Morana Alač*

We like to talk about smell: A worldly take on language, sensory experience, and the Internet

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Abstract: Western languages have been marked by their lack of specialized vocabulary to express odor qualities, and thus it is stated that it is difficult – if not impossible – to talk about smell. To engage the issue of olfactory ineffability, this paper turns to actual instances of textual renderings of smell by paying attention to how the olfactory language of scent enthusiasts is rendered on the Internet. The methods that enthusiasts' texts inscribe do not rely on specialized vocabulary but constitute a language that is *turned toward the world*. To articulate this character of olfactory language, the paper illustrates four discursive procedures employed on the Internet: embedding knowledges that are contoured and made available through their uses by the community; borrowing professional vocabulary and adapting it through humor; providing "recipes" for practical actions; and emphasizing the subjective character of scent to provide openings for conversation. The paper traces how olfactory talk becomes available as it is practiced, challenging the opposition between sensory experiences and the semiotic realm that is inscribed in the idea of olfactory ineffability.

Keywords: olfactory semiotics, sensory practices, Internet, discourse

1 Introduction

Throughout the history of western thought, scents and the sense of smell have been characterized as particularly difficult – if not impossible – to discursively capture. In *Timaeus*, Plato (referring to the four elements of earth, water, fire and air) explains that "(t)he faculty of smell does not admit of differences of kind; for all smells are of a half-formed nature, and no element is so proportioned as to have any smell." Elements of water and air are perceivable "only in the intermediate state, when water is changing into air and air into water; and all of them are either vapor or mist, and that which is passing from water into air is

***Corresponding author: Morana Alač,** Department of Communication, University of California, San Diego, CA 92093-0503, USA, E-mail: malac@ucsd.edu

vapor; and hence all smells are thinner than water and thicker than air … Wherefore the varieties of smell have no name, and they have not many, or definite and simple kinds; but they are distinguished only as painful and pleasant …" (1892: 488). We still live this paradigm, convincingly asserting that we cannot talk about our olfactory experiences. We say that this is so because our language does not have specialized vocabulary to express odor qualities, and that to distinguish between odors we have to resort to our idiosyncratic experiences of how these odors make us feel.

This take on olfactory communication parallels a set of ideas on the inferiority, dispensability, and superseded nature of the human sense of smell. While it is widely accepted that it structures our memory, eating habits, awareness of air pollution, and has a potential prognostic value in neurodegenerative conditions (e. g., Stevenson 2013; Zucco et al. 2012), human olfaction is commonly judged as less essential than vision, audition, and the somatic senses.[1] When recognized as vital, the sense of smell tends to be associated with the *interiority* of an individual, frequently discussed in terms of the human brain's wiring. Scientists explain that our nose is connected to the right neocortex (while the centers dedicated to the language processing are within the left neocortex), and that the olfactory bulb has direct access to the amygdala and hippocampus – the evolutionary "old" parts of the brain, involved in regulating hormones, emotions, and memory (see, for example, Vroon 1997: 22–44). This "primal" sense – a sense that connects us to other animals – is also associated with seduction and sexuality, and is frequently regarded as non-serious and feminine. Since language tends to be conceived as a trait that defines what is, by and large, unique to humans, it is not surprising that this carnal sense is understood as not particularly apt to be "expressed" through language.

The discursive impossibility of human olfaction is fittingly conveyed by Diane Ackerman who defines smell as "the mute sense" (1990: 6). While Ackerman associates it with the basic and vital physiological processes such

1 To the question "To which organic sense do we owe the least and which seems to be the most dispensable?" Kant famously replied: "The sense of smell. It does not pay us to cultivate it or to refine it in order to gain enjoyment; this sense can pick up more objects of aversion than of pleasure (especially in crowded places) and, besides, the pleasure coming from the sense of smell cannot be other than fleeting and transitory" (1996: 46). Similarly, we are inclined to concede that our sense of smell is considerably less effective when compared to its counterparts in other animals (see Engen 1991: 3–4), while Freud's reasoning about the human olfaction as evolutionarily superseded – its diminution being related to the process of civilization (e. g., Freud 2010 [1961]: 78n–79n) – tends not to raise too many eyebrows. Of note is, however, Trygg Engen's point that it is "(m)odern civilization, with its hygiene, plumbing, and ventilation, [that] has contributed to the decline of research about odor perception" (1991: 3).

as breathing ("Cover your eyes and you will stop seeing, cover your ears and you will stop hearing, but if you cover your nose and try to stop smelling, you will die" [1990: 6]),[2] she evokes a widely recognized idea that the Indo-European languages exhibit a shortage of specialized vocabulary dedicated to odors, and that to talk about smell we commonly "borrow" from the other senses (e. g., Feigel 2006: 14).[3] As she highlights the futility of our attempts to communicate about olfactory experiences, Ackerman describes two multisensory strategies frequently employed to talk about smell. We define smell in terms of "other things," as, for example, "when we use words such as smoky, sulfurous, floral, fruity, sweet, we are describing smells in terms of other things (smoke, sulfur, flowers, fruit, sugar)" (1990: 7), and we also express one smell by another one or by another sense (1990: 9), indicating how a smell makes us feel: "disgusting, intoxicating, sickening, pleasurable, delightful, pulse-revving, hypnotic, or revolting" (1990: 7). Ackerman, however, finds these strategies wanting, and suggests that we need, instead, new words that would – completely and in a single modality – represent our olfactory experiences:

> For the cartography of smell, we need sensual mapmakers to sketch new words, each one precise as a landform or cardinal direction. There should be a word for the way the top of an infant's head smells, both talcumy and fresh, unpolluted by life and diet. Penguins smell starkly *penguin*, a smell so specific and unique that one succinct adjective should capture it. *Pinguid*, which means oily, won't do. *Penguinine* sounds like a mountain range. *Penguinlike* is the usual model, but it just clutters up the language and labels without describing. If there are words for all the pastels in a hue – the lavenders, mauves, fuchsias, plums, and lilacs – who will name the tones and tints of a smell? (Ackerman 1990: 8)

Vision is commonly understood as a dominant sense in humans (together with hearing, vision is also known as the "higher" sense) on which the desired language of olfaction is modeled. As visual language has words for specific traits such as colors, so is the olfactory language expected to be organized around a set of traits (Wilson and Stevenson 2006) which would be expressed by a specialized, stable, and conventional vocabulary. It is interesting that, in

2 For an interesting take on smell and death, see Calvino 1986.

3 Deroy et al. argue that while "olfactory experience represent a domain that is particularly rich in crossmodal correspondences" (2013: 879), these correspondences are not to be explained as acquired through associative learning, "coming from internalization of statistical regularities in the environment," or as "a mere metaphorical transfer" (2013: 880) based in linguistic or conceptual mappings. Instead, these crossmodal associations (such as the olfactory – auditory and odor – geometrical shapes associations) are to be understood as "grounded in structural perceptual or neurological determinants" (2013: 878). But even though Deroy et al. argue that the crossmodal mappings should be understood at the level of the nervous system, their explanation is compatible with Ackerman's linguistic take.

the reported quote, Ackerman mentions lavenders, fuchsias, plums, and lilacs as examples of the words successfully used to express visual experiences when these same words function by evoking the things to which they refer (that is, flowers and fruits). In other words, the author proposes as models the terms that are organized by the same strategy for which the language of smell is criticized (i. e., they function as "source-based" terms). While indicating a certain bias toward the olfactory language, this characterization also suggests a quest for an ideal language.

But, as it happens, there are discursive methods employed situationally to generate effects of odor sensations. Ackerman, for example, says that "one of the real tests of writers, especially poets, is how well they write about smells" (1990: 18). Similarly, Roy Bedichek wraps up his discussion of "no word, no valid comparison, no intelligible metaphor" available to describe odors (1960: 15), with the following comment: "But lack of identifying symbols for smells in no way impedes the flow of publications on the subject from the presses of the Western world" (1960: 17). And this not only concerns poetic parlance but a number of professional groups that talk about smell as part of their everyday practices.

Perfumers, most probably, first come to mind. As a part of their work, perfumers interpret linguistically expressed briefs (often received from fashion houses and other clients) to create accords that somehow corresponds to those briefs, while also talking with chemists (who provide them with aromachemicals), their colleagues (who work with them or with whom they compete for commissions), as well as in-house designers and fragrance consultants (with whom they discuss their creations; e. g., Burr 2003, 2007). This ability to talk about scent is also demonstrated by the books perfumers write about perfumes and perfumery (e. g., Ellena 2011, 2013; Roudnitska 1977, 1980). In addition to perfumers who are frequently portrayed as having special olfactory capabilities,[4] also historians (e. g., Corbin 1986; Vigarello 1988), architects (i. e., Barbara and Perliss 2006; Otero-Pailos 2012), writers and poets (i. e., Rindisbacher 1992), environmental specialists and odor scientists (i. e., Doty 1981; Stevenson 2013), anthropologists (e. g., Breu 2007; Gell 1977), and marketers and designers (e. g., Lindstorm 2010; Niedenthal 2012) appear competent in applying a variety of methods in their talk about scents and olfaction. That in the domain of art

4 Metonymically called the "noses," perfumers are often seen as gifted with exceptional olfactory abilities. An example is Patrick Süskind's novel *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (1985) where an individual with supernatural olfactory sensibilities (but whose body has no odor) becomes a highly skilled perfumer. There is also recent evidence indicating that perfumers have enhanced brain areas dedicated to olfaction (Delon-Martin et al. 2012).

practice and curation the number of initiatives on odor is exponentially growing also suggests that there are artists and museum curators (i. e., Drobnick 2005; Shiner and Kriskovets 2007) who are rather skillful in communicating about odor and olfaction (see, for example, the work of Kate McLean, Nobi Shioya, and Sissel Tolaas).[5] How are their linguistic practices portrayed as accomplishing this?

To take marketers and advertisers as an example, Tom Zelman's "Language and Perfume: A Study of Symbol-Formation" (1992) provides an apt illustration.[6] Zelman points out that advertisers focus less on words and more on evoking fantasies through images since "there exists no language to describe and distinguish the sensations we smell" (1992: 109). To account for this lack, Zelman cites and aligns with Edward Sagarin's evolutionary story, according to which:

> prehistoric humans' sense of smell was essential to their survival, both in locating food and in sensing enemies. However, as the ability to use language and communicate thoughts developed, the significant importance of odor diminished ... With the advent of language, smell, an inferior means of acquiring survival-oriented information, became largely relegated to the end of aesthetic appreciation. Language could be communally shared; smell, by contrast, was incommunicable. (Sagarin in Zelman 1992: 109–110)

The problem, according to Zelman, is that olfactory semiotics is not organized by convention. In reference to the writings of Susanne Langer, Zelman says that "(w)ords have a 'general reference' and are commonly affixed by convention" (1992: 109), while the language of smell is highly indexical (or what he calls "signific"). In other words, smell communication is bound to the world via its source-based terms, and – because of the lack of conventionality – the qualities of single odors cannot be described so that they can be differentiated from each other:

> There is virtually no language, either colloquial or technical, capable of describing what we smell when we consider the scent separately from its source. How can the fragrance of hot coffee be symbolized in language if we ignore the coffee producing the odor? We may say that the odor is pleasant, and perhaps invigorating, but the same might be said of the scents of horsehide or burning leaves or freshly-turned earth. While we can discern the signific meaning of each of these odors, e.g., the smell indicates that hot coffee is on the table, we have no words to distinguish odors from one another aside from such vague

5 In 2010, the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City opened its Department of Olfactory Art; in 2009 the Guggenheim Museum in New York staged a *scent opera* entitled "Green Aria"; in 2012 the Getty Museum included in its program the educational activities where participants learn how to make scents; and in 2013 the Institute for Art and Olfaction opened in Los Angeles, to mention some of the largest US players.

6 Also referred to in Classen et al. 1994: 187.

> generalities as "spicy," "sweet," "pungent," and "sharp." Though an odor may bring to mind associations, the human mind is unable to abstract odors so as to associate them with one another. The problem, it would seem, is one of language. There are no names for odors, only for objects. (Zelman 1992: 110)

Zelman explains that – beyond describing smells by evoking their source – we can only report our olfactory experiences in terms of hedonic responses: we can specify to what degree a smell is pleasant (or, as Ackerman put it, how it makes us feel: "disgusting, intoxicating, sickening, pleasurable, delightful, pulse-revving, hypnotic, or revolting" [1990: 7]). This, however, is not particularly specific – "the same might be said of the scents of horsehide or burning leaves or freshly-turned earth," and, even more importantly, it is a *personal* assessment. Differently from symbolic signs – organized by convention and thus socially shared – talking about odorants in terms of their pleasantness pertains to a single individual – it tackles the subjective.

Zelman follows this discussion with a reference to the scientific efforts of Zwaardemaker et al. to establish a "symbolic system of relating odors to one another" (1992: 111) – a series of failed attempts to identify a stable and universally accepted system for describing odors (e. g., Engen 1982: 7–8; Gilbert 2008: 18–24). In scientific research, this difficulty to anchor smells into words is accompanied by a lack of an agreement on how olfaction works. And while today's chemistry can identify molecular structures and replicate any scent with relative ease (using such instrumentation as gas chromatography detectors), not only do we lack a consensus on how an odor molecule entering the nose brings a neuron to fire,[7] but the effort to identify a "map" of human olfactory experiences is constantly frustrated. Notwithstanding that the research in *olfactory psychophysics* – the study of how humans perceive odors – is possible because humans have language (Keller and Vosshall 2004), the link between molecular properties and odor quality is still contested territory (e. g., Wise et al. 2000). As this, conceivably, has to do with the aforementioned expectations for a specific kind of classificatory system and the historical primacy that the argument for the ineffability of odor sensations enjoys, interesting is an experiment by Pamela Dalton and her colleagues (2008) that indicates a possibility of successfully classifying odorants when multisensory and affective embeddedness of olfaction is more readily taken into account.

