



# ESPRESSO

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## Aesthetic Crossroads 5 Olfactory Aesthetics

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**Brian Goeltzenleuchter & Sean Francis Conway**

*Odophonica: A performance for scent and chamber ensemble*

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# OLFACTORY AESTHETICS

**Guest editor**  
Madalina Diaconu

# What Is and Could Become Olfactory Aesthetics?

Mădălina Diaconu

Twenty years ago, research on the aesthetics of smell was still considered quite exotic. Isolated attempts to enlarge the scope of aesthetics to olfactory phenomena and objects (Brandes and Neumann, 1995; Diaconu; 2005, Brady; 2005; Shiner and Kriskovets, 2007) were inevitably compelled to start by rejecting the denial of the very possibility of an olfactory aesthetics, as this had been argued by authorities in the field of philosophical aesthetics, from Kant (1987) and Hegel (1970) to Harold Osborne (1977). Fortunately, neither the scholars in Smell Studies – whether biologists and psychologists, anthropologists, historians, or promoters of Cultural Studies (Corbin, 1982; Le Guérer, 1988; Rindisbacher, 1992; Classen et al., 1994; Jütte, 2000; Le Guérer, 2005 etc.) – nor aestheticians and practitioners of art and architecture, let alone writers and perfumers, felt inhibited by the philosophers' scepticism regarding the aesthetic dimension of odours and 'followed their nose'. Consequently, both the recently growing body of knowledge in the multidisciplinary cluster of Smell Studies and the diversification of practices related to olfactory art have confirmed that their intuition was right.<sup>1</sup>

The rise or, better said, the rediscovery of smell after a long time of modern 'anosmia' in the Western world, including philosophy, was favoured by the awakening of a more general interest in sensibility and corporeality. The rehabilitation of the body and its pleasures in postmodernity began to cast doubt upon the implicit hierarchy of the senses, with vision and hearing on their top, which was rooted in Western metaphysics. Additionally, anthropologists criticised the fiction of a universal subject and made the case for developing global approaches on the sound basis of empirical research.

<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, contributions to Smell Studies and olfactory aesthetics include Drobnick (2006), Reinartz (2014), Shiner (2015; 2020), Hegel and Wagner (2016), Krause (2016; 2023), Lynn and Riley Parr (2021), Benthack et al. (2021), Herold and Krause (2021) etc. A special mention deserves the experiential account of anosmia in a novel by the aesthetician Marta Tafalla (2023).

Later developments – the emotional turn in sciences, research on cross- and multimodal perception, and the expansion of Atmospheric Studies – must be understood in a more general context that calls into question the implications of ocularcentrism and phallogocentrism for basic philosophical concepts such as matter, thing, agency (commonly associated with the subject’s intentionality) and for privileging persistency over ephemerality, and rational discursivity over sensibility and intuition.

At present, the time has come to shift the focus from self-justificatory and legitimating strategies in Smell Studies and olfactory aesthetics to calling attention to their huge potential, whilst remaining open to possible unforeseen developments. A few years ago, Jim Drobnick remarked in his afterword to the pioneering anthology about smell design edited by Victoria Henshaw et al.: “[...] the trend is obvious that through an accumulation of publications, olfactory studies are moving towards specialization as a discipline” (Drobnick, 2018, p. 273). The achievement of this goal would improve the status and credibility of this new discipline and promise institutional facilities for carrying out research. If the current “disciplinary messiness and permeability” in Smell Studies may appear to some scholars as contradicting the scientific standards, Jim Drobnick continued (2018, p. 273), this may be grounded in specific features of the object of study itself. Anyway, he recommended concentrating, at least in this incipient phase, on innovative research and paying less attention to formal aspects related to disciplinary compartmentalisation. Interdisciplinarity remains both a challenge and an asset for olfactory aesthetics.

Against this background, this issue of *ESPES. The Slovak Journal of Aesthetics* aims to enrich the contributions dedicated to olfactory aesthetics by emphasising its broad scope. A preliminary remark, followed by a general contextualisation of the olfactory aesthetics within the landscape of contemporary aesthetic theory, appears to me as a necessary introduction to the following papers, which focus on specific topics. First, the denomination olfactory aesthetics remains rather formal, indicating only that its object of study is smells.<sup>2</sup> Further, on closer inspection, it turns out that olfactory aesthetics communicates with several recent subdisciplines of aesthetics, defined as theory of perception and sensibility (in German known as *Asthetik*), everyday aesthetics, environmental aesthetics, social aesthetics, urban aesthetics, feminist aesthetics, aesthetics of race (which corresponds with de- and postcolonial approaches to aesthetics), intercultural aesthetics, religious aesthetics and theological aesthetics, the aesthetics of atmosphere, animal aesthetics and the aesthetics of science, etc. In addition to these, the theory of olfactory aesthetics explores artistic practices that incidentally imply or deliberately use odours, from literary descriptions of olfactory experiences to the presence of smells in architecture and design (including landscape architecture and the art of gardening), in perfumery and in the so-called olfactory art. Some papers collected here exemplarily illustrate the relation of

<sup>2</sup> The following reflections leave aside the issue of possible differences between olfactory aesthetics and smell design, concentrating on a philosophical aesthetic theory of odours.

olfactory aesthetics to the philosophy of art: Larry Shiner discusses the art status of perfumery, while Brian Goeltzenleuchter and Elena Mancioppi attempt in their conversation to situate the olfactory art within the contemporary artworld. Literary evocations of odours are present as well, grace to Frank Krause's analysis of the 'physico-theological' aesthetics of smell in the work of Barthold Heinrich Brockes, a prominent German poet of the early Enlightenment. Krause is seconded in his 'archaeology' of olfactory aesthetics by Mădălina Diaconu; her paper on the chrism oil deciphers the symbolism of fragrance in Christian sacramental theology, as part of a forthcoming systematic theological aesthetics of smell or Christian 'osmology' (from Greek *osmós*, odour). Finally, Chantal Jaquet's study warns of reducing olfactory aesthetics to positive emotions; her troubling paper draws attention to the persistence of social discrimination and racial hate that are rooted in a negative olfactory imaginary.

The widespread reinterpretation of philosophical aesthetics as a theory of senses and sensibility (e.g. Welsch (1990), Seel (2000), Böhme (2001), Berleant (2010)), often with reference to Alexander Baumgarten's unrealised project of *aesthetica* as "facultatis cognoscitivae inferioris" (Baumgarten, *Metaphysik* § 533, 1983, p. 16), has called on the plan the investigation of *all* senses, including those that Western idealism and rationalism had qualified as 'low' and animalic. As a result, other senses than sight and hearing were traditionally denied *a principio* any possibility of supporting art, their pleasure being considered merely subjective, their objects ephemeral and consumable. In particular, the enlargement of aesthetics to olfaction requires both a philosophical analysis of the subjects' experiential structures and the identification of odorous objects that trigger an aesthetic experience. Moreover, the interweaving of descriptive approaches with the imperative of cultivating sensibility is typical for the reinterpretation of aesthetics as a theory of perception. Directly derived from this is the claim of improving and even institutionalising olfactory aesthetic education at various levels, which at present takes place unreflectively, yet under the interested guidance of economic agents with their sensory marketing. Otherwise put, the *Aisthetik* does not necessarily uncritically revive a European project of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by putting it into the service of the present sensitive-corporeal consumers, but it can (and in my opinion, should) support the sensible-reasonable citizens' emancipatory efforts, too.

As for the objects of aesthetic olfactory experience, these can be found everywhere: in everyday life, in natural and built environments, in interpersonal encounters, and in the artworld. The central debate in the aesthetics of everyday life about whether an interruption of the everyday by experiencing something extra-ordinary is indispensable to have an aesthetic experience (Leddy, 2012) or whether the subject is expected to disclose the genuine aesthetic aspect of the ordinary in its ordinariness, for example when experiencing the familiar environments as trustworthy and comfortable (Haapala, 2005; Saito, 2017), can be applied to olfactory experiences as well. Both a complex fragrance and the reassuring odour of one's own home, that

tends to remain concealed and reveals itself, for example, after returning home after a long absence, can be assigned aesthetic pleasantness. A similar aesthetic quality characterises negative experiences, which cannot be excluded from everyday aesthetics without deforming and impoverishing life as such: unfamiliar and potentially dangerous environments, as well as publicly tabooed body odours, are felt as unpleasant, inspire fear, mistrust or plainly disgust.

In contrast, the other major debate in everyday aesthetics, which opposes 'weak' to 'strong' approaches (Dowling, 2010), does not appear to work in olfactory aesthetics. To recall, the promoters of the 'weak' everyday aesthetics claim that it suffices to extend aesthetic theories that were initially developed for art to the experience of everyday life, without being necessary to develop specific, genuine concepts and intuitions, as the 'strong' everyday aesthetics considers. However, the theory of olfactory aesthetics can hardly build on the previous philosophy of art. Aesthetics has at best accepted artificial scents for their art-like complexity, yet ignored *common* pleasant odours and their relation to memory or embodiment. In fact, the enjoyment of everyday odours may express the subjects' situatedness, their attachment to places and the commonly ignored role of olfactory experience in the constitution of individual and collective selves (Diaconu, 2021). Unique body odours shape personal, social and cultural identities through bonding and delimitation. The mother-infant bonding is partially based on odours, and environmental smellscape produce feelings of topophilia from an early age. The triple dimension of smells – transitive (I smell the world), intransitive (I am smelly for others) and reflexive (I feel my own smell) – engages the individual in relation to natural and built environments, to members of ingroups and outgroups, and to oneself. The spontaneity of our olfactory attunement (German: *Einstimmung*) or misattunement to people and environments has far-reaching consequences for social behaviour and for feeling in a place at home (hence passively caring for it and actively taking care of it) or feeling 'displaced'. The assignment of offensive odours to sexually (hyper)active women, to the poor segments of the population, to the POCs or to LGBTQ is used to legitimate gender, social and racial discrimination, marginalisation, exclusion and an almost irrational hate, as Chantal Jaquet's paper in this issue brilliantly demonstrates.

On the contrary, natural smells seep deeply into memory and shape identity through emplacement. An interesting controversial case of (uninhabited) environments is wetlands. For a long time, marshes and wetlands have been considered incompatible with aesthetic enjoyment; this judgment remained explainable as long as the spreading of epidemics was put down to foul smells, and people feared drowning in them. Meanwhile, scientific research on the value of wetlands as hotspots of biodiversity has improved their public image and opened the way for integrating them into environmental aesthetics. Even so, the issue of their specific odour is still overlooked. A future olfactory aesthetics may therefore compare various smellscape of natural environments (no matter how problematic the concept of 'nature' has



become): the 'wet' odour of marshes, the 'salty' smell of sea, the 'strong and pure' atmosphere of high mountains, the fragrant composition of a wild meadow or a garden, the relaxing, 'dark green' smellscape of a deep wood, and so on. Moreover, such descriptions can be varied by including temporality and correlating specific environmental smellscape to weather parameters, the time of the day, seasons, and the intrusion of human practices over generations.

Urban smellscape, too, deserve no less attention than the natural ones. The olfactory portrait of a city results from the complex amalgamation of natural factors (geographical position, including climate), the hardly controllable accumulation of social practices and everyday activities (the odour of building materials, cooking, exhaust fumes, street food), urban planning (the placement of industrial facilities, greening), technological factors (desodorisation) and commercial interests (the smell design of shopping centres, airports, Out Of Home Advertising etc.). The deliberate design of urban smellscape, whose pleasantness can be enhanced with fragrant plants and water features, competes with the dwellers' unintentional 'design' (Diaconu, 2012); the bigger a city and the more democratic its politics is, the bigger is also the challenge of controlling its smellscape. Occasionally, the city administration may attempt to regulate odorous everyday practices by forbidding the consumption of 'smelly' food in the public transport system, as the City of Vienna did a few years ago; yet on the whole, given also the under-regulation of olfactory pollution, smells remain a 'subversive' means of anonymous citizens to make *their* city. The unique 'air' of a city is unmistakably perceived by tourists and newcomers when they dive into its new atmosphere.

A further field of olfactory aesthetics, understood as a branch of environmental aesthetics, regards the development of adequate methodologies for researching smellscape; at present, these include descriptions, visualisations, mapping, smell tours, smell extraction and artificial reproduction. The cultivation of sensibility appears once again as indispensable, its implications surpassing aesthetics and achieving both a civic and existential dimension: 'fine noses' may draw attention to atmospheric pollution and sensitise the local authorities to this issue, but olfactory hypersensitivity may also become undesirable in itself in everyday work and life settings.

The distinctive olfactory profile of a city or landscape achieves a new meaning nowadays, when aesthetic subjects must be considered globally. However, a global perspective on aesthetics (whether one calls it global, intercultural, transcultural or differently) cannot be confined to commonalities and the cross-cultural transfer of perceptual qualities, as when the feasibility of an 'international' landscape and garden design is assessed in comparison to international architecture. In addition to the possibilities of acclimatising fragrant plants, a global aesthetics must integrate aesthetic theories about the beauty of smells in various cultural traditions. This includes philosophical associations between smell and art or beauty, as well as interpretations of a wide

range of phenomena that have been hitherto assigned to different disciplines, such as olfactory religious rituals, common or less ordinary habits (for instance, practices, conventions and norms of scenting bodies and indoor spaces), the presence of odours in some *jeux de sociétés* of the elites (e.g. the traditional Japanese *kōdō*) and so on. Research has disclosed the underlying reasons for the fear of smells in Western modernity, whose universality is nowadays being competed in other cultures who claim the plurality of ‘modernities’. Not even the Western world has always been so cautious regarding odours, as the history of Christian liturgy in general and Byzantine commentaries on the use of incense in particular demonstrate. The early Christian Syrian world, for example, has developed an elaborated theology of smell, and the idea of a fragrant epiphany of the sacred in Christian late antiquity was inherited from the Mediterranean cultures (Harvey, 2006). Unlike the complicated history of the liturgical use of incense, which has been already discussed by Roman-Catholic scholars (Pfeifer, 2008), the role of scents in sacramental contexts, particularly in relation to the chrism oil, has been overlooked; Mădălina Diaconu’s paper in this issue is meant to fill this gap.

A global olfactory aesthetics would have both to pursue further investigations of past olfactory practices in the Western premodern world and broaden its horizon to other, more odour-friendly cultures, such as the Indian, the Arab and the indigenous worlds. It is well-known that fragrances accompany rituals of transitions in several cultures and that the cultic functions of smells in such contexts do not compromise, let alone exclude aesthetic enjoyment. In my view, olfactory aesthetics should prefer an expansionist approach that integrates multifarious un/pleasant smelly phenomena and objects rather than a demarcationist one, that seeks purely aesthetic, autotelic fragrant beauty. Even assuming that the aesthetic theory would stick to the criterion of enjoying a smell for its own sake, there remain enough subjects to reflect on; just think of perfumery, whose creation and use can be both passionate and disinterested in the Kantian sense.

In contrast, the venerable tradition of breeding fragrant plants, such as roses, is still far away from being acknowledged as an aesthetic practice. Although roses are probably bred mainly for their colours and forms, the famous pleasantness of their smell is a good enough reason to breed them exclusively for olfactory purposes. The differences in the fragrant quality of plants harvested in different regions are well-known in perfumery. It is high time to overcome the reductionist understanding of the aesthetic use of plants in the art of gardening, ikebana and other flower arrangements, understood as mere formal and chromatic compositions; the experience of a garden as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* is multisensory *par excellence*. From this point of view, breeders may be considered artists who design living materials. A more radical view would even assign smell design to the species themselves. The fact that plants ‘develop’ odours to be pollinated by insects raises the difficult question of acknowledging an aesthetic dimension of teleological processes outside the realm of human intentionality.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A similar question was raised in zoology with respect to the beauty of sexual ornaments (Prum, 2017).

Plant odours are *addressed* to other living beings with the ‘aim’ of being *attractive* to them. *Mutatis mutandis*, can pheromones in the animal world be integrated into the olfactory aesthetics and if so, how? May a species or the evolutionary process itself be regarded as creative or even proto-artistic? Can research in life sciences influence the understanding of olfactory aesthetics in the non-human living world? How do pets react to artificial smells that humans appreciate as pleasant, such as perfumes and other scented products? More generally, how can be built the scaffold of an interspecies aesthetics?

In general, Western modernity associated a fine nose with animals and categories of ‘sub-humans’ who were supposed to be closer to nature (women, ‘primitives’, ‘abnormal’ individuals). Nowadays, artists working with smells question the stereotypical sharp demarcation between humans and other animals and explore the behaviour of species whose sharp sense of olfaction exceeds ours. Olfactory refinement and animality go hand in hand in a positive way. Artistic experiments that promise to enhance the human sense of smell grace to modern technology illustrate both a return of the repressed animality of the human and a leap forward into the age of the posthuman (Diaconu, 2021). Such attempts to bridge the human’s animality with other animal life-worlds represent only one set of issues that are tackled in contemporary olfactory art; in fact, olfactory art provides examples for all the aforementioned connections between the aesthetics of smell and new directions in aesthetics.

Notwithstanding the expansion of the scope of aesthetics during the past few decades, its core remains the philosophy of art. Even so, artists working in the medium of olfaction bring up for discussion fascinating topics that challenge tacit assumptions regarding interpretation, form, the privilege of permanence, the ocularcentric bias of aesthetic theory, and conventional display settings. In this context, it is necessary to distinguish from the outset between perfumery, olfactory art and further arts whose works emanate odours as a side-effect (architecture, gardening, installation) or evoke smells in a non-odorous medium (literature, painting, film, music). In their efforts to legitimate the art of smell, the aestheticians previously concentrated on perfumery. On one side, creative ‘noses’ like Edmond Roudnitska (1977, 1996) and the Groupe du Colysée (Blayn et al. 1988) made the case for acknowledging perfumery as an art by resorting to the legacy of aesthetic thinking, including Kant. On the other side, philosophers rejected objections related to the lack of complexity of fragrances, their volatility, their merely subjective appreciation and rather confused relation to interpretation, the reduction of beauty to adornment, often understood as a means of enhancing erotic attractivity, as well as the perfumer’s dependency on economic agents and on safety and environmental regulations.

At present, the complex landscape of perfumery requires clear conceptual differentiations and fine-tuned analyses, as when Larry Shiner’s paper in this issue suggests arranging perfumes on a continuum that stretches between ‘Artists’ Perfume-like Works’ and ‘Standard Design Perfumes’. In addition to philosophical arguments, recent developments in practising and promoting

perfumery have helped raise the acceptance of perfumery as a specific art. Noteworthy in this respect were groundbreaking exhibitions on perfumery and/as art, the founding of the Institute for Art and Olfaction in Los Angeles, the emergence and diversification of the niche perfumery, specialised blogs and journals (e.g. Nez. *The Olfactory Magazine*), perfume creation workshops, etc. The emancipation of the 'noses' from strictly commercial interests and the integration of perfumery into the system of arts could be accelerated by training them at art academies, allowing them more space for creativity and experimentation, giving them personal public recognition instead of subordinating their authorship to the label of the perfume house, organising competitions with prizes for various categories, hosting exhibitions in art museums and last, but not least by setting up specialised galleries (like the Olfactory Art Keller in New York for olfactory art) in addition to the present 'perfume museums' that display only flacons.

Obviously, the acceptance of odours as art material has benefitted from the flourishing of the so-called olfactory art, whose practitioners usually are classically trained artists. Their olfactory works of art (objects, installations, performances) are exhibited in conventional artistic settings and have among their favourite topics previously tabooed body odours (sweat, sexuality, excretion), unreflected olfactorily coded gender stereotypes, feelings of bonding (to places as well as communities), and the clashing of smell cultures in present megalopolises. The anatomically rooted close association between odours and emotions tempts artists to imagine olfactory installations that unleash the power of fear, evoke nostalgia, and allude to the human's unconscious reactions to subliminal smells (e.g. pheromones). At one end of the perceptual scale, one encounters conceptual art forms and minimalist installations: the visitor faces sealed flacons which double the *noli me tangere* of modern museums with a *noli me olere* and enters white empty or totally dark spaces that are supposed to smell. At the other end, the artists overwhelm the visitor's noses by accumulating fragrant spices or cigarette butts in closed spaces. Olfactory works of art are frequently conceived as a concerted interplay of several senses, as when smelly pieces are combined with comments, classical visual art or videos. Some pieces express the artist's commitment to the values of liberal democracy, by drawing attention to marginalised and discriminated categories and using performances and smell walks to enhance the sense of emplacement and contribute to building communities. On the contrary, others use the power of invisible odours to create spiritual atmospheres and evoke non/super-human entities. Given the multifarious forms of olfactory art, dialogues between their practitioners and theorists, like the conversation between Brian Goeltzenleuchter and Elena Mancioffi hosted in this issue, are extremely promising for contextualising olfactory art in the artworld and society at large and for exploring its theoretical and practical challenges. Let me briefly mention in the following some of these difficulties.

Exhibitions of olfactory art must manage practical problems related to the maintenance of the works (regularly watering fragrant plants, refilling artificial odour containers), the planning of spatial compartmentalisation in

order to avoid an unwanted diffusion of odours, and ensuring proper ventilation. The artists themselves have to consider various factors that influence the production of the odour (sometimes achieved through the accumulation of its natural source); also they are expected to anticipate the interaction of their smelly work with the onsite odour and take measures against the possible alteration of the smell during the exhibition period. It is worth mentioning that the development of olfactory art has already reached a moment in which questions around curatorial practice and art preservation start to be discussed in expert groups.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, during the past few years, odours have been occasionally used not only in dance and theatre performances but also in historical exhibitions. The proliferation of odourisation practices raises a plethora of issues, some of which are practical, such as the technological control of the indoor circulation of the odour, while others regard the museum visitors' safety (e.g. the tolerable intensity of the odour). A third category of problems has ethical implications, as when the olfactory 'illustration' of wars and other tragedies in museums may unleash too strong emotions or even reactivate traumas. Finally, the *possibility* of adding an olfactory component to an artistic event does not necessarily imply that this *makes* also *sense*, so in each case the question must be raised of whether the multiplication of sensory channels of information is really meaningful or simply responds to the present trend of intermediality in art and beyond it.

The conclusion at the end of this survey can be only one: while it may still be possible to chart the main directions of olfactory aesthetics today, the rapid growth of Smell Studies in general and of olfactory aesthetics in particular in terms of research, publications, public events, new institutions, curricular and networking initiatives, as well as the increasing public interest in aesthetic olfactory practices, suggests that the olfactory art has overcome its stage of infancy and is currently expanding its scope, subjects and forms. The present issue of *ESPEs. The Slovak Journal of Aesthetics* represents only a modest contribution to this broader movement. Let me conclude by thanking the authors for their valuable inspiring insights, the reviewers for their constructive comments and the editorial board of *ESPEs. The Slovak Journal of Aesthetics* for having invited me to edit this issue.

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<sup>4</sup> The latest example is the session on *Curating and Preserving Olfactory Art and Heritage* that Marjolijn Bol, Olivier David and Érika Wicky organized in June 2024 during the 36th Congress of the International Committee of Art History in Lyon. Many thanks to Frank Krause for this hint.

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# Art, Adornment, Abstraction

## Thinking Perfume

Larry Shiner

Some perfumers and users of perfume have claimed that the more complex perfumes should be appreciated as artworks and not merely as adornments. This essay contributes to the recent philosophical discussions of the issue. Part I explores the relation between adornment and art as Stephen Davies conceives of them. Part II examines the arguments Chiara Brozzo and Cynthia Freeland give for the current existence of art perfumes. Part III offers one kind of formal case for art perfumery by exploring some limited structural analogies between perfume and music. Part IV proposes a set of distinctions among types of art perfumes. Part V discusses whether certain perfumes can be both art and adornment. | *Keywords: Art, Adornment, Abstraction, Perfume, Music*

*Thinking Perfume?* To many people, perfume might seem a mere adornment, hardly worthy of thought, let alone a serious discussion of its art status.<sup>1</sup> Such things as perfume, body decoration, and clothing have traditionally been ignored by mainstream philosophy. Yet, given Stephen Davies' recent philosophical analysis of the role of adornment in various societies, even if perfume were primarily adornment, it would still raise significant aesthetic issues, including the possibility that some kinds of perfumes might merit being considered works of art (Davies, 2020). For example, one could, as I have done elsewhere, draw upon Dominic Lopes' idea of 'local analogies' to argue that something like 'art perfumes' might eventually emerge in the way 'art quilts' emerged in the 1970s, although I concluded that perfumes currently remain works of design not art (Lopes, 2014; Shiner, 2015, pp. 375–392; Shiner, 2020, pp. 229–243). But Chiara Brozzo has challenged my claim that art perfumes are only a future possibility, basing her case that some perfumes should already be considered art on both the aesthetic properties of certain innovative niche perfumes, and on the existence of networks of informed appreciators who treat them as artworks (Brozzo, 2020, pp. 21–32).

<sup>1</sup> This perspective probably reflects long-standing gender prejudices as well as Kant's and Hegel's denial that the sense of smell can be a basis for reflective aesthetic judgments (Kant, 2012, p. 67; Hegel, 1975, p. 38). The treatment of perfume as a trivial cosmetic is not true of all cultures; perfume is highly respected in Islamic societies (Thurkill, 2017, p. 116).



Brozzo's claims have recently been reinforced and extended by Cynthia Freeland (Freeland, 2021). This essay reviews and enlarges their arguments that some perfumes are art and explores its relation to Davies' work on adornment.

Part I sets the stage by exploring the relation between adornment and art as Davies conceives of them. Part II examines the arguments Brozzo and Freeland give for the current existence of art perfumes and suggests their case could benefit from an enlarged formal perspective and a conceptual framework for distinguishing among types of perfumes. Part III offers one kind of enhanced formal case by briefly exploring some limited structural analogies between perfume and music. Part IV proposes an informative set of distinctions among types of perfumes with the aim of giving greater specificity to the concept of art perfumes. Part V addresses the issue of whether certain perfumes can be art and adornment at the same time.

