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Follow Your Nose? Smell, Smelling, and Their Histories

Author(s): MARK S. R. JENNER

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MARK S. R. JENNER

“A GREAT MANY THINGS have been said of *Smells*,” observed the late-seventeenth-century Italian physician Bernardino Ramazzini, but “a particular and exact History of ’em is yet wanting.”¹ This was still the case nearly three hundred years later when Roy Porter wrote his foreword to the English translation of Alain Corbin’s *The Foul and the Fragrant*, the work that more than any other wafted odor into modern historical consciousness. “Today’s history,” Porter declared, “comes deodorized.” “How many historians,” he continued, “have given us the smell of previous societies? Researchers have been all too silent, repelled, it seems, by modern hygienic sensibilities even from contemplating the stench of the past.”²

History has not been comprehensively reodorized in the decades since Porter’s comments. There have been important scholarly investigations into the cultural history of olfaction and into historical smellscapes, but those interested in the smells of the past are most likely to find them in popularizing presentations. Period scents sell historical novels: when one reviewer praised C. J. Sansom’s detective stories (set in the reign of Henry VIII) for how they evoked the “smells of Tudor England,” the commendation figured prominently in their subsequent marketing.³ Trade histories now frequently contain a scene-setting section on the odors of their subject.⁴ In the late 1990s, Oxford University Press published an entire series founded on the general proposition that “Of all the senses of the past, we often forget the sense of smell.”⁵ Helmed by a distinguished medical historian, it aimed to recapture this dimension

My thanks to Fay Bound-Alberti, Karen Buckle, Catriona Kennedy, Kei Nasu, and Helen Smith, who listened to my thoughts about this topic, and to Patricia Greene, who helped immeasurably.

¹ Bern. Ramazzini, *A Treatise of the Diseases of Tradesmen, Shewing the Various Influence of Particular Trades upon the State of Health* (London, 1705), 95. The first Italian edition was published in 1700.

² Roy Porter, “Foreword,” in Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Leamington Spa, 1986), v.

³ Joan Smith, “Crime: Dispatches from the Past,” *Sunday Times*, December 19, 2004, 51. This quotation was placed on the back of subsequent editions of Sansom’s books and is also included in summaries of the author’s biography. It is now commonplace in reviews to note that a historical novelist captures “even the smell” of a period.

⁴ A good example of this tendency is Carl Zimmer’s study of Thomas Willis, which opens with an evocation of the smells of Restoration Oxford, but then discusses Willis’s intellectual and medical work in a more conventional and less sensory tone; Zimmer, *Soul Made Flesh: Thomas Willis, the English Civil War and the Mapping of the Mind* (London, 2004), 3–5. More self-consciously literary is Simon Schama’s bravura description of seventeenth-century Amsterdam that emulates genre paintings of the five senses; Schama, *Rembrandt’s Eyes* (Harmondsworth, 1999), 311–322. Revealingly, it begins with smell.

⁵ Mary Dobson, *Tudor Odours* (Oxford, 1997), 4. All the works in the series used this sentence.

with maximum pungency. Indeed, the Smelly Old History books for children incorporated scratch-and-sniff panels so that their readers could experience whiffs of medieval muckheaps, Victorian factory smoke, and Henry VIII's sweaty socks (complete with the aroma of gangrenous toe).⁶

Adapting a technology that had become commonplace in children's books during the 1980s, this series was also following a scent trail laid by museums. In 1984, the Jorvik Viking Centre in York extended previous museological and commercial attempts to create vivid sensory experiences through the use of lighting, dioramas, and recorded sound, and pioneered the strategic release of odors in order to re-create the atmosphere of the tenth-century city.⁷ These smells—seven in all—captured visitors' imaginations, particularly in the first years of Jorvik's hugely successful operation.⁸ Since then, the use of odors, whether in Disneyfied displays or, more discreetly, in boxes from which the visitor can inhale, has become common in historical museums.⁹ In recent years, the museumgoer has been able to experience the smells of a World War I trench, a Victorian slum, the spices traded in the eighteenth century, and a Tudor warship, to name but a few.¹⁰

Such odorized presentations of history are deemed appropriate primarily for non-academic audiences, and especially for children; they also have a tendency to adopt a humorous and at times flippant tone. (The Smelly Old Histories were full of jokes.) Smells, it seems, still fit uneasily into the world of serious scholarship.¹¹ Many academics bridle at luxuriantly sensual descriptions of the past in a way that recalls the Oxford anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard's notorious dismissal of Margaret Mead for producing a "rustling-of-the-wind-in-the-palm-trees kind of anthropological writing."¹² Jorvik's advocates displayed considerable anxiety about its olfactory dimension, and depictions of the past with perfumes can attract critical

⁶ Mary Dobson, *Medieval Muck* (Oxford, 1998), 8; Dobson, *Victorian Vapours* (Oxford, 1997), [23]; Dobson, *Tudor Odours*, 11.

⁷ In the 1960s, odors were used at a New York trade fair and in the Trafalgar room of Madame Tussaud's Waxworks in London; Gale Peter Largey and David Rodney Watson, "The Sociology of Odors," *American Journal of Sociology* 77, no. 6 (1972): 1031; Pamela Pilbeam, *Madame Tussaud and the History of Waxworks* (London, 2006), 202–203. On the sensory world of museums, see Diane Losche, "The Fate of the Senses in Ethnographic Modernity: The Margaret Mead Hall of Pacific Peoples at the American Museum of Natural History," in Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, and Ruth B. Phillips, eds., *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture* (Oxford, 2006), 223–244.

⁸ The smells are helpfully itemized in John P. Aggleton and Louise Wasket, "The Ability of Odours to Serve as State-Dependent Cues for Real-World Memories: Can Viking Smells Aid the Recall of Viking Experiences?" *British Journal of Psychology* 90, no. 1 (1999): 2–3. Jorvik attracted more than 800,000 visitors a year. Since its relaunch in the late 1990s, the smells of the past feature less prominently in its publicity.

⁹ On Disneyworld and its "Smellitizer" aroma cannons, see Stephen M. Fjellman, *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America* (Boulder, Colo., 1992), 73, 333, 362. On olfactory displays in museums across Europe, see Robert Jütte, *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, trans. James Lynn (Cambridge, 2005), 2–3.

¹⁰ John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism* (London, 2000), 113–115; Thackray Museum, Leeds; Museum No. 1, Kew Gardens, London; the Mary Rose Project Museum Tour, <http://www.maryrose.org/visit/tour10a.htm>.

¹¹ Apparently even scientific investigators of olfaction are reluctant to smell samples when evaluating research papers: Chandler Burr, *The Emperor of Scent: A Story of Perfume, Obsession, and the Last Mystery of the Senses* (London, 2003), 247–248.