In the present paper, I follow this lead by asking what happens when we do not assume that multisensory, figurative, and non-conventional features of communication are necessarily "deficient." I want to know, on the contrary,

7 For a divulgatory account of this debate, see Burr 2003.

how a sensory language that is *indexical* functions. And indexical here is widely conceived to include a variety of modes of *embedding smell in the world*. To explore this possibility, I turn to everyday methods of smell talk. I abandon a quest for an ideal semiotic system that is scientifically provable – with its stable, universally accepted, and specialized vocabulary dedicated exclusively to odor – and consider the talk of those who define themselves as enthusiasts, aficionados, and hobbyists.[8] In this, I aim to provide a portrayal of their linguistic practices that takes in account the endeavor in which they participate as members.

In contrast to the secretive nature of the perfumers' smell talk,[9] the language of non-professionals is widely available: it thrives on the Internet. But to talk about smell on the Internet appears to be a rather peculiar enterprise. If virtual reality – where bits and global networks of computational technologies are largely encountered through textual mediation – is a disembodied space, how can the sense "trapped" *in* the body as no other be articulated through language on the "other" side of the digital screen? In describing the Internet's olfactory language, my intention is not, however, to challenge the idea that to talk about smell is complex or difficult (e. g., Engen 1991: 5).[10] Instead, I describe how Internet writers take up the ineffability of smell as a challenge, and evoke its appeal in terms of a motive for engaging with others. Exploiting the affordances of digitality within an Internet culture of individualism, they enjoy an experiential language that – while borrowing and mixing idioms and modalities – is contaminated by the world.

2 Whiffs of smell talk on the internet: How to catch them?

Olive Posted on 7 April 2011: From what I can tell, the evolutionary biologists and philosophers are still insisting there's no way to translate scent into words. But from your description, I easily picked out La Pausa from the several others on my irresponsibly/overly sprayed forearms. Apparently, those scholars ain't reading this blog. Glad that I am.

Robin Posted on 8 April 2011: Oh, how sweet! Thanks.

8 See also John Manzo's (2010) work on coffee aficionados' Internet discussions.

9 See Mandy Aftel (2001: 6) on the relationship between today's perfume industry and practices of alchemy.

10 There is experimental evidence that people have difficulties in naming odors (e. g., Cain 1979; Cain et al. 1998). It is also frequently mentioned that perfumers have hard time talking about smell (e. g., Burr 2007: 121).

Olive and Robin's conversation was posted on Robin's blog *Now Smell This* (NST), and it exemplifies an exchange among "perfumistas." Perfumista is a denominator for the roles of the writer (here Robin) and reader (here Olive) of *perfume blogs*: "Some use it [perfumista] as a feminine term, with either perfumeo or perfumisto as the masculine, others (like me) use it as a neuter term" (In "A perfumista lexicon," posted by Robin on NST on April 25th, 2008). Perfumistas is also a synonym for "fume heads," "perfumephiles," "sniffas," and "fragrance intellectuals," among others. Jean Claude Ellena – one of the most revered contemporary perfumers – defines perfume blogging as follows[11]:

> Perfume criticism first emerged on the web. Starting out as personal blogs, perfume blogs have become significant discussion forums, visited by thousands of people every day. Nowadays, these critics comment on new perfumes. They are free to say what they want, as are web users who also make their own assessments. Whether lovers, gourmets, or connoisseurs, I like their attitudes, their genuine feelings, as long as they remain an independent and critical voice on fragrances and do not become a mouthpiece for brand marketing. I see them as of real benefit to people who like perfumes, to perfumes, and to perfume composers. These comments can only encourage young talent and new approaches to perfume. For a while one can forget the market leaders, which offer no form of critique other than the simple fact that they have pleased a certain percentage of consumers. (Ellena 2011: 64)

Perfume criticism, as pointed out by Ellena, started some ten years ago (around 2005) on the Internet, and is currently still largely confined to it.[12] In her NST article "The Fragrant Rabbit Hole" (posted on June 28th, 2010), Angela says that "(t)en years ago it would have been impossible for most of us to have become as absorbed by perfume as we are now." She continues by describing how in the past stumbling upon a fascinating perfume could have led to visiting the perfume counters at department stores, but it wouldn't entail sampling more challenging niche fragrances, let alone talking with others about it. The conjecture is that this would result in quickly forgetting what exactly the fragrance in question smelled like; in contrast: "(t)he internet changed all that. We can share impressions and read reviews of perfumes then swap samples to see if it's worth ordering. We can find our Evil Scent Twins so we know what to avoid – or try. And we can meet all sorts of fascinating people."

11 Ellena – the perfumer who promotes bloggers – is also a prolific writer. In fact, in the review of his *Hermesence Cuir d'Ange* (2014) on *Perfume Shrine* (November 10th, 2014), the blogger points out Ellena's writing skills to the point that smelling the actual fragrance does not seem to be anymore necessary. See also Burr 2007: 11–13.

12 See, for example, "Thank you to The Original Five," posted on *Mark Behnke Colognoisseur* on January 2nd, 2015.

When providing the origin narrative, perfumistas often credit Luca Turin's blog and his book *Parfums: Le Guide* (1992)[13] as one of the main reasons for "falling down the fragrant rabbit hole."[14] But, while Turin is first and foremost an olfactory scientist,[15] the blog writers to whose practices we now turn present themselves as neither authorities in the domain of olfaction nor as possessing special olfactory abilities. Blogger Ari, in her rebuttal to the perfumer Francis Kurkdjian's negative comments on the role of perfume blogging ("What I Hate About Perfumistas: More Thoughts From Francis Kurkdjian" posted on *Persolaise* blog on March 13th, 2012), says:

> Mr. Kurkdjian goes on to turn up his nose at perfume critics. He states, "There are no best [perfume critics]. They're so boring. And the reason they're so boring is that, to prove their legitimacy, they try to drop ingredient names, chemical names, just to prove to their readers that they have the know-how." Dude, *only like four of us do that*. I can literally name them all right now: Luca Turin, Chandler Burr, Octavian Coifan, Denyse Beaulieu. The rest of us say over and over that we have no scientific qualifications whatsoever and could not be less interested in "chemical names." Please refer to Robin's "about me" section on Now Smell This, the biggest perfume blog around, which states, "If you are wondering what qualifications I have for writing this blog, the answer is simple: none. I just like perfume" What now, Mr. Kurkdjian? *What now?* ("Come at me, Bro," *The Scents of Self*, March 13th 2012).[16]

The NST blog which Ari mentions (and on which Olive and Robin converse) is further characterized by one of its past contributors – Alysa Harad – as follows:

> In theory, Now Smell This is a blog about perfume. In practice, it is a clearinghouse, a daily newsletter, a discussion forum, and a reference room for all matters relating to perfume, scent, and the sense of smell. Its sprawling archives are cross-referenced, searchable, and augmented by background articles on where to shop, thumbnail histories of all the houses

13 The book's corresponding English rendering was co-authored with Tania Sanchez with the title *Perfumes: The A-Z Guide* (2006).

14 See also, for example, how – as a part of one of the NST's "community projects" – a number of participants mentioned Turin's book when asked to "wear a perfume that turned you into a perfumista" (November 7th, 2014).

15 Chandler Burr – a perfume critic who used to review fragrances for *The New York Times* and currently is the curator of olfactory art at the Museum of Art and Design in New York City – dedicated a book to Turin, where he suggests that, even though one of the ingredients of Turin's scientific theory that gave him confidence is his knowledge of perfume (2002: 304), that knowledge and Turin's "perfume genius" (2002: 322) are primarily in relationship to his scientific research (Turin is described as somebody who could or should get Nobel Prize for his work on the theory of smell [2002: 93]). When the book ends with two quotes from Turin on the importance of metaphor (2002: 304–305), the quotes are employed to highlight the inter-disciplinary nature of Turin's scientific work, not his connoisseurship of fragrances.

16 In the original, the underlined portions of the text functioned as hyperlinks.

> whose perfumes have been reviewed, a handy FAQ, and an alphabetized list of perfumers, each with his or her biography and updated list of credited perfumes. (This feature alone constitutes a small triumph of accumulated data – until recently, most perfumers were deliberately kept anonymous). (Harad 2012: 20)

NST is a *multiple authors' perfume blog*, as opposed to a *solo blog* written by a single author and exemplified by Ari's *The Scents of Self*.[17] In this paper, I cite posts of three of its writers – Angela (already mentioned above), Erin, and Kevin, as well as Ari in the role of its guest author. Robin – who maintains the blog – is described by Harad as somebody who "... made perfume something that could be studied and understood, and she made loving it seem perfectly reasonable. So reasonable that I missed the patently obvious fact that Now Smell This was the work of a woman obsessed – and that soon enough, I would be one, too" (Harad 2012: 22).

As exemplified by Andrew Keen's argument (2007) – where Keen asks "What happens ... when ignorance meets egoism meets bad taste meets mob rule" – bloggers have often been seen as amateurs destroying the traditional mainstream media. Perfumistas, however, see themselves as occupying a vacant post – the one of the perfume critic. Sensory psychologist Avery Gilbert points out that, for fragrances, there is an apparent need for "the identifiable voice of the independent critic" (2008: 16):

> How come we have *Cigar Aficionado* and *Wine Spectator*, but no *Perfume Enthusiast*? This is a magazine publishing niche waiting to be filled. In the meantime, perfume bloggers are popping up all over the Internet: IndiPerfumes, Anya's Garden of Natural Perfumery, SmellyBlog, Scentzilla, to name just a few. As elsewhere in the blogosphere, this evolving community is a mixture of the personal and the professional, the serious and the whimsical. But the passion for fragrance is always there. These writers are pioneering new ways of describing scent. I think their efforts may produce a vibrant, robust, and very useful way of organizing the world of perfume. (Keen 2007: 17)

Whether these bloggers – as suggested by Gilbert – are "pioneering new ways of describing scent" or not, their discursive practices pose a methodological question: how shall we approach this hybrid and affective universe (of "mixtures" and "passions") "popping up all over the Internet"?

17 See, for example, *The First Nerve's* post "How Fares the Smelly Web?," May 8th, 2011. A further distinction is the one between perfume blogs and "forums," and perfume blogs and vlogs present on video-sharing websites such as *YouTube* (for a discussion, see, for example, Ari's post "Format Face-off: YouTube Perfume Reviews," posted on *Scents of Self*, March 26th, 2012).

My interest in the ways of describing scent on the Internet started in 2011 when I first discovered perfume blogs and became puzzled by the know-how of on-line scent writing. In 2012, I decided to turn this puzzlement into a research question, and, since then – while also consulting some of the archived posts – I tried to read the updates on NST daily, keeping also an eye on multiple blogs (the majority of which do not publish weekly, or even monthly). The blogs that I read are mostly written in English (sporadically, I checked some written in Italian and German) whose authors report being located in Austria, Australia, Brazil, France, Greece, Italy, Japan, and Switzerland, in addition to the UK and USA. I followed some perfume blogs from their first appearances (e. g., *Colognoisseur*), and saw others go extinct and be resuscitated (e. g., *The Scents of Self*). As I participated in this reading activity, I observed my own practices and those inscribed in the blogs' texts. Even though my perfumista's skills are still rudimentary, this participation allowed me to acquire a membership knowledge[18] that serves here as my entrance point into the practical know-how of perfume writing. One of the key appeals of perfume writing resides in the possibility of apprenticeship that it provides. Instead of being confined to reports of activities of others or to an exposition of their personal journey, one can acquire knowledges of the community through a direct participation in its everyday practices. How community and perfumistas' digital texts arrange for such a possibility will be discussed in the section that follows; here, suffice it to say that the representativeness of the writing samples reproduced in this paper is relative to this membership status and the knowledges it entails. All the quoted and discussed material – to which I give a strong presence – was posted on websites that do not have any restriction of access and is thus available to my readers for further contextualization and interpretation.

In addition to these excerpts, the paper relies on the components of perfumistas' language observed beyond the Internet page. These, however, concern only my own activities of reading blogs and smelling fragrant materials. When considering the rest of the participants, their doings are described as available through their unsolicited and published writings. There are two main reasons I didn't seek to observe or engage perfumistas beyond witnessing their textual traces on the Internet. First, their Internet texts exhibit a writing style that is exceptionally reflexive[19] – by reading perfume blogs, I was able to access not only the discursive practices of doing "perfumistahood," but also perfumistas'

18 For my positioning, see, for example, ten Have 2002.

19 For example, on her blog *Scents of Self*, Ari features a series of interviews with perfume bloggers where she discusses with her colleagues the blogging practice and the perfume hobby that they share.

own accounts of their practices, spontaneously posted on-line. Secondly, the focus of this paper is the functioning of Internet texts and their inscribed methods for generating olfactory impressions. Even though I am interested in the *worldly* – how the olfactory language functions through its engagement with the world of everyday practice – my interest is in how that world participates in on-line texts; thus, I don't treat the world as an independent feature but as one of the textual aspects of perfumistas' blogs. In this sense, not only did I not solicit information through interviews, for example, I also didn't do so by writing comments on the blogs.[20] In other words, I wrote blog comments only as a perfumista, but as a researcher, I did not intervene with the blogs any more than I would with published paper documents.

