfactory books may well be Lara Feigel's *A Nosegay*.[159] Its subtitle places it into the category of the travelogue but, significantly, takes the reader (only) on »A *Literary* Journey from the Fragrant to the Fetid« (my emphasis; H. J. R.). It is a collection of thematically arranged purple passages on smell from world literature, across places and time. Categories include »Human Scents and Stink,« »Odoriferous Animals,« or »Dung and Roses« – ten headings altogether. Indirectly, this book thus provides an incipient bibliography of such texts – elusive so far, given the interdisciplinary and dispersive nature of smells and the writing about them, as we have seen. One of Feigel's entries, attributed to Paul Valéry, may serve, if not as the final, certainly as a most uncompromising commentary on the *perfumoirlogue* and its writers: »A woman who doesn't wear perfume has no future.«[160] Given the near interchangeability of scent and text, perfume and story, it is barely a stretch to conclude that a woman who does not write about perfume has no future either. Harad's »coming to her senses,« one sense in particular, could be taken as a case in point. But Valéry's *dictum* also resonates hauntingly with the opening phrase of Calvino's *The Name, the Nose*: Calvino is not optimistic about the future of smell and the ancient olfactory dance of the sexes, with the woman the object and the man the sniffing subject: »Epigraphs in an undecipherable language, half their letters rubbed away by the sand-laden wind: this is what you will be, O *parfumeries*, for the noseless man of the future.«[161] He may yet be proven wrong, certainly if »man« means exclusively the male of the species, given the number of women now writing (and sniffing) and the number of perfume brands in US department stores that increased from 756 to 1160 in the decade from 2002–2012.[162] But Calvino may not mean the quantity of the product but the quality of perception. Here, the old gender dichotomy and the balance among perceivers and perceived has decidedly begun to shift. There *should* be a future for *parfumeries*.

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[159] Lara Feigel (ed.), A Nosegay: A Literary Journey from the Fragrant to the Fetid. London 2006.

[160] Ibid., p. 77.

[161] Ibid., p. 67.

[162] www.statisticbrain.com/perfume-industry-statistics/