### 1. Adornment and Art

Stephen Davies characterises adornment or decoration as intentionally “making something special by aesthetic enhancement,” which can be either making it beautiful or making it awesome (sublime) (Davies, 2020, pp. 16–17). Moreover, such aesthetic enhancement needs to be noticed as well as be perceived by the targeted audience as intended to be noticed (Davies, 2020, pp. 19–21) Davies' response to the question of how adornment relates to art differs depending on whether he is considering the issue from the perspective of Western or of certain non-Western cultures. In the West, Davies points out, artworks can sometimes contain decorative elements or be used decoratively, but normally they are “treated as self-contained wholes and [...] not regarded as adornment” (Davies, 2020, p. 31). Yet Davies recognizes exceptions, e.g., “paper folding, quilt making, needlepoint, and flower arranging as seriously practiced in some cultures, might be accepted as art forms” (Davies, 2020, pp. 32–33). As for perfume, Davies considers it only as part of the history of cosmetics (Davies, 2020, pp. 107–117). After exploring the pervasiveness of adornment and decoration in the culture of Bali, including the use of adornment in many Balinese art forms such as gamelan music, he asks, “by allowing that Balinese offerings are works of art in their own right, are we denying their decorative character”? (Davies, 2020, p. 198). He replies that Balinese art forms are indeed decorative since they are “inevitably functional, being intended to please and entertain the gods” (Davies 2020, p. 198). Accordingly, Davies concludes that the Balinese are “a people who turn the arts into adornments and make decoration into art” (Davies, 2020, p. 200). But he restricts the general possibility of art works becoming adornments to “the broader context of a religion-infused, ritualistic style of life” (Davies, 2020, p. 199).

I would suggest that what Davies ascribes to Bali, is true not only of some arts in other non-Western cultures, such as calligraphy in the Islamic world, but increasingly of some arts in Western cultures. Davies himself mentions as exceptions to the traditional polarity of the fine vs. the decorative arts, not

only paper folding and flower arranging (Japan), but needlepoint and quilt making (Europe, America) (Davies, 2020, p. 32). All quilts were once classified as folk or decorative art in the West, but since the 1970s some kinds of quilts have been widely accepted as works of art and shown in fine art museums. Similarly, there is no longer a fixed line between the fine and the decorative or 'minor' arts with respect to many other pursuits; in recent decades arguments have been made in favour of repositioning some instances of fashion, comics, and video games into the category of high art (Smith and Kuber, 2013; Meskin and Cook, 2012; Nguyen, 2020). In each case, one ceases to treat entire practices as belonging to either fine art or decorative art but grants higher art status to individual works or certain types of works based on their artistic and aesthetic properties.

## 2. The Case for Art Perfumes

What are the implications of this interpretation of Davies's work on adornment for the art status of perfumes? Obviously, most perfumes are works of art in the small 'a' sense that includes any creation that requires skill and imagination, as when we call cooking, carpentry, or teaching 'arts'. The more difficult question is, are perfumes works of art in the capital 'A' sense, namely, works intended to be appreciated in ways similar to the ways Westerners appreciate more established art forms? An initial problem with saying 'yes' is that to most people the very term 'perfume' suggests the idea of adorning one's body with a scent rather than experiencing it for itself as a 'work of art.' But, since in some cultures adornment or decoration can become art just as art can be used for adornment and even in the West there are a few arts that are treated as both art and adornment, it seems appropriate to investigate the possibility that some perfumes or kinds of perfumes are not only used as adornments but also currently experienced as art.

Chiara Brozzo builds her case for treating some perfumes as art by first showing that various experimental perfumes produced by small 'niche' companies can satisfy both Nick Zangwill's aesthetic definition of art and Jerrold Levinson's historical/contextual theories. For Zangwill, something is a work of art if it has been intentionally endowed with aesthetic properties based on a configuration of non-aesthetic properties (1995), and Brozzo points out that perfumers create configurations of odour molecules ("notes") that evaporate at different rates, resulting in a new scent that can be appreciated for its aesthetic properties (Brozzo, 2020, p. 22–23). Levinson's definition of fine art requires that something be intended for 'regard-as-a-work-of-art' in any of the ways in which previous works are or have been so regarded, a definition that comes in two versions. The 'intrinsic' version requires close attention to form, *op. ess* to emotional suggestion, and awareness of symbolism. Brozzo offers a variety of examples that satisfy the intrinsic version, including the way the niche perfume *Dzing!* symbolizes through exemplification the properties of a circus with scents of leather harness, hay, and fur (Brozzo, 2020, pp. 23–24).

In the 'relational' version of Levinson's definition, to be regarded as art is to be regarded in the way works in an established art form are so regarded, but

historically in the West scent creation has not been widely regarded as an art form. Nevertheless, Brozzo claims that an art form she calls “art perfumery” has come into existence. I had claimed that for something like art perfumery to exist would require an established practice of creating perfumes to be appreciated for their “innovative structural complexity” as well as “an expressivity and symbolism that challenge the receiver’s expectations” (Shiner, 2015, p. 391). Brozzo uses these very criteria to develop her argument that ‘art perfumery’ *already* exists. She gives examples of niche perfumes that reflect innovative structural complexity, such as Christopher Sheldrake’s use of unusual notes like absinthe in *Douce Amere* (Brozzo, 2020, pp. 25–26). She also shows that currently there are many perfumes that manifest an expressivity and symbolism that goes against the receiver’s typical expectations of what a perfume should smell like, such as *Secretions Magnifiques*, which gives off odours simulating sweat, semen and other bodily fluids involved in the sex act (Brozzo, 2020, p. 26).

An equally important aspect of Brozzo’s argument, and one that is elaborated more fully by Cynthia Freeland, is that not only do perfumers *create* perfumes that manifest unusual expressivity and unconventional symbolism, but that many knowledgeable admirers of perfumes *evaluate* perfumes in these same terms (Brozzo, 2020, p. 28; Freeland, 2021, pp. 3–4). In addition to many serious print reviews, there are also a number of online perfume blogs with a wide following of informed amateurs (Turin and Sanchez, 2009, p. 2018).<sup>2</sup> As Freeland points out, the best of these perfume reviews are similar in structure to standard reviews of high art forms, whether of painting, installation art, or music, since they draw attention “to specific features, commenting on how they work together to create certain effects, offering comparisons to relevantly similar or distinct works” (Freeland, 2021, p. 9). Freeland concludes that some members of the audience for creative niche perfumes “treat perfume not so much as a means of adorning the body but as facilitating imaginative experiences and creative self-expression” (Freeland, 2021, p. 11).

By combining the argument that some perfumes are intended to manifest structural complexity and challenge our expectations regarding expressivity and symbolism, with the argument that there now exist networks of informed reception that evaluate perfumes for these same qualities, Brozzo and Freeland are led to conclude that art perfumery already exists (Brozzo, 2020, p. 28, 30; Freeland, 2021). On the whole, I find their case in favour of the current existence of an implicit category of ‘art perfumery’ convincing, although I believe we need to distinguish between a claim that perfume in general is an art form and the more limited claim that there is a subset of perfumes that constitute ‘art perfumery.’ Equally important, I believe Brozzo’s and Freeland’s case for art perfumes needs to be enlarged in two respects: first, I believe it could use an augmented formal argument based on perfume structure to supplement Brozzo’s rather brief remarks on form, and second,

<sup>2</sup> Among the better-known blogs are Basenotes, Now Smell This, Bois de jasmin, and Fragrantica. On the increasingly well-informed international audience for artistic perfumery see (Mignot, 2021) and (Jacquet, 2010).

both Brozzo's and Freeland's accounts of art perfumery and its reception need a conceptual framework for identifying the different *types* of art perfumes and their relation to non-art perfumes, thus giving greater specificity to the concept of art perfumery. In the next section, I propose one way to strengthen their formal case.

### 3. Perfume and Music

Just as the perception of some similarities between Amish quilts and abstract paintings led to the proposal that some quilts are works of art and part of an art category that came to be called 'art quilts', I would suggest that some formal analogies between perfumes and music could help us justify treating certain kinds of perfumes as part of the category "art perfumery." Obviously, it would be preposterous to claim that a single perfume, however complex, could equal even minor compositions of classical music. What interests me here are a few structural parallels between simple musical compositions and the way the best perfumes are composed. I will focus on two structural parallels between perfume and music in general that derive from the fact that both music and perfume are temporal arts. The noted perfumer, Jean-Claude Ellena, once remarked that it is only by "creating a pattern, a melody," that "I create an olfactory form" (Ellena, 2007, p. 54). But the structural parallels between perfume and music go beyond perfumers' frequent use of musical terminology such as 'melody', 'harmony', 'notes', 'accords', 'dissonance', etc. As the neuroscientist, Charles Spence points out, recent empirical research suggests, that some musical terms in perfumery are not entirely metaphorical.<sup>3</sup> As in the case of a musical score, a perfume formula's horizontal dimension or 'melody', is made up of a succession of olfactory notes (kinds of scents) of differing lengths (evaporation rates) and intensities, whereas the perfume (ac)cords are vertical 'stacks' of notes, as it were, forming sets of integrated and usually harmonious odours (Allégret, 2016, pp. 25–30). For example, among the many early notes in Sophia Grojsman's famous perfume, *Paris*, are bergamot and violet, quickly followed by lily of the valley, all of which soon fade into Grojsman's powerful iris-inflected central rose accord, and, after a long period, that accord slowly fades in turn as notes of musk, sandalwood, and amber come to the fore before they too disappear.<sup>4</sup> Knowledgeable perfume appreciators, like knowledgeable music listeners, are likely to attend to the beauty of the way each formal structure is arranged so as to offer a suite of olfactory experiences that are at once sensuous and intellectual. Of course, these structural similarities between perfume formulas and musical scores are not

<sup>3</sup> Already in 1857, Septimus Piesse's *Art of Perfume* proposed a list of correspondences between notes on the musical scale and particular scents (Piesse, 1857). Piesse's proposal has been examined experimentally by Charles Spence (Spence, 2021, pp. 5–6). Spence also reports studies that have found people tend to match certain scents with certain timbres at a greater than random rate (Spence, 2021, p. 21). For more research on music/perfume parallels see (Deroy, 2013). For some insightful general remarks on music/perfume relations see (Jaquet, 2015, pp. 39–61, 155–169).

<sup>4</sup> I only mention a few of the notes in *Paris*; reviewers' lists differ in length and distribution among the top, heart and base notes compare Allégret (Allégret, 2016) to Ayala Moriel (Moriel, 2008).

only limited, but quite general. Only a handful of musical compositions have a structure similar to that of most perfumes, in which individual elements appear and disappear one after another.<sup>5</sup>

But I believe the limited and very general formal similarities between music and perfumes become more evident if we focus our attention on what are called ‘abstract perfumes’ and purely instrumental music. The latter are perfumes that do not seek to smell like some familiar scent in nature or everyday life – roses, grass, leather, or even such untoward odours as sweat or semen. Rather, their scent is dominated by odours derived from a variety of unique artificial olfactory molecules.<sup>6</sup> I would suggest that at one end of the spectrum of more or less abstract perfumes one might put Geza Schön’s *Molecule 01*, which is composed solely of the artificial molecule Iso E Super. At the other end of the spectrum of perfumes that are not intended to smell like some identifiable thing in nature, one might place the famous *Chanel No. 5*, which, although it contains a variety of generally floral and other scent notes, is dominated by aldehydes. As the critic, Luca Turin, suggests, the heavy dose of aldehyde molecules in *Chanel No. 5*, gives “an abstract, marmoreal, blue-white radiance to what would otherwise have been a lush but relatively tame floral” (Turin, 2006, p. 54).<sup>7</sup> Abstract perfumes, then, provide aesthetic satisfaction to knowledgeable perfume users primarily through the structuring of the perfume’s elements and the unfamiliar scents that result rather than by evoking associative responses to representational or semantic indicators.

The notion of “enhanced formalism” that Peter Kivy used for absolute music offers a particularly attractive approach to the comparison of abstract perfumes and music.<sup>8</sup> Taking some liberties, one might substitute ‘abstract perfume’ for ‘absolute music’ at the beginning of his definition of enhanced formalism: “the doctrine that absolute music [abstract perfume] is a sound structure [smell structure] without semantic or representational content, but nevertheless, a sound structure that sometimes importantly possesses the garden variety emotions as heard [smelled] qualities of that structure” (Kivy, 2002, p. 101).<sup>9</sup> In an abstract perfume, the length, intensity and variety of its notes and accords are integrated into a complex structure and sequence of

<sup>5</sup> For example, Ferde Grofé’s *Grand Canyon Suite*.

<sup>6</sup> Tania Sanchez writes, “the art of abstraction in perfumery” means “the creation of a new smell for its own qualities, and not for any fidelity to things already known” (Turin and Sanchez, 2018, p. 9). By artificial molecules, I do not mean synthetics which simply offer cheaper (jasmine) or more environmentally friendly (musk) substitutes for natural odors, but new scents.

<sup>7</sup> For a review of another abstract perfume, *Odeur 53* (1998) which has 53 artificial molecules, see (Frolova, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> The term “enhanced formalism” was first used by Philip Alperson (Kivy, 2002, p. 90).

<sup>9</sup> The extent to which perfume structure might “possess garden variety emotions” (Kivy, 2002, p. 101) as smelled qualities is both complex and controversial. Of course, Kivy’s views on music are also controversial. Garry Hagberg has argued that Kivy gives away too much since absolute music does have some semantic content in the broad sense that the resolutions at the end of a piece of counterpoint, for example, can be experienced as isomorphic with our attempts to integrate the narrative of our lives (Hagberg, 2021, pp. 366–76). Similarly, many abstract perfumes may have a few notes that are representational.

unusual olfactory qualities that the trained and discerning smeller can learn to perceive, in ways similar to the way a trained and discerning listener can appreciate the pattern of notes, chords, and sound qualities of a piece of absolute music. Sometimes, one can say of an abstract perfume's purely olfactory elements and structure what Kivy says of some absolute music: it may deeply move or excite us simply by its formal beauty (Kivy, 2002, p. 129). Kivy's remark reminds me of the perfumer, Marina Jung Allégret's, description of a successful perfume accord as evoking "a memorable aesthetic emotion" which she likens to the emotion associated with "a musical phrase" (Allégret, 2016, p. 45).

Of course, there are also many *disanalogies* between perfume and music. In the matter of notes, for example, the music composer has far more creative and expressive options than the perfumer, since the composer can specify such things as length, whereas the perfumer's notes are molecules that evaporate at a fixed rate. Moreover, unlike the opening of most musical works, when a perfume is first released, all its notes are present (Ellena, 2011, pp. 147–149). As for, the typical duration of a work, most instrumental pieces last under ninety minutes, yet can pack in enormous complexities of structure, rhythm, and timbre, whereas the typical perfume for wear is designed to slowly unfold over several hours or most of a day and only the most highly trained noses can follow their development. Another disanalogy is that the internal repetition of entire passages is central to music, but extremely rare in fiction and painting (Kivy, 2002, p. 153), and almost non-existent in single works of the perfumer's art. Since a perfume is made up of notes and accords that evaporate over time its development is basically a one-way process. Taken together, these differences critically limit the expressive capacities of most perfumes compared to most works of music, whether classical or popular.

Having explored two formal analogies and several disanalogies between perfume and music, let's turn now to the task of offering greater specificity to the concept of art perfumery by suggesting a framework for distinguishing among types of perfumes.

#### 4. The Span of Art Perfumery

If only *some* perfumes are art, two questions arise: how should we think of non-art perfumes, and are there any significant differences within the category of 'art perfumes'? Establishing a framework for answering those questions will provide a second augmentation to the case for art perfumery. Since most of the criteria for identifying art perfumes that we have discussed so far, such as innovative formal complexity, openness to emotional suggestion, or challenging symbolism, are scalar, I suggest that we think of all perfumes as forming a continuum that stretches from what I will call 'Artists' Perfume-like Works' at one end to 'Standard Design Perfumes' at the other. I base the continuum on two criteria. First, the degree of the perfume creator's freedom, e.g., artists' extensive freedom vs. designers' many constraints (design briefs, hedonic and cost limits, safety and environmental regulations). Second, the receivers' norms of judgment, e.g. whether the perfume manifests innovative

structure, unusual emotional resonance and symbolic suggestion vs. conventionally pleasing scents for adornment. Between the two ideal types of Artists' Perfume-like Works and Standard Design Perfumes, I place the Niche Art Perfumes emphasized by Brozzo and Freeland as well as a few Mainstream Art Perfumes that seek a balance between adornment and cognitive/sensory interest. A brief look at some further characteristics and examples of each of these four types will help sharpen the concept of 'art perfumery'.

#### 4.1 Artists' Perfume-like Works

These are not perfumes *per se* but perfume-like olfactory works freely created by professional artists and typically exhibited in art galleries or museums as single instances. For example, among Clara Ursitti's pioneering experiments in various forms of olfactory art is her series, *Self-Portraits in Scent* (1994-), made up of simulated smells of her own body odours and exhibited as single works, often in glass vessels. Martynka Wawrzyniak's perfume-like work, *Smell Me* (2012), used odours from her skin, hair, and tears, and the gallery set aside a small room visitors could enter and be bathed in her odour. Sometimes an artist conceives of a perfume as part of a larger installation work, such as Lisa Kirk's *Revolution Pipe Bomb* (2007) which included a commissioned perfume consisting of the simulated smell of tear gas, smoke, burned rubber, gasoline, decaying flesh, etc. The elixir was presented in limited edition vessels made of silver, gold, and platinum, shaped like pipe bombs, and initially displayed in MoMA's PS1 art gallery within a "revolutionary's laboratory" (Pollock, 2011, p. 94).

What might be considered a subcategory of artists' perfume-like works are works by professional perfumers acting in the role of artists. In 2021, the Olfactory Art Keller Gallery in New York presented *Perfumers Gone Wild*, an exhibition of works by seven perfumers in various stages of their careers. They were invited to create scents "without a brief, [or] the technical requirements and economic considerations that usually come with developing a perfume." The pieces in the show would not be "perfumes, but pieces of olfactory art, intended to be experienced, analyzed, explored and shared as objects of aesthetic appreciation" (Olfactory Art Keller, 2021). Among the works from the show that particularly stand out is one inspired by Richard Serra's huge iron sculptures, Carlos Benaim's perfume-like *16 Ton*, which "stacks the heaviest molecules from the International Flavors and Fragrances collection on top of each other" (Olfactory Art Keller, 2021)

The kind of boundary-crossing work done by the perfumers participating in the *Perfumers Gone Wild* exhibition, has been going on for over a decade among a handful of experienced perfumers who regularly operate in a dual fashion: creating niche or mainstream perfumes for adornment under commissions that include a design brief, but at the same time, freely creating other scent works that are intended purely as art to be presented in galleries or museums. The best known of these figures is Christophe Laudamiel who has designed many commercial scents intended for wear, but who also has a strong artistic practice, with formal representation by art galleries in Berlin and New York.

For Laudamiel's 2017 solo exhibition called *Over 21* at the Dillion and Lee Gallery in Manhattan, he arranged ten canisters of synthetic scents around a dining table and visitors were invited to dip perfume blotters into a small hole in the top of each canister and write down their impressions.

But 'artists' perfume-like works', are not the same thing as 'art perfumes'. As the perfume critic, Tania Sanchez puts it, "art perfume" does not mean a "concept perfume" by a visual artist who commissions "a smell like rotting meat and genitals" for her next installation work. Rather, "art perfume" means a perfume for perfume collectors, for "people interested in the messages in perfume, in how wearing it changes the way we live and think" (Turin and Sanchez, 2018, p. 10; Cleary, 2020). Yet a few artist-commissioned perfumes could also be considered "art perfumes" since they have been intended for wear and are sold in limited editions, such as the series of *Biography Scents* commissioned by Anicka Yi. Even the very expensive perfume vials that were part of Lisa Kirk's *Revolution Pipe Bomb* installation, could have been opened and the contents daubed on the wrist by the owner, although apparently none of them did.<sup>10</sup> But, typically, artists' perfume-like works are single works intended to be appreciated for themselves as art, whereas the art perfumes that are the focus of interest in this essay are perfumes that are intended from the beginning to be worn, to be *both* art and adornment.

#### 4.2 Niche Art Perfumes

I would suggest that the few artist-commissioned perfumes that are intended to be worn shade off in the continuum of perfumes into artistic niche perfumes (although not every niche perfume has artistic ambitions). Niche Art Perfumes are the kind of art perfumes that Brozzo and Freeland give as examples of art perfumery, scents that are created by perfumers working independently or for small companies that place a perfume's innovative structure and challenging expressive and symbolic aspects on an equal footing with, or even above, use for adornment. Obviously, no matter how high the artistic ambitions of niche perfumers, if the small firms that sell niche perfumes are to be economically viable, their perfumes will have to adhere to safety regulations and pay some attention to the audience that wants to wear fragrances, not just discuss and write about them. As Freeland points out, niche perfumes in general have become so successful that mainstream perfume houses have begun buying up niche companies, with the result that the perfumers who work for them are often no longer as free as they once were (Freeland, 2021, p. 5). A closely related category to niche perfumes is that of "artisan perfumes," a term used by Luca Turin for the work of those self-taught amateurs who sell directly to the public over the Internet (Turin and Sanchez, 2018, pp. 17–19). Of course, like the work of amateur photographers, a great deal of amateur perfumery work is tritely conventional, but some works rise to a level worthy of attention for their artistry.<sup>11</sup> There is even

<sup>10</sup> In 2019, I asked Kirk whether anyone who bought one had actually opened the "pipe bomb" perfume vial and she said she had not heard from anyone who had.

<sup>11</sup> Most amateur perfumers make perfumes just for the challenge of it. The writer, Megan Volpert, describes her own experiences in *Perfume* (Volpert 2022).



an annual Golden Pear award given by the Los Angeles based Institute for Art and Olfaction for the most artistically interesting niche and artisan perfumes.

Naturally, those who choose to buy niche art perfumes or artisan art perfumes tend to delight in wearing a scent primarily because its structure, expressivity, and symbolic reach stimulate the imagination. As Freeland puts it, “wearing a genuinely artistic perfume involves attending to a creative work that is meant to offer and sustain an artistic experience: something that is expressive and evocative, meant to be engaged with on both sensory and cognitive levels” (Freeland, 2021, pp. 10–11). As examples of niche art perfumes, Freeland calls attention to the Canadian company, Zoologist Perfumes, which names all its scents after animals. Some Zoologist Perfumes are quite pleasant to wear, such as *Chipmunk* with its notes of hazelnut and cedar, but *Tyrannosaurus Rex*, has a harshness that makes it a long shot for most people who would probably leave it in its bottle for an occasional sniff in the company of like-minded aficionados of scent (Freeland, 2021, pp. 8–10).

#### 4.3 Artistic Mainstream Perfumes

Just because a perfume has been created on commission for a mainstream fashion or cosmetic company does not mean it would automatically fail the test for being an art perfume. Most writers and curators who have claimed art status for perfumes have included in their lists of art perfumes a few of the most aesthetically complex and innovative mainstream classics. Thus, just as museum exhibitions of contemporary art quilts have sometimes included outstanding examples of older innovative quilts, it makes sense that the *Art of Scent 1889–2012* exhibition of perfumes at New York’s Museum of Art and Design included *Jicky* (1889) and *Chanel No 5* (1921) alongside several contemporary mainstream works (Pollack, 2011, p. 92). Similarly, there are exceptional recent mainstream perfumes that one might want to consider artworks, such as Christine Nagel’s *Twilly d’Hermès* (2017) (Turin and Sanchez, 2018, pp. 273–274). Like most commercial perfumes, its design adheres to strict safety, environmental, and economic guidelines, but it is also outstanding for its formal complexity, expressiveness, symbolism, and originality. According to Robert Stecker’s and Stephen Davies’ respective definitions of art, each of which combines aesthetic and historical/contextual criteria, only those instances of design, such as cars, furniture, or fashion, that meet a “higher standard” (Stecker, 2003) or furnish “superb examples” (Davies, 2015) will qualify as high art (Stecker, 2003, p. 151; Davies, 2015, p. 379). Nagel’s perfume, *Twilly d’Hermès*, would seem to match both of those criteria.

#### 4.4 Standard Design Perfumes

At the other end of the perfume continuum, the Artistic Mainstream category shades off into that of ‘Standard Design Perfumes,’ a category which includes the bulk of commercial perfumes. The latter are characterized by their designers accepting the constraints of a design brief (often with the commissioning firm asking for changes along the way), and by the usual safety, environmental, and economic considerations. Above all, design perfumes must stay within a safe hedonic range that will appeal to a large audience that wants

to use them for adornment. Obviously, these characteristics also apply to some extent to the category of Artistic Niche and Artistic Mainstream perfumes that we just considered. But the perfumes' that belong in the two art perfume categories reflect higher artistic ambitions, greater imaginative reach, and superior structural complexity than standard design perfumes. But one should not think that in calling the bulk of commercial perfumes, 'standard design perfumes,' I mean to denigrate them. In my view, works of design are not intrinsically of lesser cultural importance than works we call fine art. Calling the bulk of perfumes standard design perfumes is a way of underlining the fact that adornment trumps such artistic aspects as complex and innovative form or unconventional and challenging emotional and symbolic resonance. As Glenn Parsons argued in *Philosophy of Design*, a key difference between art and design is that artists are primarily concerned with helping us understand the world, but for most professional designers, changing the world in the sense of creating something new that is aesthetically pleasing and serves a function well is at the heart of design (Parsons, 2015, pp. 101–102). In the case of design perfumes, most of the big firms that commission the perfumes and write the design briefs are not only likely to intervene at various stages to make sure the perfumer is on the desired track toward marketability, but they must approve the final formula. This is one reason that usually only the name of the commissioning firm (Estée Lauder, Calvin Klein, Yves St. Laurent, etc.) appears on standard design perfumes (and even on some niche and mainstream art perfumes) and not the name(s) of the perfumer(s) who designed them.

But the relation between art and design is fluid. Many encyclopedic fine art museums collect formally remarkable works of design as fine art. Moreover, some designers, like Phillipe Starck, design pieces that are barely functional and more like sculptures meant for contemplation (*Juicy Salif*) or, like Ron Arad, design pieces that are basically conceptual art (Sudjic, 2014, pp. 151–168). In the world of perfumery, a parallel figure to Starck and Arad is Christophe Laudamiel whose creative practice moves with ease among all the major types of perfumes I have proposed, from Artists' Perfume-like Works through Artistic Niche and Artistic Mainstream Perfumes to Standard Design Perfumes.