¹² E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Social Anthropology* (London, 1951), 96. Mead's literary craft is surveyed rather more favorably in Nancy C. Lutkehaus, "Margaret Mead and the 'Rustling-of-the-Wind-in-the-Palm-Trees School' of Ethnographic Writing," in Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, eds., *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley, Calif., 1995), 186–206.

derision.¹³ The Smelly Old History series sold extremely well, but one reviewer declared that it touched “rock bottom.”¹⁴ Others found it “crass,” “mindless,” and “a nasty idea,” and sniffed at its “distinctly British flavour.”¹⁵

Such hostile commentary reveals a lot about the position of smell within contemporary Western culture.¹⁶ To remark upon odors often violates decorum; to relish them is seen as characteristic of that stage of childhood in which the young person recognizes codes of politeness but has not yet fully internalized them. This attitude has deep historical roots. A venerable intellectual tradition has associated olfaction with the primitive and the childish. One can find claims about the great olfactory capacities of feral children as early as the seventeenth century.¹⁷ Pronouncements that smell-based presentations are “naturally” suitable for the young, but not the mature, also echo the intellectual prejudice of a long line of philosophers, from Aquinas to the present day, who have barred smell from the domain of the aesthetic.¹⁸ Although some contemporary artists and performers have used odors in their work without much adverse criticism, academics studying smell are all too often judged to be immersed in something not only insubstantial and ephemeral but also incapable of yielding any solid worth.¹⁹ (One should add that this denigration often draws on the association of scent and the feminine.) Certainly, collaborating with chemists or scent-makers does not seem to enhance historians’ status in the way that working with musicians committed to period performance or with curators seeking the original visual context of a painting can do.

Smell is not merely an absence from history writing. Its limited historiography

¹³ E.g., Peter Addyman, “Jorvik—Rebirth of a City,” *History Today* 34, no. 5 (May 1984): 45; Charles Kightly, “Interpretation, Entertainment, Involvement: Historic Site Presentation, c. 1983–2008,” *English Heritage Conservation Bulletin* 58 (2008): 26.

¹⁴ They sold more than half a million copies; Cindi Di Marzo, “Kid-Pleasing Reference on the Rise,” *Publishers Weekly* 246, no. 46 (November 15, 1999): 38.

¹⁵ C. Hardyment, *The Independent*, March 29, 1997, Books, 8; A. Foreman, *The Independent*, October 25, 1997, Features, 12; G. Wheatcroft, “Sniffing Out the Past,” *New Statesman* 127 (December 4, 1998): 61; *Buffalo News*, July 29, 1997 (from Nexis database).

¹⁶ The hostility was possibly compounded by the imperfect quality of the technology. I have not experienced these odors (I consulted copies in the carefully regulated and definitely no-scratching-allowed Special Collections Room of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and secondhand copies give a new meaning to the term “used books”). However, it has been plausibly claimed that they all “smell . . . like cheap perfume”; Peter A. Coates, “The Strange Stillness of the Past: Toward an Environmental History of Sound and Noise,” *Environmental History* 10, no. 4 (2005): 636.

¹⁷ E.g., Kenelm Digby, *Two Treatises: In the One of Which, the Nature of Bodies; in the Other, the Nature of Mans Soule, Is Looked Into, in Way of Discovery of the Immortality of Reasonable Soules* (Paris, 1644), 247–248. Such opinions are treated with surprising respect in Constance Classen, “The Sensory Orders of ‘Wild Children,’” in David Howes, ed., *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses* (Toronto, 1991).

¹⁸ Donald McQueen, “Aquinas on the Aesthetic Relevance of Tastes and Smells,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 33, no. 4 (1993): 346–356; Neil Campbell, “Aquinas’ Reasons for the Aesthetic Irrelevance of Tastes and Smells,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36, no. 2 (1996): 166–176; Annick Le Guérec, *Scent: The Mysterious and Essential Powers of Smell*, trans. Richard Miller (London, 1992), pt. 4.

¹⁹ Some of this can be sampled in *On Smell*, Special Issue, *Performance Review* 8, no. 3 (2003). Jim Drobnick has provided thoughtful overviews of some of this work in “Reveries, Assaults and Evaporating Presences: Olfactory Dimensions in Contemporary Art,” *Parachute* 89 (1998): 1–19, and “Toposmia: Art, Scent, and Interrogations of Spatiality,” *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 7, no. 1 (2002): 31–47. See also Ernesto Neto, Matrix Exhibit 190: A Maximum Minimum Time Space between Us and the Parsimonious Universe, http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/images/art/matrix/190/MATRIX_190_Ernesto_Neto.pdf; Ian Berry and Bill Arning, eds., *America Starts Here: Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 24, 42, 180–181; Bill Arning, “Sissel Tolaas,” in Caroline A. Jones, ed., *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006), 98–103.

is dominated by accounts of gradual erasure, by narratives of decline and deodorization. In museum exhibits and popular histories, odors, especially bad odors, signify historical distance and difference.²⁰ They are part of a world we have lost. Modernity has waged a “total war against smells,” wrote the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman; “Western culture . . . is founded on a vast deodorization project,” declared Alain Corbin.²¹ However, although the term “deodorization” dominates the historiography, it has been used in divergent and potentially contradictory ways. It is often asserted that smells were more abundant in the past and that changes in the physical environment have dramatically reduced their prevalence; it is also asserted that smells have come to matter less because the cultural significance of olfaction has declined. These two arguments are frequently intertwined, but need to be distinguished.

“SMELLS THAT MANY PEOPLE TODAY would consider intolerable,” the historian Connie Chiang has noted, “were once unavoidable and ubiquitous.”²² Most historians agree that their disappearance is a consequence of human action. In recent decades, developments in public health and sanitation from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries have been styled a progressive conquest of stench. For Corbin, the late eighteenth century witnessed a “lowering of olfactory tolerance.” He and other scholars of Enlightenment environmental medicine have argued that this led to concerted efforts to move graveyards to the edges of cities, to cleanse streets and markets, and to ventilate buildings in order to make them simultaneously healthier and sweeter-smelling.²³ Public health historians tell us that nineteenth-century sanitarians intensified this campaign to eradicate the stinking and putrescent sources of disease-inducing miasmas. The opinion of the Victorian health reformer Edwin Chadwick that “All smell is, if it be intense, immediate acute disease; and eventually . . . by depressing the system and rendering it susceptible to the action of other causes, *all* smell is disease,” is often cited as both exemplifying and explaining this

²⁰ E.g., Emily Cockayne, *Hubbub: Filth, Noise and Stench in England, 1600–1770* (New Haven, Conn., 2007).

²¹ Zygmunt Bauman, “The Sweet Scent of Decomposition,” in Chris Rojek and Bryan S. Turner, eds., *Forget Baudrillard?* (London, 1993), 25; Alain Corbin, *Historien du sensible: Entretien avec Gilles Heuré* (Paris, 2000), 66, my translation.

²² Connie Y. Chiang, “The Nose Knows: The Sense of Smell in American History,” *Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (2008): 405.