For example, when Christos of *Memory of Scent* wrote about being invited to contribute to a fashion blog, he remarked that he approached it "more freely, without the restrictions of perfume blogging" ("Perfume Prose for A Shaded View on Fashion" posted by Christos on *Memory of Scent*, on February 14th, 2013). I was compelled to ask for a further elaboration on the point about the "restrictions of perfume blogging," but, since that would push my participation beyond the perfumista role, I restrained myself from doing so. Similarly, when I intervened in blogs' comments sections, I did so only in my role of a participating perfumista, making my actions available to my observations but not impacting the actions of others as a researcher. In this sense, only the observations of my own actions share some characteristics with an Internet ethnography (e. g., Hine 2013), while my engagement with the rest of the material is done as a semiotic textual analysis.

In treating these Internet posts as traditional semiotic texts, I focus on how perfumistas' writings are composed and how such writings indicate reading paths for their actualization. In not attending to the actual practices of the empirical writers who composed those texts but dealing, instead, with perfumistas as *textual strategies*, I follow Umberto Eco's *theory of reading* (1979a, 1979b, 1990). In accordance with a larger trend in semiotics of text that characterizes European semiotics of the 1970s (e. g., Kristeva 1970; Barthes 1970; Greimas 1976; Petöfi 1975), Eco's discussion of how literary texts generate meaning does not either resort to authors' intentions or to actual instances of reading. As he is not interested in adding extra textual elements to his analysis, Eco is not only indifferent to those who actually wrote a text but he highlights how the text indicates its strategies for reading by what he calls the text's "model reader." Here, my focus is on how texts are composed to generate olfactory

20 I also did not participate as a commentator in any of the texts that I quote and analyze in this paper.

effects. As I identify methods that organize them (while pointing out the worldly character of the olfactory language), I want to know – similar to Eco's position – what are the procedures that Internet texts indicate for their readings.[21]

To further clarify this positioning and how members' accounts of who they are support it, let's confirm that perfume is first and foremost a commodity, and perfume blogging is about the late capitalism that we inhabit and where fragrance is not to be dissociated from our object fetishism surrounding commercial design and manufacture.[22] In the brief exchange between Olive and Robin reported above, the topic of the conversation is the perfume *Chanel 28 La Pausa*. While not a commodity that defined the twentieth century in the same manner that *Chanel No. 5* did, *Chanel No. 28* is a commodity, one associated with the house of *Chanel* and its history – famously ingrained in politics and scandalous associations (e. g., Mazzeo 2010). As such, the fragrance is also part and parcel of the perfume industry which is worth about 25 billion dollars, and which, together with flavor businesses, counts sales of several billion dollars annually (e. g., Guentert 2007: 2). While the exchange between Olive and Robin is intricately tied to those dimensions and persistently shaped by geographic and income patterns of those involved in perfumistahood, in the present paper I deal with those dimensions only as discursive topics and objects of interaction among perfumistas. Robin, for example, calls herself "a consumer." After being addressed as "an official perfume person" by Jonas, she replies by saying: "No, we're both consumers! I'm just a consumer with a blog, that's all. I am no more

21 A *New York Times*' article entitled "Everyone's a Critic" describes perfumistas by labeling them as "stay-at-home moms or professionals in other fields," "enthusiasts," "collectors, amassing as many as 200 bottles and vials in their homes," those "interested in mostly unadvertised limited-distribution brands," and "scents aficionados" who are "fierce, responding to certain fragrances with rapture or, as often, with venomous contempt." They are also the "chorus of critics," sources of the "opinionated chatter" which "has become catnip to consumers" and "the bane of the fragrance industry" (La Ferla 2008). As suggested by Eco and shaped by the research methods employed here, I have no way of verifying whether those who write perfume blogs are actually stay-at-home moms, whether they are professionals in other fields who lack official qualifications to write about scent, or how many perfume vials they may have at home. In fact, when I engage with perfumistas on fragrance blogs, it may well be that I am talking with disguised marketers. As a perfumista, I live them as social interlocutors, but when confronting the phenomenon as a social scientist, I recognize that Robin and Olive may be nothing else but chatbots. The research methods adopted here, however, allow me to describe how their roles and practices are articulated on the Internet through the textual format that fashions them as composing.

22 For a discussion of perfume as commodity, see, for example Classen et al. 1994: ch. 6: "The aroma of the commodity: The commercialization of smell."

official than anybody else, just more of a busybody, LOL …" (comments section following Robin's review of *Versace Eros Pour Femme*, posted on NST on January 29th, 2015).

That perfumistas' practices are embedded in and geared toward their discursive dimension is further confirmed by their own reflections on their hobby. As part of their hobby, perfumistas collect fragrances, and being a perfumista often translates to being a perfume collector (as suggested by Alicia Harad's remark on "obsession").[23] Yet, a perfumista is not somebody who *owns* perfume, no matter the size of the collection. While it is undeniable that being perfumista is about consumption, commercial goods, and the capitalist economy, to grasp how perfumistas define themselves is to acknowledge that their goal is not the perfume but connoisseurship, and that their practice is first and foremost about language – a perfumista is somebody who talks about scent. In Angela's NST post on "Becoming a Perfumista" (October 19th, 2007), the blogger differentiates the process into four stages where the first three are "Strong Interest," "Beginning Perfume Mania," and "Full Blown Perfume Mania," while the forth is "Connoisseurship." In describing that final stage, Angela states that the "best of all, scent – not just perfume – has become a source of deep pleasure. The smell of the wind, a glass of wine, or a wet garden feeds you. You smell the seasons change and the day age. Isn't it great?" The blogger also points out that this final stage is the one where one actually pares down one's collection and is not "frantic" to get the newest sample of a niche perfume, but, even though one now trust one's own preferences, one still reads perfume criticism, one "enjoys it": "(y)ou enjoy reading the opinions of perfume critics, but ultimately you trust your own judgment."

As connoisseurs, perfumistas cultivate a special relationship to the language of smell – it is that language that defines, primarily, who they are. That perfume bloggers are those who like to talk about smell is wittily expressed in Ari's post "Yes, you are a (perfume) nerd" (published on NST on July 12th, 2012). This guest author's intervention is organized as if it was a quiz, where, after listing ten questions, the blogger concludes by saying: "If you answered 'yes' to even a single one of these questions, congratulations! You are a nerd." Ari then explains why perfumistas are nerds:

> Most importantly, think about the question about your perfume blog reading habits. When a non-nerd finds a perfume that they enjoy, he or she will probably never discuss that perfume with anyone unless someone happens to ask what they're wearing. Now, here's

23 See also La Ferla 2008, and "Bottling Shame: Why Perfume is my Dirty Secret," posted on *I Smell Therefore I Am* (August 29th, 2012).

> what happens when I stumble across a new perfume that I enjoy. First, I check its MakeupAlley reviews. Then I do a general Google search and look for any reviews by perfume bloggers. There's an entire freaking research process here that would never occur to a non-nerd. Finally, I write my own review for my perfume blog. We're perfume nerds because we're not content to merely wear great perfumes; we want to talk about them. We actively seek out other perspectives and ideas about perfume, and eagerly add our own voices to the conversation.

Being perfumista (and thus being a "nerd") is about talking about perfume (not about wearing them[24]); it is about "voices" and "conversation."

In the following section, I turn to those conversations to bring forth how perfumistas' texts generate olfactory effects on the Internet. I talk about their language as being *turned toward the world*. By this, I mean that – while characterized as expressing subjective, internal, and personal – this language is, at the same time, collective and material; it manages to generate olfactory effects by being distributed across odoriferous stuff, sensory experiences, communities, and speakers (lay and professional).

In tracing this language, I describe its four discursive methods. First, the language is shared across the community – this is a language used by perfumistas. As I analyze the workings of one specific text (a "perfume review"), I show how perfumistas' language inscribes community knowledges and reenacts repertoires of uses that concern aspects such as historical periods in perfumery, perfume houses, perfumers and their styles, as well as the communal sentiment toward the "sanitization" of the olfactory environment. In discussing these features of perfumistas' language, I not only bring up its vocabulary, but highlight the effort made by the community to enable its members to acquire it. But this language also reaches out further, as it incorporates elements of a professional language – the language of marketers. As I describe this practice of borrowing, I point out how perfumistas, as they adopt this professional parlance, also disobey it, assessing it in respect to the values shared by the community, and frequently treating such acts as occasions for play. To further chart this worldliness of perfumistas' language, I indicate how their texts are organized as "instructions for use": to generate olfactory effects, these texts direct their empirical readers to practically engage the world. Finally, I note how perfumistas, by premising their talk as individual and internal, provide means for communicative exchange. As the postulation of the individual and internal enables the shared practice, the sensory is – through practice – also enacted *in the world*.

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24 See comment by Luca Turin in "Follow your Nose: A Lesson in Perfume-Making" by David Shariatmadari, *The Guardian*, October 10th, 2015.

All this, however, is not to imply a shift away from the discourse. On the contrary, I show how turning the language toward the world generates a possibility for more talk. This Internet talk *articulates* the sensory, and, while it indicates how an accounting for the sensory cannot be complete without considering its embedding in the socially shared, material world, it points out how, in turn, this world is importantly semiotic.

3 To smell what she is saying

> The average consumer would pick up a bottle of fragrance, smell it, spray it on, smell it again and say: "I like it, it smells nice, I'll take it."
>
> A blogger, in contrast, would take a fragrance, spray it and analyze it: "it opens with citrus ... a lemon ... a lemon rind ... zesty ... there is some neroli too. It reminds me of X by Y. They totally ripped it off. I can't believe it! And what's that warm woody note creeping in? Amber maybe? Ambroxan? Synthetic musk ... white musk. It dries down musky ... how typical. They ripped off X and by using cheaper aromachemicals."
>
> – Bloggers' Thumbs-Up: A Poor Predictor of Fragrance Success July 18, 2013 by Scent Bound

To bring forth the ordinary and practical means (Garfinkel 1984 [1967], 2002; Garfinkel et al. 1981) through which a scent is rendered on perfume blogs, this section turns to the "perfume review" as the main genre of fragrance writing. Although the perfume review is not the only type of post found in the fragrant blogosphere,[25] there is no perfume blog without a perfume review. As suggested by readers' comments that usually follow such reviews, to focus on the review is also warranted by its being considered a sign of writer's virtuosity.[26]

To discuss the design of perfume review – its frequently found components, its vocabulary, the values and communal uses that it inscribes, and how it articulates gaps for participation – I invite my reader to follow one review

25 Perfume blogs commonly contain lists of bests, glossaries, announcement of new perfumes, book reviews, draws, food recipes, interviews, exhibit reviews, scientific news on the sense of smell, etc.

26 For example, Prince Barry commented: "Amazingly beautiful review E. Makes my slender scribblings of a review on POL seem silly. :)" and *Perfumeshrine* responded: "B, Awww, you're so sweet! Surely the format of a blog post allows for a fuller exposition than a forum post, that's all. Even by POL standards which are better than most and with such discerning and eloquent posters as you" ("Ormonde Jayne Nawab of Oudh: fragrance review," posted on March 8th, 2013).

from NST in its entirety, which I accompany with writing excerpts from the same as well as other blogs.[27] The review is of *Iris Silver Mist* – the fragrance Robin describes as "one of my favorites" (in response to a negative comment that followed the review). The review was posted on September 21st, 2005 as one of the earlier reviews on NST blog. In what follows, I refer to *Iris Silver Mist*, in line with the perfumistas' convention, with its acronym "ISM."[28] Robin's review was also chosen as her writing is deemed capable of rendering smell on the Internet. In a response to Ralovesuk – who complained about the negativity of Robin's review for *Prada Candy L'Eau* (posted on May 30th, 2013) – Zazie writes:

> One of the reasons I've been faithfully reading this blog since years now is because when Robin reviews a perfume, one can really "smell" what she is saying. No waxy prose, no self-promotion, no embarrassing confessions, but a clear description of the fragrance.
>
> She is able to put into words those tricky smells that make the perfume- and my nose agrees with hers, though our tastes are completely different – strange isn't it?
>
> All this to say: you are free to disagree, but I don't you really smell the sweet candy notes of caramel by reading these reviews?

3.1 The knowing of perfumistas

Robin's ISM review opens as follows:

> Iris Silver Mist was launched in 1994. It is one of the few Serge Lutens fragrances that is not attributed solely to nose Christopher Sheldrake; it was created by Maurice Roucel, either alone or in collaboration with Christopher Sheldrake. The notes are iris pallida root, galbanum, cedar, sandalwood, clove, vetiver, musk, benzoin, incense, and white amber.

27 The other blogs whose pieces of writing this text interweaves are *Mark Behnke Colognoisseur*, *I Smell Therefore I Am*, *Memory of Scent*, *Persolaise*, *Perfume Shrine*, *Scent Bound*, *Scents of Self*, *Sherapop's Salon de Parfum*, *The Non-Blonde*, *The Perfume Chronicles*, and *Unseen Censer*. Five of the authors that I cite identify as female, and six as male; all are written in English whose authors reported to be located in Greece (two), the UK (one) and the USA. With the exception of *I Smell Therefore I Am*, these blogs are written by a single author (aka, they are *solo* blogs). I refer to these blogs simply because I chose to read them (and hence am more familiar with them than with other blogs), and because I felt that I was learning the most from them (while also enjoying my readings). Thus, my selection should not be treated as representative as it is not intended to be so.

28 In the comments section of "Tuesday scent of the day 7/21," Kelly explains: "ISM is generally considered a gold-standard of what a four-star perfume should be in perfumista land, which is why this particular perfume gets its own acronym. It's shockingly gorgeous to me, but I love deep, dark, dirty irises" (NST, July 21st, 2015).

When reading this passage, a non-perfumista may suppose that the discursive articulation of the fragrance's olfactory character starts with the list of notes (that is, "iris pallida root, galbanum" etc.). That, however, would miss the ability of perfumistas to discern some of the olfactory features already present in the first two sentences of the review. For a perfumista, the year of fragrance's creation, the perfume house to which it belongs, and the name of its perfumer[29] are more than just contextual information. Their reading can offer hints of how the fragrance may smell by grounding it in the knowledges of the perfumistas' community. We now turn to those knowledges and their practical enactments, pointing out how they provide shared and publicly available resources for olfactory experiences.