### 5. Art or Adornment?

Freeland has recently argued that my decision to consign nearly all perfumes to the category of design (Shiner, 2020, p. 241), runs the risk of making the category of art perfumes itself occupied by only a few "esoteric gallery perfumes." (Freeland, 2022, p. 251). Her critique applies even more pointedly to the position on art and perfumes taken by the Olfactory Art Keller Gallery. As we saw, when Olfactory Art Keller invited a group of practising perfumers to submit works for *Perfumers Gone Wild*, it told them their works would not be considered perfumes at all but works of olfactory art (Olfactory Art Keller, 2021). Moreover, in the Spring of 2022, when Olfactory Art Keller sent out a call for proposals to be included in a new show entitled *Portraits in Scent*, the call specified that "the artworks will be sold as artworks and buyers will be instructed to not wear them. These are not perfumes" (Olfactory Art Keller,

2022). There are practical reasons for Olfactory Art Keller to exclude all perfumes from what it considers ‘olfactory art.’ As the first gallery in the United States specializing in olfactory art, Olfactory Art Keller already has its hands full supporting the recognition of olfactory art as an independent art form, so that exhibiting even the most aesthetically challenging niche perfumes as art might muddy the waters, especially since to most people, the term ‘perfume’ primarily suggests adornment.<sup>12</sup> In general, the gallery’s position on perfumes strongly implies that art and adornment are mutually exclusive. Stephen Davies might agree.

Although Davies has admitted that not only in Bali, but even in the West a few art forms can be both art and adornment, he seems keen to maintain “the separation [...] between art and adornment,” and has explicitly rejected two proposals for expanding the list of arts that can also be adornments (Davies, 2021, pp. 512–513).<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, I have been arguing throughout this essay that some kinds of perfumes can be art as well as adornment. Of course, someone might be a collector of art perfumes without ever putting them on, but only sniffing them from a bottle or a blotter. But I would suggest that wearing a perfume is an equally good way to appreciate its artistic properties, especially its formal ones, since these typically emerge during a perfume’s temporal development on the skin. Of course, simply putting on a perfume is not necessarily the same thing as adornment in Davies’s sense of intending an aesthetic enhancement of the body. There are multiple motives for wearing a perfume: masking body odor, seduction, social status, expressing identity, etc. Yet, since ancient times, whatever other motives people have had for putting on perfumes, they have typically also viewed them as aesthetic enhancements.

But one might still object that although a perfume collector believes a certain perfume is a work of art *and* wears it as an aesthetic enhancement, such an individual cannot focus on it as art and as adornment at the same time but can only experience the two in alternation. Even if that charge were true, which I doubt, it seems a rather thin objection to regarding some perfumes as both art works and adornments. Moreover, unless one is a radical subjectivist in ontology, the objection leaves standing the fact that it is the same perfume that is experienced at one moment as an artwork and the next as adornment. Indeed, most of the perfumes that Brozzo, Freeland, and I offer as examples of art perfumes are, in fact, treated by knowledgeable perfume appreciators and wearers as both art and adornment. That is why I have suggested that we conceive of all perfumes as located on a continuum stretching from those singular artists’ perfume-like works not intended to be worn to those design perfumes produced in multiples and intended solely for wear as adornment, with certain niche art perfumes, artisan art perfumes, and mainstream art perfumes that are *both* art and adornment occupying the centre of the continuum.

<sup>12</sup> The gallery was opened in 2019 by Andreas Keller, a distinguished philosopher of perception who has written an important book on olfactory perception (Keller 2016).

<sup>13</sup> See the proposals of Julia Minarik (Minarik 2021) and Eva Dadlez (Dadlez 2021) and Davies’ reply (Davies 2021) in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.

## 6. Conclusion

I set out by considering Stephen Davies's analysis of the place of adornment in various societies and argued that his analysis supports the view that perfume is not only of considerable aesthetic interest, but that some perfumes have the potential to be art. Then I examined Chiara Brozzo's and Cynthia Freeland's case for the art status of some perfumes, suggesting that Brozzo's case could be strengthened by augmenting its formal dimension, something I did through a discussion of some highly limited parallels between perfume and music. Then I expanded upon Brozzo's and Freeland's equally important argument, drawn from the existence of networks of knowledgeable perfume appreciators, by proposing a set of interpretive categories, ranging from 'artists' perfume-like works' to 'standard design perfumes' that clarify the place of various types of art perfumes among all perfumes. Finally, I responded to sceptical doubts that perfumes can be both art and adornment in Davies' meaning of the term adornment. I conclude that art perfumery in the sense of the creation of perfumes that are both art and adornment does indeed exist – and it seems to be thriving.<sup>14</sup>

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# Atmospheres, Art, and Aesthetics: A Conversation

Brian Goeltzenleuchter – Elena Mancioppi

Initially conceived as an interview with the hybrid media artist Brian Goeltzenleuchter, this text gradually took the form of a conversation on various issues regarding olfactory art and the aesthetic significance of smell. Framing the artistic uses of odours in the context of contemporary art, the paper discloses some of its foundational traits, variations, and underlying impulses. By commenting on Goeltzenleuchter's olfactory artworks through a philosophical perspective, this contribution covers a number of subjects including the notion of atmosphere, the socio-cultural values and narratives conveyed by scents, the suggestive relationship between spaces and aromas, and the phenomenology of smells as compared to the experience of sounds. Consistent with how smell perception unfolds, the dialogue flows in a form that is not rigidly structured but airy, ephemeral, and fluid, developing a sequence of insights whose aim is, rather than scrutinising a specific topic, to evoke the essence of olfactory poetics as a whole. | *Keywords: Olfactory Art, Atmospheres, Osmospheres, Aesthetics of Smell, Contemporary Art*

*Elena Mancioppi*:<sup>1</sup> In April 1940, Albert Camus (1963, p. 179) entered in his *Notebooks* a short note which is, I believe, an interesting starting point for our conversation. It reads: “I am an olfactive type. And there is no art that addresses itself to the sense of smell. Only life.” We do not know who this olfactive person is, whether the writer himself or not. But we know that, as early as 1940, explicit attention to smell as an artistic medium was emerging, although it was an aside if compared to the role played by the other senses. Not to mention the explicit exclusion of smell from the aesthetic realms which has dominated Western thought until recently. Today, we even talk of ‘olfactory art.’ Does your artistic practice respond to the urgency of bridging the gap between art and life in the olfactory sphere?

<sup>1</sup> Elena Mancioppi is post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Gastronomic Sciences (Pollenzo, Italy). Her research interests primarily include smell, atmospheres, ecology of perception, and olfactory arts. She has co-edited an issue of *Rivista di Estetica* (3/2021) dedicated to olfaction, and published two monographs: *L'Olfattivo* (Edizioni ETS, 2022), and *Osmospheres* (Mimesis International, 2023).

*Brian Goeltzenleuchter:*<sup>2</sup> It does, though I am a bit dubious of associating urgency with the arts. I've often quipped that *if someone is drowning, you're not going to throw them a painting*. My sensibility owes a lot to Allan Kaprow, whose idiosyncratic reading of John Dewey's *Art as Experience* deeply affected contemporary art since the late-1950s. The idea that the art culture of the industrial West had been so marginalised from its roots in human experience signalled to me that bridging this gap would be a slow, multi-faceted project – one which required 'buy-in' from constituents outside of the art world. It is even slower when it comes to the olfactory sphere, due in part to the West's long-standing prejudice toward the sense of smell.

*Elena Mancioffi:* The fact that you studied under Allan Kaprow and that you are one of the most influential olfactory (but not only) artists suggests that your artistic education was not exactly conservative.

*Brian Goeltzenleuchter:* It's worth noting that due to the progressive nature of my art education, I was never discouraged from working with smell as an art material. I went to the University of California San Diego at a time when the Department of Visual Arts appeared to be only nominally interested in 'visual' art. For instance, Jerome Rothenberg was writing, performing, and translating in the domain of ethnopoetics. David Antin was doing improvised talk poems and teaching his infamous course, *The Structure of Art*. Lev Manovich was theorising new media and introducing people to artists working in this domain. And, of course, Allan Kaprow was a mythic figure whose ideas about blurring the boundaries of art and life permeated a lot of the curriculum. This was the education I inherited as a 19-year-old kid. The first artwork I made using olfactory components was a sculpture dating back to 1996. Even though I was still a teenager, it foreshadowed much of the work that I do today. It involved haptics, temperature, olfaction, sound, and vision. It sounds Wagnerian, but the sculpture was submissive in scale – not much bigger than a laptop.

In my early twenties I started using smell to complicate the discourse surrounding the dematerialised art object. At the time I thought of myself as a post-conceptual artist, so I was making work that looked at the legacies of Conceptual Art and Institutional Critique. I thought that perfume notwithstanding, smells – these volatile molecules – challenged commoditisation, collection, and archiving. Smells started to raise questions about art historical olfactory antecedents whose work may have escaped the historical record, which to me further trivialised the visuality in visual art.

Although I consistently used smell as a component in my art, in all honesty I didn't think about the label 'olfactory art' until 2006, which is when I was developing my first European solo show, *Institutional Wellbeing*. The entire

<sup>2</sup> Brian Goeltzenleuchter is a hybrid media artist working at the intersection of print technologies, olfactory art, and social engagement. He has held residencies at Banff Centre (Canada), Centrum Beeldende Kunst (The Netherlands), Sculpture Space (New York), and Institute for Art and Olfaction (Los Angeles). He is the Darlene Shiley Honors Faculty Fellow in the Weber Honors College, and research fellow at the Institute for Public and Urban Affairs (San Diego State University).



premise of that project revolved around a smell that I designed, so it finally dawned on me to do some research into whether other people were taking smell seriously. I came across *The Smell Culture Reader* (Drobnick, 2006), and was introduced to the work of Clara Ursitti, Gayil Nalls, and Sissel Tolaas. It's astonishing to think ten years passed before I noticed that other artists were working in this domain, or that such a domain existed in the first place. I guess it says something about how marginalised the field was back then.

*Elena Mancioppi:* Indeed, artistic experimentation with smells, and not just perfumes, has reached its zenith from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Within this framework, Arte Povera, Land Art, Fluxus, Happenings, Junk Art, Performance Art, Body Art and Eat Art are among the most prolific movements or groups, before 'olfactory art' was formalised into a specific, although rather fluid, branch. As artistic movements driven by an innovative or openly subversive spirit, their appeal and attention to odours are fully consistent not only with their underlying intents, but also with their tools, materials and *modus operandi*. In a way, the use of smells encourages us to rethink the traditional idea of the work of art, which transforms from a solid and stable object to an in-flux 'becoming.' Does your art fit into this frame?

*Brian Goeltzenleuchter:* Yes, my work is indebted to so many of these artists. In a way they were like overly permissive parents, which is to say that while I shared their experimental spirit, I had to make my own way because the world I inhabited was a much different place; so I worked through their legacies and I reflected a lot on the conditions – social, political, economic, technological, and otherwise – that influenced artistic production. In the post-WWII milieu, there was a strong existential bent that, as you say, drove experiments of an openly subversive spirit. I was fascinated by this, and it helped me to understand the role of the artist in society, the artist's relationship to personal expression, and the role of scent in contemporary art practice.

For instance, take three very disparate artworks, each of which had an impact on me: Piero Manzoni's *Fiato d'artista* (1960), Hermann Nitsch's *4<sup>th</sup> Action* (1963), and Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975). In spite of their differences in intent, methods, and expression, all use smell in a way that I find indicative of a lot of work from the post-war experimental era, which is to say that smell functioned as an index of an action as performed by the artist. The artworks' implied smells were indexical, if ephemeral, outcomes of an action or series of actions that were themselves the primary aesthetic object. At least it seems obvious to me that all three artworks have been sufficiently archived and continue to be well understood in spite of the fact that their olfactory components have long since dissipated. I wanted to know if smell could be *the primary object*, however in flux it might be. *Could the absence of smell derail the archiving and understanding of the entire work?* And I also had what you might call an 'allergic reaction' to the idea of my art practice relating in any way to personal expression. *Could an artist work with smell without reverting to self-expression?* Hence, my focus on the socio-aesthetic dimensions of olfactory space with a particular emphasis on the relationship between the

materiality and temporality of scent molecules. Left to their own devices, smells do not respect boundaries, which makes them a subversive artistic medium. Due to their invisibility, they can have arresting perceptual effects that can be equally visceral – albeit for different reasons – to those 20<sup>th</sup>-century antecedents you mentioned.

Elena, one of the things that fascinates me about your work in the philosophy of smell is that it seeks to reclaim or reconcile the olfactive's place in several branches of philosophy. And yet, in doing so your research ventures into other fields of knowledge, which seem quite willing to entertain and absorb it. If you agree with any of this, I wonder what you think are the reasons for the relatively sudden popularity of the olfactive as a perceptual modality?

*Elena Mancioppi:* Answering this question first requires a distinction that might seem trivial. The popularity that smell enjoys today is, I would say, a *thematic* popularity, in the sense that, at its *operative* level, it has never played a secondary role in human perception and social life. With respect to philosophy, social sciences, and humanities in general, I find parallels with what some have called the 'affective turn' and its emphasis put on relationships and encounters – not only in emotional terms – rather than on the different entities of the world that are assumed to be distinguishable, measurable, or separate. In fact, from Plato to Kant and beyond, many have noted the multifaceted affectivity of smell from multiple perspectives. All this appears to be connected, on the one hand, to a more ecological, relational, and holistic idea of both the environment and perception (and even of science) and, on the other hand, to a greater academic inclusiveness toward the everyday and the mundane.

Such a thing has also happened with respect to food and, to a certain extent, to the body. Notably, the former has entered the philosophical and cultural disciplines only since the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet has always been acknowledged as fundamental in that it is necessary for life and thought. Almost paradoxically, this importance emerges even more strikingly when we consider the thinkers who, throughout history, have warned against overindulging and talking about it too much: they are telling us that food is so influential that it can guide the search for truth or prevent it. The same, in my view, applies to smell. I would also add that olfactory perception, regardless of the nature of its stimuli, seems inherently rooted in food and in the idea of eating, also metaphorically speaking, as it implies the intimate ingestion of an alterity, the resulting risks for the 'identity' as something rigid, and the ongoing blurring of the boundaries between elements and dualisms well established in Western thought.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it is because of such a 'mingling' nature that smell embodies the sense of the 'digital age' we are dwelling in. As Michel Serres describes it, the current era is a fluid space-time where knowledge is dematerialised and reorganised, and its transmission as well as

<sup>3</sup> This does not deny the significance of smell, as many scholars have pointed out, with respect to other domains and aspects of life such as, just to name a few, sexuality, death, and intimacy in general. Indeed, I think it is precisely the mechanism just mentioned that makes it so relevant, taking in these cases a figurative form.

fruition takes on new, less rigid, and more airy forms, all being followed – or caused – by new patterns of relationship, contamination, and negotiation. Accordingly, an inquiry on smell in a way requires, rather than an inter-disciplinarity, a sort of *in-discipline*, as anthropologist Tim Ingold would put it.

With respect to contemporary art, I think the use of smell has much to do with the concept of experience as something always situational and evenemential. However, since you have mentioned Dewey and the issue of the first-person narrative, I would like to know whether you agree with him when he observes that “[t]he artist embodies in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works” (Dewey, 1980, p. 48). In a particularly interesting work of yours, *Scents of Exile*, you create an olfactory reproduction of the odour-related idea of home of the people you interviewed. This artwork is somehow based on your reflected, language-mediated interpretation of the direct, affective, sensuous, and preverbal experience of others’ memories connected to odours, which in turn are going to be perceived by still different people. Paraphrasing what you said earlier, one might ask: *would the absence of the referent derail the understanding of the entire work?*

*Brian Goeltzenleuchter:* Yes, in the case of *Scents of Exile*, I think it would. As Alfred Gell (1977, p. 29) put it, “the incompleteness, the disembodiedness of smells [...] makes them the model for the ideal which hovers on the edge of actualisation.” In this sense, smells are atmospheric: considered alone they produce feelings, moods, affects, etc., but not many thoughts, due to their distance from language, metaphorical and conceptual processes. An artist often needs to direct the context in which the perceived smells are understood. I appreciate how you described artists ‘using’ smells because even if an artist transmits a smell in an empty gallery space, the space itself – its volume, ambient temperature, and airflow – as well as the apparatus transmitting the smell affect the way smell is perceived and ultimately understood. This is the crux of Drobnick’s (2015) argument that olfactory art is in fact a hybrid, multi-sensorial art form.

But your initial question about my working methods vis-à-vis Dewey’s meditation on experience is even more intriguing to me because it intersects with something I think about a lot, which is the relationship between the production and reception of an artwork. Although some of Dewey’s examples are dated, his general empathy toward both the art maker and the art experiencer is quite fresh. While every artist’s working methods are different, it stands to reason that any artist who produces art for public reception thinks in some way about how that art will be perceived.

By way of example, I conceived of *Scents of Exile* in 2014, at the request of Ashraf Osman, a curator who was organising a transnational olfactory art exhibition of the same name. His title started me thinking about how scent memories of home might feel to refugees and other immigrants who, for whatever reason, could no longer go home. Completely separate from this, I began noticing a trend in American popular culture, which had to do with the unselfconscious way that people applied hand sanitiser in public space.

All these hand sanitising units seemed to have suddenly appeared everywhere I went. I was frustrated by their ubiquity and curious about the multi-billion-dollar industry that profited from people's fear of bacteria. It occurred that these banal hand sanitising dispensers could become the site for an artwork. I loved the perversity of this idea: such a marginal object could become both the provisional centre and the apparatus transmitting the olfactory aesthetic experience. But then Osman cancelled the exhibition and I got busy with other projects, so I stopped thinking about *Scents of Exile*.

Five years later I was artist-in-residence at a sculpture centre in New York, when I met staff members of a neighbouring refugee centre who were willing to explore the idea with me. I started interviewing refugees and other immigrants, translating their scent memories of home into fragrances that were then embedded in hand sanitiser. I distilled the interviews into a narrative printed in poster form and displayed above each hand sanitising unit. All the while I was, in Dewey's terms, "embodying the attitude of the perceiver." Every visual element of *Scents of Exile* was designed to normalise or encourage the unselfconscious state of pattern recognition that defined so many people's relationship to consuming hand sanitiser. That way, there would be no turning back; once they smelled something strange on their hands, they had to retrace their steps to find out more about what it was. I say this to circle back on the Gell quotation: expose people to a disembodied smell and then make it possible for them to actualise it by coming to terms with the intimate experience they just stumbled upon. Little did I know that a few weeks later the world would be engulfed by the COVID19 pandemic and the entire project would take on new meaning.

*Elena Mancioppi*: The way the idea of *Scents of Exile* came to be is as interesting as, I think, understanding how the dynamics of a peculiar historical period have changed its very sense and, perhaps, even our relationship with the olfactory dimension of life. Indeed, the COVID19 pandemic has noticeably revealed the deep repercussions of olfactory malfunctioning and, in general, the significance of odours. Among other things, we can think of the sense of anxiety triggered by smelling others, which entailed the risk of viral transmission, something reminiscent of the old connection between olfactory dimension and contagion as in the long-lived miasma theory.

As it is widely known, the most common symptoms of COVID19 concern smell dysfunctions – namely anosmia (smell blindness), and parosmia (smell distortion) – that can even become permanent. Both are usually accompanied by various disorders such as apathy, paranoia, eating disorders, and severe types of depression that can even lead to nothing short of suicide. The loss of smell is coupled with a feeling of loneliness, of disinterest in and disengagement from everything; the relationships with the world get loose and life sheds, as Oliver Sacks (1987, p. 159) put it, "a good deal of its savour [...] as a rich unconscious background to everything else." Do you think the pandemic has changed the way people treat their sense of smell contributing to an awareness toward it? Do you feel that your art has somehow benefited from such a situation?

*Brian Goeltzenleuchter:* I'm hesitant to speculate about how COVID19 affected the way people treat their sense of smell. I can't think of anything more involuntary than breathing. So it is a big deal for a culture to be anxious about that. What makes it worse is that when people are anxious they are told to *breathe deeply* to calm down! That said, for all the anxiety triggered by the fear of smelling others, I wonder if an even greater number of people experienced the converse sort of anxiety that was triggered by the absence of the smell of others, or of foreign smells in general; it's just that the latter form of anxiety did not fit the broader cultural narrative rooted in compliance through fear-mongering.

Life expectancy in the U.S. has been on the decline for nearly a decade due to 'deaths of despair' – suicide, drug and alcohol overdose, and liver failure. The pandemic exacerbated that. I imagine that most of us experienced a pivotal event during the pandemic that caused us to, at least temporarily, question the ubiquity surrounding the 'fear-of-breathing' narrative. For me, it was learning about a student – a beautifully creative, humble, and generous young man – who, six months into the pandemic, wandered into one of California's hottest deserts with scarcely a bottle of water and hiked until he collapsed, and then died of dehydration. I immediately thought of him when I read the above quote by Sacks.

This young man was my student the year before COVID19 shut down universities, and he was my student again when all instruction was online. I think he represented a great number of people who were not prepared for the temporal and sensorial changes that came with self-quarantining. Our relation to time is mediated by the technical means through which time is experienced. Anyone who has suffered from 'Zoom fatigue' knows this very well. So when our interactions became mediated by a few digital platforms our sensorium greatly diminished. What the restriction of smell did to each person individually is hard to say. I'm not even sure the extent to which most people were even aware of it. But I look forward to your latest book, *Osmospheres* (Mancioppi, 2023), because I believe this idea of the 'osmosphere' – the olfactory aura that bestows a vague but undeniable sense of authenticity to people, places, and things – is so key to living well.

*Elena Mancioppi:* I quite agree with you, and I find it really that, when trying to understand the general mood of a community, the perspective adopted can start from assumptions that may sometimes even deny grasping its very peculiar aspects and reasons.

As William James (1981, p. 243) claimed, "the feeling of an absence is *toto caelo* different from the absence of a feeling." This is very relevant (and I think also philosophically promising), especially if we try to understand olfaction not so much as a passive and chemical sensory channel, but rather as a self-tuning system, a general affective colouring of perceiving and dwelling in the world. This is what I have tried to do in *Osmospheres* by disclosing some connections with the notion of 'atmosphere' through the case of food. The intent of this book is neither to celebrate smell as *the* sense of atmospheres nor to prove that

smells are the most atmospheric stimuli. Instead, I want to probe the hypothesis that atmospheric perception is a mode of feeling comparable to an 'olfactive' modality. Hence, the term *osmosphere*: from *ὄσμη*, "smell, odour," and *σφαῖρα*, "sphere, globe;" osmospheres indicate those irradiances which provide anything (persons, commodities, situations, places, etc.) with a vague, all-encompassing, and unique *flavour*.

It comes as no surprise that, for instance, a "city without smell is like a person without character," as Gernot Böhme (1998, p. 51) claimed; however, just as a person without character has a character, namely that of having no character, in the same way an odourless city has its own osmosphere. In other words, olfactory absence is a *deeply affective presence*. Even if not extensively scrutinised – maybe due to our deodorised/deodorising cultural ideal? –, the same transpires by considering the pandemic, specifically when lockdown measures were enforced: the absence of familiar smells conveyed the atmospheric tension of the period. Interestingly enough, it appears that sales of intense personal perfumes increased during that period, perhaps to replace, so to say, the 'felt absent presence' of others.

Olfaction can thus provide a sense of life: smell has been described as that quality of an environment which "most intensely allows us to sense through our disposition (*Befinden*) where we are" (Böhme, 2017, p. 125). Osmospheres can therefore be taken as telltales of the way we live and feel, and here we come to the issue of *living well*. Osmospheres show, we could say, *the way we live how we are feeling*, as well as *the way we feel how we are living*. Again, Böhme provides a fitting example of this. In Darmstadt, where he spent many years, people used to complain about a bad smell lingering in the air. As the city was the headquarters of a big pharmaceutical company, scientists carried out some research, eventually establishing the absence of any chemical substance in the air. Nevertheless, the problem persisted: "the inhabitants of Darmstadt 'did not feel well'" (Böhme, 2017, p. 1). A hovering sense of disquiet took on osmospheric qualities. Osmospheres manifest therefore *the way we feel/live* and, as such, they gravitate towards social aesthetics. This proves particularly useful today, in that 'sensescapescapes' are often the aesthetic outcomes of economic disparities, ghettoisation, and social frictions. More specifically, osmospheres can shed light on environmental injustice, marginalisation, racism, classism, and the narratives around them, becoming a fertile field to develop new ethics and politics. In this respect, I think some of your works are worth mentioning, such as *Sillage* and *The Olfactory Present: By Means of Smoke*.

*Brian Goeltzenleuchter*: Although I've never thought about it so succinctly, I respond to this idea: "Osmospheres show *the way we live how we are feeling*, as well as *the way we feel how we are living*." That is precisely why my work takes a relational or dialogical form, which I think is roughly equivalent to what you refer to as *social aesthetics*.

*Sillage* has been launched at three urban art museums over the years. Each instantiation involves the museum launching a formal survey in which

museum patrons verbally describe what they think their city smells like, neighbourhood by neighbourhood. I take the museum's survey data and try to consolidate it into what you might call an 'osmospheric narrative.' These narratives function as you described above; in an effort to articulate the aesthetic qualities of a scent-scape, the respondents inadvertently comment on injustice, racism, and classism. I use the narratives to inform the design of synthetic versions of neighbourhood smells. I compose the smells at perfume-level concentration. This privileges temporal flexibility, allowing each component of a scent composition to predictably evaporate, thus conveying the olfactory equivalent of the respondents' osmospheric narrative. For instance, when *Sillage* launched in Los Angeles, the narrative description of that city's wealthiest neighbourhood was, "wet lawn gives way to dry air, which gives way to the clean sweat of a trophy wife." I designed a dewy, green smell, using aroma chemicals that, within minutes, evaporated into a classic ozonic perfume accord. Using a heavy dose of an aroma chemical called norlimbanol gave the smell of the air a dryness that actually outlasted the ozonic smell. Hours after the rest of the perfume evaporated, the smell of the remaining norlimbanol took on the clean, dry, amber smell of a woman's armpit.