²³ Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant*, pts. I and II, quotation from 59. Corbin’s emphasis on Enlightenment doctors’ preoccupation with airs was anticipated by other French historians in the 1970s; see Michel Foucault et al., *Les machines à guérir: Aux origines de l’hôpital moderne* (Paris, 1976); and *Le sain et le malsain*, Special Issue, *Dix-huitième siècle* 9 (1977). Since then, his arguments have been extended and reiterated in a number of studies: Simon Schaffer, “Measuring Virtue: Eudiometry, Enlightenment and Pneumatic Medicine,” in Andrew Cunningham and Roger French, eds., *The Medical Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1990), 281–318; James C. Riley, *The Eighteenth-Century Campaign to Avoid Disease* (Basingstoke, 1987); Pieter Spierenburg, *The Broken Spell: A Cultural and Anthropological History of Preindustrial Europe* (London, 1991); Rodolphe el-Khoury, “Polish and Deodorize: Paving the City in Late-Eighteenth-Century France,” *Assemblage* 31 (1996): 6–15. For excellent accounts of the general context of Enlightenment environmental medicine, see Ludmilla Jordanova, “Policing Public Health in France, 1780–1815,” in Jordanova, *Nature Displayed: Gender, Science and Medicine, 1760–1820* (London, 1999), 143–160; and Laurence Brockliss and Colin Jones, *The Medical World of Early Modern France* (Oxford, 1997), chaps. 7 and 12.

project of deodorization.²⁴ From Paris to Valparaiso, the story goes, late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century sewer systems made this ambition an actuality, more or less successfully removing the stench of excrement from urban public space.²⁵

The historiography of personal hygiene amplifies this tale of deodorization. Studies of Europe and North America have shown that from the late eighteenth century, and particularly from the mid-nineteenth, clothes were washed more often and bodies were increasingly subjected to novel regimes of regular bathing. As Georges Vigarello argued, the latter development marked a shift from dry forms of hygiene in which the body was cleansed and sweat removed by rubbing the skin and by changing one's linen, to water-based ones involving washing the skin and cleansing its pores.²⁶ During the same period, the middle and upper classes increasingly distanced themselves from the stink of the unwashed lower orders.²⁷ Over the course of the twentieth century, this drive to bathe, shower, and deodorize continued and spread through society. Soaps, deodorants, and other hygiene products were at the forefront of mass consumer culture, promoted by energetic education and advertising campaigns that stigmatized and sought to eradicate bodily odors.²⁸ By the 1960s, anthropologists could argue that "the extensive use of deodorants and the suppression of odor in public places" had made America "a land of olfactory blandness."²⁹ An "olfactory revolution," it seems, had occurred; modern society had become deodorized.³⁰ Nowadays noxious odors are said to be literal blasts from the past—a journalist traveling through twenty-first-century France claimed to have encountered a "medieval pong" emanating from an Alsatian drain.³¹

The suggestion that drains get medieval on our noses perpetuates the medievalist,

²⁴ Quoted in S. E. Finer, *The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick* (London, 1952), 298. As the passage makes clear, the putative relation between smell and disease causation was complex. Scholars of nineteenth-century public health have demonstrated that contemporary ideas about the aetiology and transmission of disease were even more nuanced and debated; see Margaret Pelling, *Cholera, Fever and English Medicine, 1825–1865* (Oxford, 1978); Christopher Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800–1854* (Cambridge, 1998); Peter Baldwin, *Contagion and the State in Europe, 1830–1930* (Cambridge, 1999); Richard L. Schoenwald, "Training Urban Man," in Michael Wolff and H. J. Dyos, eds., *The Victorian City: Images and Realities* (London, 1973), 687–688; Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London, 1988), 139; Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985), 114.

²⁵ Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen: Realities and Representations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), chaps. 2, 3, 5, and 6; Mark M. Smith, *Sensory History* (Oxford, 2007), 69. Assertions about sanitary triumph in this period are thoroughly Eurocentric.

²⁶ Georges Vigarello, *Concepts of Cleanliness: Changing Attitudes in France since the Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, 1988). For further elaboration of this argument, see Virginia Smith, *Clean: A History of Personal Hygiene and Purity* (Oxford, 2007), esp. chaps. 9 and 10.

²⁷ Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant*, chap. 9. Cf. Holly Dugan, "Coriolanus and the 'Rank-Scented Meinie': Smelling Rank in Early Modern London," in Amanda Bailey and Roze Hentschell, eds., *Masculinity and the Metropolis of Vice, 1550–1650* (Basingstoke, 2010), 139–159.

²⁸ Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (Oxford, 1995), chaps. 4–6; Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life*, paperback ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1999); Vincent Vinikas, *Soft Soap, Hard Sell: American Hygiene in an Age of Advertisement* (Ames, Iowa, 1992); Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York, 1989), 95–96, 134–136.

²⁹ Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (Garden City, N.Y., 1966), 45. See also Margaret Mead and Rhoda Métraux, eds., *The Study of Culture at a Distance* (Chicago, 1953), 163–166.

³⁰ Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott, *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London, 1994), 78–84.

³¹ Graham M. S. Dann and Jens Kristian Steen Jacobsen, "Tourism Smellsapes," *Tourism Geographies* 5, no. 1 (2003): 9.

and for that matter imperialist, racist, and/or Orientalist, stereotype that “simpler societies” lived amid stench and squalor. It says little about the actual smellscape of the past.³² As these stereotypical assumptions are so widespread, it is worth emphasizing that the stench of excrement was probably most intense in historical settings marked by poverty and a rapid shift to urban living—moments and cultures better understood as experiencing or entering modernity than as immured in some “primitive” state. The ecological conditions that led to the Great Stink of London in 1858, for instance, were substantially produced by the spread of that modern convenience the water closet.³³ Claims that the impulse to deodorize originated in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries also ignore the many campaigns against environmental stench in earlier periods. Premodern urban and medical historians have demonstrated just how unhealthy foul odors were thought to be in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, and how strenuously local and public authorities, not to mention individual households, sought to combat them through systematic cleansing and fumigation and through the control of malodorous trades.³⁴ Their findings call into question the usual portrayal of Enlightenment hygiene policies as a fresh departure.³⁵

Furthermore, to suggest that nineteenth- and twentieth-century sanitary developments amounted to a “total war against smells” on the part of modernity is thoroughly misleading, because the modern (however defined) embraced and emitted so many of them.³⁶ Perfumes, for instance, became more affordable and widespread in nineteenth-century Europe.³⁷ There was certainly a shift toward lighter scents, ones

³² On medievalism, see Paul H. Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant* (Stanford, Calif., 1999), pt. 3; Annmarie Adams, “The Healthy Victorian City: The Old London Street at the International Health Exhibition of 1884,” in Zeynep Çelik, Diane Favro, and Richard Ingersoll, eds., *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space* (Berkeley, Calif., 1994), 203–212. On race, see Anne McClintock, “Soft-Soaping Empire: Commodity Racism and Imperial Advertising,” in George Robertson, Melinda Mash, Lisa Tickner, Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, and Tim Putnam, eds., *Travellers’ Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (London, 1994), 133–154; Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham, N.C., 1996); Warwick Anderson, “Excremental Colonialism: Public Health and the Poetics of Pollution,” *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 3 (1995): 640–669. On Orientalism, see Catherine Delmas, “Saveurs et senteurs de l’Orient dans *Le quatuor d’Alexandrie* de Lawrence Durrell,” in Paul Carmignani, Jean-Yves Laurichesse, and Joël Thomas, eds., *Saveurs, senteurs: Le goût de la Méditerranée* (Perpignan, 1998), 425–435.

³³ On this, see Leslie B. Wood, *The Restoration of the Tidal Thames* (Bristol, 1982), 17–24; Bill Luckin, *Pollution and Control: A Social History of the Thames in the Nineteenth Century* (Bristol, 1986), chap. 1.

³⁴ Jo Wheeler, “Stench in Sixteenth-Century Venice,” in Alexander Cowan and Jill Steward, eds., *The City and the Senses: Urban Culture since 1500* (Aldershot, 2007), 25–38; Renato Sansa, “L’odore del contagio: Ambiente urbano e prevenzione delle epidemie nella prima età moderna,” *Medicina e storia* 3 (2002): 83–108; John Henderson, “‘La schifezza, madre della corruzione’: Peste e società nella Firenze della prima età moderna, 1630–1631,” *Medicina e storia* 2 (2001): 23–56; Mark S. R. Jenner, “Curare l’ambiente senza dottori? Igiene pubblica a Londra nella prima età moderna,” *Storia urbana* 112 (2006): 17–37; Joëlle Ducos, “L’air corrompu dans les traités de peste,” in Sylvie Bazu-Tacchella, Daniëlle Quéruel, and Évelyne Samama, eds., *Air, miasmes et contagion: Les épidémies dans l’Antiquité et au Moyen Âge* (Langres, 2001), 87–104.