ISM is a part of *Serge Lutens*' line of perfumes. *Serge Lutens* is one of the most venerated[30] *niche*[31] houses in the blogosphere, and, when Robin states the name of the house, she implicitly evokes its style. In her review of another *Lutens*' fragrance ("Sa Majeste La Rose," posted on September 5th, 2006 on NST) – this style is the topic of discussion:

> It is hard to explain the allure of the line to someone who hasn't smelled any of the fragrances, and for that matter, I don't think it is easy to understand until you've tried quite a few: his fame rests on the entire body of work he has produced with perfumer Christopher Sheldrake rather than on any one fragrance. More than with any other line I can think of, the fragrances are like personal artistic statements; to smell them is akin to entering someone else's dream world. At the same time, as perfumes, they are satisfyingly rich and complex, and as such they stand in stark contrast to many other niche lines.

In line with much of the reflection on olfactory language (examples of which were reported in the opening section), Robin first points out the difficulty of rendering Lutens' style through words, to then suggest that one needs to smell and compare the fragrances from the line: not only does one have to smell each Lutens' fragrance (the writer's words are impotent when taken on their own), s/he

29 These elements do not always appear in the opening of fragrance reviews, but they are habitually found in them.

30 In her NST review of "L'Artisan Drôle de Rose" (September 6th, 2006), Robin writes: "I would guess that if you were to rank niche perfume brands by the status accorded to them at the various online fragrance blogs and forums, Serge Lutens would easily take the top spot." See also Burr 2002: 47–49.

31 In her NST review of "L'Artisan Drôle de Rose," Robin marks the niche status of *Serge Lutens* (as well as *L'Artisan Parfumeur*) line by explaining that "(t)he fragrances don't smell generic or like they've been through a series of focus groups (although perhaps they have, I wouldn't know), and they don't always bow to conventional gender distinctions, or even to conventional ideas about what 'unisex' should smell like. This is what makes them stand apart from the mainstream, and is what I think of as the hallmark of niche perfumery" (September 6th, 2006).

needs to relate it to the rest.[32] When the blogger, finally, describes it, the features that she highlights (though rather general) are those that the text, when evoking the name of the line, implies. Though it is, of course, possible to read the review without knowing what fragrances from *Lutens*' line smell like, the point is, rather, that when a review provides those contextual elements, the model reader – inscribed in the text – is expected to recognize them. In Robin's review, to recognize them, the reader is not only instructed to "try quite a few," but is also provided with an explicit description of them: "like personal artistic statements," "akin to entering someone else's dream world," and "satisfyingly rich and complex." This description is an example of a broader set of knowledges on perfume houses that the perfumistas community enacts and deposits on-line.

Another element of this communal knowledge concerns historical periods in perfumery. The review of ISM was written in 2005, and in its very opening Robin specifies that the fragrance "was launched in 1994." Perfumistas see fragrances as reflecting their times – they are part of the fashion system,[33] and thus follow popular culture, inscribing the zeitgeist at the time of their creation (e. g., Herman 2013; Burr 2007: 247–251; Ellena 2011: 58–60). Regarding historical context, perfumistas are also known for their appreciation of vintage and discontinued perfumes.[34] In fact, in an interview, the perfumer Ellena (whose stand toward the bloggers is generally rather positive, as exemplified by the quote reported above), complains that "(t)he main problem is that, quite often, bloggers like old perfumes too much. Mainly they find that the best ones were in the past. And I tell you, that's not true" ("The Enigmatic Illusionist – An Interview With Jean-Claude Ellena," posted on *Persolaise*, July 31st, 2012). That perfumistas "wax

32 How this, as perfumistas explain and enact, is practically accomplished, will be discussed in what follows.

33 In her post "Perfume Acting as a Time Capsule" (July 12th, 2013), *Perfume Shrine* writes:

> Perfume itself is cyclical: like fashion (which famously can be so atrocious that it has to change every six months) it alters its key syntax to reflect a changing world with changing needs. This is why every decade of the twentieth century has roughly had its own fragrance background, from the impressionistic scents of La Belle Epoque to the orientals of the 1920s (boosted by the success of Guerlain *Shalimar*), the advancement of floral aldehydic perfumes, the 1940s and 1950s feminine chypres deriving from the iconic *Mitsouko*, the hippie revolution with patchouli and musk, the career women of the 1980s with their strong aura of *Poison, Obsession* and *Giorgio* up till the 1990s and the watery ozonics exemplified by *L'Eau d'Issey, Aqua di Gio* and *Light Blue* and our current inundation of gourmand, sweet perfumes.

34 See for example NST article "Vintage: 26 Vintage Fragrances Every Perfumista Should Try," posted by Angela on November 26th, 2012.

nostalgic about the lost glory days of perfumery" has to do with "the various IFRA restrictions on fragrance materials that have resulted in large-scale reformulations of many older perfumes" ("Robin, Van Cleef & Arpels Muguet Blanc ~ perfume review," posted on NST on November 5th, 2009),[35] and parallels perfumistas' resistance toward sanitization and the odorless world of the present moment, where the use of perfume is banned in public spaces and where progressively more numerous office policy statements are generated to reduce or eliminate personal scented products at work.[36]

Another distinguishing aspect of the community is the knowledge of perfumers and their style. An example of how that knowledge is enlisted to generate olfactory impressions comes from Robin's review of "L'Artisan Drôle de Rose" (NST, September 6th, 2006):

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35 IFRA stands for "international fragrance association," and describes its mission as, together with the fragrance industry, "(e)nsuring the safe enjoyment of fragrance" (http://www.ifraorg.org/, cited in NST's article "Perfumista tip: on reformulations, or why your favorite perfume doesn't smell like it used to," September 29th, 2009). Perfumistas, on the other hand, see IFRA as representing the economic interests of aromachemical companies (see also Sherapop's article "Between Charybdis and Scylla: Is There a Third Way," posted on *Sherapop's Salon de Parfum* on May 22nd, 2013). For those who appreciate vintage perfumes, the "IFRA battles," going on in Europe while the industry is rapidly expanding across the globe (e. g., Burr 2007, 94), are of no small significance.

36 *ScentSense*, a website dedicated to opposing the use of fragrances, and written by somebody whom perfumistas may call a "perfume hater," reports:

> In the US more and more municipal authorities are banning fragranced products: Detroit City, Minnosota educational institutions, Cecil College (Maryland) and Portland State University are all some of the many fragrance-free workplaces. In Santa Cruz, California, the municipality has banned the wearing of fragranced products at public meetings. At Marin County in California, restaurants now offer "fragrance-free" areas for customers.
>
> In Canada, Halifax, Nova Scotia, has a policy of "no scents makes good sense" and discourages the wearing of fragranced products in municipal office, libraries, hospitals, classrooms, courts and buses.
>
> [Forty-nine] municipalities in Gothenburg, Sweden, are considering banning the wearing of fragranced products in all hospitals in the region. An estimated 6% of the Swedish population is sensitive to fragrance and suffer allergic reactions (from "My right, your right").

For perfumistas' reflections, see for example, *Perfume Shrine's* post "'Your perfume is giving me the hives/a headache/asthma!'" (July 6th, 2010) with the comments that followed, and *I Smell Therefore I Am's* post "I Wore This: Simply Right Hand Sanitizer" (September 30th, 2014) with the comments that followed.

> Drôle de Rose is often compared to Frederic Malle's Lipstick Rose (2000), and the two share an attitude along with prominent notes of rose and violet. That attitude is rather hard to describe, but both scents combine a modern, overtly synthetic feel with an almost tongue in cheek, vintage uber-femininity: picture a woman with lots of hair piled up high on her head, wearing a negligee, and sitting at her dressing table holding a large powder puff. Now picture Olivia Giacobetti interpreting that woman into scent, and you have Drôle de Rose.

Again, the "attitude" of the perfume in question is "hard to describe," but the blogger accomplishes it by comparing *Drôle de Rose* to another perfume (i. e., *Lipstick Rose* by perfumer Ralf Schweiger), and by employing the commonly adopted personification technique to ground the comparison. To render the difference between the two fragrances (and thus evoke what *Drôle de Rose* smells like), the reviewer enlists the readers' (expected) familiarity of the perfumer Olivia Giacobetti's style.

In bringing up this style, bloggers also counteract the practices of not acknowledging perfumers, emblematic of the fragrance industry. An evocation of this concern is seen in the review of "Marni eau de parfum (Daniela Andrier 2013)":

> Like Castiglioni's designs, *Marni* is cheeky, elegant and well aware of the playful potential of irony. It's also on the quiet side – which will no doubt attract criticism from some quarters – but with its mix of intelligence and flirtatiousness, it deserves to be the first mainstream hit of the year. My only real complaint – and I concede this is something which won't register on the high street – is that its press release doesn't mention Daniela Andrier a single time. A shameful omission, if ever there was one. Note to PR people: give her the credit she's due, so that she can carry on making sweet little numbers like this one. (Persolaise, January 18th, 2013)

It is then also interesting that, when the same blogger reviews "Jour D'Hermès from Hermès (Jean-Claude Ellena 2012)," he laments the opposite tendency enacted by perfumistas:

> I doubt *Jour* would have received as much thought and attention if it hadn't been an Ellena creation. Maybe there's nothing wrong with that; maybe it's right that his status persuades people to study his work. But perhaps, every now and then, it causes some of us to see glittering finery on an emperor who's actually naked. (posted on Persolaise on Friday, February 8th, 2013)

This knowledge of perfumers and their styles strengthens ties inside the community: there is a group of people that participates in the talk about those whom the industry treats as "ghosts" (Burr 2007: XI). But the community – through its writings and other discursive exchanges – also risks conformity: in the case of *Jour D'Hermès*, a perfume may be receiving attention primarily because the community shares a predilection for its perfumer (here – Jean Claude Ellena).

That there is something that only we can talk about,[37] but that we also exhibit and make available to all those who share our interests, is also reflected in the perfumistas' vocabulary. During my initial visits to perfume blogs, I was overwhelmed by the foreign parlance: there were not only names of perfumers, houses, vintage fragrances, but also "perfumista slang." The slang abounds in adopted and coined terms such as "juice," "flanker," and "skanky"; and acronyms and abbreviations for local terminology (e. g., "SOTD" for "scent of the day"), perfume houses (e. g., "CdG" for *Comme des Garçons*), and fragrances (e. g., "LHB" for *L'Heure Bleue* by *Guerlain*). The first comment that follows the ISM review states: "And thus the lemming is born … Thank you, R. Must sample this at all costs" (posted on September 21st, 2005). "Lemming" in "A perfumista lexicon" (posted on NST on April 25th, 2008) is defined as follows:

> Lemming: lemmings are small rodents, said to look like fat furry hamsters. They are believed to blindly follow their crowd, even to the point of throwing themselves off a cliff if everyone else is doing it. This behavioral pattern is mythical, but the word is used on many fragrance forums and blogs to describe the feeling of intense longing generated by reading posts about a product or fragrance; in more simple terms, it just means to want a perfume. Sometimes converted to the verb form, "*to lemm*."

Perfumista slang commonly occurs in readers' comments where it is, not so rarely, discussed and reflected upon.[38] Following Robin's review of *Ego Facto's Poopoo Pidoo* (posted on NST on November 12th, 2009), bipharma commented: "I wonder: How does it stack up to Etat Libre d'Orange's Putain des Palaces? They have similar notes – kinda woodsy musk gourmand with rice." Robin replayed saying: "I don't remember that one as being rice-y … more like powdery rose violet over skank? But it's been awhile since I tried it." This, what seems a rather ordinary exchange between two perfumistas, is followed by Joe's meta-comment: "That just struck me as hilarious, for some reason, R. Only among this group would 'powdery rose violet over skank' sound like a perfectly normal description of anything … and more or less a positive description too." In her reply, Robin continued commenting on the practice: "LOL … so very true! It does sound strange. And I ought not to use skank anyway, to many people that's a pejorative term."[39] To which Joe said: "Aw, c'mon. Everyone loves some good skank. J/K. Hard to come up with a better word, though. Musk? Funk?" To get at

37 Focusing on race and gender, Gray (2012) and Young (2014) pointed out how fan groups in on-line communities also exclude and discriminate.

38 Kenneth Lieberman (2013: 218, 219, 236) points out how coffee tasters come up with coffee descriptors collaborative, as they interact with each other.

39 On a discussion of perfumistas' appreciation for "skank" see "5 Perfumes: A Skank Sampler," posted on NST by Angela (October 12th, 2015).

the meaning of those terms, one can consult the dedicated blogs' sections – NST, for example, has a section dedicated to perfume glossary and a section on perfumista lexicon – where bloggers diligently guide their readers through the meaning of the vocabulary, its pronunciation, and its historical origins. But, as the exchange between bigpharma, Robin, and Joe indicates, this knowledge is also constantly enacted, accounted for, and made available through the Internet talk. Perfumistas use their slang to evoke specific aspects of odor qualities: not "rice-y" but "more like powdery rose violet over skank." And while their talk is about "this group" ("Only among this group would 'powdery rose violet over skank' sound like a perfectly normal description of anything …"), there is also an exhibited intent to make it available "to many people" ("I ought not to use skank anyway, to many people that's a pejorative term").