I mention this because the aesthetic function of the scents provoked wonder in many participants. But I wanted to redirect that wonder into a relational domain. So I introduced a key element to the project, which was a rule: the only way participants can smell neighbourhoods other than their own is to introduce themselves to other patrons and ask if they can smell them. This intimate and often humorous introduction breaks down barriers and allows for frank dialogue to take place. Apparently, the olfactory aura of the osmosphere wasn't so vague that participants were at a loss for what to talk about. Dialogues that began in an aesthetic domain often morphed into political, social, and economic ones. The project took the form of what I call an 'olfactory counter-monument' (Goeltzenleuchter, 2021), a materially volatile, physically unimposing event that uses its ephemeral nature to provoke public memory.

The *Olfactory Present: By Means of Smoke* built on this idea by working *in situ*, dealing in real time with the actual smells that make up the osmosphere. The idea for it came to me as I was walking through this park in San Diego that is flanked on two sides by low-income apartments. The residents of the apartments often have to deal with the smells of their neighbours' cooking. Since many of the residents are immigrants, the smells are diverse and can be quite exotic – even irritating – to others. I had been thinking about the spatiality of smell in these tight domestic settings as I walked through the park, where, at the time, members of many of these communities were grilling food for outdoor picnics. As I breathed, I could smell overlapping cuisines from the various picnics. It made me think of my longstanding research into what I call 'The Olfactory Present': in *that* moment, in *that* space, cultural migration and atmospheric migration brought together a mixture of olfactory traditions, which shook me, and presumably others, awake to the similarities and differences in which cultures experience the present.

With funding from the San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture, I began a one-year sensory ethnography of home cooking. Through extensive interviews with four home cooks, I researched how knowledge is conveyed through food. The project took the form of a series of ethnographic interviews, a cooking school, four large-scale watercolour paintings, and a forthcoming cookbook. At the *By Means of Smoke Cooking School*, students learned recipes and foodways from members of Eritrean, Filipino, Iraqi, and Mexican communities. The stories told and the recipes shared informed a series of foodways watercolour paintings which begin to articulate the efforts taken by immigrant cultures to maintain culinary traditions in their new environment. Broadly speaking, the project was about how knowledge is conveyed through food, and how recipes are a sort of Duchampian assisted-readymade waiting to be brought into being by the home-cook, who cannot help but hybridise the recipe, renewing its contemporaneity.

*Elena Mancioppi*: Thus, as *The Olfactory Present: By Means of Smoke* suggests, the various problems arising from multi-ethnic co-existence can turn into aesthetic and socio-political potential, as well as sources of artistic inspiration. Specifically, they foster reflection on the value attributed to food and spaces, where perceptual qualities become the bearer of ethical instances and racial prejudices clearly conveyed by the verbal expressions used to describe them. This is somehow even more apparent in *Sillage*, which shows the latent but stubborn olfactory fragmentation operating between the neighbourhoods of a city, where the aesthetic and linguistic connotations can be ascribed to broader socio-economic dynamics embedded by food.

In *Sillage*, for example, the case of Baltimore discloses fruitful insights. In addition to the Northeast being associated with roasted coffee, the East and Southeast are described through food smells in such a way as to reveal socio-economic disparities and how this translates into aesthetic values and lexical choices. Recurring odours for East Baltimore are trash and mildew, and verbal labels include nomenclature such as ‘pit beef,’ a peculiar way of cooking meat connected to low-income African-American communities. Although this dish is widely appreciated and consumed, most people judge negatively the city areas affiliated with it. Southeast Baltimore is instead pervaded by an atmosphere characterised by undertones of gentrified, white or hipster Baltimore, which fully corresponds to its reputation as an old-fashioned but charming neighbourhood. Associated with freshly baked bread because of the presence of a historical bread factory, the survey lists flavours like Old Bay Seasoning (a blend of herbs and spices marketed throughout the U.S. but originally from Baltimore), beer, ice cream, pizza, cinnamon, raisin, fish, coffee, and tacos. As it is clear, the osmosphere of ethnic popular gastronomy is persistently coloured by a hostile pitch, whereas local dishes (or ethnic ones, but assimilated and adapted to North American taste) contribute to the positive idea of a clean and quiet place.

As Georg Simmel (2009, p. 577) put it, the “social question is not only an ethical one, but also a nasal question.” Ethnic and class tensions embodied or caused by food smells are one of my main research interests. Since it is



evident that food flavours partake in socio-political dynamics by forging and negotiating social identities, I would say that osmospheric gastronomies can be seen as forces which model human geographies, either igniting frictions or promoting a sense of community. My question is: Do you think food scents play a key role in this kind of social aesthetics? Or, in other words, do they hold, according to you, a preferential relationship with the affective characters of spaces and times, and with how humans relate to other people?

*Brian Goeltzenleuchter:* Food scents hold a special kind of equivocality within the broader domain of scents. A food scent can represent the food itself. It can be a symbol for something else. It can speak to regionality, seasonality, scarcity, and abundance by suggesting methods of preparation, as well as the quality and availability of ingredients. It can, as we have discussed, separate ‘us’ from ‘them.’ But it can also distinguish ‘host’ from ‘guest,’ which brings up the wildly different ways cultures define and practise the concept of hospitality. So, yes, I think food scents are profoundly important to social aesthetics.

As you well know, there are a lot of tensions caused by food smells. And some are undeniably legitimate and pervasive. But I am sensitive to how easily this topic can be weaponised, simply because it is more complex than many care to understand. Take, for instance, disgust. Disgust can take a physical *and* a moral character. The former is a biological reaction while the latter is a learned response. But neurologically speaking, the way the brain processes both forms of disgust is basically the same. To further complicate the matter, both forms of disgust look and sound the same, in terms of our facial and lexical expressions. If physical disgust can be forgiven – since even newborn babies express disgust to some tastes – we ought to be sensitive to the nuances of each case before we label it ‘racist,’ ‘classist,’ etc.

If we want to move culture forward it may be productive to note that the Western modernist project that birthed nationalism often leaves the very people who inherited this project with a feeling of absence when it comes to osmospheres. Imagine a Westerner’s discontent with the deodorised culture they have inherited. And from this feeling of absence (of smell) comes a sense of desire, which gives rise to seeking out other ways of living with scent. In their pursuit, let’s imagine they come upon a foreign smell that triggers disgust. But they recognise that response was linked to fear, and they push past that fear. By recognising the fear and working through it, a new relationship with smell develops. That relationship may start as something superficial – seduction, fetishisation, orientalisation. But let’s say it doesn’t end there. Let’s say that the relationship evolves into something more substantive. Let’s say that by embracing alterity, that fictional Westerner more than fills the absence that has been plaguing them. These days that person will likely get accused of cultural appropriation. And if they actually modify the tradition and fuse it with other, more traditional aspects of their pre-existing identity, they are equally liable to experience accusations of cultural imperialism. When in fact, what I just described is and has been the lifecycle of culture – how it grows, advances into new areas, stimulates, antagonises (and is stimulated and

antagonised in due course), adapts, grows stronger, and emerges as something different.

That fictional Westerner was actually me as a kid. Had I been conditioned to feel shame about my catholic taste of smells I would never have felt comfortable engaging people from all walks of life about their intimate relationships to olfaction. Nor would I have developed an artistic methodology which uses relational systems that allow for collaborative authorship and participatory engagement. It makes me think about how I felt when I interviewed a man named Amir, whose personal story and corresponding osmosphere was featured in a German edition of *Scents of Exile*. When I asked him to tell me about a scent-memory of home – Yugoslavia – this is what he said:

The first smell that comes out of my memory is the smell of the hot asphalt. A wonderful childhood in a beautiful country where, in my memory, it was always sunny and warm in summer. This becomes all the more important if, in retrospect, one knows the course of the recent history of the Balkans.

The first independent way, with less than five years to the ice cream shop with his own dinars in the pressed five-year-old hand, along the country road with no pedestrian area... just don't get too close to the trucks and don't let anything fall out of your hand. The freshly made asphalt, strongly heated by the sun, and many eyes directed at me who found refuge in some shade at 40 degrees did not make the way easier for me.

The days with temperatures around 40 degrees were not uncommon in Yugoslavia... accordingly, the ways to the ice cream shop were not either. With every further walk, the self-confidence grew and thus the smell of the hot asphalt burned itself into my memory as a good one.

At this point, these childhood memories mix with the stories and the family biography and longings of a completely different kind.

Before I was born, after months of drudgery as a road construction worker, my father set off from the same hot asphalt, a few kilometres further, on the way to a better future, to Germany. This story, which is often told to me, and the fact that my parents' marriage didn't last long after I was born, brought the two stories together. The two stayed in Germany and the same hot asphalt became a stretch of longing.

As I was listening to Amir, I was not thinking about whether I had the cultural credentials to interview this man. Rather, I was transfixed by the thought of this 5-year-old kid walking alone in the incredible heat with a melting ice cream cone in his hand. His absent father could have paved the very road on which Amir walked, the very road that represented the distance separating the two. I was also intrigued by the way in which he crafted his story: the poetic juxtaposition of the hot temperatures and the cold ice cream, and the function of the road as a reachable path to the ice cream shop yet an unreachable path to his father. But even more touching was the way that Amir, the storyteller, crafted the narrative in a way that shifts from first-person to third-person back to first-person. It is as if he is standing outside himself when looking at his boy-self coming to terms with independence and loss.

Elena Mancioppi: I think these “osmobiographies,” as Mădălina Diaconu (2021, p. 62) has called them, fully support the hypothesis put forward by Hubertus Tellenbach (1981, p. 221) that the experiences of our oral sense clearly reveal the “state of being (*Befinden*) of man as a category which comprises and characterises a certain human condition.” In other words, *what* we smell and *how* we feel coincide thanks to a kind of metonymic relationship. But these examples concurrently epitomise the cross-sensory nature of atmospheric perceiving. For Amir, the smell of asphalt is the mnemonic condensation of his childhood *and* adulthood but it cannot be distinguished by the haptic dimension – the coins held tightly in the small hand – and especially by the ‘thermal quality’ of the overall situation, which is also *bittersweet*. Paradoxically, the flavour of ice-cream – the actual reason for such frequent trips – here fades and is absorbed by everything else.

In a sense, the opposite occurs in another story of *Scents of Exile* that has moved me greatly, that of Azira, aged 52, an immigrant working in a refugee centre. It reads:

When we fled Bosnia, my cousins took their cow and hid it in the woods. Every morning they gave me a bowl of boiled milk, straight from the cow. Even now, if someone says, ‘I am refugee,’ I smell boiled milk.

Here, the very word ended up absorbing the osmosphere, radiating the specific smell whenever its sound was heard. I would like to take this aspect of Azira’s story, namely *sound*, to ask you something with respect to the relationship between smells and music, which I know is part of your artistic experimentation.

To cut a long story short, the analogy between odours and sounds or music recurs from multiple perspectives. Anthropologists have shown us that they are interchangeable in the cosmologies of certain populations,<sup>4</sup> and the jargon of perfumery is particularly indebted to a musical lexicon; philosophers, for their part, have racked their brains to justify the aesthetic legitimacy of sounds as opposed to smells, foremost among them Hegel. Once we turn to art, the panorama becomes even wider.

Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, various artists have experimented with creating scent concerts, from Sadakichi Hartmann’s *A Trip to Japan in Sixteen Minutes* (1902), where smells mingle with the reading of a text, to some exhibitions of Aleksandr Skrjabin’s *Prometheus*, with far from intuitive associations between perceptual elements. Such an idea finds specific discussion in *The Art of Odours: A Futurist Manifesto* by Ennio Valentinelli, presumably written in 1914 – 1915, where he insists on the need to “create a new music of odours, the sister of the music of sounds and noises” (Valentinelli, 1996, pp. 133–134). Not to mention all the ‘scent organs’ that, from the dystopian imagination of Aldous Huxley, are the prototype of all the disparate olfactory technologies developed since the late 1970s. An example is Wolfgang Georgsdorf’s *Smeller*

<sup>4</sup> Among others, the Dogon of Mali ‘hear’ smells: the auditory and verbal sphere overlaps seamlessly with the olfactory one, so much so that, as an example, they perfume their breath when they want to make sure they give a good speech (cf. Classen, Howes and Synnott, 1994, p. 119).

2.0, an enormous and complex hi-tech machine designed to be very sensitive to the keyboard and to avoid any mingling of odours. Other examples are M Dougherty's *Odor Organ* and the scent organ used for Christophe Laudamiel and Stewart Matthew's *Green Aria: A Scent Opera* (2009).

Not least, this affinity is actually the basis of the theory set forth by 19<sup>th</sup>-century chemist and perfumer Septimus Piesse who invented an olfactory categorisation system on a musical cast. As said, such a cross-sensory alliance is not foreign to your work. *Odophonics* plays precisely on Piesse's scale, placing itself in the context of olfactory art understood as a multisensory art form. In your opinion, what does it reveal about the phenomenology of smell as an aerial sense as well as the auditive one?

*Brian Goeltzenleuchter: Odophonics* came out of a deep collaboration with Sean Francis Conway, who is an experimental musician and composer. *Odophonics* began as our way to mine an anachronism. As you remarked, Piesse theorised the *Odophone* as a scale of smells that corresponded to different auditory pitches. By his logic, 'chords' could be formed. This is obvious in music: two notes equal three things – each note plus their aural relationship to one another. As one adds notes, the relationship becomes more complex. Figuratively speaking, this can be true with smells. Piesse used that analogy to explain these relationships. The building block of perfume is the accord; individual scent 'notes' may reveal themselves as the odorant molecule evaporates, but the appeal of most perfumes is the way in which combinations of notes modify one another to create an idiosyncratic accord. What makes all of this anachronistic is that if you *logically* follow Piesse's analogy, it falls apart before it even starts.

Scents, like sounds, appear to influence the olfactory nerve in certain degrees. There is, as it were, an octave of colours like an octave in music; certain odours coincide, like the keys of an instrument. Such as almond, vanilla and orange blossom blend together, each producing different degrees of a nearly similar expression. (Piesse, 1862, p. 25)

Piesse's logic somewhat corresponded to the scientific understanding of smell in his day, which posited that smell, like sound, influenced "the olfactory nerve" (*ibidem*) by means of frequency and vibration. That logic, however, has since been debunked, rendering the *Odophone* an anachronism. That is, if one treats it as a sort of logos-based proposition, which is easy to do given the way Piesse mapped smells onto a diatonic scale – a quasi-mathematical convention with a history that arguably dates back to Pythagoras. Nevertheless, Sean and I love anachronisms, and we share a special kind of contempt for academic hubris; you know, the kind that often begins with, 'Whereas we *used to* think...we now *know*...'

Rather than get hung up on the science of olfaction, we thought about Piesse's *Odophone* as a mythos-based proposition. We saw his scale as an embodied understanding of an almost savant-like experience of sound and smell. Sean has often remarked, "When I think too much about it, it doesn't make sense," which makes perfect sense to me. Recently, during a post-performance Q&A, Sean made the following observation:

Piesse's *Odophone* is arranged in a diatonic C scale. This is interesting, but I don't think the key of C is vital. It can be thought of as transposable. Also the smells are not superimposed on a chromatic scale, which simplifies things and gives us a smaller amount of intervals with which to be concerned. In and of itself, it is not very interesting that *New Mown Hay* is an A note. But what becomes very interesting, at least to me, is how it interacts with, for instance, Orange Flower, a G note. This creates a major 2<sup>nd</sup> interval, which is dissonant but still somewhat open and shimmering or bouncing. Think of smelling fresh cut hay and sweet, floral, citrus all together, creating its own new smell. To me, cut hay and orange flower are somewhat dissonant, but still *bounce off* one another in a pleasing, major 2<sup>nd</sup> kind way. Okay, now take Orange Flower, a G note, and Almond, the D note above, which creates a Perfect 5<sup>th</sup>. Sweet, floral, citrus and sweet, nutty, cherry are similar enough and create this hollow consonance of a big Perfect 5<sup>th</sup>. Even with just these two examples, this is an expert level of mapping from Piesse. It works so well and is very mysterious to me. The interplay of all of these intervals, chords, and smell relationships in Piesse's *Odophone* is becoming endlessly interesting to explore. (Conway, 2023)

What does this reveal about the phenomenology of smell as *both* an aerial and auditive sense? *Odophonics* offers audiences an environment in which smells entangle themselves with sounds in a fairly predictable way, in terms of quality and duration. The performance, which is over 30 minutes long, grows in complexity, using drones, polyrhythms, and 13 airborne smells to test or complicate Piesse's *Odophone*. If I were to distil audience feedback into one prevailing comment, it would be this: *When one is exposed to a sensation – a sound, a smell – long enough, it changes. It becomes weird.* Or maybe one becomes weird. Although each performance of *Odophonics* has taken place in a museum, against the backdrop of whatever exhibition happens to be on view, audience members often close their eyes, which speaks to the intuitive desire to subjugate vision in order to more intimately 'tune into' the smell/sound environment.

*Elena Mancioppi*: Indeed, in poetry, but also iconography and everyday experience, the theme of the aerial – hence olfactory and aural – space as opposed to the optic one often recurs. In a way, it appears that to dive into the *weirdness* of odours (and sounds) one has to close their eyes. Something similar is present in the poetics of Baudelaire, who equals Proust in the importance attributed to smells. Sartre explains Baudelaire's being fond of scents not because of his refined olfaction, but because of the very nature of smells, in that Baudelaire seems to have a taste "for those strange objects which resemble the outcropping of being and whose spirituality consists of absence" (Sartre, 1950, p. 174). The famous poem *Le Flaçon (The Flask)* by Baudelaire reads:

[...]  
 Or poking through a house, in closets shut for years,  
 Full of the smell of time – acrid, musty, dank,  
 One comes, perhaps, upon a flask of memories  
 In whose escaping scent a soul returns to life.  
 [...]  
 Fluttering to the brain through the unsettled air,  
 Rapturous memory pervades the atmosphere;

*The eyes are forced to close; Vertigo grasps the soul,  
And thrusts her with his hands into the mists of mind.*  
(Baudelaire, 1993, pp. 97–99 [my italics, Elena Mancioppi])

Brian Goeltzenleuchter: Yes, this tuning is dependent on air, as is breathing, and life in general, which is actually *weird*. In this respect, somewhat along the lines of Timothy Morton’s dark ecology, a whole inquiry into the *weirdness* of the aesthetics of smells should be developed. But this is something far beyond the scope of this conversation. Maybe that’s a fitting place to end.

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# Barthold Heinrich Brockes’ Physico-Theology of Smell

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Studies on the significance of olfaction for philosophical aesthetics are justifiably interested in innovative literary explorations of links between aesthetic values and olfactory perceptions. In this context, the early Enlightenment poetry by Barthold Heinrich Brockes has remained neglected: literary historians rarely pay attention to his approaches to smell, and the few pertinent studies appeared in German only. This article introduces the English-speaking public to the valuation of smell in the theological aesthetics of Brockes’ poems, and it concludes with a sketch of his contribution to the tradition of modern cultic smelling, in which the olfactory and the aesthetic are variously intertwined. He thematises smelling as an emotional climax of human relations to external nature which are validated by a sacred essence of the experiential world, the awareness of which can be conjured up through innerworldly poetic thought. This interpretive pattern of olfactory culture has remained relevant to the present day. | *Keywords: German Literature, Enlightenment, Nature Poetry, Natural Theology, Literature as Ritual, Literature and Olfaction*

Barthold Heinrich Brockes (1680–1747), one of the most eminent German poets of the early Enlightenment, does not yet separate between the poetic contemplation of natural beauty, the didactic conveyance of scientific knowledge, the theological proof of God, and the cultic praise of Creation. The poems of his nine-volume collection *Earthly Joy in God [Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott]* (1721-1748) thematise smell as part of nature, the useful design and beauty of which prove the existence, indeed the concealed presence of God, and they celebrate them as an inducement to worship the Creator. All of his poems contemplate the connexion of humanity with the sacred, but as smell plays on the boundaries of the bodily permeable self, it can serve as a medium for religious self-experience; and as the joy of smell affects body, feeling and thought, it marks an emotional climax of religious experience. For Brockes, mindful sniffing and the experience of beauty are comparable: both quicken the mind and point at the Creator. When smell and vision evoke sacred inner states, the aesthetic and the olfactory merge into one complex of sensory knowledge. As Brockes’ poetic osmology is largely unknown to the



English-speaking public, it warrants a detailed introduction with illustrative examples. The first part of the following overview foregrounds Brockes' approach to the observation and philosophical explanation of smell, whilst the second part is focussed on his theological interpretation of smell and its exercitatorial values.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Philosophical Borrowings and Independent Observations

The persona of Brockes' poem *Three Kinds of Violas* [*Dreyerley Violen*] describes a bunch of flowers he had asked his gardener to bring in. The flowers are now in a vase, and the beholder sits down so that he can honour their admirable qualities in detail:

And their fair effects  
[...]  
Are conceived by our brain:  
As through the spiced sweetness,  
Which mingles with a range of scents,  
The heart is pleased by feeling smell,  
The tongue 's enlivened, blood refreshed,  
And Man 's filled with delight. Me thinks  
(Although the words for smell do not come easy)  
That, when I close my eyes for joy,  
And savour the sweet scent with mindfulness,  
I find therein united smell and strength  
Of honey, milk of almonds, must, peach-stone, and rind of cinnamon,  
And that with lovely sweetness  
A trifle sour- and bitterness are merged  
To a degree that pleases heart and brain.  
From their versicoloured caves they filled  
My brain, the seat of souls, in pleasant ways  
With an almost incorporeal fare,  
And, yes, imbued with a dry juice  
The soul itself in sweet abundance.  
This animated me, whilst savouring  
Such pleasant and fair properties, to raise  
My eyes up towards heaven  
And give with utmost gratitude my thanks,  
To him who is from all eternity the fount of every virtue.<sup>2</sup>

[Und deren holde Influentzen  
[...]  
In unserm Hirn empfunden werden:  
Indem durch die gewürtzte Lieblichkeit,  
Die mit so mancherley Geruch sich mischet,  
Im spürenden Geruch das Hertz erfreut,  
Die Zung' erquickt, das Blut erfrischt,  
Der Mensch vergnüget, wird. Mich deucht,  
(Beschreibet man gleich den Geruch nicht leicht)  
Wann ich vor Lust die Augen schliesse,  
Und mit Aufmercksamkeit des süssen Dufts genieße,  
Es sey darin der Duft und Kraft vereint zu finden  
Von Honig, Mandel=Milch, Most, Pfirsch=Kern, Zimmet=Rinden,

<sup>1</sup> These parts are largely based on chapter 5 of Krause (2023).

<sup>2</sup> All translations of Brockes' poems are mine.

Und daß, mit holder Süßigkeit,  
 Ein wenig säurliches und bitt'res sich verbinden  
 In solchem Grad, der Hertz und Hirn erfreut.  
 Sie fülleten aus ihren bunten Hölen  
 Mir mein Gehirn, den Sitz der Selen,  
 Und nährten es, auf angenehme Weise,  
 Mit einer fast uncörperlichen Speise,  
 Ja träncketen zugleich mit einem trocknen Saft  
 Die Sele selbst in süßem Überfluß.  
     Dieß trieb mich im Genuß  
 So angenehm= und holder Eigenschaft,  
 Die Augen auf= und Himmelwärts zu schlagen,  
 Und höchst= erkenntlich Danck zu sagen  
 Dem, der von Ewigkeit die Brunnquell aller Kraft.  
 (Brockes, 1732, pp. 18–19)]

This poem is in many ways representative for Brockes' poetic approach to smell: it is focused on blossom smell, takes time for detailed observation, stresses the simultaneous effects of scent on body, emotions and thought, and responds to this intense impact with gratitude towards the Creator, whose existence is proven by the purposive design of nature, which meets human needs and provides scope for the enjoyment of the senses. The observation of human and external nature is scientifically interested; Brockes recognises the contribution of smell to taste, to which contemporary neuroscience refers as 'retronasal olfaction' (Smith, 2021, p. 31), and the phrase 'dry juice' links up with Aristotle's (384–322 BC) theory of smell.<sup>5</sup>

According to Aristotle, "[o]dour is the natural substance consisting of the Sapid Dry diffused in the Moist, and whatever is of this kind would be an object of Smell". For him, neither steam (which only consists of water) nor smoke (in which air and earth are mingled) are objects of our sense of smell: "Hence the propriety of the figure by which it has been described by us as an immersion or washing of dryness in the Moist and Fluid." However, Brockes' qualification of smell as an almost incorporeal nourishment does not match Aristotle's theory: "It is plain, therefore, that odour, *qua odour*, does not contribute to nutrition; that, however, it is serviceable to health is equally plain" (Aristotle, 1908, unpag., 445a). Moreover, Brockes repeatedly stresses the refreshing or cooling effect of smell, which seems to contradict the Aristotelian view:

This is the reason of the further fact that man alone, so to speak, among animals perceives and takes pleasure in the odours of flowers and such things. For the heat and stimulation set up by these odours are commensurate with the excess of moisture and coldness in his cerebral region. (Aristotle, 1908, 444a–b)

To be sure, Aristotelian medical theories of the Middle Ages also know cooling

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle also noted a link between smell and flavour; he states that smells "have taken their names from the latter" (Aristotle, 2002, p. 35, 421a 30). However, his theory does not allow for a contribution of smell to taste; similarities between smell and taste result from partially identical qualities of distinct objects of perception. The sense of smell perceives *dryness* with the help of a moist *medium* contained in air and water, which "has no name" (Aristotle, 2002, p. 29, 419a 34); for further detail, see Johansen, 1996, pp. 1–19. Brockes' impression that the flowers vitalise the tongue is not compatible with Aristotle's model.

scents such as the smell of roses, but they need to explain such special cases as an exception from the rule (Robinson, 2020, p. 78); by contrast, Brockes presents the refreshment through scents as an evident norm beyond doubt.