³⁵ For more on this, see Jenner, “Curare l’ambiente senza dottori?”; and Mark Jenner, “Death, Decomposition and Dechristianisation? Public Health and Church Burial in Eighteenth-Century England,” *English Historical Review* 120, no. 487 (2005): 615–632.

³⁶ Bauman, “The Sweet Scent of Decomposition,” 25.

³⁷ Eugénie Briot, “De l’*Eau Impériale aux Violettes du Czar: Le jeu social des élégances olfactives dans le Paris du XIXe siècle*,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 55, no. 1 (2008): 28–49. See also Briot, “Le parfum au XIXe siècle, entre luxe et industrie” (paper presented at the Colloque sur l’économie du luxe en France et en Italie du Comité franco-italien d’histoire économique [AFHE-SISE], Lille, May 4–5, 2007), <http://lodel.ehess.fr/afhe/docannexe.php?id=450>.

based on floral odors rather than musk, but this distanced commercial scent from signs and traces of the bodily; it did not disavow perfumery *tout court*.³⁸ Reminiscing about the “smells of days gone by,” contributors to a Manchester local history forum in 2006–2008 recalled the smells of road tar, of newly painted buses and steam trains, and of factories making jam, soft drinks, cough medicines, and biscuits, evoking a city that in the mid- and later twentieth century was full of modern and specifically industrial smells.³⁹ All too often, historians’ talk of deodorization unhelpfully confuses the removal of *particular* scents, notably fecal odors and the smells of human sweat, with the removal of *all* smells.

Indeed, as estimates of the number of odors discernible to humans vary between 10,000 and infinity, the way in which the histories of stench and of hygiene dominate the historiography of smell seems excessively to restrict Clío’s nose.⁴⁰ There are many unexplored themes within the history of odors, and at least as many ways to link the subject to wider histories of cosmology, consumption, and the environment. Kari Telle, for instance, has found that in areas of rural Indonesia, theft is said to produce “a foul smell” that envelops the community as an olfactible sign of the violation of proper neighborly relations.⁴¹ Many groups of people have commonly employed odors *actively* in order to demarcate and regulate space and time, not least in religious observance. As Susan Harvey has shown, the early Christian Church was initially extremely austere in its liturgical and ritual use of aromatics, distinguishing itself from the sacrificial and associated incense-burning practices of other Mediterranean religions. However, over the fourth and fifth centuries, it reodorized its devotions so that its services included abundant censuring.⁴²

Although deodorizing powders and pastes were certainly at the forefront of mass commodity culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, other consumer goods filled the air.⁴³ In English novels of the 1860s, Janice Carlisle tells us, the odors of gin and geraniums, soap and sherry, were described and evoked in a precise and variegated osmology of social distinction; in the same decade, Charles Dickens catalogued City of London churches according to their various scents.⁴⁴ One could

³⁸ Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant*, chaps. 11 and 12. On “cette décorporéisation,” see Corbin, *Historien du sensible*, 63.

³⁹ Manchester Forums, Manchester Local History, “Smells of Days Gone By,” <http://www.aidan.co.uk/forums/showthread.php?t=404>. Olfactory tourism was recommended in Sam Lambert, ed., *London, Night and Day*, 4th ed., revised (London, 1955), 89–90.

⁴⁰ This bias is partly because protests about and inquiries into foul airs and stygian stinks generally leave more archival traces than benign fragrances, but it also disconcertingly recalls Edmund Burke’s claim when discussing the sublime that “no smells . . . can produce a grand sensation, except . . . intolerable stench.” Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, in T. O. McLoughlin and James T. Boulton, eds., *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, vol. 1: *The Early Writings* (Oxford, 1997), 252. For estimates of the number of odors discernible by humans, see Trygg Engen, *The Perception of Odors* (New York, 1982), 99; Lyall Watson, *Jacobson’s Organ and the Remarkable Nature of Smell* (New York, 2000), x; Burr, *The Emperor of Scent*, 398–399.

⁴¹ Kari G. Telle, “The Smell of Death: Theft, Disgust and Ritual Practice in Central Lombok, Indonesia,” *Social Analysis* 46, no. 3 (2002): 75–104.

⁴² Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley, Calif., 2006). More generally, see David Howes, “Olfaction and Transition: An Essay on the Ritual Uses of Smell,” *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 24, no. 3 (1987): 398–416.

⁴³ Vinikas, *Soft Soap, Hard Sell*; Susan Strasser, *From Waste to Want: A Social History of Trash* (New York, 2000).

⁴⁴ Janice Carlisle, *Common Scents: Comparative Encounters in High-Victorian Fiction* (Oxford, 2004). She shows that the excremental osmology of public health tracts was largely absent from novels. Charles

doubtless produce similarly precise delineations of the social distribution, significance, and semiotic function of smells in many other genres, periods, and historical contexts. Moreover, the significance of particular odors changed over time. Tobacco, for instance, impacted pungently upon its surroundings as it became a global commodity. It appeared onstage in one early-seventeenth-century play as a figure accompanying the character Olfactus.⁴⁵ From the first, critics condemned its “incurable stinke” and “stinking smoke,” a theme in anti-smoking discourse to this day, while its advocates celebrated its “aromatic” quality.⁴⁶ However, contests over the status of a smell were not peculiar to the history of this herb. Coffee, too, was denounced on olfactory grounds. In December 1657, the wardmote inquest of the parish of St. Dunstan’s in the West in the City of London presented James Farr, a barber, “for makeing & selling of a Drinke called Coffee whereby in makeing the same he annoyeth his neighb[ou]rs by evill smells.”⁴⁷ Such a complaint was inconceivable by the early eighteenth century, when coffeehouses were common in English urban life.⁴⁸ As the historian Edward Hatton wrote of this incident in 1708, “who would then have thought *London* would ever have had near 3000 such Nusances, and that *Coffee* would have been (as now) so much Drank by the best of Quality, and Physicians.”⁴⁹

The process of habituation that Hatton noted—the way in which smells not only become unremarkable and thus disappear from the historical record, but also can more or less cease to be perceived—brings us to a crux in the history of smell more specifically. Many, probably most, of its historians do not try to calculate the concentrations of olfactible chemicals in a particular place and time as did the environmental archaeologists working on the Jorvik reconstruction.⁵⁰ “Smell is cultural” was the central claim of *Aroma*, the influential historical overview of the sense by Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott.⁵¹ Smells, such scholars argue, are perceptual entities. Ontologically, they come into being in the period nose of the perceiver. The historian of smell therefore generally sees her- or himself as engaged in a form of social or cultural history, exploring the history of mentalities.

Dickens, “*The Uncommercial Traveller*” and *Other Papers, 1859–70*, ed. Michael Slater and John Drew (London, 2000), 115.

⁴⁵ T. Tomkis, *Lingua; or, The Combat of the Tongue, and the Five Senses for Superiority* (London, 1607), sig. [H4r–v].