3.2 Borrowing and laughing

But if slang – enacted through perfumistas' chat and whose terms can be found listed in appended glossaries (like "A perfumista lexicon," mentioned above) – is proprietary to the group, the names of the notes are not as exclusive. Like slang, they borrow from the everyday parlance, but they also reach into a realm of professional talk. For ISM, Robin lists notes of "iris pallida root, galbanum, cedar, sandalwood, clove, vetiver, musk, benzoin, incense, and white amber." In considering terms such as "cedar," "sandalwood," and "clove," one may assume that they are not particularly challenging to decipher; this supposition, however, would be readily disqualified when one turns to "iris pallida root," or semantically more complex and ideologically tinted notes, such as amber.[40] For example, non-perfumistas are not typically aware that what is associated with iris fragrance is not derived from the iris flower, but that it comes from the rhizome of the plant, that this root needs to be carefully dried for several years, that the fragrant element in iris is a molecule called "irone," that iris pallida traditionally comes from Florence in Italy, that there is a significant olfactory difference between iris germanica and iris florentina, that iris is one of the most precious ingredients in perfumery, that in recent years its Italian production has been radically reduced, etc.

This semantic richness not only suggests a usage that goes beyond everyday talk, but that the notes are not organized around a simple referentiality: they do not stand for ingredients from which a fragrance is composed and whose

40 For a definition of amber, see, for example, *Perfume Shrine's* post "The Wonders of Amber: Perfumery Material of Soft, Oriental Character" (November 3rd, 2006).

meaning is to be comprehended in terms of their sources. As described by the blogger at *Sherapop's Salon de Parfum*, they, instead, indicate how perfumers and marketers suggest a fragrance should be read:

> Iso-E-super is usually not mentioned as a note even though it is quite frequently used as a cedar surrogate, just as ambroxan is used to mimic natural ambergris, which is often listed as a note though it is in such cases a fiction. All of this should suffice once and for all to demonstrate that the ingredients are not the notes, and the alleged notes said to be salient in a given creation by marketers are metaphors and manifest evocations: an attempt to tell consumers what they are supposed to find in the perfume ("Can We Talk? About Perfume?" Part 2, posted on December 30th, 2012).

And here is a perfumer's take on the notes, where notes are defined in terms of what is expected to be perceived when someone is experiencing a fragrance:

> What distinguishes the vocabulary of the perfumer from that of laypeople is the choice of a common language based on the training provided in perfumery schools and the discussions between perfumers and experts within the profession. This linguistic community creates a consensus around certain perceptual features. For the perfumer, soap, aldehyde, jasmine, nail varnish, rose, leather, wood, bonbon, and so forth are terms that describe the odor and not the object that produces it. A lily of the valley can be described as "jasmine," as can a fragrance, a washing powder, and so on.
>
> For the perfumer, the word "jasmine" refers to an olfactory experience, which can be very different from the fragrance given off by jasmine flowers. For the professional, therefore, the vocabulary of odors no longer brings to mind the image of the source but a mental picture of the odor. The perfumer thus invents the object of his science; he invents odor, and that is the source of his creativity. (Ellena 2011: 38)

As Ellena talks about notes in terms of "olfactory experiences," he highlights their ties to the communal practices in which perfumers participate as they share terminology within their profession. Ellena points out that the vocabulary acquired through schooling and communicative exchanges among "perfumers and experts within the profession" distinguishes their community. Yet, while the language of perfumers tends to be framed as "secretive," the language of marketers is not – this "public" language of the perfume industry is what perfumistas have access to. While they, on one hand, have their own slang, perfumistas also openly rely on lists of notes provided by marketers.

But that perfumistas borrow this language is not to say that they uncritically take up the parlance of professionals. Instead, as they mix specialized lexicon and vernacular knowledges, these are acts of *semiosis*, where each following element in the chain of *interpretants* (CP) – while partially forgetting – participates in reshaping the industry's language. One can spot this not only in perfumistas' lamenting of inadequacies of the language of marketers (see, for

example, Kevin's comment after NST announcement of *Aerin Lauder* new scent on September 8th, 2014 where he describes the marketers' language as "incomprehensible"), but also in their "translations" (Eco 2001) of it.

An indicative example comes from Robin's NST review of *Balenciaga Paris L'Eau Rose* (posted on February 5th, 2013). As the review suggests, the official lists of notes may be consulted, yet there is no obedience to them. Instead, the lists (or what Robin here calls "the description") are assessed in respect to the values shared by the community.

> (T)he description is accurate enough:
>
> A sparkling violet fragrance. A twist of the iconic violet with a sparkling touch of blackberry and musk. The scintillating and youthful fragrance is a feminine scent that captures the sophistication of Balenciaga Paris with an enticing, floral musk.
>
> Plain speak translation: a sort of mash-up between a blackberry musk and a traditional powdery rose-violet. The top notes are sparkling, fruity and sweet but not *too* fruity and sweet, with lots of peppery citrus. I found it quite fun – it makes a great first impression on paper and on skin. The dry down recalls the original Balenciaga Paris fragrance: muted dry woods, even more muted (and clean) patchouli, a bit of musk, all smoothed over with a light dusting of powder. It's a bit more transparent than Balenciaga Paris, and a bit less earthy, and a lot less creamy. Arguably, it's also a bit more youthful and a bit less distinctive.

The excerpt opens by reporting the manufacturer's presentation of the perfume's notes which is judged "accurate enough." The partial (marked by "enough") approval is then followed by the rendition framed as a "(p)lain speak translation." There is some toning down of language so that "a twist" is rendered as "a sort of mash up," and "the iconic violet" is given as "a traditional powdery rose." The term "sparkling" (which occurs twice in the original) is taken over, but is accompanied with "fruity and sweet." This not only specifies what is meant by "sparking" but also adds a negative value to it, as perfumistas tend to express their dislike toward fruity and sweet fragrances (characteristic of the current mainstream fragrance offerings[41]). This position is corroborated when further modified by "but not *too* fruity and sweet," and rendered more specific

41 As an example, following the announcement of Ariana Grande's new perfume, pyramus said: "Well, that hits all the marks, doesn't it? Fruity floral, sugary gourmand note, musky wood base, the word 'addictive', something sticking out of or dangling off of the bottle. Sounds like it was focus grouped to within an inch of its life," to which Robin responded: "Somehow, I doubt they spent much money on focus grouping it – more likely they just did what everybody else had already focus grouped! The pom pom is completely cracking me up" ("Ari by Ariana Grande ~ new perfume," posted on NST on July 24th, 2015).

by adding notes that were not originally listed: "with lots of pepper and citrus." The blogger then provides a comparison to *Balenciaga Paris* (already identified in the original): the two fragrances are similar in the "dry down" where the blogger smells "muted dry woods, even more muted (and clean) patchouli, a bit of musk, all smoothed over with a light dusting of powder." The list imbeds further values shared by the community: perfumistas, for example, tend to disapprove of the frequent use of patchouli in contemporary "pink chypres"[42] and "fruitchoulis,"[43] and the mention of "clean" similarly alludes to a disliked contemporary trend[44] (differently from "earthy" – noted in the expression "less earthy"). The introduction of those terms goes well with the supplanting of what was originally described as "sophistication" by "muted and smoothed over." When Robin says, "(a)rguably, it's also a bit more youthful and a bit less distinctive," the token "youthful" does not have the positive valence of its original (this reversal of value is marked by its pairing with "less distinct"). Similarly, perfumistas also tend to oppose the rigid distinction between feminine and masculine fragrances, which may explain the omission of "feminine" in Robin's translation.[45] While inscribing those positions, the piece is imbued with explicit judgment: the fragrance is declared to be a "*decent enough* flanker" while it is pointed out that "it makes a *great* first impression." These evaluations are again not free of shared tenets: perfumistas, for example, tend to deride "flankers" as an expression of the industry's greed for profit,[46] while they stress the importance of not judging fragrances by "first impression," further bypassing the expected comportment of a consumer. And while the original description is pronounced "accurate enough" and several of its elements are taken over, the tone is curbed down. The translation feels as if now shared among friends who, occasionally, do not disdain to roll their eyes and share a chuckle.

42 See "Sign of the Times (and a Little Rant)," posted on *Perfumeshrine* on October 22nd, 2009.
43 See "Chypre Series 3: the new contestants," posted on *Perfumeshrine* on October 3rd, 2007.
44 For example, in her review of *Penhaligon's Ostara*, Robin says: "Mind you, it's not *that* clean, not when you're paying attention. But there's a definite undertone of clean. Sometimes it seemed more assertive and sometimes less, but I found it disconcerting" (posted on NST on May 5th, 2015).
45 Perfumistas define themselves against this distinction. As a part of the "Lazy weekend poll ~ you might be a perfumista if ..." (posted by Robin on July 20th, 2013), *50_Roses* explains: "You might be a perfumista if you have ever bought for yourself a perfume that is marketed to the opposite sex. People who aren't seriously into perfume seem to have a very hard time getting past the gender stereotypes, whereas perfumistas don't care whether it is "supposed" to be masculine or feminine" (posted on July 21st, 2013).
46 See, for example, "New Perfume Review Bvlgari Eau Parfumee au The Bleu- More Purple than Blue" (posted on Mark Behnke Colognoisseur, August 10th 2015).

As perfumistas exploit and transgress marketers' language (together with the cultural norms inscribed in it), they frequently turn to humor.[47] This often takes place in the comments sections where reports of marketers' announcements of new scented products are routinely transformed into occasions for play. NST also hosts a contest called "Le Prix Eau Faux" where readers are invited to create a "fake ad copy" and mock the language of marketers. To see how this is done in a review, we can use the example of a perfume called *Lithium* by niche house *Nu Be*. Here is, first, how marketers describe it:

> Lithium ~ developed by perfumer Nicolas Bonneville. " ... Slowly evoking the smell of flint, the heat after the spark. I have played with the ingredients in a harmony of contrasts: the tenacious presence of woods, cedar wood and patchouli, the softness of musk, the energy of spices and the subtleness of rose, the intensity of iris and the preciousness of saffron. Here it was, [3Li], primordial smell of flint and leather blended with the soft warmth of saffron and the ephemeral freshness of the rose" ("Nu Be ~ new niche line," posted by Robin, NST on March 29th, 2013).

And here is Kevin's playful translation of it in his post "Top 10 Winter Fragrances 2014":

> How does nu_be Lithium smell? Take one lumberjack, have him shower with a lemon-and-rose-scented soap ... then make him chop down cedar trees in 90-degree heat ... in a few hours, serve him a falafel, or two, for lunch. As he relaxes after eating, have him put his hands behind his head – exposing his damp, odiferous armpits. All together now: Lithium! (If you don't like sweaty/musky perfumes, don't go near it) ("Top 10 Winter Fragrances 2014," posted by Kevin, NST on January 17th, 2014).

One may suppose that this turning to humor and downplaying the seriousness of the enterprise provides a way to deal with the prejudice against human olfaction, or that laughter even functions as an act of subversion against social norms (e. g., Corbin 1986: Ch. 13). But with the Internet culture of *lolcats* and *4Chan*, it is of no surprise that the fragrant blogosphere also bursts with humor. This is even less surprising if one considers that smell and olfaction have been associated with play since antiquity (Classen et al. 1994: 26). Even in today's digital entertainment applications, such as video games, smell is explored via its linkage to humor (e. g., Niedenthal 2012[48]). And that the intimate link between

47 Following NST review of "Prada Candy L'Eau, Dolce & Gabbana The One Desire" (posted by Robin on May 30th 2013), ralovesuk commented: "I have been reading reviews on this website for a while now and I am tired of the so called 'reviews' that say nothing about the fragrance but keep looking down at it. And then follow a bunch of tasteless jokes, rolling eyes etc. Is this website all about this?"

48 Niedenthal, as an example of smell and entertainment, mentions perfumistas 2012: 120.

smell and entertainment goes beyond western culture is nicely exemplified by the *Kodo incense ceremony* (e. g., Iwasaki 2004).[49] In line with the character of an intersubjective amusement that all these examples share, Kevin, in the *Nu_Be* review, invites the reader to communal laughter. He sets out to achieve this by resorting to two methods: describing "perfume's development" and perfume writing as *instructions for use*. Let us now turn to the first, and then devote the following section to the second.

Kevin's *Lithium* is personified as a lumberjack and rendered through a plot-like structure with a chronological sequencing (Propp 1958 [1928]) where the lumberjack changes across the day: first he showers, then chops some trees, thereafter he eats his lunch, and finally he rests. The narrative alludes to the changing smellscape around the lumberjack which perfumistas read as the scent's "development." The idea of fragrance development is another aspect of perfumistas' talk adopted from marketers. Even though the concept is disputed,[50] blog reviews typically describe the temporal development or "structure" of a fragrance. Some perfumes are, thus, characterized as "linear," but most frequently, fragrances are seen as having the "top," "middle," and "base notes," and are often conceptualized in a style of a pyramid. In her review of ISM, Robin writes about this temporal unfolding as follows:

> Iris Silver Mist starts with damp, dirt-caked roots, spicy and peppery, with a touch of dry, mossy green. There is a slightly bitter, vegetal edge to the top notes that has been compared to the scent of raw turnips, and there is a hint of the metallic buzz that frequently accompanies iris. It is earthy, but not earth-bound; it has a sheerness about it that together with the resinous notes and sandalwood perfectly evokes the cold swirling mist implied by its name. The longer it is on the skin, the more vaporous it seems …

The description is multisensory. The writer evokes familiar things from the world: dirt-caked roots, raw turnips, earth, mist, etc., and relates them to sensations from the sense of touch – damp, dry, cold, vaporous; elements that may be visual – sheer, swirling vaporous; those from the sense of taste – spicy and peppery, bitter; and even evokes the auditory aspect of the experience – metallic buzz. These components are linked together to render the fragrance development: "The longer it is on the skin, the more vaporous it seems." As the

49 I am deeply grateful to Mayumi Bono and her laboratory members for arranging a Kodo incense ceremony visit for me. Even though I scored the perfect zero on the game we played, I enjoyed every moment of it, mesmerized by its aesthetics.