Brockes' shorter poems usually aim to enhance our senses' attention to nuance, and they therefore don't normally discuss scientific concepts; in his 310-page didactic poem *Observations on the three Realms of Nature* [*Betrachtungen über die drey Reiche der Natur*], published posthumously in 1748 and still unfinished by the time of his death, he engages with such concepts in more detail. For example, he explains that catarrhs in the nose stem from glands and not, as older theories had it, from the brain (Brockes, 1748, p. 208); with this statement, he also distances himself from a medical explanatory model which presupposed, in line with Aristotle, that the brain is cool.<sup>4</sup> But in a didactic poem about *The five Senses* [*Die fünf Sinne*] of 1727, he still assumed that discharges from the nose would flush out moisture from the brain, and he insisted that cold and moisture hinder the sense of smell (Brockes, 1734, pp. 328–380, here pp. 345 and 346); at the same time, he did not deny the refreshing effect of smell fostered by warmth. Brockes' claim that the qualities of smells vary with the geometrical shape of perceived particles is based on a view held by Democrit and the atomists, from which Aristotle had distanced himself (Aristoteles, 2002, pp. 64–65; cf. Johansen, 1996, p. 15). In short: Brockes proceeds in an eclectic fashion, is prepared to correct himself and tolerates possible tensions between theoretical models and observations.

When Brockes' praise singles out the rosebuds, "from which a spiced myrrh-fume, / Wherein sweet- and bitterness are fairly mingled, / Rises upwards invisibly, refreshing brain and head" [Aus denen ein gewürtzter Myrrhen=Rauch, / Worin sich süß und bitter lieblich mischet, / Unsichtbar aufwärts steigt, und Hirn und Haupt erfrischt (Die Rose [The Rose] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 82–92, here p. 87))], he seems in line with Aristotelian-leaning humoralism, but as a supporter of Paracelsian models, he does not let himself be tied down to that approach. Brockes links up with Paracelsus' view that salt, sulphur and mercury are manifestations of the three fundamental principles which are inherent in all things, and he adopts Paracelsian interpretations of bodily functions as alchemistic processes; by contrast, humoralism posits four bodily fluids, and these correspond with the four elements of earth, air, water and fire which, according to Aristotle, make up everything in the terrestrial realm.<sup>5</sup> And in further contrast with humoralism, one of Brockes' spring poems qualifies the entire "army of plants" [Pflanzen-Heer] as refreshing: "Therefrom emerges instantly a fair and bitter scent / Refreshes our sense of smell, and fills the air" [Draus dampft sogleich ein lieblich bitterer Duft, /

<sup>4</sup> "For his brain is naturally cold [...] (whence it happens that the exhalation arising from food, being cooled by the coldness of this region, produces unhealthy rheums)" (Aristotle, 1908, 444a).

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed exploration of Brockes' eclectic approach with emphasis on his views on alchemy and affinities to Paracelsus, see Kemper, 1991, pp. 114–121; for an account of the main difference between Aristotle's theory of elements and Paracelsus' concept of fundamental essences, see Kemper, 1988, pp. 125–127.

Erfrischt den Geruch, und füllt die Luft (Erbauliche Betrachtung eines zeitigen Frühlings [Edifying Reflections on an Early Spring] (Brookes, 1732, pp. 4–7, here p. 5)) –, and further examples could be provided.<sup>6</sup> His praise of the hyacinth is likewise:

Your lovely scent fills up my brain and chest  
 With balm-exuding pleasure-pregnant spirits,  
 Which, due to rather unexpected joy,  
 Nearly usurp the soul itself with sweet delight,  
 Which well-nigh sinks in a sea of charm,  
 When it, as if intoxicated by the pow'r of scent,  
 Drinks the subtle sweet and sour juice  
 From your fresh blossom's sapphirine chalice.  
 From which, as it is downwards turned,  
 The dry juice pours incessantly,  
 Without it ever being emptied,  
 For our enjoyment flows incessantly.  
 The very sweetest Tokay grapes  
 Cannot give such force and zest  
 To our dry palate and our weakened chest  
 With their nectar-juice, as your  
 Spiced vapour, mixed with balm,  
 Refreshes my befogged head  
 And feeds and gives to drink to my mind;  
 So that it turns itself delightedly to your Creator,  
 The or'gin of all joy, from whose love and power  
 Sprouts what is lovely; who makes all the beauty.  
 I wish, with hot desire and joyful gratitude,  
*That I will also spend my time as you do;*  
*That, in the fragrance of good deeds,*  
*My neighbour realises GOD in me, as I in you;*

[Dein lieblicher Geruch erfüllt mir Hirn und Brust  
 Mit Balsam= dünstenden Vergnügungs= schwangern Geistern,  
 Die, durch recht unverhoffte Lust,  
 Sich fast der Seele selbst mit süßser Lust bemeistern,  
 Als welche schier im Anmuhts=Meer versincket,  
 Wenn sie recht wie berauscht durch des Geruches Kraft,  
 Den säurlich=süssen zarten Saft  
 Aus deiner frischen Blüht Sapphirnen Kelchen trincket.  
 Woraus, indem sie unterwärts gekehrt,  
 Der trockne Saft sich stets ergiesset,  
 Und, sonder, daß sie ausgeleert,  
 Zu unsrer Lust beständig fließet.  
 Die allersüßesten Tockayer=Reben  
 Vermögen nicht, dergleichen Kraft und Lust  
 Dem durren Gaum' und unsrer matten Brust,  
 Durch ihren Nectar=Saft, zu geben,  
 Als dein gewürtzter Dunst, mit Balsam angemischt,  
 Mir mein benebelt Haupt erfrischt,  
 Und mein Gemühte lab't und träncket;

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Die Blumen [The Flowers] (Brookes, 1732, pp. 104–109, here p. 107); unlike the diamond, the flowers refresh “with their smell” [“durch ihren Ruch”]; Morning Prayer in Spring, to be used from 23 March until 22 June [Morgen=Gebet im Frühlinge, vom 23. Martij bis den 22. Junij zu gebrauchen] (Brookes, 1732, pp. 471–477, here p. 473); here, the “lung” [“die Lunge”] is refreshed [“erfrischt”].

So daß es sich entzückt zu deinem Schöpfer lenket,  
 Dem Ursprung aller Lust, aus Dessen Lieb' und Kraft,  
 Was herrlich ist, entspriesst; Der alles Schöne schafft.  
 Ich wünsch', aus heissem Trieb' und froher Danckbarkeit,  
 Daß ich auch so, wie du, verbringe meine Zeit;  
 Daß, im Geruch der guten Wercke,  
 Mein Nächster, GOTT in mir, wie ich in dir, bemercke;  
 Die Hyacinthe [The Hyacinth] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 338–340, here pp. 339–340)]

The comparison of hyacinth scent with sweet Tokay grapes seems to associate refreshment through smell with enlivening rather than cooling effects, the more so as its balsamic virtue consists in removing fog from the head, thus clearing the mind, but in another poem, the hyacinth's "ambergris scent" [Ambra=Duft] with its balsamic quality reminiscent of Tokay is explicitly qualified as "cool" [kühl] (Ein Bett voll Hyacinthen [A Flower-Bed full of Hyacinths] (Brockes, 1734, pp. 24–27, here p. 25)). Brockes also qualifies the scent of lilies of the valley which "refreshes" [erfrischt] "brain and nerves" [Gehirn und Nerven] as "fresh and really cool" [frisch und wirklich kühl] (Lilien=Convallien oder Mayen=Bluhmen [Lilies of the Valley, or Flowers of May] (Brockes, 1734, pp. 56–59, here p. 58)). When he claims that the smell of *syringa vulgaris* refreshes the "brain" [Hirn] (Die Cyrene [Silphium] (Brockes, 1734, pp. 67–70, here p. 68)), and that lemon scent refreshes "heart and brain" [Herz und Hirn] (Betrachtungen über die drey Reiche der Natur (Brockes, 1748, pp. 190–192, here p. 192)), it remains unclear whether cooling effects are implied.

In a poem about the marigold variety *Flos Africanus*, Brockes implicitly assumes that the strength of a smell depends on the *heat* of its substance:

In this herb, of which many  
 Cannot bear the fragrance,  
 Must burn strong fire in the bitterness,  
 As it smells pungent, if one rubs it;  
 So that its smell almost resembles bitter myrrh.

[In diesem Kraut, von welchem viele  
 Nicht den Geruch vertragen können,  
 Muß in der Bitterkeit ein starckes Feuer brennen,  
 Weil es so streng, wenn man es reibet, reucht;  
 Daß am Geruch es fast den bittern Myrrhen gleicht.  
 Flos Africanus und Ritter-Sporn [French Marigold and Delphinium]  
 (Brockes, 1734, pp. 405–409, here p. 407)]<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> In *Die Nelcken* [The Carnations], Brockes proceeds in a similar manner (Brockes, 1732, p. 244–250, here pp. 248); here, the scent of carnations is compared to the aromatic fire of cloves, the German name of which is identical with that of the flower: "Are Ceylon's cloves not beaten by the scent / Which pleases head and heart? / As our palate with delight / Feels the sweet fire of the spice, / As is our nose stirred in the same way / Through the scent of the carnations, which alone / Are similar in smell to the most strong of spices." ["Sind nicht durch den Geruch, der Haupt und Herz vergnügt, / Ceylonens Nägelein besiegt? / Wie unser Gaum mit Lust / Von dem Gewürtz das süsse Feuer spühret; / So wird die Nas' auf gleiche Art gerühret / Durch den Geruch der Nelcken, die allein / Der starck'sten Würtz an Düften ähnlich seyn."] Brockes chiefly links the *spiciness* of smell with heat: "One smells, yes, almost sees it in the air / The rich fertility. A spicy scent, / Wherein life-fire glows, / Fills all one sees." ["Man riechet, ja man siehet fast in der Luft / Die fette Fruchtbarkeit. Ein angewürtzter Duft, / Worin ein Lebens=Feuer glüheth, / Erfüllet alles, was man siehet."] (Noch andere Frühlings=Gedancken [Further Thoughts on Spring] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 60–63, here p. 63)).

Brockes' innovative contribution to the science of smell consists in combining Aristotle's model of dry substance in a moist medium with empirical observations of self and world which provide evidence for the refreshing effect of smell on brain and spirit without invalidating the theoretical knowledge about the contribution of heat to the dispersion of strong fragrance. In his poem *Bean Fields* [*Bohnen-Felder*], he even notes that some mixtures of scents are bodily refreshing and emotionally inflaming:

Through these so sweetly mixed airs one feels the heated blood  
 Not only, so to speak, itself recov'ring, cooling, and refreshing,  
 A soul that's thusly driven by sweet air, by God, feels  
 Fire that is inwardly enlivening [...]

[Durch die so süß vermengten Dünste, fühlt man das hitzige Geblüte,  
 Nicht nur sich gleichsam recht erhohlen, nicht nur sich kühlen und  
 erfrischen,  
 Es fühlt ein, durch so süsse Luft, durch Gott getriebenes Gemüthe  
 Ein innerlich erquickend Feuer, ein fast entzückendes Empfinden [...]  
 (Brockes, 1740, pp. 133–136, here p. 133–134)]

In line with medical theories which were current in 18<sup>th</sup> century England (Tullett, 2019, p. 31), Brockes refers to the nerves' contribution to smell, which allows him to question the assumption of a direct link between the nose and the brain.<sup>8</sup> As trigeminal sensations can contribute to the sense of smell, Brockes' sense of refreshment may also refer to such impressions. Be that as it may, the physiological refreshment of blood, lungs, nerves or brain is indicated by feelings and sensations; the observation of nature is thus valorised as an independent source of knowledge. Unlike the empiricist German thinkers of the Enlightenment, who characterise the understanding of science in the epoch from around 1740 onwards (Alt, 1996, pp. 7–11), Brockes combines the observation of external and inner nature with a hermeneutic approach to the purposive order of Creation as a whole: "The creatures' silent language / Can be heard everywhere; / It can be tasted, felt and seen." [Der Creaturen stille Sprache / [...] / Sie läßt sich allenthalben hören; / Man kann sie schmecken, fühlen, sehn. (Erbauliche Betrachtung eines zeitigen Frühlings (Brockes, 1732, p. 7))].

## 2. Theological Perspectives and Poetic Exercitations

The versatile applicability of the myrrh motif, which indicates something fiery in the *Flos Africanus* poem and refreshing roses in another context, results from Brockes' method to use the same *tertium comparationis*, in this case bitter smell, to tease out a series of categorically different similarities of sensory experiences. When bitter smells of different plants are compared with the fragrance of myrrh, he thus does not claim that their bodily or spiritual impact is comparable, too. Brockes' comparative specifications of smells draw on a limited pool of motifs; besides taste impressions, he chiefly mentions ritually relevant plants or secretions such as myrrh or incense, precious animal products such as ambergris, civet and musk, or balm, which is a mixture of

<sup>8</sup> Zumbusch (2012, pp. 62 and 65) provides examples for medical hypotheses concerning the contribution of the physiology of nerves to infections from German discussions in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

resins and oils. His comparisons of plant scents with smells of inorganic or animal substances follow the same pattern as his depictions of scenes in which impressions of earth, water and sky mirror one another or are compared to cut precious stones: in a meaningfully organised Creation, all orders can mirror one another.<sup>9</sup> The baroque writer Catharina von Greiffenberg had also compared plant scents with musk, but unlike her, Brockes does not meditatively withdraw from external nature in order to examine the sacred nexus of cosmic ordering. When Brockes elaborates on the experience of specific smells in great detail, he tends to present them as a climax of the enjoyment of self and world, which inspires body, feeling and reason to praise God; sometimes, he also interprets fragrant objects allegorically, but this approach is no longer at the centre of the understanding of nature, as it was in the baroque.<sup>10</sup>

The poem *The Ruddy-White Hyacinth* [*Die rōthliche weisse Hyacinthe*] increases the complexity of such enjoyment, as it explores the synergy of vision and olfaction. Beauty is beheld by the sense of sight:

As I, on your white snow,  
 With zest, and grace within my soul  
 And heartfelt pleasure see,  
 How sweet from the filled cavity  
 Such a sweet redness radiates,  
 And paints your petals' whitish light  
 with rosy-coloured sheen;  
 When I behold the tender shine,  
 And note the gentle rosy-coloured glow,  
 Which even puts the most beautiful blood  
 Of the most lovely skin to shame,  
 Whilst white and red so sweetly join together:  
 My touched spirit 's being filled with pleasure.

[Da ich auf deinem weissen Schnee,  
 Mit Lust, und Anmuth meiner Seele,  
 Und innigem Vergnügen seh,  
 Wie süß aus der gefüllten Höhle,  
 Solch eine süsse Röthe strahlet,  
 Und deiner Blätter weißlich Licht,  
 Mit rosenfarbnem Glanze malet;  
 Wenn ich den zarten Schein betrachte,  
 Die sanfte rosenfarbne Gluht,  
 Die, auch das allerschönste Blut  
 Der schönsten Haut, beschämt, beachte,  
 Da weiß und roth so süß sich fügt:  
 Wird mein gerührter Geist vergnügt.  
 (Brockes, 1740, pp. 28-29, here p. 28)]

<sup>9</sup> In this way, Brockes flags up his debts to hermetic thought (Kemper, 1991, p. 119).

<sup>10</sup> "The bitter-sweetish scent / Which streams from crowns imperial / Is an image which instructs / That even the most high rank / Is often filled with bitterness." [Der bitter-süssliche Geruch, / So aus den Kaiser=Cronen quillt, / Ist ein mit Lehr' erfülltes Bild, / Daß auch der allerhöchste Stand / Mit Bitterkeit oft angefüllt. (Die Kaiser=Crone [Crown Imperial] (Brockes, 1732, p. 64)).

At the same time, the ruddy-white hyacinth vitalises the sense of smell and renders sensible a creative force in all beings that can only be beheld by the nose:

When now your fair adornment subsequently  
Is gently pressed against my nose:  
Thus is, through renew'd fancy, in me,  
The spirit vitalised in a new way.

Is the Creator's grace, who joined  
A twofold pleasure within you, not worth,  
that, as one sensed a twofold joy,  
One honours him with joyous praise to God?

Yes, I am, my dearest flower, through the splendour that adorns your,  
thusly led to our Creator, source of you and me.  
Your friendly, cool and sourly-sweet scent stirs me most notably,  
Which, from you little chalices exhales into the air  
Incessantly, as if from many mouths, as if arising from so many sources,  
Which to our souls does not appear through sight and through the light,  
as other bodies, but  
only through the smell, just through our nose.

[Wenn nun nachhero deine holde Zier  
Sich sanft an meine Nase drücket:  
So wird, durch neue Lust, in mir,  
Der Geist auf neue Weis erquicket:

Ist denn des Schöpfers Huld nicht werth,  
Der doppelt Lust in dir verbunden,  
Daß, wenn man doppelt Lust empfunden,  
Man, durch ein froh Gott Lob! Ihn ehrt?

Ja ich werde, liebste Blume, durch das Prangen, das dich zieret,  
So zu dein- als meiner Quell, unsern Schöpfer, hingeführet.  
Sonderlich rührt mich dein freundlich=kühl=und säurlich süsser Duft,  
Der, aus deinen kleinen Kelchen, unaufhörlich in die Luft,  
Als aus so vielen Münden haucht, als aus so viel Quellen steigt;  
Der sich unsern Seelen, zwar durch die Augen, und durchs Licht,  
So wie andre Körper, nicht  
Sondern ihr, nur im Geruch, durch die Nase bloß, sich zeigt.  
Die röthliche weisse Hyacinthe [The Ruddy White Hyacinth] (Brockes, 1740,  
pp. 28-29)]

Brockes' longer didactic poem about the senses performs the physico-theological proof of God with a view to the sense of smell; he concludes from the purposive order of nature the existence of a Creator who acts with intent, wisdom and benevolence (Kemper, 1991, p. 48):

68. That we smell in moderation  
Is a marvel. If we would  
Sense all vapours much more keenly,  
Which right now we hardly could;  
Many thousand matters must  
Cause displeasure and disgust,  
About whose fumes we now don't carp,  
As our sense is not too sharp.

69. How much ben'fit in our lives  
Does the sense of smell us bring?



If a blaze starts to arise,  
it's more useful than our seeing.  
Conflagrations would be felt,  
If they were not timely smelt and  
Fought, so that the fire would  
Not destroy our livelihood.

70. So much spicery, many flowers,  
Numberless variety,  
Which in India and Edom  
Grow and in barbarity,  
Would not serve a single creature,  
Vanish as a useless feature,  
If our noses were not fit  
To refresh themselves with it.

71. Tell me, uncouth mindset, does  
All this come by accident,  
Or from pow'r and loving kindness  
of an or'gin sapient?  
Tell me, should this not be prized  
So much as to be recognised?  
Who of creation loses sight,  
desecrates his Maker's might.

[68. Daß wir riechen, doch mit Massen,  
Ist ein Wunder. Sollte man  
Alle Dünste schärffer fassen,  
Die man itzt nicht spüren kann;  
Würden so viel tausend Sachen  
Uns Verdruß und Eckel machen,  
Deren Dampf uns itzt nicht rührt,  
Weil man gar zu scharf nicht spürt.

69. Welchen Nutzen in dem Leben  
Bringet der Geruch uns nicht?  
Will sich eine Brunst erheben;  
nutzt er mehr, als das Gesicht.  
Manche Gluht wär' ausgebrochen,  
Hätte man sie nicht gerochen,  
Und bey Zeit dem feur gewehrt,  
Das sonst Hab' und Gut verzehrt.

70. So viel Specerey und Bluhmen,  
Die unzählbar mancherley,  
Was in Indien, Idumen  
Wächst und in der Barbarey,  
Könnte kein Geschöpf gebrauchen,  
Und müst', ohne Nutz, verrauchen,  
Wär die Nase nicht geschickt,  
Daß sie sich dadurch erquickt.

71. Sprich, verwildertes Gemüthe,  
Kommt dieß wohl von ungefehr  
Oder aus der Macht und Güte  
Eines weisen Wesens her?  
Sprich! verdienen solche Wercke  
Nicht so viel, daß man sie mercke?

Wers Geschöpfe nicht betracht,  
Schändet seines Schöpfers Macht.  
Die fünf Sinne [The Five Senses] (Brockes, 1748, pp. 325–380, here p. 350–  
351)]

The world is, as stanza 70 shows, created to be perceived; the enlivenment of the senses through fragrance fulfils an intrinsic purpose of Creation, and our senses are, as stanza 68 explains, attuned to a proper degree of enjoyment in this world.

In his posthumously published didactic poem, Brockes feels compelled to see “in nature’s work of reproduction / Not only ways of nature, but something divine” [in dem Werke der Natur der Vermehrung die wahre Bildung der Gestalten / nicht bloß für Wege der Natur, für etwas Göttliches zu halten], and he thus locates God’s presence in nature. Under the guise of St Augustine’s dictum that belief begins where knowledge ends – “Where reason falls down, that is where faith is being built up” (St Augustine, 1993, p. 108) –, Brockes relates the perceptible world to something that is hidden everywhere: “Whatever in nature’s realm I hear, smell, taste and see, / All that is and shows itself, does indicate, / That something everywhere’s concealed which surpasses reason by far” [Was ich im Reiche der Natur auch höre, rieche, schmeck’ und sehe, / So weist mir alles, was vorhanden, so zeigt mir alles, was sich zeigt, / Daß etwas überall verborgen, so die Vernunft weit übersteigt (Brockes, 1748, p. 231)]. The claim that the divine is “hidden everywhere” [überall verborgen] is not identical with St Augustine’s doctrine that everything which exists points at an absent Creator (Krause, 2023, pp. 25–27). Brockes’ love for God is a love for the universe: “GOD is no old man, no spirit such as other spirits, / He is an eternal ubiquitous All, / An immeasurable whole” [GOTT ist kein alter Mann, kein Geist, wie andre Geister, / Er ist ein ewiges allgegenwärtigs All, / Ein unermesslichs Gantz [...] (Das, durch die Betrachtung der Grösse GOTTes, verherrlichte Nichts der Menschen. In einem Gespräche Auf das Neue Jahr, 1722 [The Nothingness of the Human Species, Glorified by the Contemplation of God’s Greatness, in a Conversation about the New Year 1722] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 431–467, here p. 445))]. Brockes speaks to God as “you who, for our salvation, conceal yourself in yourself” [Der Du Dich in Dir selbst, zu unserm Heyl, verhüllest]; the senses thus cannot perceive God himself, but the concealment of his presence, so that he is almost visible in the starry sky (Der Wolcken= und Luft=Himmel [The Sky of Clouds and Air] (Brockes, 1734, pp. 5–14, here p. 14)). The human ability to think God’s greatness is also of divine origin; with this capacity, he “almost” seems “to descend in our mind” [fast Sich Selbst in unsern Geist zu sencken (Brockes, 1732, p. 461)]. From this perspective, the awareness of God in the experience of smell also marks a religious climax, as the concealed real presence of God is almost palpable in body, feeling and soul.<sup>11</sup> The concealed share of man in God’s emanation sacralises the self, as Brockes’ word choice testifies:

<sup>11</sup> Brockes emphatically distances himself from attempts to turn nature into a Goddess; see *Misbrauch des Worts Natur* [Misuse of the Word Nature] (Brockes, 1740, pp. 310–313). This attitude is also manifest in Brockes’ translation of a poem by Shaftesbury; Brockes modifies Shaftesbury’s reference to an all-loving nature, to which the latter ascribes a divine quality, and speaks of divine nature as a source of knowledge about God’s essence. See Kimber (1969, p. 807).

When my chest, as all's in blossom,  
Draws balm-full spring scent  
Of the air, warmed up by Zephir's breeze,  
T'wards itself whilst breathing;  
[...]  
My soul is filled by a sweet shiver.

[...]

A pleasant fear, a lovely holy fright,  
Aquivers my heated blood,  
And calls upon me to see, hear, feel, taste  
Awestruck the great Giver's goodness.

[Wenn meine Brust, da alles blühet,  
Den Balsam= vollen Frühlings=Duft  
Der, durch des Zephirs Hauch erwärmten, Luft  
Im Atem=Holen an sich ziehet;

[...]

Nimmt meine Seel' ein süsser Schauder ein.

[...]

Ein' angenehme Furcht, ein holdes heiligs Schrecken,  
Erreg't mein wallendes Geblüte,  
Und heisset mich, des grossen Gebers Güte,  
Mit Ehr=Furcht voller Lust, sehn, hören, fühlen, schmecken.  
Sing-Gedicht [Song-Poem] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 58–59)]

Elsewhere, he asks a human mind to note in “holy wonderment” [heiliger Verwund’rung] the sensually perceptible qualities of leaves, including their scents (Betrachtung der Blätter [Contemplation of the Leaves] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 75–79, here p. 76). A bowl filled with fruit allows humans “with soul and mind through all our senses’ doors / The Godhead’s shine, that’s everywhere concealed, / To feel as present” [Mit Seel’ und Geist durch aller Sinnen Thüren / Der überall verhüllten Gottheit Schein / Als gegenwärtig zu verspühren (Eine Schüssel mit Früchten [A Bowl with Fruit] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 288–295, here p. 294)]. The force with which God acts is “his love, / Which in the scent my heart has felt” [Seine Liebe, / Die im Geruch mein Herz empfunden (Die Rose [The Rose] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 82–92, here p. 91))]. “One tastes in scents the balm of his love.” [Man schmecket im Geruch den Balsam Seiner Liebe (Die Welt [The World] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 503–509, here p. 506))]. When the lily’s good scent causes “sleep, melancholia, pain and dizziness” [Schlaf, Schwermuth, Schmerz und Schwindel zeuget (Die Lilie [The Lily] (Brockes, 1734, pp. 108–113, here p. 112))] in the long run, it still teaches us helpfully that all joy requires its proper measure, and if bad smells annoy human beings at all, they harbour excessive expectations, as they judge Creation as a whole only in the light of human self-love. To be sure, the “scent of the best spiceries / Cannot delight the nose as much / As stink does cause us nausea” [Duft der besten Specereyen / Kann nicht so sehr die Nas’ erfreuen, / Als ein Gestanck uns Eckel bringt (Ursprung des menschlichen Unvergnügens, samt einem bewährten Mittel wider dasselbe, in einem Sing=Gedichte, darin alle Absätze einerlei Reim=Endung haben [The Origin of Human Displeasure,

Including a Proven Antidote, in a Song-Poem, in which all Paragraphs end on the same Rhyme] (Brockes, 1732, p. 523–525, here p. 523)), but the reflection on all the good we receive from God can alleviate this inadequacy. Even a poor man who sees the sunshine from a grave in the “mist of half-rotten air” [Dunst der halb=verfaulten Luft (Der Ursprung des menschlichen Unvergnügens, bey dem Anfange des 1720sten Jahres [The Origin of Human Displeasure, At the Occasion of the Beginning 1720th Year] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 406–414, here p. 413))] would yearn for God as the origin of this beauty, and repulsion pertaining to the ageing body can be superseded by our certainty of bodily resurrection (Das, durch die Betrachtung der Grösse Gottes, verherrlichte Nichts der Menschen. In einem Gespräche Auf das Neue Jahr, 1722 [The Nothingness of the Human Species, Glorified by the Contemplation of God’s Greatness, in a Conversation about the New Year 1722] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 431–467, here p. 445)). Therefore, Brockes’ literary attention training plays a prophylactic role, too; those who are aware of the world’s design transcend blinkered self-love and protect themselves against displaced expectations.