⁴⁶ James VI and I, *A Counterblaste to Tobacco*, in *Minor Prose Works of King James VI and I*, ed. James Craigie (Edinburgh, 1982), 98–99; Elizabeth Foyster, “Sensory Experiences: Smells, Sounds and Touch,” in Elizabeth Foyster and Christopher A. Whatley, eds., *A History of Everyday Life in Scotland, 1600 to 1800* (Edinburgh, 2010), 224; Matthew Hilton, *Smoking in British Popular Culture, 1800–2000: Perfect Pleasures* (Manchester, 2000), esp. 34.

⁴⁷ Guildhall Library, London, MS 3018/1, fol. 140.

⁴⁸ On their diffusion, see Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven, Conn., 2005); Markman Ellis, *The Coffee-House: A Cultural History* (London, 2005).

⁴⁹ Edward Hatton, *A New View of London; or, An Ample Account of That City, in . . . Eight Sections*, 2 vols. (London, 1708), 1: 30.

⁵⁰ Their reconstruction of “the ambient environment” was based on the analysis of no less than 12.5 tons of soil samples and 3 million animal bones; Addyman, “Jorvik,” 44–45. László Bartosiewicz, “‘There’s Something Rotten in the State . . .’: Bad Smells in Antiquity,” *European Journal of Archaeology* 6, no. 2 (2003): 175–195, presents less exhaustive and rather less convincing research in the same vein.

⁵¹ Classen, Howes, and Synnott, *Aroma*, 3.

Their project is the reconstruction of the history of the sense of smell, of the classification and perceptions of odors and of their cultural meanings.⁵²

Nevertheless, this second historiographical tradition is at least as fond of narratives of deodorization as is the more materialist strand surveyed above. The pioneering early- and mid-twentieth-century historians of sensibility whose models still shape the field maintained that the sense of smell declined as cultures became more complex and more ocularcentric. Norbert Elias's 1930s account of the civilizing process argued that among "more civilized men," the eye acquires "a mounting significance . . . as the mediator of pleasure with the growing moderation of the affects." In this process, he hypothesized, "the sense of smell . . . comes to be restricted as something animal-like," and the ability "to distinguish . . . sounds [and] scents" is reduced.⁵³ "The sixteenth century did not see first," wrote the Annaliste historian of sensibilities Lucien Febvre in the 1940s, "it sniffed the air." Its poets, physicians, and philosophers, he argued, used and were attuned to "a whole set of acoustical and olfactory images that are somewhat surprising to us."⁵⁴ Writing two decades later, Robert Mandrou concurred, stating that in Renaissance France, "smell and taste, the most affective of the senses, were much more developed than they are with us."⁵⁵ Although scholars now are often more cautious in their formulations, many agree that the cultural significance of olfaction has declined in modern times. "There is no doubt," wrote Mark Smith, "that modernity helped deaden smell in favour of sight." Constance Classen is even more emphatic: "no sense," she declared in the early 1990s, "has suffered such a reversal of cultural fortune as smell."⁵⁶

Historians, sociologists, and psychologists have offered three general explanations for this supposed diminution of the olfactory. Some have argued that the significance of, and attention to, smell has declined as human society has detached itself from its natural surroundings; others have maintained that intellectual and/or technological shifts made visual skills more important and olfactory ones less so; others suggest simply that different societies have different ratios between the senses.

Mandrou and Elias exemplify the first school of thought. The former maintained that the cultural importance of olfaction during the sixteenth century indicated how early modern people "lived close to nature"; the latter argued that from the end of the Middle Ages, the significance of the non-visual senses declined as nature became

⁵² The conceptualization of the history of the senses in Anglophone countries was not helped when the subtitle of Corbin's seminal book *L'odorat et l'imaginaire social XVIIIe-XIXe siècles* was rendered as *Odor and the French Social Imagination. The Sense of Smell* would have been a more accurate translation. Corbin subsequently emphasized that he did not write a history of odors; Corbin, *Historien du sensible*, 58. A useful overview of the history of odor classification is sketched in William McCartney, *Olfaction and Odours: An Osphrésiological Essay* (Berlin, 1968), 111–126.

⁵³ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1977–1982), 2: 297–298, 1: 203. Nearly four decades later, Elias noted that "the advancing thresholds of shame and embarrassment in relation to smells, particularly bodily odours, in the course of the civilizing process, perhaps requires closer examination"; Elias, "The Civilizing of Parents," in Johan Goudsblom and Stephen Mennell, eds., *The Norbert Elias Reader* (Oxford, 1998), 272 n. 8.

⁵⁴ Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. Beatrice Gottlieb (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), quotations from 432 and 431.

⁵⁵ Robert Mandrou, *Introduction to Modern France, 1500–1640: An Essay in Historical Psychology*, trans. R. E. Hallmark (New York, 1976), 55.

⁵⁶ Smith, *Sensory History*, 63; Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and across Cultures* (London, 1993), 15.

less threatening.⁵⁷ Both linked olfactory sensitivity to a lack of control over the emotions, and seem to have assumed that the sense of smell is inherently animalistic or instinctual and thus inclined to atrophy with civilization. Such thinking was strongly influenced by Freud's suggestion, first in his discussion of the Rat Man and then in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, that humankind's adoption of an erect posture led to the "depreciation of his sense of smell."⁵⁸ The image of premodern society as emotionally unstable and instinctively violent has been subjected to withering criticism in recent years.⁵⁹ Eliasian and Annaliste claims that societies that were closer to nature were therefore more sensitive to smells can now be recognized as versions of the theory that there have been human societies that inhabited the world in a state of unmediated natural sensuality, a model of the olfactory, rather than the ecological, Indian.⁶⁰

Not all stories of smell's decline invoke an origin myth of olfactory oneness with the natural environment. Various technologies have been presented as undermining the importance of olfaction: writing, printing, perspectival representation, and even urban living have all been judged to have placed a premium on sight that led to the diminution of smell and the other senses.⁶¹ Recent histories of olfaction are less schematic. They generally agree that linear models of the historical development of the sensorium are oversimplified, and strongly reject claims that ancient, medieval, and early modern Europe was not predominantly ocularcentric. Nevertheless, because they center their work on whether there was a dramatic turning point in the history of the senses, a moment when smell declined and sight came to dominate, they perpetuate this old problematic even as they conclude that there was no such sensory caesura in European and American history.⁶²

Other scholars have been less technologically deterministic and less concerned with tracing change over time. Some anthropological accounts have suggested that each culture has a particular configuration of the senses that should be described ethnographically. "Every culture has its own sensory model based on the relative importance it gives to the different senses," declared Constance Classen in 1990.⁶³ David Howes writes that is "possible to think of cultures as contrasting in terms of

⁵⁷ Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 2: 297–298; Mandrou, *Introduction to Modern France*, 55.

⁵⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in Freud, *Civilization, Society and Religion*, ed. Albert Dickson (Harmondsworth, 1985), 288–289, 295–297, quotation from 296; Freud, *Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis*, in Freud, *Case Histories II*, ed. Angela Richards (Harmondsworth, 1984), 126–127.

⁵⁹ For particularly trenchant criticism of this school of historiography, see Barbara H. Rosenwein, ed., *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1998).

⁶⁰ William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York, 1995), 69–90; Shepard Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York, 1999); and Philip J. Deloria, "Natural Indians and Identities of Modernity," in Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, Conn., 1998), 95–127, offer interesting parallels here.

⁶¹ Jütte, *A History of the Senses*, chaps. 8 and 9. This list does not exhaust the range of factors invoked: Febvre emphasized the development of optics; Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century*, 432.

