

Making Scents of Transition: Smellscapes and the Everyday in ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Urban Poland

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Abstract

In this article, the growing body of literature on transition within central and eastern Europe is developed by exploring how discussing the senses may illuminate the experience of change to post-socialism for urban dwellers. After situating the study within the rich ethnographic heritage on urban transition, the key tenets of ‘geographies of smell’ are outlined as a means of inquiry which emphasises the lived, sensually embodied experience of transition. The empirical study is focused upon the interrogation of the meanings created by, and attached to, olfactory experience in contemporary Poland, discussing three motifs that highlight the symbolic and transformative role of smell in relation to transition. In understanding smell as playing an active role in the creation of meaning, not only are current debates surrounding geographies of smell extended, but it is argued that addressing the relatively neglected sensual dimension of the social provides an avenue into more nuanced dimensions of urban transition.

Introduction

Across Europe, the transformation from socialist to capitalist-driven political and socio-cultural systems has yielded valuable insights concerning transition from a range of disciplines including economics, geography, political theory, culture studies and social-legal studies. Concerned with issues as diverse as market shifts and the labour

market (Ericson, 2002; Ashwin, 1999), identity (Krzyzanowski, 2008), gender (Pavlenko, 2002; Szalai, 2000) and rural land reform (Perrotta, 1998), it is clear that effects are not purely economic but impact citizens in their everyday lives. As Hörschelmann and Stenning argue, in researching post-socialist change, the

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engagement with processes and meanings of transformation as it is lived, experienced and negotiated everyday is of crucial importance. It provides a most important counterpoint to the bird's eye perspective of transitology and to neoliberal ideology (Hörschelmann and Stenning, 2008, p. 343).

This extant corpus of accounts argues that

economic blueprints must not be decontextualised: it is essential to analysis of *practices*, what people actually do, and to explore how this is shaped by the beliefs they hold and the social relationships they maintain (Hann, 2002, p. 29; original emphasis).

Subsequently, a rich tapestry of ethnographically informed commentaries in countries across central and eastern Europe now exists, demonstrating how the consequences of major political and economic reform have dramatic effects on family structure and the home (Thelen, 2003; Drazin, 2002), work ethic and labour relations (Kaneff, 2002; Ashwin, 1999) and the dynamics surrounding religion (Bohlman, 2000; Buzalka, 2007). Key to these discussions has been how interfaces between 'old' and 'new' are shaped and negotiated in both ideologies and logics of practices that influence the social.¹ This involves not only an acknowledgement of changes, but sensitivity to the weaving of socialist and post-socialist ideals and practices that highlight the vein of continuity often overlooked in other forms of transition studies (Berdahl, 2000, p. 3).

Our particular interest here is in how these changes, continuities and differences can be understood through exploring the sensual dimension of the everyday, in particular, smell. Some studies of the circadian experience of transition have highlighted how the body has discursive, symbolic and material significance in retaining and renegotiating pre- and post-1989 values. For example, in his ethnographic industrial

anthropology of coal miners and chemical workers in post-socialist Romania, Kideckel (2008) uses ideas of the body and embodiment as a way of achieving a richer understanding of transition from socialism and capitalism, particularly in relation to the contention that "postsocialism hurts" (p. 6). Similarly, Roubal (2003) has discussed how the gymnast's physique embodied the desired characteristics of a socialist society, whilst Skultans (1999) explores how reference to body episodes and illness is used as 'evidence' by a Latvian woman discussing life under the regimes of the state. However, this focus on the materiality has yet to lead to an exploration of how both change and continuity within transitional spaces in central and eastern European countries are understood and experienced through the senses, and how this may extend our appreciation of renegotiating the social within these countries.

In this article, we explore smell as both a signifier and a material experience in order to develop our understanding of transition in urban settings, through building a

greater awareness of the divergent ways in which transition is lived, experienced and interpreted by locally embedded social actors (Hörschelmann and Stenning, 2008, p. 345).

Taking our inspiration from the extant literature within this sub-field of ethnographies of transition, we explore how smell can be used to understand urban phenomena, using the case study of Polish city dwellers. First, we critically review recent debates on the local experience of transition and introduce the notion of sensually exploring this terrain, discussing how a focus on the geographies of smell can help to illuminate the embodied, material experience of transition. We then introduce our research context, after which follows an analysis of three olfactory themes that formed part of respondents' dialogue in making sense of change in Poland as they

have lived (and continue to live) through the transition. In light of our findings, we not only situate our discussion within debates concerned with urban transition, but call for a sensitivity to smell within research agendas, suggesting ways in which this may provide an avenue into the more subtle and subliminal dimensions of the social.