The awareness of this design also includes knowledge of the sense of smell of other species. In his encyclopaedic didactic poem, Brockes praises the extraordinary ability of the dog to scent game, even though it cannot always perceive the hare’s trace in its entirety; he notes that foxes use stench to deter badgers from their den, recognises the elephant’s trunk as an organ that is sensitive to smell, and realises the cat’s keen sense of smell (Brockes, 1748, pp. 254, 255, 263, 270 and 290). He also speaks about scents of animals, whilst he is usually focussed on plant scents. The impression that the faeces of martens have a “not unpleasant lovely smell” [nicht unangenehmen lieblichen Geruch] is as fit for poetry as the observation that an auroch’s tuft of hair smells like musk, or that burning a goat’s horn helps against the plague and other epidemics (Brockes, 1748, p. 276; cf. pp. 295 and 300). Brockes’ nose still appreciates the scent of the civet cat’s glandular secretion, which went out of fashion over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century;<sup>12</sup> he praises the “scent” [Duft] of its “ejection” [Auswurf[s]], which

With such sweet loveliness and fair fumes in the air,  
Which it surrounds, wells up incessantly,  
So that through smell wells up sensitive joy in our brain  
And delectates us dearly. Who of us humans understands,  
In which way all the particles, which please our smell, pile up,  
Emerge and last so long? As a thing, which lies near to them and,  
Is, so to speak, embalmed by them, gives pleasure that’s as strong as they,  
Without depriving them of anything.

[Mit solcher süßen Lieblichkeit und holden Dünsten in die Luft,  
Die sie umgiebt, beständig quillet,  
Daß ein empfindliches Vergnügen durch den Geruch das Hirn erquillet  
Und uns recht inniglich vergnügt. Wer von uns Menschen kann begreifen,  
Auf welche Weise sich die Theilchen, die den Geruch vergnügen, häufen,  
Entstehen, und so lange dauren? Da Dinge, die bey ihnen liegen,  
Von ihnen gleichsam eingebiesamt, so stark uns, wie sie selbst, vergnügen,

<sup>12</sup> In the 1760s, civet had fallen out of favour, especially in France; see Muchembled (2020, pp. 138–139).

Ohn etwas ihnen zu benehmen. [...]  
(Brockes, 1748 p. 292)

These smell motifs are only insofar in a sacred context as Brockes regards the poetic reflection on the Divine as a cultic activity; the process of smelling itself is sanctified when it points to the concealed presence of God. In addition, Brockes appropriates biblical motifs and transfers their sacred authority to impressions in which the figurative meaning of biblical speech takes on a perceptible form:

The flowers are offering musk-sated juices;  
The herbage is stewing enlivening forces,  
Solely to honour the great universe.  
O aspire, you humans, to notice it well;  
And strive, through good deeds and devotion,  
To be a sweet savour before the Creator!

[Es opfern die Blüthen bebiesamte Säfte;  
Es dünsten die Kräuter erquickende Kräfte,  
Dem grossen All zur Ehr' allein.  
Ach trachtet, ihr Menschen, es wol zu bemercken!  
Bemüht euch, in Andacht und guten Wercken,  
Dem Schöpfer ein süsser Geruch zu seyn!  
Der Garte [The Garden] (Brockes, 1732, pp. 165–177, here p. 177)]

The biblical wording “sweet savour”, in German translated as “Geruch” [smell], refers to a sacrifice agreeable to God (in the Old Testament, see 1 Moses 8: 21; 2 Moses 29: 25; 3 Moses 1: 9 and 13; 3 Moses 17: 6; 3 Moses 23: 18; 4 Moses 15: 3, 7 and 24; 4 Moses 18: 17; 4 Moses 28: 6, 8 and 13; 4 Moses 29: 13 and 36; see also 1 Samuel 26: 19; cf. 3 Moses 26: 31), and as the fragrance of flowers and herbs is presented as such a sacrifice, the allusion to the bible seems plausible enough. However, when the bible qualifies pious human acts with smell motifs, good savour pertains to the knowledge of Christ which rises from the believers to God (2 Corinthians 2: 14–16), and to good deeds themselves (Philippians 4: 18). As Brockes leaves Christ unmentioned and amalgamates the figurative smell motifs of St Paul with the real aroma of a sweet sacrifice, the redeemer is marginalised in favour of a direct link to God. The attempt to harmonise readings in the Holy Scriptures and the Book of Nature results in a creative appropriation of biblical motifs, by which the poetic service of worship emancipates itself from ecclesial piety. The mystics of the Baroque had deified a consciousness which turned away from the bodily senses, and some humanists of the Baroque presented smells of nature as part of symbolically meaningful perceptions with sacred meaning. In Brockes’ poetry, the praise of scent also puts humanity’s permeable bodily self in a sacred context. Literary-historical studies on smell culture justifiably characterise the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the beginning of an “olfactory silence” or “muting” which remains a dominant trend for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Rindisbacher, 1992, p. 284; Friedman, 2016, p. 127, see also Davies, 1975): “the eighteenth century begins to clean up its act, and odours are increasingly complained about, condemned, and more and more eliminated” (Rindisbacher, 1992, p. 34), and “in many threads of the developing novel, we can see scent deployed in

increasingly muted ways over time” (Friedman, 2016, p. 119). However, such narratives of deodorisation need to be complemented by inquiries into impactful innovations of 18<sup>th</sup>-century olfactory culture.

### 3. Ritualised Depictions of Smelling in German Literature after Brockes

Brockes’ inquiry into the nature of sensory knowledge did not make a lasting contribution to theological aesthetics; however, it marks the beginning of a long-lived modern tradition in German literature to endow depictions of smelling with ritual significance. Brockes interprets olfactory experiences of nature as manifestations of a sacred essence, and he claims that poetic thought can conjure up the awareness of such manifestations. This pattern of using olfactory motifs from nature as a medium for poetic rituals has survived to the present day; the movements of Sensibility and Storm-and-Stress continued to evoke smells to heighten a joyous perception of nature framed by a religious ethics of love which increasingly relied on sacralised feeling as a source of innerworldly knowledge. From Romanticism through Symbolism to Expressionism, smells and their synergies with sound often mark thresholds to sacred spheres of inspiration, in which autonomous poetic forms reveal the *natura naturans*, the ensoulment of the world as a whole, or the metaphysical essence of authentic selfhood. And since the movement of New Objectivity after the First World War, neo-pagan explorers and poetic seers of nature have sniffed out and sought to conjure up the sacred value of natural forms which exceed and delimit the scope of human control. Links between olfaction and the aesthetic vary significantly over the course of this tradition. Pre-Romantic movements only allow the olfactory to amplify the aesthetic experience of visible and audible beauty and sublimity (cf. Eibl, 1996, pp. 9–10); by contrast, Romantic synaesthesiae of sound and smell mark a fusion of the aesthetic and the olfactory, and post-Expressionist proponents of ritualised smelling endow the qualities of scent with a sensory claim to validity in its own right. Brockes’ poetry marks the beginning of a tradition which has variously redressed relations between olfaction and the aesthetic, and which thus deserves the attention of research into the history of olfactory aesthetics, even though pertinent poetic contributions only intersect incidentally with the concerns or approaches of philosophical aesthetics. In this context, the literary historian can widen the scope for understanding such contributions; their contextualisation in the osmological discourse of modernity is still a desideratum.

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# The Fragrant Seal of the Spirit: the Aesthetics of Chrism

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Despite recent developments in the fields of olfactory aesthetics, phenomenology of liturgy, religious aesthetics, and theological aesthetics, the complex presence of odours in the Christian culture has been scarcely discussed. This study is meant as a contribution to a future systematic exploration of the aesthetic 'osmology' of theology, by focusing on the fragrant chrism oil (in the Eastern Church called Holy Myron). Technical-historical explanations regarding the olfactory composition, preparation and use of this sacramental oil are followed by an examination of the semantics of its odour in patristic theology and medieval popular imaginary. This rich symbolism has been lost in the 'anosmic' modern Catholic and Orthodox sacramental theology. | *Keywords: Fragrance, Theological Aesthetics, Chrism Oil / Myron, Spirituality, Symbolism*

## 1. Introduction

Chrism is a consecrated oil used in several Churches, including the Catholic, the Eastern Orthodox, the Oriental Orthodox and the Nordic Lutheran, it smells pleasantly and has a complex odorous composition. This paper begins by introducing recent developments which testify to an increased general interest in corporeal and material aspects of religious experience despite its still relatively scarce thematisation in theology. Given the complexity of the olfactory culture in the Christian world, the discussion is further confined to the chrism oil. Explanations regarding its composition, preparation and use in the Latin and Byzantine rite (where chrism is called Holy Myron) are followed by a historical retrospective of its symbolism. While Ephrem the Syrian focused on the oil in the Myron, Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita acknowledged its fragrance and the contribution of olfaction to the knowledge of the holy. During the following centuries, analogies between the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world and the spreading of fragrances, as well as olfactory metaphors in general, have lost importance, and modern sacramental theology ignores the odour of chrism. This 'anosmia' contrasts with medieval legends about the balsam and its adventurous purchase in a mirific Orient, which are mentioned in the last section of the paper.



The following cross-disciplinary analysis aims to expand the sources of aesthetic experience to a category of texts that have been hitherto largely ignored by the aesthetics of olfaction. Historical and theological references are meant to support the assertion that the believer's liturgical experience is intrinsically aesthetic (in both senses of sensorial and pleasant), even though the olfactory delight derived from preparing, anointing, being anointed or merely attending rituals was (and still is) by no means autotelic.<sup>1</sup> Perception is moulded by cultural symbolism and the hedonic dimension of smell must be considered in correlation to its epistemic function. Moreover, the understanding of olfaction in religious contexts cannot be abstract from the rhetorical use of olfactory images in theological treatises, sermons, and legends. An 'external' subject (a non-believer) may easily subsume such metaphors to the as-if-modus of metaphysical imagination, which has already been discussed in aesthetics (e.g. Hepburn, 1996). However, I claim that believers, too, make an aesthetic experience when inspiring the fragrance of the chrism oil and that paying attention both to the quality of its odorous composition and the olfactory symbolism in theological commentaries can enrich the religious experience as well. Eventually, both olfactory aesthetics and religious aesthetics would benefit from such analyses.

## 2. Religious Olfactory Aesthetics

The symbolism of smells has been explored in relation to the Indian culture (McHugh, 2012), ancient Egypt (Kügler, 2000) and Greco-Roman antiquity (Detienne, 2000; Kügler, 2000a), but also the Old Testament (Bechmann, 2000), the New Testament (Kügler, 2000b) and the early Christianity, with focus on classical Syrian theology (Harvey, 2006). A Christian 'osmology' (from Greek *οσμός*, odour) involves various contexts: Patristic literature distinguishes between good and dangerous pleasant smells (e.g. John Chrysostom, 1951). Liturgical Byzantine commentaries include elaborate explanations of the symbolism of incense (Ică, 2012), while the Catholic liturgy clearly regulates the use of incense (Pfeifer, 2008). Legends on the fragrance of the saints' corpses are known both in the Latin and the Byzantine world; however, in parallel with the leitmotif of the odour of sanctity the traditions of foul-smelling 'pillar saints' (stylites) and of 'holy fools' have circulated. Moreover, the Christian olfactory imaginary opposes the fragrances of paradise to the stench of hell, associating virtues with pleasant odours and vices with bad ones. However, smells are barely mentioned in the New Testament and the Epistles of Paul (Kügler, 2000b). This fact, along with the recession of the liturgical use of incense after the Second Vatican Council, may explain why research on the Christian 'osmology' has remained marginal. A systematic study of smells in the Christian world is still a desideratum.

Three contemporary research directions promise to shed light on the pervasive presence of odours in Christian theology, traditions of piety and religious practices: an incipient phenomenology of liturgy, recent developments in religious and theological aesthetics, and (philosophical) olfactory aesthetics.

<sup>1</sup> At the same time, to project the modern distinction between values onto premodern religious experience may appear as anachronistic.

First, phenomenological approaches have emphasised the importance of corporality for practising faith. For example, Christina M. Gschwandtner claims in her phenomenology of orthodox liturgy that liturgical and sacramental practices constitute the subject: “Anything that is ‘experienced’ in liturgy is mediated through the senses. We experience liturgy as we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. Liturgy is fully incarnate, corporeal, and sensory experience” (Gschwandtner, 2019, p. 111). Sometimes, the sensory richness of the liturgy can even appear as “sensory overload” with “too much ‘smells and bells’” (Gschwandtner, 2019, pp. 101f). In contrast, John Panteleimon Manoussakis’ draft of a ‘theological aesthetic’ in a post-metaphysic age (2007) takes over from phenomenology only analyses related to sight, hearing and touch, yet ignores smell.

Secondly, the emergence of a new discipline called *Religionsästhetik* (Mohn, 2004), *Religionsästhetik* (Mohn, 2012), the ‘aesthetics of religion’ (Schlieter, 2010) or ‘religious aesthetics’ (Burch Brown, 2014) sounds promising for exploring the aesthetic dimension of odours in religious contexts. Yet this field appears as a “somehow fluid ‘map’” (Burch Brown, 2014, p. 13) at present and the connection of such theories to aesthetics is often confined to merely enumerating the presence of arts, aesthetic imagination and beauty in religions. In the German-speaking scholarship, this new field reflects the recent developments of aesthetics, as when Jürgen Mohn (2012) focuses on ‘perceptual spaces’ and Anne Koch (2007) on ‘bodily knowledge’. Nevertheless, both scholars mention smells only randomly. Once one takes into account Jens Schlieter’s 2010 remark that an ‘aesthetics of religion’ is still in its infancy, it cannot be excluded that an olfactory aesthetics is yet to come in Religious Studies. In his overview of Swiss research in this field, Schlieter characterised the research on other senses than sight and vision as a ‘hot issue’ and a challenge to science due, among others, to terminological difficulties (Schlieter, 2010, p. 246).

At present, most studies on religious aesthetics and theological aesthetics<sup>2</sup> omit any mention of odours and odorous practices, as the following two examples demonstrate. The first one is Richard Viladesau’s systematic approach to ‘religious aesthetics’, a term which covers in his view specific (artistic) practices and aesthetic theories insofar as they relate to the sacred or are practised by religious communities (Viladesau, 2014). The theories of religious aesthetics (should) discuss six major topics: the laws of perception; the investigation of sensation and imagination; feeling as a non-conceptual knowledge that includes emotional reactions; beauty; art in general and the visual arts in particular; finally, issues of taste (Viladesau, 2014, p. 27). Regarded in this context, theological aesthetics represents a particular, namely a Christian, version of religious aesthetics. The second example is Edward Farley’s ‘theological aesthetics’ (2001).<sup>3</sup> Unlike Viladesau, Farley sets forth

<sup>2</sup> A separate discussion would deserve the label “theological aesthetics”, which is originated in the works of the Protestant phenomenologist of religion Gerardus van der Leeuw (1957) and of the Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1965). However, their approaches are less relevant to my present topic.

<sup>3</sup> For the reconstruction of the history of theological aesthetics in the 20th century in Catholic and Protestant contexts see Farley (2001, pp. 67–81).

the classical reduction of aesthetics to the investigation of beauty and art. In his attempt to rehabilitate the aesthetic (plainly equated to beauty) against its marginalisation and even suppression in the traditions of the Judeo-Christian iconoclasm, asceticism and legalism, Farley emphasises the positive impact of aesthetic enjoyment on the “benevolent ethical self-transcendence towards any and all others” (Farley, 2001, p. 120) and, finally, on the pursuit of redemption. Unfortunately, fragrances remain absent in both Viladesau’s and Farley’s approaches.

Finally, aesthetic theory has largely retrieved the domain of olfaction lately. Scholars have provided phenomenological descriptions of the olfactory experience (Tellenbach, 1968; Diaconu, 2005), argued in favour of the artistic status of perfumery (Shiner, 2020) and of including it in the field of everyday aesthetics (Brady, 2005) and urban aesthetics (Diaconu, 2012; Henshaw, 2014), developed a specific critique of the olfactory art, etc.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, despite the complexity of the Christian olfactory culture, the hitherto mainly cultural-historical and liturgical research has been insufficiently phenomenological (in the broad sense of being experience-centred) and omitted aesthetic evaluations. Scholars drawing on phenomenology to better understand liturgy have hardly paid attention to odours; the same goes for theological aesthetics and the new discipline of religious aesthetics. Finally, with few exceptions (e.g. Diaconu (2015, 2016), (philosophical) olfactory aesthetics has ignored the religious Christian experience. This has brought about a strange coexistence of ‘two cultures’, to take up C.P. Snow’s expression for the gap between the (literary) intellectuals and the (natural) scientists of his time (Snow, 1959). Snow criticised that these two groups were not willing to communicate, manifested no interest in the others’ field and had deformed images of each other. “Mutual incomprehension”, “hostility and dislike”, and even reciprocal despise were the consequences of this situation, not to mention an “intellectual loss” and “illiteracy” in the others’ domain. Contemporary olfactory art – which is still the core topic of (philosophical) olfactory aesthetics – and theology of olfaction, too, form “two subjects, two disciplines, two cultures [...] two galaxies” (Snow, 1959, p. 15) and ignore the creative potential of dialogue. On one side, in case olfactory artists manifest interest in the religious experience and do not ironically relegate olfactory practices to superstitions,<sup>5</sup> they associate their works with shamanism and meditation practices, having a rather confused understanding of spirituality with which they tongue-in-cheek play. On the other side, the Christian culture has either restricted the liturgical use of odours or uses them unreflectively; the rich symbolism of the odorous liturgical-sacramental practices, as is commented in the patristic theology, has been forgotten. When contemporary art is displayed in settings of Christian worship, the most ‘audacious’ works and installations remain indebted to an oculo-centric modern aesthetics, as if

<sup>4</sup> For an extensive discussion of the development of olfactory aesthetics in the context of contemporary aesthetic theory see my introduction to this issue, *What Is and Can Become Olfactory Aesthetics?* (Diaconu, 2024).

<sup>5</sup> Like in Claudia Christoffel’s *Für und gegen alles* (2021).

no considerable expansion of the aesthetic theory had taken place during the past decades. However, the artists' tendency to exoticise spiritual fragrances and the theologians' attachment to modernism in art can hardly find common ground for a fertile encounter. In fact, what lacks in both directions is the reflection on the multi-layered symbolism of odours, as encrypted in theological writings, liturgical-sacramental practices and the popular religious imaginary. Given the confined frame of this study, the following analysis focuses on the chrism oil.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Preparation and Use of the Chrism/Myron Oil

In the ancient Mediterranean cultures, olive oil was used for food, lighting and as a remedy and was therefore invested with a symbolic meaning. In the Old Testament, too, oil symbolises the fertility of the earth and the family; moreover, the aromatic oil stands for God's blessing. Chrism oil is one of the holy oils used liturgically for consecrations and anointings, yet, unlike other holy oils (e.g. for catechumens in the Roman Catholic Church), it smells pleasant, being prepared by adding balsam (the sap of the balsam plant, a fragrant resin obtained from the *Commiphora opobalsamum*, which grows in Arabia and Judea) or also other fragrances to olive oil. Originally, priests used balsam from Judea; in the Middle Ages, substitute fragrances were circulating, and after the discovery of America the balsam from Peru was considered particularly precious.

In the Eastern Orthodox churches, too, the Myron oil is prepared from a mixture of olive oil and aromatic substances. Around the fourth century, baptisms probably employed either pure olive oil or olive oil mixed only with balsam. However, interest in spices and herbs, which were used for various anointings (of bridal couples, for ordinations of priests etc.) and were also mentioned in the Song of Songs, was already growing in late antiquity. As a result, the formula of Myron oil became increasingly complex over time and, during the Byzantine Empire, the Myron for the consecration of the Patriarch of Constantinople contained 52 fragrances (cf. Harvey, 2006, pp. 73f.). Nowadays, an orthodox abbey in France uses an anonymous source from the 19<sup>th</sup> century that requires to cook first olive oil and red wine, together with 43 odorous substances, further essences being added at the end (Fraternité monastique orthodoxe de Nîmes, 2011).<sup>7</sup>

In the Arab countries, the Maronites add saffron, cinnamon, rose essence and white frankincense, among other ingredients, to the olive oil and balsam. Nevertheless, the Syrian-orthodox Church considers a mixture of olive oil and balsam to be quite sufficient, because it symbolises the union of the divine Logos (the balsam) with the flesh of human nature (the olive oil) (Dolabani, 2006, p. 21). In general, the number of odorants required for preparing the

<sup>6</sup> The present study is part of a forthcoming monograph on the multidimensionality of the olfactory aesthetics in the Christian culture and theology.

<sup>7</sup> The first category of odorous ingredients includes orange blossom water, rose water, mastic bush, two kinds of pepper, nutmeg, myrrh, cloves, cinnamon, white Lebanese frankincense, white ginger and wild ginger or turmeric. The second one consists of cinnamon oil from Ceylon, balsam from Mecca, oils from rose, lemon, marjoram, clove, lavender, laurel, as well as Chinese musk and grey or 'true' amber.

Myron oil varies between 38 and 77. These figures alone give a first impression of the complexity of its fragrant composition, which seems to be in no way inferior to modern perfumery.

However, in contrast to the composition of the ‘noses’ (perfumers), the production of chrism/Myron is strictly regulated.<sup>8</sup> Usually, in both the Catholic and the Eastern-Orthodox Churches this holy oil is consecrated on Maundy Thursday, however In the Roman Catholic Church it is consecrated by bishops yearly, whereas the Myron oil is prepared at rather long intervals.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the consecration of Myron oil remained a prerogative of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Orthodox Churches having been allowed to consecrate it only after the attainment of the autocephalous status (i.e. mostly in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century). To give an example, in the Romanian Orthodox Church, during the first three days of the Holy Week over 40 spices and resins are boiled together with oil and wine, while priests are praying; then, on Holy Thursday, the Myron is consecrated in the presence of the patriarch and of all the bishops.

In the Eastern Church, this holy oil is used for baptism, for the consecration of a church (walls are symbolically anointed with it), of the Holy Table, and of the communion utensils, in the Latin Church, at baptism, confirmation and the ordination of priests, as well as for the consecration of altar, church and bells. Regarding the persons’ anointing, in the Orthodox Churches, this is administered immediately after baptism, in the Catholic Church separately. In the Orthodox Church, the priest anoints crosswise the person’s forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, ears, chest and feet right after the immersion in the baptismal font, saying during each of the anointings: ‘Seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit’. In the Latin Church, it is the bishop who “breathes over the chrism and speaks a thanksgiving praise, in which he makes special reference to the anointing of Christ’s spirit at the baptism in the Jordan. During the subsequent prayer of blessing, the concelebrants extend both hands towards the chrism” (Berger, 2008, p. 375).<sup>10</sup> Despite such differences,<sup>11</sup> this initiation rite is related in both Churches to the Holy Spirit. Although the function of this rite is, obviously, not aesthetic in the common sense of enjoying a sensory experience, given its being mediated by the senses, mainly touch and smell, it falls within the scope of aesthetics understood as theory of perception and sensibility (in German *Asthetik*). Moreover, the following analysis demonstrates that olfaction is particularly appropriate to suggest the presence of the spirit.

<sup>8</sup> In the Catholic Church according to the Ordo of Oil Consecrations of December 3, 1970, in the Eastern Church(es) following the rules recorded in the *Archieratikon*, the liturgical book for bishops.

<sup>9</sup> For example, approximately every ten years in the Greek Church or every seven years in the Romanian-Orthodox Church.

<sup>10</sup> Whenever non-English writings are used in this paper, their English translations are mine.

<sup>11</sup> The separation between baptism and the laying on of hands (which was a prerogative of the bishop) can already be documented in the second century, but it became normative in the fifth century (Vorgrimler, 1992, p. 128).

#### 4. The Symbolism of the Fragrant Oil

The origin of this sacrament is apostolic, being linked to the Pentecost, when the apostles received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-41). Other interpretations relate the child's anointing after having been immersed in the baptismal font to Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, after which the Holy Spirit floats down on him as a dove (cf. Benz, 1971, p. 31). Finally, other scholars draw an analogy to the anointing of Jesus in Bethany by the sinner woman (in other sources, Maria, Lazarus' sister) and the anointing of the sick by the apostles (Mark 6:13) or by the priests (James 5:14-15) (Harvey, 2006, p. 66).

Therefore, unlike incense, anointing is likely to have existed since the beginning of Christianity, even if evidence of such practices is sparse and its meaning unclear. The Chrismation during the baptism is documented from the fourth century onwards, when the previously widely varying baptismal practices were also standardised. Nevertheless, even after that, there were still differences regarding the number of anointings, their timing within the baptism ceremony, and the body parts on which they were performed. The influence of hygienic and medical practices on the development of this ritual may explain why the holy oil is considered a healing one and baptism symbolises the healing of the wounded human nature. Late antique commentaries emphasise the apotropaic function of the chrism oil, occasionally in analogy with the anointing of athletes before battle. Put differently, the anointing confers the person the power to ward off malefic forces due to its identifying function: according to Theodore of Mopsuestia (352-428), the Myron marks the persons who belong to Christ similar to the way sheep were branded or imperial soldiers were tattooed to make their affiliation visible (Harvey, 2006, p. 70). Myron oil resembles an invisible armour that is put directly on the skin.