⁶² Smith, *Sensory History*, is an excellent example of this paradox. Elsewhere I have termed this hunt for a pivotal moment the search for the mirror phase of Western history; Mark S. R. Jenner, "Civilization and Deodorization? Smell in Early Modern English Culture," in Peter Burke, Brian Howard Harrison, and Paul Slack, eds., *Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas* (Oxford, 2000), 143.

⁶³ Constance Classen, "Sweet Colors, Fragrant Songs: Sensory Models of the Andes and the Amazon," *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 4 (1990): 722.

the distinctive patterns to the *interplay of the senses* they present,” further arguing that one can approach different cultures through their “sense ratios.”⁶⁴ Such models may be fruitful ones for historians to develop, but this terminology—deriving ultimately from the work of Walter Ong and Marshall McLuhan—can leave readers with a homogenized image of culture; it gives the impression that the sensory regimes of different historical contexts might be represented as pie charts setting out what percentage of a period’s sensory information was provided by olfaction, by touch, and so on. It can also misleadingly imply that the history of the senses has been a zero-sum game in which smell or some other sense or senses must diminish if (say) sight increases.⁶⁵

These stories of rise or decline generally treat the senses as physical capacities that were sharpened or dulled in each historical period. Other cultural historians argue that to write the history of smell, one should study the physiological models by which olfaction was understood and through which it was experienced. Changes in these understandings, such scholars imply, provide the chronological sequence by which to emplot smell’s history. There has been considerably less research into the intellectual history of the sense of smell than into theories of vision or hearing, and this is not the occasion to attempt comprehensively to remedy that neglect. Nevertheless, there have clearly been shifts in the understanding of scents and scenting. Few people today would seriously entertain the possibility that the smell of a recently snuffed candle could cause death or miscarriage, an opinion found in European natural philosophical and medical writing from the second to the eighteenth centuries.⁶⁶ From ancient to relatively modern times, odors were commonly thought to have a direct physical effect upon whoever inhaled them because they were directly absorbed into the body. Within physiological models common from classical antiquity into the seventeenth century, odors were conceived of as fumes that were imbibed by a part of the brain; olfaction was thus a form of ingestion by which nutrients or poisons were conveyed into the body.⁶⁷ This understanding never commanded universal assent (not least because there was considerable debate about whether smell was an immaterial quality of particular airs or a more substantial entity).⁶⁸ Still, one might expect that attitudes to odors would have become less fraught after the anatomical work of Conrad Schneider and others demonstrated in the mid-seventeenth century that airs did not penetrate the front of the brain.⁶⁹ Yet although after

⁶⁴ David Howes, “Introduction: ‘To Summon All the Senses,’” in Howes, *The Varieties of Sensory Experience*, 8; Howes, “Sensorial Anthropology,” *ibid.*, 167.

⁶⁵ Jenner, “Civilization and Deodorization?,” offers a fuller critique of this style of analysis. See also Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (2000), 281–285.

⁶⁶ *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa’s Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum—A Critical Text*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1975–1988), 2: 1303.

⁶⁷ Richard Palmer, “In Bad Odour: Smell and Its Significance in Medicine from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century,” in W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter, eds., *Medicine and the Five Senses* (Cambridge, 1993), 61–68.

⁶⁸ Katherine Park, “The Organic Soul,” in Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner, eds., *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1988), 470–472, 474–475; Simon Kemp, “A Medieval Controversy about Odor,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 33, no. 3 (1997): 211–219.

⁶⁹ A. M. Luyendijk-Elshout, “The Cavity of the Nose in Dutch Baroque Medicine,” *Clio Medica* 8, no. 4 (1973): 296; Walter Pagel, “Medieval and Renaissance Contributions to Knowledge of the Brain and Its Functions,” in *The History and Philosophy of Knowledge of the Brain and Its Functions: An Anglo-American Symposium, London, July 15th–17th, 1957* (Oxford, 1958), 109; Pagel, *Joan Baptista van Hel-*

circa 1700 olfaction was generally thought to be nervous in nature, Enlightenment and Victorian commentary, such as Chadwick's quoted above, understood smells as having considerable, and often dangerous, effects upon the body.

Germ theory revolutionized understandings of odors. As David Barnes has shown, in the 1880s and 1890s, medics moved from a conviction that noxious stinks were lethal to a confidence that, although offensive and indicative of unhealthy conditions, they were not in themselves particularly hazardous. Crucially, however, Barnes demonstrates that there was no equivalent epistemic shift in general attitudes toward foul odors. Indeed, like other scholars of the bacteriological revolution, he finds substantial continuities in attitudes. Because they could indicate likely sites for germs and hence of disease, bad smells continued to generate considerable sanitary anxiety and activity. Bacteriology was thus laid upon, and became entwined with, older miasmatic attitudes in what he terms a "sanitary-bacteriological synthesis."⁷⁰ Evidently, scholars should not assume that changes in the scientific models of sensory perception were or are necessarily translated into equivalent transformations in subjective understandings of sensation or perception. Indeed, the way in which contemporary historians describe current biomedical understandings as how "we" understand the senses reveals a remarkable faith in the bridging of the two cultures within the academy and an ignorance of the folk physiologies of contemporary society.⁷¹

THE MORE MATERIALIST HISTORIES of smells are limited by their assumption that the disappearance of certain odors left environments empty of all smells; many of the failings of the cultural histories of olfaction stem from a similar tendency to generalize from a narrow range of case studies. They deal with smell in general and emplot a unitary history of olfaction. However, in recent years some cultural historians have begun to examine not whether odors mattered more in the past, but how and where *particular* odors mattered or were said to matter. One important strand of scholarship has drawn attention to the ways in which odor terms have been used to stigmatize social and ethnic groups in contexts ranging from the medieval Middle

mont: *Reformer of Science and Medicine* (Cambridge, 1982), 162–171; Kenneth Dewhurst, "Thomas Willis and the Foundations of British Neurology," in F. Clifford Rose and W. F. Bynum, eds., *Historical Aspects of the Neurosciences: A Festschrift for Macdonald Critchley* (New York, 1982), 334; Conrad Victor Schneider, *De Catarrhis*, 5 books (1660–1664), 2: sec. 1, chap. 20, and sec. 2, chap. 1; Richard Lower, *De Catarrhis 1672*, trans. and intro. Richard Hunter and Ida Macalpine (London, 1963), 6; Shigehisa Kuriyama, "The Forgotten Fear of Excrement," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38, no. 3 (2008): 422–424.

⁷⁰ David S. Barnes, *The Great Stink of Paris and the Nineteenth-Century Struggle against Filth and Germs* (Baltimore, 2006). Key aspects of his argument are set out in Barnes, "Scents and Sensibilities: Disgust and the Meanings of Odors in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques* 28, no. 1 (2002): 21–49; and Barnes, "Confronting Sensory Crisis in the Great Stinks of London and Paris," in William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson, eds., *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life* (Minneapolis, 2005), 103–129.

⁷¹ For the equation of modern scientific understandings and general Western ones, see C. M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven, Conn., 2006), 2, 267. Cecil G. Helman, "'Feed a Cold, Starve a Fever': Folk Models of Infection in an English Suburban Community, and Their Relation to Medical Treatment," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 2, no. 2 (1978): 107–137, remains an essential point of departure for discussions of lay understandings of the body.