The Lived Experience of Transition

When referring to countries that saw a fall of socialism between 1989 and 1991, the broad brush term CEECs (central and eastern European countries) might incorrectly imply that transition is a similar experience or pattern of events across a range of geographical populations. Similarly, there is a danger of presenting this transformation as one that is wholly progressive and working towards a model of 'civil' society. However, to be seduced into such narratives either devoid of negative dimensions or documenting a complete transformation to capitalist-driven modes of living would be a misrepresentation of the daily experiences of those who are living through these processes of change. Of course, political reforms have brought a number of benefits in terms of democratisation, potential mobility and civic freedoms, such as freedom of speech and association. Nevertheless, in many cases, alignment with 'first world' economic benchmarks and practices has meant that post-socialism has resulted in levels of poverty, inequalities and uncertainties that may not have been present under socialist regimes (Śliwa, 2008). As a consequence of the introduction of neo-liberal reforms aimed at the creation of stable economies organised along the principles of free markets, members of post-socialist societies experienced trends previously unknown to them. The most widely felt have been the loss of jobs for many and the shift from state-guaranteed employment to the reduction in job security for all; changes in the

socioeconomic status of individuals, either up or down the social ladder; the polarisation of incomes; and the withdrawal of the state from providing free education, health care and a variety of other welfare benefits for its citizens. In an attempt to demonstrate how "market changes are neither neutral nor innocent but ... have their own involuntary effects" (Burawoy *et al.*, 2000, p. 60), ethnographies of transition have helped to reveal the impact of economic and political reforms post-1989 upon individuals and groups in the affected countries (Burawoy *et al.*, 2000; Dunn, 2004; Hann, 2002; Mandel and Humphrey, 2002). For example, Burawoy explored the experiences of workers in a Russian furniture company over seven years, not only taking into account labour relations, but the effect of declining industry on the domestic sphere, with new strategies of economic survival being a necessity for vast numbers of Russian workers (Burawoy *et al.*, 2000; Burawoy and Krotov, 1992). Similarly, Verdery's (2003) work on rights and land-ownership explores the interplay between state and private relationships in Romania and, in doing so, unveils how concepts such as 'property' are imbued with historical and culturally weighted assumptions. Such accounts have demonstrated how capitalist-driven modes of thinking may compete and clash with styles of participation and norms of working from the past or reframe practices or identity resources through a Western-centric paradigm and the discourses of 'Europeanisation' (see Krzyżanowski, 2008).

Without doubt, post-socialist transition has brought significant changes to the urban areas in CEE (Hamilton *et al.*, 2005; Stenning, 2004). However, socialist urbanisation is not just a variation on a more general pattern of global urban development since there is a qualitative difference between the nature of socialist and capitalist cities (Szelenyi, 1996). Whilst under socialism cities constituted privileged sites, during transition they have become the

main destinations of international investment, with a high concentration and flow of capital, goods, information and people (Young and Kaczmarek, 2008). The neo-liberal framework of economic reforms implemented in line with programmes stipulated by major international institutions and the broad theme of privatisation, as well as systemic political change, have been recognised as the major drivers of changes in CEE cities post-1989 (Bodnar, 2001; Buckley and Mini, 2000; Hamilton *et al.*, 2005; Sykora, 1994; Tsenkova, 2008). Moreover, factors such as domestic and foreign investment, housing and land reforms, and differentiation and fragmentation of property markets have also shaped the direction of post-socialist urban change (Brade *et al.*, 2009; Burdack and Rudolph, 2001).

Of course, this commonality of urban change drivers has not meant that urban experiences across and within particular post-socialist cities have been uniform. As Tsenkova (2008) claims, the various transition processes affecting CEE cities, including deindustrialisation and growth vs decline within the economic sphere, demographic transition and profound changes in urban governance have resulted in a great diversity of urban experience. Nevertheless, she points to three general dimensions characterising spatial change in post-socialist cities

- (1) new spaces of production/consumption reflecting globalization and economic restructuring within the hierarchy of cities;
- (2) social differentiation in residential spaces associated with growing inequality and the emergence of urban poverty; and
- (3) conflicts and selective urban development associated with new models of governance and institutional transformation (Tsenkova, 2008, p. 293).

This resonates with Brade *et al.*'s (2009) account of urban change in post-socialist CEE cities, whereby the authors mention gentrification, residential suburbanisation and the creation of gated communities as

the key dimensions of post-socialist urban transition which to date, to a greater or lesser extent, have attracted research interest. Understanding the way in which the socialist past has been treated in these post-socialist cities is of course crucial to developing an understanding of both post-socialist transition at a macro level and the formation of new urban identities at the level of individual experience. Young and Kaczmarek (2008), for example, explore the role of socialist experiences in the process of post-socialist urban identity formation in the Polish city of Łódź, whereas Bitusikova (1998) discusses the connection between the post-socialist reconstruction of the city centre of the Slovak city Banská Bystrica and the remaking of the identities of its inhabitants.

When exploring the minutiae of post-socialist city living, emotions and behaviour are key indicators of symbolic practices that may either provide comfort or exacerbate tensions most often discussed with reference to relationships created between the past and present. One of the key recurring themes within studies of transition is the importance of memory, comparison and synthesis of past and new experiences. As Darieva and Kaschuba (2007) explore in their study of the post-soviet states joining Europe, memory is both a resource and active signifier of identity and subject positioning, whilst Gallinat's (2009) ethnographic study of East Germany demonstrates the complexities of researching memory and the interpretation of a socialist past. Both studies demonstrate that memory and remembrance become key resources in accessing the sense-making processes of those who have experienced changes in their lifetime, as well as highlighting the importance of objects, spaces and places in developing a complex understanding of transition. However, how sensory elements of the past are utilised or drawn upon in the present post-socialist state is an area ripe for research.