50 For example, Ellena explains that "you add something to the bottom and you influence the top notes, and when you first smell a perfume you smell everything, top to bottom, instantly" (quoted in Burr 2007: 110).

scent is articulated across modalities, the reviewer describes how it is experienced through time. These experiences – as we will see in what follows – are not only described but are also *accomplished* through perfumistas' texts. And this is done not only by bloggers but their readers as well.

3.3 Fragrance reviews as instructions for use

Reading Robin's description of her ISM experience may provide an impression that the blogger is positioning herself as an authority, situating her readers in a witnessing position. Under that reading, Robin's language would function in an expressive manner – her words would be seen as generating meaning by themselves and in entirety. Kevin's *Lithium* more readily suggests that perfume reviews are not done in such a manner. Articulated as a series of *directive* speech acts (Searle 1969), the temporal unfolding in Kevin's review is explicitly rendered as a set of instructions (Wittgenstein 1953). As the reader is humorously instructed to "(t)ake one lumberjack, have him shower … then make him chop down cedar trees …, serve him a falafel … have him put his hands behind his head …," the reviewer's words orient toward their practical actualizations.

Another example of an olfactory text explicitly intended toward imaginary but practical doings comes from Christos' review of *Sienne l'Hiver* by *Eau d'Italie*:

> Notes as listed in Parfumo are Benzoin, Fern, Geranium, Gaiac wood, Labdanum, Musk, Papyrus, Violet leaf, Cedar and the end result has nothing to do with what you would expect from these. In reality it opens with a milky, sappy note that is quite indefinable. One thing comes to mind: dry beans soaked overnight. If you crack one open before you start boiling them this is exactly what it smells like. Something between green and doughy ("Sienne l'Hiver and what's in a name," posted by Christos on Scents of on March 9th, 2013).

Christo's discussion of the fragrance's development is premised by "in reality," and initiated by evoking a (presumably) familiar scent: opened dry beans after they have been soaked overnight. To get at that scent one shall "crack one open" after the beans have been "soaked overnight" (and before "boiling them"). Those actions are recognizable as part of the familiar life-world that the (inscribed) blogger and reader share. One can imagine that, if a reader was unfamiliar with the described action, s/he could get at the scent by soaking the beans and cracking them open. Christos' text, thus – rather than being a complete description of something that independently exists in the world – provides an opportunity to be read as a recipe for action; the reader is directed to recollect, imagine, or perform some doings on the fragrant material (here, the beans) so that the olfactory effects hinted by the review could be achieved.

Dušan Bjelić and Michael Lynch (1994) discuss Goethe's natural-philosophical texts on optics, and, as they contrast them to Newton's writings, point out how Goethe's physics provides openings for a reader's firsthand engagement:

> Newton (at least in Goethe's view) placed his readers in the position of virtual witnesses who can only appreciate the truth revealed by an authoritative source, whereas Goethe (at least in principle) equipped his readers to become co-investigators who are entitled to struggle with the existential conditions under which the primal phenomena are disclosed ... For Goethe, anybody should be entitled to rediscover the natural marvels his investigations revealed; these marvels were visibly apparent, palpable properties of surface phenomena disclosed through systematic investigations. (Bjelić and Lynch 1994: 704)

When considering bloggers' writings, we deal with prosaic and often humorous narratives, written by hobbyists who employ language in a way that is deemed, if not impossible, then certainly challenging. Yet, when Bjelić and Lynch use Goethe's claims "as an occasion to examine how a textual argument is reflexively integrated with practical performance" (1994: 707), this is not much different from what takes place in perfumistas' reviews. Perfumistas' texts function as instructions for use: they ask their readers to arrange their everyday world so that they can experience it through smell. While this orientation may not be always explicitly available in the linguistic structure of a review, what is reported on-line and what I noticed through my participation in the smelly blogosphere[51] indicate that readers of perfume blogs orient toward arranging the world as a part and an extension of reviews. In doing so, they deal with the olfactory matter not only in imagination but also through a direct engagement.

Perfumers are commonly portrayed as spending years of training as they smell a variety of raw (and often precious) material, organized in so-called perfumer's organs. Through such repeated acts, they are expected to acquire an intimate knowledge of a large number of scents – they "learn to be affected" (Latour 2004: 206). How about blog readers? What kind of smelling practices (and *learning to smell* practices) do bloggers' texts inscribe, and how do their readers – featured as seated in front of digital screens as they talk with people that may be located continents apart – acquire their noses? Differently from perfumers who engage with often costly raw materials, the enthusiasts' access is mostly limited to commercially available perfumes. Learning kits for amateurs are obtainable (this practice most closely emulates how perfumers learn),

51 I borrow the term "smelly blogosphere" and "smelly web" from Avery Gilbert's blog *The First Nerve*.

but more often – according to reports I read on-line, and my own experiences of learning – this is accomplished by smelling large amounts of perfume samples.

These sampling practices are what fragrance reviews rely on, as apparent when Christos rhetorically asks: "Who wants to read what I think about a perfume they cannot smell?" ("Jil Sander man Pure 1981: too good to be forgotten," posted on *Memory of Scent* on March 13th, 2013).[52] The blogger can assume that his readers can smell perfumes he describes since, in parallel with fragrance blogging, there is a trading universe that accompanies it. On the Internet, there are businesses (some of them came into existence from fragrance blogging) that sell perfume samples, and there are practices of sharing cost of perfumes, as well as those of exchanging fragrances among perfumistas (see, for example, NST article "Perfumista tip: how to get fragrance samples, free or otherwise," posted by Robin on April 9th, 2007). The circulation of samples allows perfumistas to experience discontinued and hard-to-find fragrances, to avoid acquiring large quantities of perfume without having a chance to try them beforehand, and most importantly for my account, to enact what a review is saying. In other words, to align with the model reader of the review, the empirical reader can engage fragrance reviews as instructions for use while aided by the vast network of samples, decants, and splits which circulate in the perfumistas' universe.[53] By orienting toward this organized universe, the review asks to be realized through its interleafing with the world – its meaning resides in exactly this crossing between the digital and the physical.

Once samples are obtained, one can compare. In her ISM review – just after pointing out how the fragrance develops ("The longer it is on the skin, the more vaporous it seems") – Robin places the reviewed fragrance in a larger structure to be *differentiated* from other perfumes that may share notes or generate similar impressions: " … both Hiris and Bois d'Iris seem comparatively heavy and weighted down."[54] The reviewers' mastery importantly lays in providing such

52 One may also recall Robin's description of *Serge Lutens* line where she remarks that "(i)t is hard to explain the allure of the line to someone who hasn't smelled any of the fragrances and for that matter I don't think it is easy to understand until you've tried quite a few."

53 These perfumistas' practices are not particularly appreciated by perfumers and the industry, see for example, *Perfume Shrine's* interview with Andy Tauer, "Perfume Marketing & Prices: A One-To-One with an Indie Player, Tauer Perfumes" (October 14th, 2013).

54 These are iris fragrances as well, composed by Olivia Giacobetti (for *Hermes*, 1999), and Jean Claude Ellena (for *The Different Company*, 2000). The names of the two fragrances are rendered as hyperlinks that lead to their reviews on Robin's site.

comparisons. As pointed out in the opening of this section, the review inscribes the knowledge of a perfumer's style, the style of the perfume house, and the character of the time period in which the fragrance was released. Those knowledges, while relying on the hypertextual affordances of blogs,[55] are to be acquired through comparisons. To get a sense of how one fragrance might smell, one needs to differentiate it from the other elements in the system (de Saussure 1983 [1916]). To appropriately identify the comparable fragrances and meaningfully differentiate among them, the reviewer also needs to have a "good nose." As reported by Angela (in response to one of the comments regarding the post "Becoming a perfumista," posted on NST on October 19th, 2007), this is, in turn, honed (and further cultivated) through practicing comparisons:

> It sounds like you're having a lot of fun with perfume! That's terrific. Comparing fragrances with each other, as you've been doing, is the best way to develop a nose, I think. (Not that my nose is particularly well developed.) The most important part is just to have fun (posted on June 26th, 2011).

In this sense, blogging about comparisons – as it generates a sense of scent's character – also directs the reader toward "developing a nose." By indicating which other fragrances should be considered, the reviewer provides instruments for smelling; we could say that reviews function like perfumers' organs. And the reader's chance to get at the evoked smell relies not only on imagining what the reviewers indicate but also on following it as a recipe – linking the review's words to sampling actions in the world.

In my early attempts on perfumistahood, I wondered how a reviewer is possibly able to smell that a fragrance is "earthy, but not earth-bound," that "it has a sheerness about it that together with the resinous notes and sandalwood perfectly evokes the cold swirling mist implied by its name." When I smelled ISM, I did share the impressions expressed by Robin's review; nevertheless, I wanted to know how a smell description can be done so precisely. As I continued to read, I started to follow instructions. That meant that now I actually compared the

55 Perfumistas put a sizeable effort into building knowledge in their community by exploiting the digital affordances of their texts. In Robin's review of ISM, all the names of perfumers are hyperlinks so that the reader can go to the list of the fragrances that the perfumer in question has composed, and from there connect to reviews of other fragrances (by the same perfumer) that have been previously featured on the blog. These hyperlinks are not only paths to other articles but connect reviews to glossaries as well as various lists. There are, for example, lists of fragrances "every perfumista should try" (e. g., "100 fragrances every perfumista should try," "50 masculine fragrances every perfumista should try," "26 vintage fragrances every perfumista should try").

samples of scents that reviewers evoke in their comparisons. Even though my skills are still rudimentary, as I continued to smell and compare, I gradually became more skillful at individualizing specific features of a fragrance and at knowing which fragrances, in the first place, should be compared. That I managed to do so also meant that now I could start to talk. As the fragrance review directs you toward comparing – and is meaningful in respect to those practical actions in the world – it also allows you to talk about smell.

3.4 Evoking individualism as an opening of conversation

After positioning ISM in a relation of difference to other fragrances, Robin continues to report her experience as follows:

> It is an unusual, intensely captivating fragrance. Lutens has described Iris Silver Mist as "a summer scent recalling the smell of white linen," which I find interesting not only because I never reach for it in summer (it works best for me on a cool day in spring or fall) but also because I find it far too ethereal to compare to something so prosaic as white linen (the quote, and the fragrance notes in the first paragraph, are via Women's Wear Daily, 6/24/1994).

The blogger disagrees with the official description of ISM by pointing out how she uses the fragrance: "I never reach for it in summer" and "it works best for me on a cool day in spring or fall." These aspects of the scent experience, described as a part of somebody's everyday affairs – how a certain scent fits not only the season (as indicated here), but also a particular weather features (temperature and humidity, for example), wearer's mood, health state, presence of others, specific occasions of wearing, etc. – are frequently reported by readers as well (on NST, for example, there is a, recently installed, section dedicated to readers' reports of their daily fragrance choices).

When the blogger of *Sherapop's Salon de Parfum* reflects upon perfume writing, she brings up this indexical (Garfinkel 1984 [1967]) character of the olfactory experience to then articulate it in individualistic terms:

> Some perfume reviewers take themselves to be offering advice to their readers about which perfumes are good and which are not. Others, however, regard their task as a more modest one: to record the subjective experience of their own encounter with a perfume. Such an experience can never, strictly speaking, be replicated, even within the very same perceiver who spritzes on the very same perfume. Why? Because the perceiver will have changed, and the conditions in which the perfume is being used will be different, too.
>
> In fact, the two different kinds of reviewers may inhere in the very same person, someone who chronicles his or her subjective experience in order to inform other people that there is someone somewhere who has experienced the perfume thus. In other words, the review

> expresses one possible reaction to the perfume, which may or may not cohere with other people's experience. It is interesting, all the same, because it reveals how other people may perceive what we perceive in an entirely different way. Therein lies the profound philosophical importance of perfume ("Can We Talk? About Perfume? Part 2," posted on December 30th, 2012).

Sherapop says that what is "interesting" about the perfume (its "philosophical importance") is that "it reveals how other people may perceive what we perceive in an entirely different way." Even though on each occasion not only "the conditions" of experience but also "the perceiver will have changed," Sherapop accounts for the scent's embeddedness in the specific occasion of use by evoking subjectivity. In fact, on perfume blogs, the chronicling of indexical aspects of scented experience that pertains to specific situation of use is routinely framed as subjective and individual.

A common remark is that "everybody's body chemistry is different, what works for one may not work for another."[56] One recent piece of evidence for this idea – deeply ingrained in our *modern* understanding of olfaction (Classen et al. 1994: 27) – comes from a scientific study of Noam Sobel and his laboratory (Secundoa et al. 2015). The study – supporting the view that "each person may have a unique nose" (2015: 1) – goes to suggest a link between scent perception (which, according to the authors, "may be unique") and genetic markers: "individual noses may say a lot about a person." I learned about this study by reading NST (see Robin's Post "Sense of smell is strictly personal, study suggests 'Olfactory fingerprint' could be tough target for identity theft," June 22nd, 2015) which further emphasizes perfumistas' interest in the idea that olfaction is subjective.