East to modern Nigeria.⁷² Holly Dugan, for instance, has shown how in late medieval and early modern pageantry and drama, the metaphorical and symbolic languages of odors constructed social and sexual distinction.⁷³ In his study of slavery and segregation, Mark Smith has pushed this further, arguing not only that “stereotypes concerning black scent percolated . . . deeply into colonial society,” but also that the olfactory was extremely important within the phenomenological as well as the symbolic construction of racial categories.⁷⁴

Environmental historians, meanwhile, have uncovered the smells at the core of conflicts over pollution. Joy Parr, for example, has unpacked the perceptions of the risk presented by a heavy water plant operating on the Canadian shores of Lake Huron between the 1970s and 1990s by examining the various interpretations of the hydrogen sulfide stench that it intermittently emitted. On the California coast in the early twentieth century, it was not the smell of rotten eggs but the odor of squid and sardines that polarized opinion. Whereas the tourism industry characterized it as intolerable, advocates of the fishing industry declared it to be no more than a minor note in the smellscape of Monterey. How these competing constructions of the olfactory environment were adjudicated, Connie Chiang points out, reflected not the prevailing wind but the prevailing distribution of power.⁷⁵

Odors can signify in less expected ways. In imperial Rome, the scent of roses escaped the common philosophical condemnations of perfumery because it had become emblematic of the qualities of Italy; for the modern Greek diaspora, the smell of basil is imbued with meaning and stimulates the recollection of home.⁷⁶ In her subtle examination of the olfactory dimensions of early Christianity, Susan Harvey has explored how in the fourth and fifth centuries, incense articulated and materialized an anti-dualist theology: as the fragrant smoke was sensed and inhaled by worshippers, so “at the incarnation the divine . . . entered into matter, sanctifying . . . the whole of material existence.”⁷⁷ Jonathan Gil Harris has attributed to odors

⁷² E.g., Alexandra Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* (Notre Dame, Ind., 2007); Walter E. A. van Beek, “The Dirty Smith: Smell as a Social Frontier among the Kapsiki/Higi of North Cameroon and North-Eastern Nigeria,” *Africa* 62, no. 1 (1992): 38–58.

⁷³ Holly Dugan, “Scent of a Woman: Performing the Politics of Smell in Late Medieval and Early Modern England,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38, no. 2 (2008): 229–252.

⁷⁴ Mark M. Smith, *How Race Is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2006), quotation from 13. The link that Smith makes between the intrinsic nature of smell and its cultural uses parallels work in Indonesian anthropology, such as Telle, “The Smell of Death”; Nils Bubandt, “The Odour of Things: Smell and the Cultural Elaboration of Disgust in Eastern Indonesia,” *Ethnos* 63, no. 1 (1998): 48–80; James T. Siegel, “Images and Odors in Javanese Practices Surrounding Death,” *Indonesia* 36 (1983): 1–14.

⁷⁵ Joy Parr, “Smells Like? Sources of Uncertainty in the History of the Great Lakes Environment,” *Environmental History* 11, no. 2 (2006): 269–299; Connie Y. Chiang, “Monterey-by-the-Smell: Odors and Social Conflict on the California Coastline,” *Pacific Historical Review* 73, no. 2 (2004): 183–214. See also Stephen Mosley, *The Chimney of the World: A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester* (Cambridge, 2001); E. Melanie DuPuis, ed., *Smoke and Mirrors: The Politics and Culture of Air Pollution* (New York, 2004).

⁷⁶ Nicole Fick, “L’odeur des roses dans la Rome Impériale,” in Carmignani, Laurichesse, and Thomas, *Saveurs, senteurs*, 111–127; David E. Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory* (Oxford, 2001), chap. 3.

⁷⁷ Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, esp. 59. See also Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Why the Perfume Mattered: The Sinful Woman in Syriac Exegetical Tradition,” in Paul M. Blowers, Angela Russell Christman, David G. Hunter, and Robin Darling Young, eds., *In Dominico Eloquentia/In Lordly Eloquence: Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2002), 69–89; and Harvey, “On Holy Stench: When the Odor of Sanctity Sickness,” *Studia patristica* 35 (2001): 90–101.

an even more potent capacity for actualization, arguing that the sulfurous smell of firecrackers used onstage could have conjured up memories of gunpowder plots in the early audiences of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, evoking the experience of an explosion that had not actually taken place.⁷⁸ Further studies will doubtless lead to an even more diverse cultural historical osmology that will decisively take us away from attempts to construct linear narratives of smell and the other senses in favor of a more complex historical anthropology of odors.

YET FOR ALL THE VARIETY, vividness, and interest of this impressive scholarship, there are problems with its assumptions and framework. Most of this historiography treats the history of smell either as part of the history of the environment or as part of the history of human culture. The two approaches stand on different sides of a methodological canyon that marks the nature/culture boundary. Most scholars who have written about the history of smell probably self-identify more or less strongly with cultural approaches to the subject, perceiving statements about the biology of sense perception as not only anti-historicist but also anti-historical.⁷⁹ Yet when one examines this "soft" cultural historiography more closely, one finds the same polarity at its core. Indeed, by insisting that smell "is . . . not simply a biological and psychological phenomenon" but rather "cultural," social and cultural historians and anthropologists end up reinscribing precisely this nature/culture divide. A second strand in the same literature draws this distinction in a slightly more sophisticated way. This body of scholarship writes about how sensation—sometimes characterized as sense data—is mediated, organized, and/or interpreted in a variety of culturally and historically specific ways, through grids of meaning, or through culturally specific lenses, or according to the perceptual lexicon of this or that society or class. For example, in their introduction to the 1990 collection *Medicine and the Five Senses*, W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter described the contributors as wrestling with the question of "how . . . the faculties of the mind convert the raw data of the senses into something like coherence."⁸⁰ This approach again depends upon a distinction between the physical (understood as non-historical) and the cultural (which processes information in a historically specific and variable way). Moreover, as the anthropologist Tim Ingold has shown in his impressive overview and critique of this literature, these rhetorics and models depend upon and reaffirm a dichotomy between the human subject and the environment that she or he occupies.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Jonathan Gil Harris, "The Smell of *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2007): 465–486. Also on smell and the imaginary, see Clare Brant, "Fume and Perfume: Some Eighteenth-Century Uses of Smell," *Journal of British Studies* 43, no. 4 (2004): 444–463.

⁷⁹ The parameters and limitations of such debates can be gauged by comparing Peter Charles Hoffer, *Sensory Worlds in Early America* (Baltimore, 2003), and Mark M. Smith, "Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 4 (2007): 841–858.

⁸⁰ Classen, Howes, and Synnott, *Aroma*, 3. For similar entanglements, see Smith, *Sensory History*, esp. 3–5; W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter, "Introduction," in Bynum and Porter, *Medicine and the Five Senses*, 2. Stuart Clark's learned and sophisticated *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford, 2007) is based upon a comparable set of distinctions between vision and visuality developed from the work of Norman Bryson.

⁸¹ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, esp. chap. 9, "Culture, Perception and Cognition."

This distinction is singularly inappropriate for the history of smell. As we have seen, in many historical settings odors have been understood as being incorporated, as being taken into the body, and as thereby transforming the person. In other words, the human/environment boundary was neither absolute nor impermeable. When Michel de Montaigne wrote that odors affected his animal spirits and consequently his state of mind, he was expressing an entirely conventional early modern sentiment.⁸² In the twentieth century, workers in factories that emitted hydrogen sulfide recognized that they would be changed physically by the inhalation of this gas—it would reduce their ability to discern smells.⁸³ All this points toward a richer, quasi-ecological, history of smell and the senses that examines simultaneously the person or people perceiving *and* the environment that they inhabited.