Notwithstanding the amount of research over the past 20 years that has been dedicated

to post-socialist urban change, little attention has been paid to the sensual dimension of transition as experienced in the city. This is surprising considering the widespread evidence that the city provides an assault on the senses. Schaffer (1977) argues how the increase in noise has become associated with increasing urbanisation or redevelopment of social space, whilst Clark views cities as

loci of converging flows and subterranean connections, as sites where complex social interaction in milieux rich in sensory stimulation are generative of new forms, practices and rhythms (Clark, 2004, p. 13).

With the exception of Cockayne's (2007) historical study of smell in England in the 17th and 18th centuries and Meighan's (2007) smell-led tour of Glasgow's past, which show the value of exploring the urban through smell, out of all the senses, smell has been overlooked as a key signifier of changing political and social practices in the contemporary city. This is surprising considering that Howes (1987) argues that smell in general often signals a transformation of sorts at both the personal and social levels. In seeking to promote a holistic approach to smell, he states that not only is smell subject to physiological mechanisms of adaptation (Geldard, 1972), but also to sociological processes where continued exposure results in the smell effectively 'disappearing', at least to that person. This interplay between the physiological dimensions and socio-cultural elements of smell as a signifier of change emphasises the value of a cultural or historical approach to exploring smell that may help us to understand the quotidian experience of social change.

Sensual Geographies and the Urban

Whilst there has always been an awareness that place, space and culture are both understood and mediated through the body

and material experience, the explicit role of particular senses is only now emerging as a concern to social scientists. Although a range of 'sensual' empirical studies have mainly foregrounded the importance of the visual (for example, Pink, 2007; Frers and Meier, 2007), there is a scattering of excellent commentaries on the relationship between other senses and the social (see Howes, 2005). However, as Rodaway asserts, traditional social research often induces an implicit separation of the physical, cultural and aesthetic. In developing a more central and integrated exploration of the senses in social studies, he emphasises

the senses both as a relationship to the world, and the senses as in themselves a kind of structuring of space and defining of space (Rodaway, 1994, p. 4).

Whilst these dimensions have been acknowledged in recent studies by Hockey (2009) and Wilson (2009), there is still a lack of empirically derived data on the importance of smell in living through social change and transition.

Although traditional conceptions of the senses have often dismissed smell as vulgar, sub-human or lacking any aesthetic importance (for example, Kant, 1974; Hegel, 1998), some of the earliest anthropological studies recognised the importance of smell in understanding culture and social change. At the turn of the 19th century, Alfred Cort Haddon (a biologist by training and scientist by disposition) and his multidisciplinary team sought to 'measure' the senses within the Torres Strait cultures (Herle and Rouse, 1998) with later fieldwork beginning to explore the varying importance of different senses to particular cultures (for example, McLuhan, 1962, 1964; Ong, 1969). A post-colonial critique of anthropology encouraged an exploration of smell in the context of a particular culture, such as the role of smell in spiritual ceremonies and geographies (Classen *et al.*, 1994; Stoller, 1997; Rasmussen, 1999). Through rich ethnographies, the 'anthropology of

the senses' not only seeks to challenge the construction and Western-centricity of the five senses framework, but also can potentially provide us with a means of understanding the role of the sensorium in how we make sense of our everyday experiences. Such theoretical commitments have now spread across sister disciplines, most notably in studies of space and place, where 'sensual geographies' have sought to explore experience through what Crang (2003) calls a 'touchy-feely' approach, with concerns akin to the sentiments of humanistic geography. Studies of the sensuous landscape of religion (Holloway, 2003) and the importance of touch (Paterson, 2009) have thus shown the importance of exploring the sensuality of everyday experience and its relationship to space and place.

Our concern in this article, therefore, is how smell may play a role in people's everyday understanding and experience of transition in Poland. We will now introduce the study, outlining particulars of our research design and reflecting on the framework we adopted for analysing our 'smell data'. There follows a discussion of three key findings emerging from the analysis of interviews. First, we will explore the role of olfaction as a resource for constructing comparisons and framing the 'old' and 'new'. This then leads to a discussion of olfaction in relation to becoming 'Europeanised'. Finally, we discuss smell in the development of social stratification and the interplay between discourses surrounding smell and how these discourses are created, supported and legitimised by various smells. We will conclude our paper by resituating our study within current understandings of transition, as well as considering the role of smell in the sensual exploration of social life.

Introduction to Study

The ephemeral nature of smell makes it one of the most interesting dimensions of social life to explore and one that brings significant

methodological challenges. Unlike visual studies, where a growing critical mass of research reflects the ocular-centric West, small pockets of research dotted around the arts and social sciences have sought to bring smell to the fore as a phenomenon worth exploring both in its own right and as a tool for understanding a wide array of topics such as food (Duruz, 2002; Law, 2001), hygiene (Cohen, 1988) and the workplace (Warren and Riach, 2010). However, the practicalities of undertaking 'embodied' research are well documented (Warren, 2008; Pink, 2009), particularly when investigating areas where change or temporality plays an integral role. Noting this challenge, in our research, we focused particularly on how individuals talk and frame their experiences of smell in relation to transition, rather than their reaction *vive nunc ipsum*. Thirty interviews were undertaken with 12 male and 18 female urban-dwelling Poles in the city of Krakow using snowballing techniques, conducted in Polish by one of the authors and then translated into English for analysis. All of the respondents had lived in Poland since birth and had resided in cities throughout their lives. Whilst a range of occupations was represented, the majority of the respondents currently worked in white-collar jobs. The age qualifier of the sample was over 30, meaning that all respondents were at least 11 at the beginning of transition in Poland, to ensure that they were likely to have memories of socialist living. Interviews were semi-structured in nature, following a broad guide referring to practices in relation to smell, personal experiences of smell and the smell of places, people and themselves. Whilst there was emphasis placed on comparing the general similarities and differences between smells and odourising routines pre- and post-1989, we also encouraged respondents to discuss particular instances or events where they may have been aware of the sensual dimensions of transition.