Even today, chrism or Myron anointing symbolises the individual's incorporation into the Church and her/his becoming a 'Christian'. There is indeed a direct connection between the Greek *χρῖσμα* ('anointing oil') and the etymology of 'Christos' (*χριστός*) as 'the anointed'. However, linguistic analyses of the New Testament revealed that in some pericopes it is not clear whether the anointing was meant merely metaphorically or really took place. Moreover, the focus lies on the *gesture* of anointing and not on the sensorial-aesthetic quality of the oil; there is no mention either of the visible traces left by anointing on the body or of its odour, although the odorous aspect was intrinsic to both Greek terms for the holy oil, *chrisma* and *Myron* (Harvey, 2006, p. 67). Therefore, Chrismation and incensing shared this irrelevance of olfaction in late antiquity. This olfactory silence may be explained by using different oils: pure olive oil for the catechumens and fragrant Myron oil for the post-baptismal anointings. Sometimes the candidates for baptism were prepared for this transition from unscented to scented oil by anointing the forehead, eyes and especially the nostrils.

The direct association between *oil* and Christ appears clearly in the hymn *De Virginitate* authored by Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306-373) when he mentions that the name of the oil is "a symbol and shadow of the name

‘Christ’” (Ephrām, 1967, p. 69). Although Ephrem often resorts to olfactory metaphors in his writings, his comments on the Holy Myron omit mentioning odours, which makes Susan Ashbrook Harvey (2006, p. 70) assume that at that time non-fragrant oil was used for Chrismation. More important for him were the visible traces left by anointing, given that they make the divine invisible perceivable: “The image of the king is formed with visible colours, and the invisible image of our invisible king is formed with visible oil” (Ephrām, 1967, p. 70). In this respect, the chrism oil has the aforementioned *identificatory* function, distinguishing the anointed person from non-Christians. In addition to this, the oil has a *lustrative* effect, by cleansing the body, which recalls the penitential psalms.<sup>12</sup> This absolution, however, must be preceded by repentance:

The oil, in its love, becomes a companion for the diver, who hates his life because of his poverty and descends, burying himself in the water. The oil, a nature that does not sink, joins itself to the body that sinks; and submerging, it brings out of the depths a rich treasure (Ephrām, 1967, p. 71).

Repentance and absolution are considered here in analogy to physical processes in which oil does not sink in water and does not mix with it. Oil thus stands for the divine nature and water for the human one. ‘Burying oneself in water’ means abandoning oneself to sin and by that, forgetting the image of Christ within oneself. The double dynamic of ascent and descent is reminiscent of incense, which also rises (with the prayer) so that divine mercy can descend. However, this symbolism is completely opposed to Ephrem’s metaphor of oil and water: it is the body that is dragged down by sins and the divine that accompanies the submerging body out of love. Both body and soul are linked to each other without mixing. One is heavy (water/body), the other light (oil/soul), and these qualities are akin to dynamic forces: the body pulls one down, while the soul drives him/her up. This recalls Plato’s image of the human as a team with two winged steeds pulling one down and up (*Phaedrus* 246 a–b, Plato, 1982, pp. 435–436). Plato left the task of steering the soul correctly to the spirit, whereas the Christian is required to become aware of his/her sins (*metanoia*) in order to be cleansed of them. To use Ephrem’s image, it is the oil that, although it never sinks due to its nature, can ‘submerge’ and thus bring ‘out of the depths a rich treasure’. Ephrem connects this physical impossibility of the oil submerging in water and bringing something back up again with the ‘scandal’ of Incarnation – Christ took on human nature to redeem mankind<sup>13</sup> –, which solves the riddle of the immersing oil as an image of Christ.

While Ephrem’s analogy focuses on the duality of the human being, Chrismation could also stress the *positive role of the body* in gaining divine knowledge. This interpretation is supported by Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita’s theology, which postulates the continuity between heaven and earth (although

<sup>12</sup> E.g. “Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” (Ps 51:7)

<sup>13</sup> “Christ, the nature that does not die, clothed himself in a mortal body, submerged and brought out of the water the treasure of life to the progenitors” (Ephrām, 1967, p. 71).

both are strictly hierarchically structured). Therefore, the knowledge of the holy and the suprasensible can be mediated by senses, including olfaction. Moreover, sensory perception is even necessary for this divine knowledge, being considered appropriate for embodied beings. Visible beauty mirrors the invisible harmony and “the diffusion of sensual fragrances” reflects “the diffusion of thought” (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1986, p. 29). According to this cataphatic logic, transcendence can and should be translated into physical symbols. This also applies to smells, which are considered a kind of “emanation of what can be thought” that “fills our thinking organ with divine pleasure” (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1986, p. 127). Evidently, such signs are not indexical (pointing to something external), but symbolic or *theophoros*: sensible phenomena carry the sacred within themselves.

In Pseudo-Dionysius’ view, the ordinary (ecclesiastical) liturgy communicates with two other invisible divine services taking place simultaneously within the human soul and in the heavenly Church. His commentaries on the Holy Myron extend the analogies between the sensible and the suprasensible to smells: physical odours used to spread; *mutatis mutandis*, after the ‘mysterious consecration of the fragrant oil’<sup>14</sup> during the holy mess, the Myron is distributed to churches and, through them, it reaches the faithful.

Other occurrences of olfaction in Pseudo-Dionysius’ commentaries appear nowadays as merely metaphorical, as when he discusses virtues. From a Christian perspective, virtuous behaviour indicates the presence of the Holy Spirit, with whose fragrant seal the person was marked through Chrismation. This explains why Pseudo-Dionysius characterises the virtues as “beautiful, fragrant likenesses of the hidden God”, that are acquired through the imitation of their divine model and whose pleasant odour reflects “the fragrance of goodness” that resides in “the innermost depths of the divine principle” (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1986, pp. 124 f.).<sup>15</sup> Given the long history of European oculo-centrism, today’s readers may find it difficult to understand how image and imitation can function in olfactory contexts and how believers are supposed to look at the “supernatural, fragrant beauty of God’s thoughts” (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1986, p. 124). In Pseudo-Dionysius’ view, this olfactory vision can be experienced already when attending the consecration of the Holy Myron, yet people only see what they are able to perceive according to their degree of spiritual perfection. The consecration of oil thus has a visible beauty and an “even more divine” one, which “fills us with the fragrance that is not concealed to rational beings” (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1986, p. 125). The concept of such cognition transcends the modern understanding of perception: being experienced by the whole person, the fragrance of the Myron has effects on the state of mind and morality.

It would be far too easy to dismiss such mentions of odours as purely metaphoric and fictitious, given that, almost disconcertingly, Pseudo-

<sup>14</sup> In the same context, Pseudo-Dionysius refers also to the odour of incense when he mentions the “fragrant intercourse of the hierarch with every point of the sanctuary” (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1986, p. 123).

<sup>15</sup> This olfactory image for virtues is still widespread in the spiritual literature of the Eastern Church.



Dionysius continues by referring to odours in the common sense. Smells, he claims, produce well-being and cognition to a healthy nose that is able to react appropriately to stimuli. Similarly, if our thinking is not weakened by the propensity for what is inferior, it can perceive “the fragrance of the divine principle”, being “filled both with sacred well-being and with the most divine nourishment” (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1986, p. 127). The condition for perceiving God’s fragrance – a metaphor that can be traced back to the Paulinian Epistles<sup>16</sup> – is a correct *orientation* (towards the divine). Even then, the sensitivity<sup>17</sup> to the “divine fragrance emanations” (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1986, p. 127) remains dependent on the subject’s own sanctity (which means nearness to God), angels having a finer ‘nose’ than the humans. Moreover – he continues –, these gifts of fragrance penetrate the mind, feeding thinking and bringing joy, pleasure, and well-being. The later distinction between knowledge and pleasure, let alone between the Kantian *Annehmlichkeit* and *Wohlgefallen*, are unconceivable in this early Christian context: divine pleasure represents an analogical tool that enables a participatory knowledge of God.

To conclude, the pleasant smell of Myron oil distinguishes Christians from non-Christians, the attendants of a sacred ceremony from outsiders, and finally, the sacred space from the mundane, creating an invisible ‘aura’ of the sacred. In general, pleasant fragrances (*nota bene*, in liturgical contexts) announce God’s presence, which, in Harvey’s view (2006), represents a heritage of the ancient Mediterranean cultures. Moreover, experiencing these scents is not merely intellectual participation in the divine, but *transforms* the humans themselves: one cannot make the experience of the Spirit without being “contaminated” by it, just as by entering a smelly place we take on this smell ourselves and pass it on. Smelling something is inseparable from smelling something; the subject that perceives an odour turns into an *osmophoros*, an odour carrier, and, in the special case of sacramental and liturgical scents, into a *theophoros*.

While we do not necessarily look like what we see and do not replicate the sounds we hear, the peculiar ‘logic’ of smells implies that we are *physically* impregnated by the odorous spaces we cross or live in. In Pseudo-Dionysius’ words: “the composition of the oil is an ‘assembly’ [*συναγωγή*] of fragrant substances” and “those who receive something from it become fragrant depending on how much fragrance they have received” (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1986, p. 126). This mixture does not produce a specific olfactory form of a new quality through chemical interactions, as Edmond Roudnitska and other perfumers consider (Diaconu, 2015, pp. 306 ff.), but a *synagoge* that produces *meaning* through interpersonal interaction. From Pseudo-Dionysius’ perspective, this meaning is eventually the olfactory image of Jesus as the source of all fragrances, a metaphor that is admittedly hardly comprehensible based on the mimesis theory.

<sup>16</sup> Various English translations mention the ‘odour’, ‘(sweet) fragrance’, ‘sweet-smelling perfume’, ‘lovely smell’, ‘savor’ or ‘aroma’ of the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 2:14 - Bible Gateway, no date).

<sup>17</sup> This aptitude is usually known in the Christian spirituality as power of discernment.

Finally, the Myron oil being a sacrament, the transfer of odour from the Good to good people and from God to the faithful also produces, in Pseudo-Dionysius' view, the elevating *sanctification* of the profane, be these people, spaces or objects of liturgical use. In this respect, consecration represents a "philanthropic principle" (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1986, p. 129) *literally*, expressing the love of divinity for the humans.

### 5. The Loss of Smell in Sacramental Theology

Byzantine sacramental theology achieved a systematic form in the 14<sup>th</sup> century grace to Nicholas Cabasilas. His *Book of Life in Christ* (1981) interprets the sacraments (in Eastern Church diction: 'mysteries') of Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist in olfactory terms due to their pneumatological dimension. While Logos inspires Cabasilas light metaphors, the Holy Spirit primarily awakens olfactory associations, as in the following description of the future Aion (of the eternal life): "The delicious fragrance of the Pneuma flows forth and fills the universe; but he who then still has no sense of smell receives none" (Cabasilas, 1981, p. 16). On one hand, this is meant to prompt believers to develop their 'spiritual organ' before it gets too late, on the other, it announces that a saint way of life enables one to feel the foretaste of the afterlife already in this world, because "the supra-heavenly Myron has already been poured out in these polluted regions" (Cabasilas, 1981, p. 17).

In the same context, Cabasilas claims that the sacraments as "gates of righteousness" (Ps 117:19) are even 'more venerable and salvific' than those of paradise: they are true gifts, being received without struggling or suffering like Christ, but simply by believing in him and accepting his gifts. Later, the gate metaphor reappears in relation to the body: only because the sacraments are material can Christ "occupy" nose and mouth as "entrances of life": "through one door as fragrant Myron, through the other as food" (Cabasilas, 1981, p. 38). Whether the sacred is breathed in or ingested, in both cases, the sacred penetrates the human body and brings about its unification with the holy into one body, which – from a Christian perspective – is eventually the ecclesiastical body, with Christ as its head.

In the chapter on Chrismation, which is much shorter than the discussions regarding the Baptism and the Eucharist,<sup>18</sup> Cabasilas considers the anointing with Myron oil necessary to make effective the energies received by the subject through baptism. These gifts of grace differ among various persons, which guarantees the functional unity of the community. Once received, the charisms must be practised consciously and continuously to keep them active. However, smell only plays an indirect role in Cabasilas' commentaries on Chrismation. For example, when he refers to the Incarnation as the removal of the dividing wall between man and God, he mentions that 'the wall of separation itself has already become Myron' and evokes Jesus' anointing in Bethany with fragrant oil by an anonymous woman:

<sup>18</sup> This peculiarity characterises also later treatises on sacramental theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

So it is as if an alabaster vessel were transformed to Myron through some feat. Then this Myron could no longer be prevented from communicating itself to what it is outside; it would no longer remain inside, no longer for itself alone (Kabasilas, 1981, p. 91).

In a similar way – he continues –, human nature was divinised in Christ's body, so that nothing can separate them anymore. The image of the alabaster pot whose fragrance irresistibly spreads obviously recalls the anointing in Bethany, when a sinner (Lk 7:39) broke an alabaster jar of precious nard oil to anoint the feet and/or head of Jesus (Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9; Lk 7:36-50; Jn 12:1-8), after which “the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil” (Jn 12:3). The emanation of the scent cannot be prevented, not only in the church ('the house') but also beyond its boundaries, into the wider world. In general, smell stands for breaking down boundaries, for continuity and not least for a specific dynamic. Even the fundamental restoration of communication between God and man grace to the Incarnation in no way means their alignment, but activates an infinite process that Cabasilas calls “a life in Christ” and which the theology of the Eastern Church calls *theosis* or deification. The “chaste pleasure of Myron” (Kabasilas, 1981, p. 37) restores the human's attraction to the divine so that the Myron sets in motion the human being.<sup>19</sup> The *smell* of the Myron oil, however, can only be inferred indirectly: partly phenomenologically, knowing the peculiarities of olfaction compared to other senses, and partly hermeneutically, through Cabasilas' allusion to the anointing in Bethany. The physical odour of the consecrated oil is simply overlooked.

Even more striking is the 'anosmia' of the later explanations of Chrismation, both among Orthodox and Catholic theologians. The fragrance of the Myron oil and its complex aromatic composition, as described in the first part of this paper, receive no mention at all in Alexander Schmemmann's (1974), Herbert Vorgrimler's (1992), Nikos A. Matsoukas' (2006) and John D. Zizioulas' (2011) commentaries to Chrismation. The following discussion is confined to the theologians of the Eastern Church.

At the centre of Schmemmann's interpretation of anointing is the sanctification of the body which, alluding to Paul (1 Cor 6:19), is consecrated as the temple of God and whose life should itself become a liturgy. In this respect, Schmemmann criticises a reductionist spiritualisation of faith and calls for a positive attitude to life in the world: the Spirit primarily conveys *joie de vivre*. In contrast to Schmemmann, Matsoukas emphasises the power of the sacrament to bend the will of the anointed person in order to “fight the demonic forces” and progress on the path to perfection (Matsoukas, 2006, p. 358). Finally, Zizioulas emphasises that the Eastern Church sets forth the symbolism of the anointing of priests and kings in the Old Testament. Through its embedding in the baptismal rite, Chrismation stands for “participation in Christ's royal priesthood, by virtue of which the baptized would become himself a king and a member of the people of Christ as the anointed God” (Zizioulas, 2011,

<sup>19</sup> “So we live through this bread and *move* by virtue of the Myron, after we have received being from the baptismal bath” (Kabasilas, 1981, p. 23, my emphasis).

p. 119). Whether a mission for the world that conveys a sacramental dimension to everyday life, as in Schmemmann, energy in the fight against evil, as in Matsoukas, or dignity of the laity as a world priesthood, as Zizioulas believes, the semantics of Chrismation has much to offer despite its status of a 'stepchild' in sacramental theology. Integrating the symbolism of smell would certainly enrich even more its semantics.

However, this analysis would remain incomplete without mentioning medieval popular beliefs related to the chrism oil. These testify to the possibility of a specific olfactory aesthetics that differs both from the 'anosmia' of contemporary sacramental theology and merely empirical interest in the fragrant composition of the chrism oil.

#### 6. The Imaginary of the Balsam in Western Popular Christianity

Traditionally, balsam was the main (or even only) fragrant component of the chrism oil. In his analysis of medieval popular literature<sup>20</sup> about the balsam, Jean-Pierre Albert (1990) identified a chain of analogies between the balsam tree, the tree of life, the cross and the bleeding Christ, all revolving around the Crucifixion. Although their semantics considerably diverges from the theological interpretations of Chrismation, legends that circulated in Western popular Christianity are worth mentioning as evidence for the complexity of the olfactory symbolism of chrism and for its power to spark the imagination.

In the Western Middle Ages, Jesus was considered the new tree of life who reconciles man with God and promises eternal life. Moreover, life was regarded as the sap of the tree of life and at the same time as the balsam which is extracted from the balsam bush; combining these meanings, the tree of life (which complemented the cross) was believed to exude balsam. In this setting, by allowing precious balsam to flow from his wound, Christ nourishes the world. However, the "aromatic secretion" (Albert, 1990, p. 177) does not only symbolise the principle of life, but it also reveals what is concealed, manifesting an *essence* in both the physical and metaphysical sense (i.e. the divinity of the Crucified). Although the legend of the fragrant cross might have historical explanations as well (crosses used to be oiled with balsam), modern interpretations ought not to underestimate the power of collective religious imaginary in a highly symbolic culture as the Middle Ages were.

A complex symbolism of odours evinces also the archbishop Jacobus of Voragine's *Sermones aurei* in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. His sermon for Passion Sunday mentions that Christ was anointed four times: by his father (with charisma, grace, or the gifts of the Holy Spirit), by his mother (with tears by laying his corpse in the tomb), by Magdalene (during the anointing in Bethany) and by "the Jews" (who anointed his whole body when he bled during the Passions) (apud Albert, 1990, p. 173). Moreover, his sermon for Holy Week, cited by Albert (1990, pp. 174–175) compares Christ not only to a "bag (*sac*) full of mercy" that God sent down to earth and that was torn to pieces in the Passion, but also to a vessel of fragrant oil, to a cupboard with medicines, and

<sup>20</sup> Albert finds his interpretations mainly on the literature of *mirabilia*, completed by legends, hagiography, Christianised folklore and 'superstitions'.

to medicinal herbs. The 'old' man, to use Apostle Paul's expression, was captive and his wounds were foul-smelling (*puant*). Christ himself puts himself in the same position, but only to restore man's original state: he must be wounded so that his fragrance may be released into the world and redeem the captive humanity.

First, Christ was full of ointment, as much as an alabaster vase, and for this, he willed it to be broken by many wounds: so that the precious ointment might come out, by which the wounded are healed. The allusion to the broken alabaster jar in Bethany is unmistakable. Second, this image of *Christus medicus* is reinforced by the analogy with the pharmacy cupboard (*apotheca, armoire*):

Christ's body was filled with balsam like a cupboard and he willed that this should be opened so that the balsam might flow out of it, by which he who stinks is healed. This cupboard was indeed opened when a soldier opened its side with his spear. Of the odour of this balm, it is said: *I have made my perfume like cinnamon and fragrant balm.*

Christ's body is full of precious remedies, yet must be opened in order to administrate the medicines to the foul smelling wounded human (*celui qui pue, le blessé*). Similarly, the Crucified's body was 'opened' by the spear, which allowed the fragrant essence to flow out and fill the world.

Third, Christ shares the fate of aromatic plants. When his body is compared to the bark of the tree, his words to the leaves and his soul to the seeds, his 'precious blood' can only stand for the sap of the plant, which must pour out. And just as medicinal plants must be crushed, triturated and pounded to create a plaster for an abscess, so Christ's body was tortured (Jacobus uses here the same verb as for the plants, *triturer*) to empty 'the abscess of our pride'. Incidentally, similar extraction methods apply to the balsam and the oil, both components of chrism oil. The oil, too, is extracted from seeds or fruits, like a hidden essence that only manifests itself through pressing.<sup>21</sup> A comparison of the sacramental interpretations of the chrism oil, as mentioned before, with this symbolism of essences that connects balm and oil testifies to a shift in emphasis from a pneumatological and ecclesiological context to a Christological and staurocentric<sup>22</sup> theology.

Finally, medieval Catholic Christianity connected aromatics with stones, in particular gemstones. One reason for this analogy may be physical: fragrant resin is a solidified liquid. In addition to this, legends circulated since Antiquity about their common origin in a fabulous Orient and their dangerous purchase: being extremely precious, aromatics and gemstones must have originated in a kind of paradise on earth. According to some legends, the balsam for the chrism oil came from the region of Jerusalem, considered at that time the symbolic centre of the world. One such story from the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century mentions that the exquisite odorous substances for the holy oil

<sup>21</sup> This parallel was indeed used by ancient authors for the "oil" of the frankincense bush (cf. Albert, 1990, p. 179).

<sup>22</sup> I.e. centred on the Crucifixion.

are the sparse product of an otherwise dry tree that is guarded day and night by a dragon (Albert, 1990, p. 83). The balm can be stolen only once a year, on Saint John's Eve (on the night of 23/24 June), when the dragon falls asleep. Such legends recall those already mentioned by Herodotus regarding the difficult extraction of frankincense in Arabia Felix despite dangerous snakes hanging in the trees.

Although the aridity of the 'tree of life' and the close presence of snakes is plausible for the Arabian balsam bush, such narratives were necessary both for the symbolic and the commercial value of balsam. Life (the remedy) and death (the serpent's poison) are inextricably linked in the mythical Orient where, as the legend says, the traveller comes only one day away from the earthly paradise. In the medieval and early modern Christians' collective imagination, the chrism was converted from a rite of initiation and admission into the homeland of the Church to an invitation to adventure in exotic lands. Spiritual dwelling was replaced by dreams of conquest, and the participation in the common life of the Church according to specific charisms, by the individual's heroic deeds. The seeds of modernity are already perceivable here.

## 7. Conclusion

To conclude, the implications of this investigation on the olfactory symbolism of chrism oil and Chrismation are at least threefold. First, it challenges the widespread prejudice regarding the hostility of theology to the body due to its dualistic anthropology. Secondly, it revives the logic of symbolism which has been impoverished since the triumph of modern scientific and philosophical rationalism yet has survived in art and the aesthetics of daily life. Moreover, the present case contradicts philosophers' common dismissal of olfaction as unleashing a merely sensory pleasure which cannot be subject to interpretation. Thirdly, the paper makes the case for initiating a dialogue between philosophical and religious aesthetics. Despite the considerable expansion of the field of aesthetics during the past decades, philosophers still manifest a general disinterest in the religious experience, although it makes an essential part of everydayness in several cultures worldwide. In so doing, aesthetic theory has remained indebted to its roots in the Western philosophy of the Enlightenment and has not sufficiently reacted to the imperative of a global aesthetics and to theories about the 're-enchantment' (Berman, 1981) of our present, post-secular world.

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# The Nose of Hate

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The paper analyses the olfactory figures of hate and the various kinds of discrimination based on smell. It shows how figures of hate express themselves in the olfactory form of rejecting the other who stinks. All of the categories considered to be contemptible or inferior are olfactorily devalued. The paper examines successively the nose of anti-Semitism and racism, the nose of homophobia and sexism, the olfactory social discriminations, and the fiction of the stinking enemy. One may ask why this theme of the other's bad smell so thoroughly permeates the discourses of rejection. One of the reasons is doubtlessly related to the uncontrollable nature of smell, which invades space and intimacy, and betrays your identity. Eyes can be turned away or be deceived, but the nose knows. It is supposed to sniff out otherness and perceive invisible differences despite all efforts to hide them. | *Keywords: Homophobia, Racism, Sexism, Smell, Social Discrimination*

## 1. Introduction

We are bodies that smell: smelling the other or being smelled always entails discovering the intimate part of individuals and penetrating their inner sphere. This is because odour is an emanation from the body, the externalisation of an internal space beyond the frontiers of the skin. The other's smell is their flesh exhaled and inhaled by myself, both from the inside out and from the outside in. The other extends their hold on the world, expanding his body through its smells. Odour thus makes it possible to incorporate the other through his familiar smell and abolishes the distance between my body and theirs. This is what Sartre (1950, p. 174) very clearly brings to light in his *Baudelaire*: "The smell of a body is the body itself which we breathe in with our nose and mouth, which we suddenly possess as though it were its most secret substance and, to put the matter in a nutshell, its nature. The smell which is in me is the fusion of the body of the other person with my body; but it is the other person's body with the flesh removed, a vaporized body which has become completely itself but which has become a volatile spirit." Through its smell, the other person's body becomes spirit and expresses its quintessentialised nature. By inhaling it, I possess it, yet it slips away right under my nose, because the odours escaping from it vanish into thin air, and present themselves to me like an ephemeral skin. The other is therefore both

caught and slips through our fingers. In its presence full of absence, smell takes a hold of me and gives me a hold on the other like ectoplasm. "Smelling the beloved," Bernard Marcadé (1987, p. 146) tells us, "is being in the illusion of her presence for a few instants. It is believing that it is possible to access her interior, that is, ultimately, have access to her soul. But smell, like the soul, is purely a trick. We take pleasure in it, we revel in it, we get lost in it, but we never possess it. In this sense, smell is what identifies the other's irreducibility." A fleeting trace of secret intimacy, smell thus reveals the other person in his essence as a distant neighbor.

By metonymy, how the other person smells becomes an expression of a close or, on the contrary, distant relationship, and implies a value judgment on his entire being. In ordinary language, "he passes the smell test" expresses complicity, a trusting relationship, and means that I have figured out his personality and I do not see any hint of trickery or deceit. The expression "I smell something fishy," on the other hand, introduces a reservation since it implies an accusation that the other has an ulterior motive that I saw coming and have detected thanks to my shrewdness. In a more negative register, if I say "I smell a rat," I am indicating not only that I do not quite get him, that he is shifty and difficult to pin down, but I am also insinuating that I have suspicions about his reliability and I am showing my distrust. Lastly, in a more negative register, if I say "he stinks," I affirm without a shadow of a doubt that I cannot stand him; he arouses repulsion in me and all of the accompanying hostile emotions. All of these expressions borrowed from the register of smell demonstrate how the essence of the other is perceived, identified, assimilated, or rejected, depending on whether it is the subject of a negative or positive judgment.