Furthermore, certain of the presuppositions built into the structure of this forum need to be challenged. Although the contributors were not asked to adopt a preferred emblem to symbolize their subject, this group of essays does look a bit like a twenty-first-century equivalent of those sets of allegorical depictions of the five senses that European artists used to produce.⁸⁴ (Smell was depicted as, among other things, a bunch of flowers, a keen-nosed hound, and a vulture.)⁸⁵ A number of studies already acquaint us with other, different, historical and cultural conceptions of the senses: medieval and early modern European authors debated whether speech should be reckoned a sense, and according to Ian Ritchie, the Hausa language contains only one word for all the non-visual senses.⁸⁶ We risk naturalizing the five-sense model of perception through the pentad organization of our contributions, which could easily be taken as implying that, although the interrelations and relative significance of the senses have varied through history, sensorially unimpaired human beings have invariably perceived the world in a fivefold way.⁸⁷ In the wake of Judith Butler's theorizing of sex and gender, various historians have argued that scholars should be tracing the changing articulation and establishment of sexual difference rather than mapping the changing meanings attributed to physical difference.⁸⁸ In a similar vein, one could argue that, rather than producing histories of smell, taste, hearing, touch, and sight, we should be investigating how and when the five-sense model has been established and how it has been maintained.

⁸² Michel de Montaigne, "On Smells," in Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans M. A. Screech (Harmondsworth, 1993), 353–354.

⁸³ Parr, "Smells Like?"

⁸⁴ On the iconography of the five senses, see Louise Vinge, *The Five Senses: Studies in a Literary Tradition* (Lund, 1975); Frank Kermode, "The Banquet of Sense" (1961), reprinted in Kermode, *Shakespeare, Spenser, Donne: Renaissance Essays* (London, 1971), 84–115; Carl Nordenfalk, "The Five Senses in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 48 (1985): 1–22; Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, ed., *Immagini del sentire: I cinque sensi nell'arte* (Cremona, 1996).

⁸⁵ Michel Pastoureau, "Le bestiaire des cinq sens (XIIe–XVIe siècle)," *Micrologus* 10 (2002): 133–145.

⁸⁶ Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, esp. chap. 1; Ian Ritchie, "Fusion of the Faculties: A Study of the Language of the Senses in Hausaland," in Howes, *The Varieties of Sensory Experience*, 192–202, esp. 194.

⁸⁷ Although a number of authors associated with the Berg series *Sensory Formations* and the journal *Senses and Society* have highlighted the importance of intersensoriality, the series of readers replicates the fivefold classification.

⁸⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990); Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London, 1993); Nelly Oudshoorn, *Beyond the Natural Body: An Archaeology of Sex Hormones* (London, 1994); Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London, 1991).

At a less abstract and more significant level, historians need to explore the senses as a form of practice, which is both situated and intersensorial. Constructing or examining taxonomies of the senses does not reveal very much about how sensory perception *worked* in particular historical settings.⁸⁹ This is perhaps especially the case with the sense of smell, which has commonly been recognized as intimately bound up with taste. Moreover, as the cultural geographer Douglas Porteous made clear in his pioneering discussion of smellscape, odors in and of themselves provide very little information about their origin and can rarely, if ever, be considered without assistance from the other senses.⁹⁰ This observation is borne out by a fresh examination of Jean-Noël Hallé's 1790 reports to the Société Royale de Médecine on the condition of the Seine and its banks. Alain Corbin remarked that "the idea of writing a book about the perception of odors" came to him while he was reading these pages, claiming, "There is no reference anywhere in the text to anything visual." He was mistaken. Hallé's account records a good number of visual impressions as well as information derived from his sense of touch. He wrote, for example, of mud that was "black and smelled bad," and found that past the Arsenal sewer the bank was formed from earth that was "soft, deep, greyish on the surface, black when you stir it, when it gives off a bad odour."⁹¹

That Hallé noted the findings of several senses is hardly surprising: most perception is intensely intersensory. Psychological studies find not only that information derived from one sense strongly influences what is perceived by another, but also that perception is usually based upon the correlation of "multisensorially determined sensations."⁹² Writing on the acoustemology and the sound world of the Kaluli people of Bosavi, a forest area of Papua New Guinea, the anthropologist Steven Feld has described how their "vision-sound interplays are . . . locationally intersensual to smell," with the sound of a creek by sago palms cognitively entangled with the smell of the sago.⁹³ Historians can profitably extend and refine this style of analysis by analyzing the roles of smelling within the bodily repertoires of particular occupations or within specific ways of being in the world.⁹⁴ In the process, we will cease to describe

⁸⁹ Sarah Pink, "Sensing Cittàslow: Slow Living and the Constitution of the Sensory City," *Senses and Society* 2, no. 1 (2007): 72, offers some very apposite comments on this point. Mark S. R. Jenner, "Tasting Lichfield, Touching China: Sir John Floyer's Senses," *Historical Journal* 63, no. 3 (2010): 647–670, addresses these themes.

⁹⁰ J. Douglas Porteous, "Smellscape," *Progress in Human Geography* 9, no. 3 (1985): 359–360.

⁹¹ Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant*, 1; M. Hallé, "Procès-verbal de la visite faite le long des deux rives de la rivière de Seine . . . le 14 février 1790," *Histoire de la Société de Médecine* 10 (1789 [sic]): lxxxvii, my translation. Such examples can be multiplied.

⁹² Charles Spence, "Making Sense of Touch: A Multisensory Approach to the Perception of Objects," in Elizabeth Pye, ed., *The Power of Touch: Handling Objects in Museum and Heritage Contexts* (Walnut Creek, Calif., 2007), 45; M. Luisa Demattè, Daniel Sanabria, Rachel Sugarman, and Charles Spence, "Cross-Modal Interactions between Olfaction and Touch," *Chemical Senses* 31, no. 4 (2006): 291–300; Gil Morrot, Frédéric Brochet, and Denis Dubourdiu, "The Color of Odors," *Brain and Language* 79, no. 2 (2001): 309–320.

⁹³ Steven Feld, "Waterfalls of Song: An Acoustemology of Place Resounding in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea," in Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, eds., *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe, N.Mex., 1996), 99.

⁹⁴ For very different case studies in these veins, see Jonathan Reinartz, "Uncommon Scents: Smell and Victorian England," in Bronwen Martin and Felizitas Ringham, eds., *Sense and Scent: An Exploration of Olfactory Meaning* (Dublin, 2003), 129–148; Michael R. McVaugh, "Smells and the Medieval Surgeon," *Micrologus* 10 (2002): 113–132; Bruce Curtis, "'I can tell by the way you smell': Dietetics, Smell, Social Theory," *The Senses and Society* 3, no. 1 (2008): 5–22; Piero Camporesi, *The Incorruptible*

or even to reverse the deodorization of the past, but delineate instead the totality of bodily techniques in various historical moments.

Flesh: Bodily Mutation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore (Cambridge, 1988). More generally, see Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, pt. 2.

Mark Jenner is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of History at the University of York. He is completing a book on notions of cleanliness and dirt in early modern England. Author of numerous articles, he has co-edited *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London* (Manchester University Press, 2000) and *Medicine and the Market in England and Its Colonies c. 1450–c. 1850* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).