In order to analyse the data, we drew on Classen *et al.*'s (1994) concepts of 'olfactory classifications' and 'dynamics of smell', which emerged from studies of smell in the indigenous cultures of Africa, Oceania and South America. Classen *et al.* argue that, like other senses, smell is culturally coded in relation to how we refer to different smells and their social meanings. We found these classifications particularly helpful during analysis since they not only focus on how smell may relate to actions or objects, but also how social practices and perceptions are framed and justified by respondents. Whilst some of Classen *et al.*'s categories were not immediately applicable due to their initial purpose within indigenous settings, the two levels provided in the classification offered us a framework that could be used for the initial coding of the data. Following this stage of analysis, traditional qualitative techniques in textual analysis were deployed (Miles and Huberman, 1994) in order to see how these dimensions of smell were being called upon, or helped to shape themes in relation to dimensions of urbanity, transition and other social practices.

We will now proceed to discuss three ways in which smell was drawn upon as a means of understanding transition. The first section will explore how smell was employed as both a physiological and symbolic indicator of change through providing a comparison of socialist and post-socialist temporal and spatial geographies. We will then discuss the relationship between changing odours within daily practice and the move towards a capitalist-driven, Westernised society. The final section will concentrate upon smell as a means of symbolic distinction, playing a role in both the construction and justification of social stratification.

Smellscapes Pre- and Post-1989

One of the major classifications of smell identified by Classen *et al.* (1994) is the use of

smell to define space. As Dann and Jacobsen (2003) note, smell creates highly emotive reactions and connections with space and place, and the subsequent creation of 'smellscapes' (Porteous, 1985) reveals insights not immediately obvious when focusing on other dimensions, such as the visual. For our respondents, smellscapes of their city were a key resource in invoking comparisons between the past and the present. A key example of this was how smell was related to parameters surrounding private/public activities and was often emblematic of the intimacy of close living pre-1989, in particular for those city dwellers who lived in blocks of flats on the socialist housing estates

The neighbour used to prepare potatoes with bacon for breakfast for her husband and I could smell it every day when I was going to work ... I'm happy that I don't have to breathe in the cooking smells of my neighbours anymore (J, male, 62).

The potato soup could be smelt in the morning on the communal staircase. This smell would somehow go through the walls and into other people's flats (L, female, 61).

Here, a comparison is drawn between the housing situation of the respondent pre-1989 and the way he feels in his current location, situated in a newly built estate of single-family houses on the suburbs of Krakow. This sense of satisfaction associated with being able to move out of a socialist estate echoes the findings of Brade *et al.* (2009) where suburban detached living was an aspiration. For our participants, smell signified one of the advantages of the new private domain. For many, it was not the actual aroma of the food that was offensive, but more the inability to escape someone else's lifestyle habits and customs, the smell epitomising this lack of control or privacy.

That past communities shared an olfactoryium appeared to carry the same connotations

as found in studies of smell as a marker of social relations or kinship (for example, Corbin, 1986), since one could understand why a smell may be present at particular time, even if they had not visited that place before. This resulted in smells evoking memories related to local routines (see Radcliffe-Brown, 1964), that were also linked to larger economic or social regimes

The smell of mangle was ugly. When you entered the communal staircase, you could smell it immediately. The local inhabitants would have been annoyed by this but it was a good business (L, female, 61).

I remember the smells of disinfection agents, floor polishing paste—the school, shops and every office smelt of it. This is how you could recognise that you were not at home (H, female, 39).

All kindergartens, schools, public institutions used to smell of Lizol. Also libraries, hospitals smelt of it (M, female, 41).

Sibley (1995, p. 94) refers to the separation of the private from the public, home from non-home, whereby “the home secures privacy” as connected to space and objects which “together provide aesthetic experiences, they evoke memories”. Respondents described odours pre-1989 as strong, distinctive and often intrusive. For example, in all interviews, the smell of Lizol (a disinfecting agent) was mentioned as inescapable and notable through its lack of existence in post-1989 smellscapes. This particular odour thus demonstrated how personal experiences of smell conflate with a shared history of smell (Corbin, 1986) in reimagining the past. In one sense, the lack of choice over what and when you smelled something, and where you smelled it, became an invasive symbol that underpinned the key tenets of the socialist regime. For our respondents, memories of places and objects had a strong olfactory dimension that was material but, more

significantly, was attached symbolically to the political terrain. In this sense, smellscapes went beyond olfactory mnemonia and were discussed as sensual experiences that embodied socialist rule: smell represented the state.