There is an accidental but curious fit between this supposition and the characterization of the Internet as the reign of the personal. This feature of the Internet – deeply seated in the individualistic culture of the modern West – is described by Andrew Keen (2007) as follows:

> The *New York Times* report that 50 percent of all bloggers blog for the sole purpose of reporting and sharing experiences about their personal lives. The tagline for YouTube is "Broadcast Yourself." And broadcast ourselves we do, with all the shameless self-admiration of the mythical Narcissus. As traditional mainstream media is replaced by a personalized one, the Internet has become a mirror to ourselves. Rather than using it to seek news, information, or culture, we use it to actually BE the news, the information, the culture. (Keen 2007: 7)

56 See, for example, Angela's article "Same Perfume, Different Scent" (posted on NST on November 11th, 2013).

Not surprising then is that perfume bloggers, as they – like the rest of the Internet – write about themselves, also use the framework of the individual as a resource to account for their olfactory practices. In replying to Ari's question "What Is The role of A Perfume Blogger?" (posted on *Scents of Self* on December 9th, 2011), Christos of *Memory of Scent* (here in the role of a reader) highlights the subjective as the distinguishing feature of perfume writing:

> The main difference between us, perfume bloggers, and critics in other fields (books, films, food, whatever) is that we are amateurs. Very few might have a formal training in the field. We are beautifully, preciously subjective. But there is a big difference between saying that I do not like perfume X because it rubs me the wrong way and saying that perfume X is badly composed, pretentious, made with cheap material. The former is a personal opinion and nobody has the right to judge for this. The latter is a statement trying to pass for an objective evaluation (posted on December 10th, 2011).

In the smelly blogosphere, expressing just "a personal opinion" (as opposed to "a statement trying to pass for an objective evaluation") is tacitly normative. When originally trying to obtain my membership status in the community, I had to learn the expected ways of acting as a perfumista. When occasionally posting comments, only with time did I pick up that whenever you express a value judgment (about a certain fragrance, note, perfume packaging, etc.), it is customary to hedge it by signaling that this is only your opinion and that you are simply reporting on your personal experiences. Otherwise – as the implied sanction dictates – you end up being ignored (I, namely, noticed that when making categorical statements, nobody would respond or otherwise acknowledge my comments). As a part of this comportment, one is also expected to comment on other people's comments (rather than just write their own). This spirit of the smelly blogosphere is humorously characterized by olfactory psychologist Avery Gilbert (also a blogger of *First Nerve*) with "You know, the "everybody's opinion is equally valuable," "say only nice things," "'you go girl' school of universal warmth and empathy" ("The Smelly Web: Zombies Walk Among Us," posted on *First Nerve* on April 1st, 2012).

The reader will recall that, when Zelman (1992) laments the impossibility of smell talk, he casts the individual character of olfactory experiences in a negative light. The argument is that the idiosyncratic character of those experiences makes them not apt for conventional (symbolic) signs, and therefore for sharing. In the fragrant blogosphere, on the contrary, accounting for the individual is what allows for sharing. Stating one's own views is not only acceptable ("nobody has the right to judge for this"), but it functions as a mechanism for inviting others to express *their* idiosyncratic experiences. The text, thus, by retracting any absolute authority (it is "only about my personal opinion"),

provides space for intervention. Liberally adopting from Harvey Sacks and conversation analysis (e. g., Sacks 1992; Schegloff 2007), we may say that perfume writings are designed as the first-pair part in conversational turn-taking. This providing of the first-pair part is done not only when the reviewer explicitly asks for readers' reports, but also when the text foregrounds the idiosyncratic character of olfactory experiences. Here, the customs of the Internet coupled with the bias against human olfaction actually allow perfumistas to practice a "possible" language.

3.5 Smelling for talking and smelling through talking

Robin ends her ISM review by listing purchasing details: "For buying information, see the listing for Serge Lutens under Perfume Houses." That perfumistas write and talk about commercial products unmistakably indicates that this is a pursuit embedded in consumption – related issues being financial gains from blogging,[57] the independence of bloggers' voice,[58] and their relationship to

57 There may be other dimensions not readily available on the textual surface, but the majority of the blogs that I read feature external advertisements on their sites. Robin, for example, when reviewing *Aedes des Venustas'* fragrances, writes her "disclaimer – Aedes is a long time advertiser at Now Smell This, so do keep that in mind" ("Aedes de Venustas Iris Nazarena ~ fragrance review and a quick poll," NST, July 11th, 2013). *Mark Behnke Colognoisseur* (whose blog at this time does not host any advertising) reports on how he obtained samples of the reviewed fragrances, and openly talks about his relationship with some of the central players in the fragrance industry.

58 Persolaise, in his article "Who Do You Work For? – Thoughts On Blogs And Perfume Criticism," comments (see also "The Problem With Blogging –2014 Edition," posted on November 24th, 2014 on The Non-Blonde):

> I have no doubt we're still years away from a time when impartial fragrance reviews are a regular feature of mainstream media; I think most of us are resigned to that sad fact. But I'm aware that many of us net-based scentusiasts had hoped the internet would be the site where honest, independent voices could flourish and gain legitimacy. I'm now beginning to wonder if these hopes were unfounded ... Of course, no-one is obliged to follow any rules on the net: the way things stand at the moment, everyone is within their rights to publish any text they see fit, even if this means acting as an extension of a brand's or a retailer's PR machine. Near-absolute freedom has always been both the internet's primary advantage and its main drawback. But the blogging landscape does appear to be shifting, so readers would be well advised to check out the credentials of any sites which claim they're 100% independent. It's now become more important than ever to surf the blogosphere with eyes wide open (posted on October 15th, 2013).

fragrance industry.[59] That all this would provide interesting material for a study on broader societal dynamics concerning the perfumistas' practice is not in question. What is also certain, however, is that such a study would have to take into account the discursive aspects of the smelly blogosphere. Commenting practices that accompany fragrance reviews further support this supposition, foregrounding the centrality of the discursive aspect of perfumistahood.

Even though bloggers assume that most of their texts are read without being commented upon,[60] perfume reviews are routinely followed by number of comments. One reads a review; samples the mentioned fragrances; or asks further questions about it, often about a possible relationship with other fragrances; if sampled, one comments on one's own experience of the perfume in question; often mentions other perfumes that were not identified in the review, and reports on the experience with them; disagrees with the blogger; or compliments the blogger on a well-accomplished review; provides a humorous remark; asks for recommendations; wants to know more about a note mentioned; alerts others on good deals, readings, fragrance related events; or engages with someone's else's comments which frequently leads into a new conversation that others can join, etc. When originally browsing through fragrance blogs, I didn't find much content in the comments sections, wondering why, in the first place, the blogger meticulously (but often repetitively) responds to each of the remarks. Only after further readings, I realized that comments are, actually, where review still takes place. Comments can, for example, further unfold the review as readers mention new comparisons, ask for a further one,[61] or, when they describe how they live a fragrance. As new connections between fragrances are made, proposals are ruled out, and reports on how a fragrance fares in different weathers, climates, occasions etc. are made, the review goes on.

59 While *The New York Times'* article (La Ferla 2008) defines perfumistas as "critics" that have been "the bane of fragrance industry," perfumistas paint a possibly more complex picture. See, for example, Kevin's discussion in his article "My Review Philosophy: What I Write About, What I Ignore ... and a Quick Poll" (posted on *NST*, November 19th, 2014) where he talks about "a company that overreacts to a negative review ... with a legal team," as well as the comments that followed it. On this topic, interesting is also Ari's post "What is the Role of a Perfume Blogger?" (posted on *Scents of Self* on December 9th 2011) with her position on fragrance industry's dislike for women as critics.

60 For example, when – following Angela's review of "Chanel Chance, Chance Eau Tendre & Chance Eau Vive" – nebbe commented: "I'm in the minority, since i love Eau Tendre, especially in the summer. ...," Angela responded: "You might actually be in the majority, since lots of people are reading this and not commenting. ...," to which nebbe replied with: "Possibly I am!" (posted on NST on August 3rd, 2015).

61 The comment following *Poopoo Pidoo* – briefly reported above – is an example.

I own a perfume kit for amateurs with samples of notes to learn from, but my kit quickly turned uninteresting. I wonder whether this had to do with the kit's lack of a space where one can engage with others. Comparing perfume samples is fun because you learn how to hone your comparisons by engaging in sensory practices but also because you can do so by discussing with others (which may often mean no more than reading how others account for their experiences). Judith – the blogger on *Unseen Censer* – when describing her "Perfume Habits," confesses that she primarily reads fragrance blogs because of the comments:

> I read the blogs as much for the comments as for the reviews. To be honest, I don't even read reviews that often any more, unless it's for something I'm curious about, or unless it's just really entertaining or funny or educational. If I'm considering buying something, I'll Google the reviews. I like perfume blogs for the community and the discussion. I know, I'm writing one where there's almost no community and discussion; but that's my narcissistic self-publishing problem, not indicative of what I like about perfume blogs in general (December 31st, 2013).

Judith notes that what attracts her to perfume blogs is "community and discussion." This engaging with others – while it further turns the scent writing toward the world – does not imply a diminished interest in the discursive. On the contrary, the appeal of fragrance blogging importantly resides in the possibility of a linguistic exchange and the intertwining of the sensory with the discursive. As the bloggers' meta-comments indicate,[62] perfumistas' olfactory experiences (material and social) take place inside semiotic systems – infused in words and writing. When, for example, their websites feature "blogrolls" and other links to kin websites, this is not just to signal camaraderie, but to sharpen one's own olfactory experiences and writing skills. In his article "How I write a review," Christos describes how the talk of fellow bloggers organizes his own[63]:

> Writing a perfume blog can be quite claustrophobic at times. There are so many perfumes that I have and so many samples and so many ways to approach a perfume. It is like an unexpected gift when things I read in other blogs give me feedback and new ways to approach perfume ...
>
> This wonderful post appeared on Sherapop's Salon de Parfum <the link is to a post entitled "On the Many Uses (none of which are abuses) of Perfume," posted on February 22nd,

62 See also Ari's point cited in Part II.

63 This is not to say that bloggers always agree among themselves – see, for example, "Annick Goutal Nuit Etoilee ~ perfume review," posted by Robin on NST, April 26th, 2012, and "Hermes Jour d'Hermes," posted on *Scents of Self*, by Ari, March 18th, 2013.

> 2013> made me think about the implications of branding and naming on our perception of a perfume. And there I found the perfect angle to write about Sienne l'Hiver (*Memory of Scent*, March 9th, 2013).[64]

A related point is made by Normand Candella in his post "John Fairchild: Fashion is a very boring subject" (*The Perfume Chronicles*, September 24th, 2014). The blogger refers to the comment by John Fairchild expressed in the documentary on Diana Vreeland, where Fairchild (pointing out how Vreeland gave fashion "energy and pep") says that "(f)ashion is a very boring subject":

> I think perfume is like this. In and of itself, it's a very boring subject … let's face it. But when friends like FiveoaksBouquet and Tara talk to me about perfume, it's anything BUT boring. In fact, I was telling FiveoaksBouquet about an incident where two shoppers became violent in a department store and she was horrified, as was I! It seemed so crazy. But when I mentioned that they were arguing about perfume, she said, "Oh … well … that's different. I could see how someone could get violent about perfume!" We both laughed.
>
> Certain bloggers seem to be able to write about perfume and also give it that edge. For fear of forgetting someone, I won't mention them by name but you know who they are. They take basically useless liquid and turn it into an art form, or almost. Or they at least make it intriguing and make us want to go out and try it!

As the perfumista acknowledges that fragrance blogging is not about the "useless liquid" but about the talk that can make a perfume appear "intriguing,"

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64 As Christos and Simone mention here, naming is another linguistic element of the marketers' language that perfumistas take into account. In the ISM review, Robin writes that the fragrance has "a sheerness about it that together with the resinous notes and sandalwood perfectly evokes the cold swirling mist *implied by its name*" (italics are mine). While in this example the name provides an image that the blogger's experience confirms, there are also cases where the name disappoints the bloggers' expectations, possibly damaging the success of the perfume in the fragrant blogosphere. One example is *Hermes' Paprika Brasil*. In her review of the fragrance (posted on NST on October 26th, 2006), Robin states that:

> Paprika Brasil was reportedly inspired by the 1955 *Claude Lévi-Strauss* book Tristes Tropiques, which recounted his travels in the Brazilian interior … My initial trials of Paprika Brasil cannot be described in any way other than disappointing, and the experience points to the dangers of building up expectations based on the fragrance name, back story and notes. I suppose what I was expecting was a deep woods scent with exotic spices, something that would evoke the jungles of Brazil before the impact of globalization, where Lévi-Strauss was said to have found "a human society reduced to its most basic expression."
>
> I wouldn't necessarily know such a thing if I smelled it, mind you, but Paprika Brasil certainly doesn't call up any such picture. It is first and foremost an iris fragrance, and a sheer one at that.

he highlights the joy in talking which characterizes perfume enthusiasts – we want to try a fragrance because we talked about it, which then can turn into another possibility of talking together.[65]

This discursive interactivity allows one to even smell through the talk of others. Following "Honore des Pres Vamp a NY~perfume review" (posted by Erin on NST on December 10th, 2010), kaos.geo asked how the reviewed fragrance (namely, *Vamp a New York*) compares to another tuberose fragrance (*Estee Lauder's Private Collection Tuberose Gardenia*). The question received an answer from a reader – mals86 – who explained that the *Lauder*'s fragrance is "very floral" while *Honore des Pres'* is more "oriental" and "spicy." To this, kaos.geo responded:

> Thank you mals. As you know from my comments (telling where I live ad nauseam), here in Argentina we get *most* of the international brands and a precious *few* of the more rare brands. So the comments comparing it to fragrances I know is the only way I have of "sampling" at a distance 😉. (December 11th, 2010)

Kaos.geo "samples at the distance" as mals86 describes how the reviewed fragrance differs from one that kaos.geo is already familiar with. The example

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65 Even the adoption of the marketers' language is marked with a social dimension in perfumistas texts. Sherapop (of *Sherapop's Salon de Parfum*) articulates this point by stating that perfume should be considered as design (directly concerning perfumers, marketers and fragrance industry) rather than art:

> To claim that perfume is a product of design is to appreciate the cultural context in which it arises and to acknowledge that, if not for business interests, we could have no knowledge of or access to perfume. To own that perfume is a product of design is to affirm what most everyone already does, that "Perfume must smell good," just as as "Food must be edible" ("Can We Talk? About Perfume?: What is the Language of Perfume," posted on Wednesday, December 26th, 2012).