This was also noticeable in descriptions of the emergence of a post-1989 ‘smell of capitalism’, when new smells entered the spaces of urban Krakow and operated as a metaphor for social and economic change (Classen *et al.*, 1994). The contrast between smells designed to be enjoyed and traditional chemical functional smells where the smell was seen as an aspect of a product’s function (such as ‘to clean’) was even more striking in terms of the pervasiveness of a limited number of ‘new’ smells and the speed with which they impregnated the smellscapes of respondents

New smells appeared post-1989, probably these were the years 1989-92. For example, the smell of Currara perfume. I think it was produced by the first firm with foreign capital. The whole city smelled of it (H, female, 39).

Many respondents recalled both Currara and Vanilla Fields as being ‘everywhere’ in the early days of the 1990s. The beginning of transition was thus an embodied experience: the difference between the old and new was discernible through the senses and, at the same time, the new smells filling the city emanated from and on the bodies of its inhabitants. Smell had become a product in itself: something that was consumed in post-socialist CEE, demonstrating transition not only as something that is passively accepted through political change, but connected to active patterns of consumption and new choices emerging for the individual eager to experience difference (Rausing, 2002). However, the new smells and products did not necessarily invoke only positive associations, as some of the characteristics of contemporary capitalist cities of consumption resulted in unpleasant smells filling the city, such as “the stink of French fries from McDonalds” (B, female, 33).

Deodorisation and 'the West'

Looking in more detail at the narratives surrounding post-1989 smellscape, the influx of new products which took place clearly brought a new availability of smells into society. This, as Urry (2000) concurs, appeared to be of key importance in the creation of the development of the 'new' city. However, for respondents, the function of smell also changed. When referring to the smells of the pre-1989 era, the strong connection between smell and the other senses (taste or sight) was highlighted, with smell seen as a 'promise' of its derived source; what Classen *et al.* (1994) refer to as organising smell through its relationship to a 'natural' source. Drawing on Howes (1987), we can understand the role that odour served for our respondents in transforming a concept or expectation into 'fact', shown in the following examples

My classmates and I used to guess what food we were going to have for lunch. Which soups? Which main course? The cooks were preparing the food since morning and you could smell it in the whole school (T, female, 33).

'From the past, I miss the smells of different shops. They all used to have their distinct smell. The vegetable shop used to smell of vegetables, the meat shop of meat etc. Nowadays you go into a supermarket and everything smells the same (M, female, 41).

Smell was conflated with specific social practices that were more common prior to transition, such as doing one's daily shopping in small local shops, queuing for different products in the times of supply shortages and cooking meals every day from raw ingredients. In comparison, in the 'new city' described by participants, smell could no longer be trusted as indicative of something close to you, something about to be experienced or 'naturally' originating from a product, object or person. Interestingly, this was reflected in their narratives, where discussion of smells

was not only confined to everyday social practices, but also to larger socioeconomic motifs. For example, one of the participants, without referring to the material odour of the product, suggests that to him, "the smell of petrol station is the smell of capitalism" (K, male, 41). Discussions of everyday practices post-1989 focused on the separation of smells from source and an increasing compartmentalisation of smell. Smells were described as more contained, controllable through new technologies or architectural design and generally "less natural and less diverse" (L, female, 61) than those remembered from the past. However, this notion of transition from old to new smells was not necessarily equivalent of 'bad' to 'good'

I associate the smell of air conditioning—in supermarkets, shopping malls—with capitalism (M, female, 41).

I see the time post-1989 as the time of smells becoming less diverse. Nowadays sausages and hams have the same smell no matter whether you are in Krakow, Warsaw or any other place (J, male, 62).

In part, this experience of a lack of diverse smells is the result of changing social practices: for example, more than half of Poles now do their grocery (54 per cent) and household detergent (60 per cent) shopping in supermarkets, with these figures being higher for those living in big cities (Feliksiak, 2008). However, this move from bodily to chemical smells and traditional to mass-produced food symbolised a form of 'smell muzak' which was conceptualised by many as irritable due to its ever-present blandness, drawing parallels with Hall's (1969) discussion of olfactory blandness that brings homogeneity to the city. Urbanicity is not only created through its smells but through the lack of smells as a key indicator of the global city, emblematic of the cosmopolitan and an ability to transfer people, objects and

practices across the world with no immediate sensual disjuncture. For example, whilst the practice of daily shopping in small shops still exists in Poland, the rise of large stores such as Tesco and Carrefour in urban areas, and the increased level of car ownership have increased the popularity of a 'weekly shop' common in other European countries (for example, Pettersson *et al.*, 2004).

For respondents, experience of smell and the knowledge that transition was occurring were mutually constituted. Whilst Western deodorisation represented a material 'lack' in contrast to the habituated smells of the socialist era, the physical sensation of the 'non-smell' is embedded with the individuals' interaction with it in terms of new places and spaces emerging (see Rodaway, 1994). Just as Corbett (2003) provides evidence of how the noises created by timekeeping devices seem to help produce ideals of industrialisation and modernisation, it appears that various smells symbolically organised social ideals about what capitalism meant through the olfactory experience of everyday life. Whether smells were present or not, there was a recognition that the olfactory landscape was an important resource participants called upon to recognise a move from a socialist past towards becoming a nation of 'Westerners', echoing studies exploring more conscious and deliberate efforts to 'de-communise' cities (Azaryahu, 1997; de Soto, 1996; Light, 2004; Young and Kaczmarek, 2008). Here, a connection is drawn between city-level initiatives, such as those associated with 'decommunisation', and the reconstruction of identities of urban dwellers following the collapse of socialism. The case of Poland exemplifies this point: up to the mid 1990s, common actions undertaken in order to stress the separation of the new 'Europeanising' present from the communist past included the removal of statues and changing the names of streets in Polish towns and cities (Stenning, 2000). In relation to this particular aspect of

post-socialist urban change, Sezneva (2002, p. 48) points out that it "signals the centrality of urban space in the construction of post socialist identities", a process which our analysis suggests is inadvertently supported through smell.

Smell as a Process of 'Othering'

Whilst the influx of new smells into Poland was widely recognised, a large portion of respondents' narratives about smells were in relation to the construction of differentiation in socioeconomic status. Drawing on Classen *et al.*'s (1994) notion of 'value systems based on olfactory symbolism', we can see how smell was repeatedly used to validate and construct the stratification of society post-1989. Participants discussed how, pre-1989, smell had been used to some extent as a social qualifier, where, for example, women discussed how girls had a display of empty perfume or body spray cans, whilst those who travelled outside Poland would return with deodorant. However, following the collapse of socialism, it appeared that odour itself could be used as a means of creating divisions, mirroring Urry's (2000) thesis of smell playing a role in the construction of class in the 19th century

After 1989 people started to smell more pleasantly although still when one gets on a bus, it stinks. But these are people from lower 'castes'. Richer people move around in cars and on a daily basis don't smell it (I, female, 32).

In the past we all used to stink in the same way so it wasn't that disturbing. Nowadays there are still places where there is terrible stink. Recently, I took a bus and a tram to pick my car up from servicing and it smelt awfully there. I was considering getting off the bus earlier and walking. Nowadays it's obvious that some people, especially those with a lower social status, do not have basic personal hygiene habits (J, male, 62).

Sibley (1995, p. 8) argues that “feelings about others on one level register as *sensations*” which subsequently can “become part of a social experience”. Following Corbin, he explains how, historically, smell or a fear of smell was used as a mechanism of separation of the bourgeois self from the working-class ‘other’ so that, on the basis of smell, it became possible to draw class distinctions and frame those smelling differently as ‘the generalised other’ (Sibley, 1995, p. 9). For our respondents, it appears that the awareness of a ‘difference’ in smell triggered a sense-making justification about social status. Whilst habituation, the experience of becoming used to smell to the point that it becomes ‘scentsless’, is mainly discussed as a physiological phenomenon which takes under five minutes to occur (for example, Stuiver, 1958; Engen, 1982), it appeared that, in order for social habituation to occur, participants were involved in symbolically recoding why new smells were emerging, or why they became aware of smells around certain people or places. This of course transpires into an example of embodied distinction. As Low (2005) describes, the othering of people based on smell, is extremely powerful in deciding the ‘not I’. Just as smell was linked to ethnicity in his work (Low, 2005), it was connected to class within our interviews, where discussion of profession and who respondents aligned themselves with (or distanced themselves from) was often justified by smell, often conflating smell with cleanliness

I think that nowadays, more socially advanced people wash more often than others, and they smell more nicely (K, male, 41).

In her study of the senses and the home, Pink (2004, p. 68) suggested that dirt is “not just a visual experience, but also olfactory”, whilst Low (2005) discusses how the relationship between hygiene and pleasant smelling is often assumed. Similarly, respondents here

formed judgements based on smell as well as the visual, with smell becoming directly correlated with one’s overall cleanliness. This process draws similarities with Low’s (2006) commentary on sociologically understanding smells as classifiers of racial difference. Drawing on Goffman, he argues that personal smells may be ‘performed’, whilst socially determined undesirable smells by an ‘other’ are seen as a social violation and stigmatised. Thus, one can make a connection between the physical presence of smell and some form of moral judgement (Synnott, 1993). For our participants, this judgement, in addition to conflating smell with cleanliness and hygiene, also involves mobilising notions of civilisation and development—hence, those who smell ‘nice’ become perceived not only as cleaner but also as more ‘socially advanced’. This confirms the findings of Drazin (2002) in relation to the use of cleaning products in post-socialist Romania, whereby the newly available detergents were framed both in terms of their cleaning function and as symbols of modernity and progress. Smell can thus be seen as not only a social medium as indicated by Low (2005) but also is itself imbued with social meaning and significances that are learned and change throughout our lives.

As pointed out elsewhere in relation to smell reinforcing social strata (le Guerier, 1992), smell did not simply thrust people upwards in Polish urban society. As well as ‘becoming civilised’, people moved up whilst simultaneously, others ‘moved down’. For example, basic amenities that were once available to all, such as hot water, were now privatised and therefore those who could not afford it could not wash

Some people smell less nicely than in the past. Especially those who are poor try to save money. Water and electricity are expensive so people wash less. And these are the people who use public transport (M, female, 41).