Rather than assuming that a discussion of perfume in terms of notes may be "insulting to perfumes and their creators" (as Chandler Burr's exhibit "The Art of Scent: 1889–2012" at the Museum for Art and Design seems to suggest), Sherapop believes that, on the contrary, choosing to talk about fragrance in the language of visual arts would be detrimental for perfume blogging: it would not only subsume perfume under other realms (implying that "perfume is somehow parasitic on the other arts," while Sharapop sees it as "independent" and "sui generis"), but it would be insensitive to the intersubjective character of fragrance writing. Sherapop's rebuttal is interesting as it casts the perfumistas' borrowing practices as shaped – and needed to be shaped – by the community of talkers. Moving perfume into the realm of art would not only impact its cost, but may generate a loss of the possibility to talk and discuss scents together. Perfumistas' talk is woven into certain *language games* (Wittgenstein 1953), including that of perfume manufacture and marketing, which are a condition for *discussing together*.

whimsically (marked by kaos.geo's emoticon) suggests that the practice of sampling can go so far as to exempt one from directly smelling a scent. While talking is realized through its coupling with the world, one also experiences smell through the talk. This is not only to claim that olfactory experiences are part of the world, but that such experiences are importantly semiotic.

4 Conclusion

I opened this paper by recalling discourses on olfactory ineffability, underlining the solidity and far reach that this claim enjoys in the West. For scientists today, the linguistic aspect of olfaction remains an unresolved and fascinating problem: "One of the most intriguing aspects of olfactory information processing is why odor naming is so hard" (Wilson and Stevenson 2006: 219). I pointed out how discourses on the difficulty of olfactory talk – as they use the language of vision as the comparator system – not only forgive of the visual language what they demand from the olfactory one, but model a desired olfactory language on the language of specific visual traits. The olfactory language is, thus, to be organized around traits that can be expressed by specialized, stable, and conventional vocabulary.[66]

A recent article reports on two languages – the language of the Jahai people of Malaysia and the Maniq of Thailand – that contain 12 to 15 specialized words that express smell features without being descriptions of sources (Majid and Burenhult 2014). It is reported that Jahai and Maniq speakers can name smells as consistently, easily, and clearly as English speakers can name colors. English speakers, on the contrary, talk about smell by either using the source-based terms or resorting to subjective experiences:

> Words like *red*, *blue* or *green* denote a particular range of hues, but nothing comparable exists for scents. The closest matches *stinky* or *fragrant* appear to denote the evaluative experience of the participant rather than the quality of the smell. More importantly, people typically employ a different kind of strategy when they describe smells – they say an object smells *like a banana* or *like a rose*. (Majid and Burenhult 2014: 266)

I do not deny any of this: in the Indo-European languages descriptive vocabulary for odors is scarce, and we have a strong sense that each of us experiences odors in an idiosyncratic manner. In this paper, however, I approached the elements of this argument differently. Even though it may be hard to talk

66 For a detailed description of this argument, see also Wilson and Stevenson 2006.

about smell in English, we nevertheless talk about smell. How do we do it? And how do we do it spontaneously and as part of everyday instances of ordinary life? So, rather than asking what ineffability may tell us about the human mind, for example (see Levinson and Majid 2014), I explored the practical procedures of engaging our sensory experiences semiotically when such an engagement is deemed difficult or even impossible.

As the reader may notice, the discussion of how Jahai and Maniq speakers talk about smell is similar to Ackerman's and Zelman's arguments illustrated in the introduction – they all imply that olfactory talk in western languages is wanting because it is bound to the world. The described mechanism is the one that relies on the source-based terms where descriptors for odors are said to be incomplete without the objects in the world to which they correspond. But what if we start our inquiry by allowing the worldly and subjective to be elements of the olfactory language we are witnessing? And what if, in doing so, we treat language as part of everyday practices (Wittgenstein 1953), going beyond single terms and their one-to-one mappings to linguistic "sources"? Here, while exploring such possibilities, I described how – once we let the world constitute the language-as-practiced – odors become linguistically "expressible." I therefore not only accepted the indexicality of olfactory terms, but attended carefully to how indexicality is accomplished, leading to an expanded idea of what it entails. This sense of indexicality, or what I called "worldliness," includes the use of linguistic and other community knowledges, borrowings from external registrars, practical and sensory engagements with the world so that odor experiences can be opened to conversation and multiparty production. Indexicality so conceived also suggests that olfactory talk is experience-dependent and can be enhanced by training, further supporting the idea that its ineffability has more to do with the prejudice against human olfaction mentioned in the very opening of this paper than with the sensory modality as such.

To get at this *widely* indexical view of olfactory talk, I experimented methodologically, combining ethnomethodology with semiotics of text. I looked at on-line texts as actual instances of how olfactory language is practiced. That meant following methods of perfumistas, rather than limiting my focus on words that function as descriptors of olfactory traits. Semiotics allowed me to engage with perfumistas and their everyday methods as textual strategies. In parallel, I let my analysis be informed by my own participatory practices. The domain of perfume blogging proves particularly appealing for analysis as it provides mechanisms for apprenticeship. Perfumistas are not only willing to coach novices through their olfactory experiences, but their on-line landscape abounds in deposited infrastructure for learning; there are glossaries (with perfumistas' vocabulary, acronyms, and slang terms), explanations of notes, lists of bests,

and other instructive articles, all connected together through hyperlinks, and meticulously organized for ease of searching. This means that analysts, rather than depending on interview accounts or exclusively relying on their own idiosyncratic experiences, by reading Internet pages, can gain knowledge that is enacted as shared across the community while directly participating in its everyday practices (e. g., Sormani 2014).

Dealing with perfumistas' texts in such a manner brought up everyday procedures through which olfactory talk is accomplished on the Internet. I first pointed out how those texts are geared to generate olfactory effects by containing knowledges and values enacted by the community. While the community has its own vocabulary it also embraces elements of professional talk. But rather than using them as containers for stable cultural meanings, perfumistas often treat these "borrowed" elements with a subversive attitude – they engage them through humor and play. Furthermore, the expanded idea of indexicality suggests that the linkages these words have with the world are not of a representational correspondence; when perfumistas, for example, borrow marketers' vocabulary for notes, those terms do not index the actual materials a fragrance is made of, but are about "a consensus around certain perceptual features" intended to "evoke experiences."

But beyond this borrowed language, the world-orientation in perfumistas' texts is materialized in the reading strategies inscribed in them. Their texts, for example, indicate that they are meant to be read as recipes for practical engagement with the world. They are, thus, worldly as they demand from their readers to engage with fragrant materials. This can be done in actuality or in the imagination, but what bloggers are saying is sensible only in respect to olfactory experiences that readers enact.

And as the olfactory acts are part of perfumistas' reading practices, those practices, in turn, function as sites for conversation with others: perfumistas would not be perfumistas if it wasn't for the Internet, and, without the possibility of an on-line chat, the sampling practices risk becoming dull. While in the West children are routinely drilled to learn color names, in the perfumistas case, the on-line community provides a space where the smell talk is acquired and practiced. As perfumistas converse about their sensory experiences, their texts are organized by enmeshing the discursive with the experiential. In academic discussions, it is customary to pose a distinction – if not a binary opposition – between those two realms, theorizing the olfactory dimension of experience as existing "beyond" language. Language, on the other hand, is often used in interviews, narrative accounts, and storytelling as a "window" to the sensory domain, and is typically seen as a way to get to and organize the world of the senses (rather than engage it through a mutual articulation). Somewhat related

are debates in anthropology where proponents of a "sensory anthropology" argue for a shift away from the "anthropology of the senses," suggesting that the focus should be on sensory experiences as a part of wider projects dealing with questions concerning human perception, movements, environments, and images, informed not only by phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty but also findings in psychology and neuroscience (Pink 2010). While such an approach may risk a diminished attention to the "lower" senses – taste and smell (Howes 2010: 335), it also downplays the importance of the semiotic facet of sensory perception. It does so by narrowly equating semiotics with representational approaches, where cultural categories are *applied to* sensory experiences (e. g., Pink 2011: 273). Then, as in the supposition of olfactory ineffability, specifically interrogated in the present paper, this line of argument only strengthens the perceived tension between the discursive and the sensory. In turning to perfumistas, I was, instead, interested in the intimate intertwining of the sensory and the semiotic that characterizes their experiences: perfumistas smell as they talk with others. And in describing their practices, my claim has not only been that olfactory experiences are part of the world (see, for example, Latour 2004 on olfaction; Lieberman 2013 and Manzo 2010 on taste), but that such distributed experiences are also importantly semiotic. In so doing, I proposed a semiotic approach that is based in reflexive accounts and lived communal engagements of those involved in olfactory experiences.

Starting from those practical experiences allowed for noticing how the view of olfaction as instantiated in the semiotic world could co-exist with the commonly assumed idea of the idiosyncrasy of olfaction. While the language of vision is seen as standing for a shared experience, olfactory language is regularly presented as being about experiences that are strictly individual: "your perfume may seem stinky to us, but fragrant to you (in contrast your blue will not be our red)" (Levinson and Majid 2014: 411). Olfactory language is then portrayed as wanting in that it expresses the subjective, as implied in the quote from the study on Jahai and Maniq speakers, where the authors say that in English the words dedicated to description of odors "denote the evaluative experience of the participant." By considering how olfactory language is actually enacted – rather than asking what it "stands for" (and thus distinguishing it from an *internal* experience) – I turned to what the idea of subjective does in perfumistas' talk. I described how perfumistas use this idea as a semiotic tool: what actions it performs and what effects it generates in their smell talk. While they discuss general criteria for judging the artistic achievement of fragrances (e. g., "An essay on art in perfumery" posted on *Perfumeshrine* blog on July 7th, 2006), perfumistas also agree that olfactory experiences are radically subjective, further articulating the broader *ideological* (Barthes 1957) frame of

individualism. But they not only express this idea, they employ it to frame the situated character of their olfactory experiences, and as an invitation for others to engage in conversation. If each of us experiences fragrances differently, then we can continue talking about them without risking that this difference in opinion disrupts our talking together. In other words, in perfumistas' texts, the idea of subjective is not only there to reflect the state of the world, but to do something in the world (Austin 1955). In that sense, perfumistas' practical doings indicate how that which is commonly conceived as internal may be adopted to make the external and the shared possible.

Again, all this is not to oppose (or even distract us from) the findings that indicate that smell is about emotion, personal memories, etc. It is, instead, to notice what is commonly overlooked in the discussions of olfaction as a mute sense: its worldly dimension. While significant effort has been devoted to dealing with ineffability by focusing on the brain and its processes (e. g., its limbic system and cortical plasticity), I wanted to direct attention to the world and the communal. I thus engaged the issue of ineffability by describing how perfumistas – spontaneously and as part of their everyday – arrange the world so that they can practice an olfactory language.

In bringing forth these doings, I devoted a great deal of attention to perfumistahood, laying out what being a perfumista consists of. That the embeddedness of sensory talk in specific practices is relevant is also evident in the contrast between my account and that of Kenneth Lieberman (2013) on coffee tasters. Lieberman studies practices of "professional coffee tasters," seen as "stewards of industry" (2013: 248), describing how they try to achieve "some transcendent, objective knowledge" (2013: 216) through their coffee tasting. The account points out how the "subjective" participates in establishing the "objective taste" (2013: 259) as "(o)ne of the many factors that militates against any caprice in tasting is the hundreds of thousands of dollars that will be invested in the objective accuracy of tasting" (2013: 216). This means that coffee tasters have to come to agreement in how they describe what they taste: "By the end, the particularities of the taste will come to have the kind of universality that one can read in a coffee advertisement" (2013: 249). In perfumistahood something rather different is at stake. That perfumistas are hobbyists talking on the Internet, attracted by the whimsical and frivolous character of their practice, means that their accounts can stay "particular" and "subjective" all the way through. That they embrace this characterization of their accounts provides them with a tool for more talk – a tool that keeps the ongoing talk running. Accounting, then, for the practice is not to glorify it; it is, instead, to help us get at the workings of the smell talk that may go unnoticed otherwise.

There is an ongoing discussion on whether on-line narratives and interaction allow one to observe what "is akin to any social efforts at sense making and practical social organization" (Manzo 2010: 154). My descriptions of perfumistas' texts was not to say that either the Internet can be seen as a site for meaningful social interaction (e. g., Rheingold 2000 [1993]), or that, on the other hand, its sociality effects shall be understood as irrevocably distinct from the social in the physical world (e. g., Turkle 2012). In other words, while describing how we engage the social of the Internet as it is inscribed on the Internet, this text is not to be understood as discussing sociality on the Internet. Of interest, instead, was how an olfactory text predisposes a sociality, and how such sociality – as part of the text's worldliness – is accounted for and enacted on Internet blogs. Accepting this social of the Internet, the paper traced how perfumistas read fragrance reviews while smelling perfume samples that the reviews direct them to engage. To develop a possibility for olfactory experiences as indicated by those texts, perfumistas compare fragrances, learning to talk as they anticipate more talk. In other words, reviews are not complete without the sensory acts in the world. And, at the same time, those acts of smelling are articulated by what takes place at the level of the Internet text: they can be accomplished as acts of smelling in respect to reading and talking. Then, by treating as one what is commonly seen as two separate and self-standing poles – namely, the disembodied text on the Internet and the worldliness of action, interaction, and sensory experiences "out there," we encountered an olfactory talk that, as it is practiced and enjoyed, intertwines the sensory with the semiotic.

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