From the respondents' narratives, it appears that at present in Poland one can observe a 'ghettoisation' of bodily smell in that it is confined to certain spaces, such as public transport. For example, private car ownership was presented as an enabler of creating a barrier to being exposed to other people's personal smells, as opposed to 'having' to use public transport, indicative of a lower social status, lack of money and conflated with a low level of personal hygiene. This resonates with debates surrounding the representation of cleanliness in American commercials, presenting the car as providing the owner and the passengers with protection from the dangers of the city, its dirt and the 'others' populating it (Sibley, 1995). What is described appeared to be a conflation of smell and space which exacerbates the divide between the classes. In many ways, body odour on the bus or the smell of the homeless becomes a symbol of 'civic uncleanness' that relates as much to cultural classification as it does to the smell itself (Classen *et al.*, 1994). At the same time, there was recognition that the reasons why the personal smell of some had changed post-1989 was related to broader economic changes within the society. Here smell—including the smell of one's own body—becomes a product and, by consuming it, individuals are able to make distinctions "between clean and dirty, ordered and disordered, 'us' and 'them'" (Sibley, 1995, p. 8), to reach a state of betterment and to signal their progression to the outside world. However, whilst the contemporary framework of consumerism means that freedom for making such distinctions can be framed as consumer 'choice', financial means ultimately remain the gatekeeper to who has and who has not.

There is thus an awareness of the power relations that have emerged in post-socialist Poland together with new social divisions: those who have money also have choice; they can afford to be surrounded by pleasant smells and smell nicely themselves, and they are also able to choose a preferred smell for their

bodies. As Mandel and Humphrey (2002) remind us in their discussion of post-socialism, market practices—such as those associated with consumption—are not morally neutral. Pleasant bodily smell is constructed as indicative of one's high hygiene standards and social status. The practice of ensuring that the body is appropriate for one's environment therefore became a form of cultural capital in the context of post-socialist urban Poland. However, part of the construction of this stratification was not only new modes of physical maintenance, but the need to classify those who do not conform to the new standard, indicating moral or social shortcomings.

Concluding Reflections

In this paper, we have sought to understand how the quotidian experience of post-socialist transition may be understood through exploring smell and odour in urban settings. Whilst aesthetic judgements have been connected to identity in other parts of CEE, such as Czechoslovakia (Lass, 1995, p. 43), our study has demonstrated the sensual experiences of this shift, underlining the interplay between social, ideological and political changes and everyday practice and perception. In particular, we have sought to contribute to extant literature on post-socialist transition and urban change in several respects. First, responding to Hörschelmann and Stenning's (2008, p. 340) call for engagement with processes and meanings of transformation and for developing "a more differentiated understanding of the historical and geographical dimension of change", we have focused on the minutiae of the lived experience of socialism and post-socialism in CEE through a lens previously overlooked by transition researchers. In bringing out the idea of post-socialist change as an embodied experience, we have built upon the so far underdeveloped corpus of work, to date represented by Kideckel's (2008) ethnography of post-socialist Romania

and the experiences of workers in a declining industry, which deploys the ideas of body and embodiment as its central concepts. This approach has allowed us not only to move away from macro accounts of transition, but to engage with sense-making processes by reference to the ways in which life is actually 'lived' and the world apprehended—the human body—albeit with a focus limited to one way in which the body interacts with its environment: through the sense of smell.

We concur with Andrusz *et al.*'s (1996) assertion that, for an understanding of post-socialism, it is necessary to become aware of the legacies of socialism. Therefore, we have concentrated on the memories of smells from the past as well as the smells which characterise urban Poland at present. This preoccupation with memory has provided further empirical evidence of what Drazin (2002) has noted in relation to post-socialist Romania: that the present serves as a resource to reinterpret the past and that the past is drawn upon in order to make sense of the present. Reflecting upon the comparisons made by our respondents between the smells of their city under socialism, during the early days of transition and contemporarily, we see that both the past and the present are open and that their meanings constantly shape each other in the minds of individuals. In this sense, urban transition becomes a multilayered concept, referring to the physical, symbolic and imagined.

As shown in our analysis, exploring smell may also elucidate the ways in which connections can be made between urban and national transition. Cities and urbanisation play a central part in both state socialism and capitalism, and therefore questions about what is involved in transition, how it proceeds and how it relates to previous histories of the societies it affects refer both to urban change and to transition of society in general. Indeed, our findings confirm and add a sensual dimension to previous literatures concerned with post-socialist transition as well

as those focusing specifically on CEE cities. In terms of the general socioeconomic effects of transition, our research provides further evidence of social stratification, polarisation of incomes and the emergence of new consumption patterns in post-socialist contexts—themes which have attracted a considerable amount of research attention over the past 20 years. At the same time, it offers both empirical and conceptual insights into the mechanisms of transition, especially the interaction between the macro level of structural change and the micro level of individuals, a point previously discussed by Rausing (2002). What is particularly new here is the way in which smell is actively mobilised by individuals as a discursive resource that is legitimised through its materiality in differentiation processes that are taking place: class formation; social inclusion and exclusion; formation of boundaries between spaces, places and members of different groups in society; and development of particular moral evaluations in relation to self and others. Andrusz (1996) makes similar connections in relation to space, giving as illustration the creation of middle-class suburbs and 'sink estates' of state housing from which the emerging middle classes have fled and which are now occupied by the new 'underclass'. Whilst the important connection between marketisation and morality in post-socialist CEE settings has also been acknowledged by Mandel and Humphrey (2002), and Sibley (1995) has included smell in his discussion of the spatial differentiation of classes in 19th-century Paris in London, our analysis brings together these two conceptual points, in the empirical setting of urban Poland.

We have found our work resonates with themes previously addressed specifically in relation to post-socialist urban change. For example, phenomena such as gentrification, spatial differentiation, suburbanisation, downgrading of former socialist housing estates and development of new spaces of

consumption, have all been illustrated by our respondents. From the empirical material, in response to Brade *et al.*'s (2009) call for research into how urban spaces are socially constructed and imagined, new insights have emerged into the olfactory dimension of the social construction of urban spaces. This included both spaces remembered from the socialist past, such as residential estates of blocks of flats and small local shops, as well as those characteristic of the capitalist city, such as supermarkets, shopping malls, fast food outlets and public transport vehicles. Moreover, engaging with post-socialist urban change with an emphasis on the sense of smell has also allowed us to find out about the three aspects of the city discernible through smell and together constituting its smellscape: people—including both self and others; places—both from the past and the present; and objects—in particular consumed products. We contend that, to understand the olfactory dimension of post-socialist urban change, it is important to explore the judgements involved in references to the smells of people, as well as the meanings of social practices associated with specific places and objects. Whilst an aversion to some smells may be innate, we also provide empirical evidence relating to smell and its associations and how one ultimately becomes 'socialised' into smell (Synnott, 1991), where the increase in 'synthetic smells' along with changing social practices relegates bodily odours to the realm of unacceptability.

The study is not without limitations. Throughout the empirical work, it became clear that respondents had difficulties articulating their olfactory experience, often resorting to metaphors or the suspected source of the smell, rather than the smell itself. This emphasises Synnott's (1991) and Rodaway's (1994) point concerning the lack of vocabulary relating to smell compared with sound and sight, perhaps another indicator of the marginalised position smell has held

in Western society compared with the other senses. More significantly, by using traditional interview techniques, it may be that the translation (or transformation) of their experiences into words created an aesthetic fallacy that reduced their sensory experiences to words. By concentrating on the senses, we seek to challenge the verbocentricity of research—and yet, asking individuals to articulate their experiences then writing about them inevitably confines our study to a textual reduction. Moreover, exploring one sense automatically leads to dismissing the importance of intersensory relationship, whilst sensual anthropology has highlighted how treating the senses as five separate (albeit socially constructed) entities results in a skewed view of the sensorium. However, the potential of exploring the senses not only allows an alternative site for exploration, but provides possible ways of elucidating our understanding of how the body interacts with the urban. In not bounding our study to material spaces or places through, for example, smell samples or scent-led walks around the present city, we were also able to access memories that crossed over space and time.

Low (2005) notes that polemic constructions of smell undermine the multiple experiences of smells that we encounter and our subsequent reactions or associations. Understanding smells as social practice also helps to distance smell from static objects and instead consider them dynamically in relation to activities, practices and different spaces. Whilst studies of transition or place have often focused on the physical or symbolic dimensions of space (for example, Brade *et al.*, 2009; Czepczyński, 2008), our study calls for a more considered exploration of the sensorium and place. As Feld (1996, p. 91) argues, there is a reciprocal relationship between the two: "as place is sensed, senses are placed; just as places make sense, senses make place". Although Feld concentrated upon sound within his own anthropological study of the

Kaluli, we have shown that smell has a similar research potential. For our respondents, smell was discussed as a connector to the past, both the same and different place as the present, helping to orientate them within the 'new' Poland whilst showing that these 'sensuous geographies' (Rodaway, 1994) exist across space and time.

Smell itself is powerful, but at the same time distances us from the material odour or physical origin and conjures up images that exist beyond the olfactory experience that may be privy to nostalgia or romanticism. Whilst we have highlighted smell as an aspect of post-socialist transition, memories of certain smells are not necessarily explicitly confined to associations with socialism but also with a different period in one's life, for example, childhood, youth and periods of study. Some of the positive associations brought about by participants' memories of past smells therefore meant that they were labelled as the smells of 'good times', 'sweet times' or 'carefree times' compared with the mundane of the present. Notwithstanding this critique, our understanding of the senses could thus help us to extend our engagement with embodied processes of the social by not only considering the physical and the symbolic, but also helping to work towards exploring the interface of internal and external, the interior and exterior in relation to everyday life. Exploring smell in this way, which remains "the liminal sense par excellence, constitutive of and at the same time operative across all of the boundaries" (Howes, 1987, p. 401), we can see how 'making scents' of changing landscapes and urbanisation is not simply a case of categorising the cosmopolitan through binary classifications of good/bad, fragrant/fetid, etc. Instead, what is important is not only how the city 'really' smells, but individuals' olfactory perceptions and what those aromatic representations mean to those located within the real and imaginary spaces of the

city and how these are both sensually and symbolically integral to the everyday experience of change, continuity and disjuncture in the interfaces between 'old' and 'new' Poland.

Note

1. Rather than consider such terms in a binary, dualistic fashion with little overlap of social practices and perceptions, we use the notion of 'old' and 'new' as a temporal shorthand to delineate between the socialist-driven political regime and new forms of capitalist modes of behaviour.

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