The sense of smell plays a key role in various figures of speech expressing love and hate. In the register of hate, it becomes the principle of judgment of negative value. My goal is to examine what I call the "Nose of Hate" and the different uses of odours as a means to exclude. The paper analyses the various kinds of discrimination based on smell and their expressions in hate discourse.

Generally speaking, verbs and slang turns of phrase such "to sniff at," "to turn one's nose up at," "to hold one's nose," "he gets up my nose," as well as the abundance of adjectives and nouns borrowed from the register of things that smell bad. Thus we speak of a guy who "stinks to high heaven," is "rotten to the core," "revolting," "foul," "a piece of garbage," "a filthy pig," "scum," "dirtbag," and "a piece of shit," etc. In a nutshell, the person I hate smells bad. More peculiarly, figures of hate express themselves in the olfactory form of rejecting the other who stinks. All of the categories considered to be contemptible or inferior are olfactorily devalued. It is necessary then to embrace the main figures of olfactory hate and to try to explain why this theme of the other's bad smell so thoroughly permeates the discourses of rejection. In this regard, I will examine successively the nose of anti-Semitism and racism, the nose of homophobia and sexism, the olfactory social discriminations, and the fiction of the stinking enemy.

## 2. The nose of anti-Semitism and racism

Thus, forms of hate such as anti-Semitism come with the stigmatisation of the other's smell, and have even resulted in the fabrication of the specific concept of the "*foetor judaïcus*," or the Jewish stench, which has been feeding into anti-Semitic discourse since the Middle-Ages.<sup>1</sup> All we have to do is look at how the anti-Semitic press attacked Léon Blum. The leader of the Popular Front was called a "pile of trash," a "scumbag," a "smelly camel" that "perspires that sort of Middle-Eastern vapour that all his kind give off, that greasy wool odor so typical of them."<sup>2</sup> In the same register as the *foetor judaïcus*, in Arabic "jiffa" refers to the characteristic odor of Jews that makes it possible to identify and ostracize them. In his *Manifeste archaïque*, Laurent Dispot denounces this nasal fraud: "Racism is thus a science of scent-sensitive people: You have to have a nose for recognizing Jews, and at the same time Jews are recognizable by their noses. It is time to turn our noses up at these things" (Dispot, 1987, p. 181).<sup>3</sup>

In general, racism, particularly towards Blacks, goes hand in hand with olfactory discrimination. Blacks are beings that smell in both senses of the term. On the one hand, they are cursed with a rough sensuality marked by the primacy of the senses of smell and taste over the other senses, which are judged to be nobler. In his *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, Gobineau (1853) thus believes that the Black race is characterised by a predominance of smell and taste, ready to sniff and devour indiscriminately, while the white race, less influenced by the senses, is inclined by nature to speculation. Indifferent to bad smells, Blacks wallow in stink and are content with any flavour. On the other hand, Blacks give off a characteristic odour that stinks up the air. The stereotype of the foul smell of sweating and stinking Black people is a leitmotif in colonialist and racist literature. It even shows through the scientific works of a naturalist like Buffon (1803, p. 303), who does not shy away from writing that "Negroes" from Angola and Cap Verde "smell so bad when they become hot and that the air of the places they have been passed through remains infected for more than a quarter of an hour."<sup>4</sup> Smell was frequently used as a marker of racial identity by missionaries in accounts of their travels, as a sign of irrefutable recognition. The Dominican friar André Chevillard thus writes: "one knows that there is a Black due to the goat stench that is emitted from the sweat of their bodies" (Chevillard, 1659, cited in Peabody, p. 116).<sup>5</sup> Carl Vogt, in his *Leçons sur l'homme*, goes even further by

<sup>1</sup> Fabre-Vassas, in her book *The Singular Beast: Jews, Christians, and the Pig*, shows that the theme of the Jewish stench is recurrent and is a cliché, repeated even in medical treatises: "It is this stench and the filth in which they wallow every day in their homes, like a pig in its trough, that makes them subject to inflammations of the skin, to flushes, and to other stinking illnesses that cause them to lower their heads all the time" (Fabre-Vassas, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> On this subject, see David Le Breton's (2003, 123ff) article *Les mises en scène olfactives de l'autre*. English translation from David Le Breton (2017, p. 168).

<sup>3</sup> "Le racisme est ainsi une 'science' de gens bien-nez: il faut avoir du nez pour reconnaître les Juifs et en même temps les juifs sont reconnaissables à leur nez. Il est temps d'en avoir plein le nez de ces histoires."

<sup>4</sup> "Sentent si mauvais lorsqu'ils sont échauffés que l'air des endroits par où ils sont passés en est infecté pendant plus d'un quart d'heure."

<sup>5</sup> See *Annales des Antilles* 11 (1963, p. 72). English translation of the passage by Peabody (2004).

considering that smell is a characteristic of race: “The exhalations from the skin also have their specific characteristics, which in certain races do not disappear in any circumstances, even the most scrupulous cleanliness. These characteristic odors of race should in no way be confused with the exhalations that originate from type of food, and can be noted in the same race [...] the specific odor of the Negro remains the same whatever attention he pays to cleanliness or whatever food he takes. It belongs to the species as musk does to the musk deer that produces it” (Vogt, 1865, p. 161). The stench of the Black person then becomes the expression of his bestiality, of his savage and primitive nature, of his naturalness that cannot be tamed by any form of culture or civilization. It is the stigmata of barbarian sub-humanity and flagrant evidence of racial inequality.

It is striking to note that, in racist discourse, disqualification by smell occupies a prominent position. Facial features, skin colour, language, or the sound of the voice may be condemned as ugly and subject to rejection, but it is the other’s real or imaginary smell that arouses the strongest disgust and triggers the most violent comments. Ethnologist Jean-Pierre Jardel<sup>6</sup> notes that although colour and smell play the role of markers of discrimination in para-anthropological literature about Caribbean Blacks, the former marks a phenotypical distinction with Europeans that is possible to get used to, while the latter always has a strong negative connotation. To back up his argument, he cites Paul Reboux’s (1931, p. 39) comment about Caribbean Blacks that “these Blacks of African origin, even with a complexion the color of licorice, are characterized by a civility in which a moral culture worthy of esteem comes to the fore”,<sup>7</sup> but, on the other hand, he judges the “smell of the Negro [to be] powerful and intolerable,” (Reboux, 1931, p. 88) several pages later. So colour is okay, but surely not smell!

We may wonder why this theme of the other’s bad smell so thoroughly permeates racist discourse. One of the reasons the olfactory motif is so full of rejection is doubtlessly related to the uncontrollable nature of smell, which invades space and betrays your identity. Eyes can be turned away or be deceived, but the nose knows. It is supposed to sniff out otherness and flush out ethnic differences despite all efforts to hide them.<sup>8</sup> Is it not the greatest fear, deep down, that the other is lumped together with me and resembles me to the point where I am so taken in that even I can no longer tell the difference? The nose is supposed to remind forgetful or imperceptive eyes, with the help of foul-smelling fictions, of the ethnic particularity hidden behind the mask of culture. This phenomenon of disqualification by the nose is widespread and also extends to sexual orientation.

<sup>6</sup> See his article *De la couleur et de l’odeur de l’Autre dans la littérature para-anthropologique : représentation de l’altérité antillaise et idéologie raciale* (Jardel, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Jardel (1999, p. 88): “ces Noirs d’origine africaine sont, même avec un teint couleur de réglisse, d’une urbanité où s’atteste une culture morale digne d’estime”.

<sup>8</sup> This is what Jean-Pierre Albert (1999, p. 13) underscores: “The sense of smell, as the sense of the invisible and intuitive knowledge, could become an infallible means of detecting the least obvious otherness: The other that resembles us (and wants to resemble us) does not elude our nose, precisely because it is the least cultivated sense. And its discriminatory abilities count as evidence of the naturalness of the differences (or incompatibilities) it is supposed to make us aware of.”

### 3. The nose of homophobia

Indeed, homophobia is also expressed in the form of the olfactory stigmatisation. Homosexuals, marked by anality, are supposed to smell of latrines and excrement. In his *Etudes de pathologie sociale, Les deux prostitutions*, published in 1887, Félix Carlier already highlights how homosexuals are attracted by the proximity of latrines and their mustiness.<sup>9</sup> The visceral rejection and slurs take various forms, such as equating homosexuality with bestiality, deviance, a disease, or disgrace, but the most frequently encountered theme revolves around smelliness, which gives rise to scatological comments. Prejudice dies hard, despite the evolution of society. This is what clearly emerges from Serge Simon's book, *Homophobie, 2004, France*, a compilation of letters, e-mails, and drawings from among the four thousand messages received by the mayor of Bègles, Noël Mamère, when he conducted a gay wedding in his community. A local citizen, who wished the young couple a happy honeymoon behind bars, commented ironically on the "happiness of making love in our body's sweet-scented sewage plant" (Simon, 2004, p. 50).<sup>10</sup> One of the messages is a good summary of the olfactory content of the slurs since it is entirely written in the register of foul-smelling dirtiness: "You filthy bastard, you're really a scumbag, a dirty pig, a whore, a piece of garbage, scum, a freak, a dirty pig, really disgusting, a filthy bastard, asshole, douchebag, dirty pimp" (Simon, 2004, p. 57; my translation). In these letters, which sometimes even contain dirty toilet paper, the nose of hate clearly shows through. It consists of not being able to stomach homosexuals and people supporting them by attributing an excremental stench to them. This is the recurring theme in this medley of insults, behind which the entire scatological imagination is revealed along with its procession of fascination and anxiety about something that has been stigmatised since childhood as dirty and smelly. It is above all male homosexuality conceptualised on the basis of the model of anal intercourse that is the target of violent rejection. Lesbians, however, do not come up smelling like roses either, since in this case homophobia is coupled with olfactory sexism, as this recommendation addressed to the mayor demonstrates, for example: "When you marry two dykes, it is in your interest to negotiate a blowjob or be sprayed with smelly clam juice" (Simon, 2004, p. 52).

### 4. The nose of sexism

Sexism, in turn, is fed by slanderous epithets borrowed from the register of smell. Like Black people, women are often considered to be endowed with a more developed sense of smell than men, a sign of a greater naturalness and a lesser intellectuality. Generally speaking, body odour in women is more subject to repression than in men, where it often seems like a sign of virility. A woman with a strong body odour will be perceived as a slob and will be accused of negligence. She will inevitably inspire disgust, while a man may be

<sup>9</sup> "The odor exhaled by these sorts of places is one of the circumstances which a very numerous category of pederasts seek, as it is indispensable to their pleasures" (Carlier, 1887, p. 305), as cited in Alain Corbin (Corbin, 1986, p. 271, note 27).

<sup>10</sup> We translate: "bonheur de faire l'amour dans la station d'épuration de notre organisme aux senteurs suaves." (Simon, 2004, p. 50).

subjected to a simple smile or a joke before being called a pig or a smelly goat. The rules of hygiene are thus less strict for a man than for a woman. Women are disqualified through olfactory discrimination. A woman of ill repute is thus called a *putain* in French, which etymologically comes from the verb *puer* or 'to stink'. Like the Italian *puttana*, or the Spanish or Portuguese *puta*, the French noun is derived from the Latin verb *putere*, which means 'to stink, to smell bad', or the adjective *putidus*, which means 'fetid, stinky'. A woman of easy virtue can also be seen as a  *salope* [slut]. Although the origin of this word is uncertain, it relates to dirtiness and applies to unsavoury people and by extension to loose women. It must also be noted that when the term is used to insult a man, it is even more contemptuous than the French adjective *salaud*, since it even denies the virility of the man we wish to denigrate.

*Putain, cocotte* [chick], or *morue* [tart, literally codfish], women are sometimes called names evoking a smelly vagina, or considered to be dirty and impure. Their menstrual blood is very often conceived of as a foul-smelling or even evil flow. In Jewish medical literature, for example, period (*vesset*) is also called *nidda* (impurity). For a very long time, it was equated with a putrid stain, so much so that "we may wonder whether the anorexia that so many mystics condemned themselves to did not only have the effect of, but also the goal of, erasing this stain by provoking a saintly amenorrhea" (Bruit Zaidman et al., 2001, p. 30). In *Aroma. The Cultural History of Smell*, Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synnott thus observe that for the Desana, the smell of menstrual blood is the most disgusting and polluting of all smells. Menstruating women are considered to be like wild animals, escaping the influence of cultural norms, hence the need to control them. When she has her first period, the young girl is locked in a small room where she receives a visit from a shaman three times a day, who blows tobacco smoke on her in order to purify her (Classen et al., 1995, p. 136). The anthropologists also note that for the Hua of the highlands of Papua New Guinea, menstrual odours are harmful to men and particularly to initiates who must avoid some varieties of mushrooms, possums, and yams that are said to smell of *be'ftu*, or menstruation, otherwise their descendants would degenerate (*Ibidem*). This belief in the harmful nature of menstrual odour, which goes as far as contaminating food and making anything a menstruating woman touches impure, is widespread in many cultures.<sup>11</sup> It is linked to the idea that menstrual blood is of a putrid and excremental nature.

<sup>11</sup> It is frequent in Arabic culture, and particularly in the United Arab Emirates, where women on their periods are considered impure and do not have the right to use perfume until their period is over and they have taken a ritual bath. There are, however, exceptions to this repulsion, for example among the Ongee or Dassanetch of Ethiopia, for whom menstrual blood does not have a significant smell; it is called "the rain of a woman" and is synonymous with fertility. For more details, see Classen et al. (1995, pp. 137ff). This impure blood can also be charged with a seductive connotation. This is what Alain Corbin (1986, p. 44) notes, when he analyzes the ambiguous status of menstruation in the 19th century: "Menses were an aspect of the purging process and therefore exercised a putrid effect; but they were also impregnated with subtle vapors transmitted by the essence of life. From the viewpoint of the Montpellier school the woman at that point in her cycle was conveying the vitality of nature; she was emitting the products of a strong animality, she was making an appeal for fertilization, dispersing seductive effluvia."

Whatever the language, men have come to forge a vocabulary stigmatising feminine stink. In Persian, for example, the word *lakhan*, which evokes the fetidness of a sweaty body in general, applies specifically to women to describe the smell of their genitals. Françoise Aubaile-Sallenave (1999, p. 105) also recalls that in Moorish Spain, a woman's breath could be a legitimate motive for divorce and that in this domain, "the vocabulary is very precise: *nashar*, 'a smell that unfolds and spreads' is also 'a women's breath, the odor of her nose and armpits when she wakes'."<sup>12</sup> Ironically enough, neither rigorous hygiene nor exemplary moral purity can overcome this feminine stink; only a man can put things right, at least if we believe doctor Trotula, who claims in her *De Passionibus mulierum* that abstinence and the build-up of their own unexpelled seed cause infections in virgins and widows.<sup>13</sup>

Invoking this stink also sometimes serves as an excuse or an alibi to justify sexual mutilations such as excision. Without going into a complex analysis of cultural and religious motives that govern this practice, the removal of the clitoris, which deprives women of the possibility of experiencing pleasure, also has the function of purifying them and thereby preventing them from being unfaithful and overcome by their sexual desires. Excision is an ancestral rite of passage to which girls must submit during the *Salindé* (purification) festival. As Senegalese director Ousmane Sembene's film *Mooladé* (The right of asylum) shows, little girls must bear the physical pain without whining or crying and are elevated to the status of pure women who will be the honour of their husbands and families. An unexcised girl is a *bilakoro*; she is impure for marriage and therefore cannot find a husband: "The *bilakoro* smells bad." The lead actress, Fatoumata Coulibaly, echoes this line from the film in an interview where she explains that men "say that as long as a girl isn't excised, she is unclean, she is dirty, they don't have the right to marry her."<sup>14</sup> Unexcised women are therefore devalued and abandoned because a bad smell is attributed to them.

## 5. Olfactory social discrimination

Social stigmatisation through the sense of smell can be added on top of sexual or racial discrimination. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, social class, particularly in France, was based on an olfactory hierarchy. The discreet perfume of the bourgeoisie is set against the stench of the working class, who are dirty and foul-smelling. In a letter addressed to Mme Bonenfant dated May 2, 1842, Flaubert echoes this repulsion with regard to the common people: "The journey back was excellent, apart from the stench exhaled by my neighbors on the top deck, the proletarians you saw when I was leaving. I have scarcely slept at night and I have lost my cap." In French slang, *pue-la-sueur* (literally, "stinks-of-sweat") designates the labourer, unskilled worker, a prole or manual worker. The rich excoriate the odour of the poor bathed in sweat, thus justifying the legitimacy

<sup>12</sup> "Le vocabulaire est très précis: *nashar*, 'odeur qui se déploie et se répand' is also 'l'haleine de la femme, l'odeur de son nez et de ses aisselles au réveil'."

<sup>13</sup> As cited in Laurence Moulinier (2001, pp. 96–97).

<sup>14</sup> You can see her interview on <http://www.commeaucinema.com/interviews=29756.html> Accessed 1 July 2010.

of their exploitation and keeping them at a distance due to fear of the risk of infection.<sup>15</sup> The labouring classes deserve to be treated with little consideration; they live like coarse beasts, do not know about hygiene and crowd together in shacks. They have little use for luxury and would not be able to use money astutely. What is the use of raising their salaries under these circumstances?

The insistence on the fetidness of the labouring classes has the goal of signalling the risk of infection, reveals the fear of being contaminated, and the need to establish deodorisation strategies. As Alain Corbin (1986, p. 143) notes, disinfection and submission are symbolically equated: “The enormous fetidity of social catastrophes, whether riots or epidemics, gave rise to the notion that making the proletariat odourless would promote discipline and work among them.” The author of *The Foul and the Fragrant* thus shows how all the lower social categories were the targets of this olfactory discrimination. Among tradesmen, it is the rag picker, reeking of excrement and corpses, who gets the award for worst smelling, hence the common French expression *sale comme un chiffonnier* (dirty like a ragpicker). But it is not only the fetid labourer, the dung-smelling farmer, or the grubby tradesman that smells bad. Domestic servants are also steeped in the odour of their condition, such that you have to air out as much as possible the places they have stayed, or even ban them from the nursery, as Hufeland, recommends (Corbin, 1986, p. 70). This olfactory social stigmatisation extends to the figure of the prefect and the teacher and reflects contempt for the lower classes.<sup>16</sup>

The olfactory social discrimination continues even when excluded groups, motivated by a desire to integrate, come to use the costly perfumes of higher social classes. Luxury perfume being a sign of success, they sometimes use it liberally in order to raise themselves to the upper strata of society or they use poor quality scents that disqualify them in the eyes of initiates. Far from being abolished, class distinctions have shifted to the olfactory realm, since individuals from lower social classes always betray their origins through their indiscreet use of luxury perfume or by spraying themselves with unsophisticated scents, like the *Eau de Cologne* that was formerly very popular among the working class. This results in a new form of ostracism, which consists of making fun of the perfume used by social climbers, who reveal themselves as such by their bad taste. Using too much or bad perfume, the social climber reeks of vulgarity, as Chekhov subtly remarks in *The Cherry Orchard*. Gayev, the heir of the cherry orchard, pretends not to hear the comment made by Lopakhin, who used to be a peasant but is now a merchant;

<sup>15</sup> This is what Alain Corbin (1986, p. 143) starkly highlights: “The absence of intrusive odor enabled the individual to distinguish himself for the putrid masses, stinking like death, like sin, and at the same time implicitly to justify the treatment meted out to them. Emphasizing the fetidity of the laboring classes, and thus the danger of infection from their mere presence, helped the bourgeois to sustain his self-indulgent, self-induced terror, which damned up the expression of remorse.”

<sup>16</sup> Based on Paul Gerbod’s study *La condition universitaire en France*, Alain Corbin thus maintains that “these old, frustrated bachelors, whose former bourgeois pupils remembered their odor of sperm and rancid tobacco, had proved unable to fulfill their dreams of promotion; their stench, like the stench emitted by clergy of humble descent continued to betray their origins” (Corbin, 1986, p. 177).



instead of answering him, he contents himself with noting with an aristocratic disdain: “It smells of patchouli here.” (Chekhov, 2010, p. 9) Ironically, the use of perfume, instead of being a means of eclipsing the unpleasant smell of those judged to be inferior, becomes a new means of stigmatising them.

## 6. Stinking enemy

Beyond class prejudice, a bad smell always comes from the other, the foreigner, the enemy. In all likelihood, body odour is a function of diet and the environment one lives in, but what is striking is that this smell is always considered to be foul and is devalued. Thus, for example, Arthur Toynbee (1935, p. 231) talks about the disgust felt by Japanese vegetarians when they smelled “the rank and fetid odor of the carnivorous peoples of the West.” Similarly, Westerners give off an odour of cheese and butter, causing them to be called *bata kusai* (stinking of butter) in Japan. The uncircumcised also give off a stinky odour. In the language of the Bedouins, the uncircumcised are referred to by the terms *lakhnum* and *al-khanum*, which are derived from *lakhina*, whose primary meaning is “to smell bad, for a goatskin.”<sup>17</sup> Otherness is therefore very often a synonym of fetidness.

When otherness takes the ultimate form of enmity, the enemy sees himself demonised, he smells of sulfur. Paul Valéry (1970, p. 530) rightly points out: “Hearts are hardened (as the Bible says) or, rather, stiffen up the moment they suspect or catch scent of the enemy.” In this respect, one of the most striking examples of demonising the enemy through his stench is attributed to Edgar Bérillon, the author of a work titled *La bromidrose fétide de la race allemande* (The fetid bromidrosis of the German race), published in 1915.<sup>18</sup> This French doctor, marked by the ideology of WWI, had come to create a “Kraut smell” and give life to the idea of a pestilential ethnic disease, the fetid bromidrosis of the German race. Bérillon, the inventor of a false science, ethnochemistry, believed himself capable of defining races and characters as a function of the chemical composition of smells. In his book, he maintains that “the different chemical constitution of the races is also revealed by the specificity of their odors [...] We know that the odor of certain races is so strong that it permeates a space long after people of that race have been there for only a few hours. This is the case of most negro races, as well as with the Chinese, and the north Germans” (Bérillon, 1915, p. 7).

David Le Breton (2017, pp. 168–169) also highlights Bérillon’s quackery, who “affirms, with the calm objectivity of the scholar steeped in rigor, that bromidrosis (from the Greek *bromōs*, meaning “stench”, and *hindrōs*, meaning “sweat”) is ‘one of the most widespread afflictions in Germany’”. As an example, Bérillon uses pseudo-accounts of French doctors who had to treat wounded Germans and who recognised that a fetid and tenacious

<sup>17</sup> Françoise Aubaille-Sallenave highlights that this is also the case for the Teda and Tibesti, based on Le Cœur’s account about how the Sara tirailleurs (colonial soldiers) had come to get themselves circumcised because the Teda women they kept company with reproached with smelling bad. See Musset and Fabre-Vassas (1999, p. 111).

<sup>18</sup> On this subject, see David Le Breton’s (2003, pp. 124–128) analyses in his article *Les mises en scène olfactives de l’autre*.

odour emanated from them. He proceeds to crude generalisations by asserting that it is not only the wounded but also prisoners who smell to such an extent that they had to disinfect the bank notes found in their pockets! Barracks or hotel rooms occupied by Germans were thought of as stinking for a long time after their departure. Without batting an eye, Bérillon (1915, p. 3) even goes as far as maintaining that German cities are bathed in a pestilential aura so strong that it is perceptible by French pilots flying a plane overhead. In sum, the entire German race is afflicted, and Bérillon does not hesitate to proclaim that bromidrosis is originally an ailment of Prussian origin. He applies himself to explaining the physiological causes of this illness and finds ethnic reasons for it: “The German, who has not developed control over his instinctive impulses, has not mastered his vasomotor reactions either. In this way, he has more in common with those species of animals in which fear and anger have the effect of triggering exaggerated activity of the odor-secreting glands” (Bérillon, 1915, pp. 5–6). This brilliant “diagnosis” aims to animalise the enemy and bring him down to the level of a brutish beast incapable of controlling his instincts. In short, the German is a real skunk.

The nose knows! All these olfactory figures of racism, sexism, classism and xenophobia demonstrate that smell functions as a principle of discrimination and exclusion to such an extent that acceptance and integration of the other involves deodorisation, or even purification. Olfactory sterilisation, however, does not necessarily mean the negation of all smells. Sometimes, integration into the community is based on a process of substituting one smell for another. The perfume that eclipses the initial odor therefore works as an agent of assimilation. It abolishes differences and makes me similar to the other. Thus, for example, the rituals of sprinkling guests in North Africa with rosewater and orange flower water are a sign of hospitality destined to both purify the stranger of his scent and welcome him. Pierre Loti (2011, p. 62) echoes this in his account of a trip to Morocco in which he describes the customs of welcoming strangers by sprinkling and sumptuously diffusing perfume to honor them: “There we are sprinkled with rose-water, flung as one uses a whip in our face from silver bottles very long and slender in the neck; pieces of precious Indian wood are kindled in brasiers in our honour, shedding a thick odorous smoke.” Perfume here abolishes distance and otherness by enveloping people in the same olfactory environment. From that moment on, it makes a merger of separate individuals possible and facilitates their integration. Recognition of the other therefore does not necessarily occur through deodorisation but by reodorisation. Perfume plays the symbolic role of a baptism or a reconversion. In this respect, the ritual of incense in Christian churches, which makes it possible to purify the faithful from the stench of sin and to elevate them to a communion with God, also has the function of abolishing all differences between rich and poor by enveloping them in the same olfactory community and by transcending the social hierarchy in order to proclaim equality before God and inciting people to live in the odour of sanctity. The sacred perfume in

which the faithful are bathed unites them in the same belief and proscribes ostracism. It strengthens religious and social cohesion by breaking barriers and transforming the other into a neighbour. The sharing of smell may seem like a symbolic means of integration and opens the way not to the nose of hate but to the nose of love.

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# ARTIST PORTFOLIOS

# The Essence of Perception - An Artist's View

## Helga Griffiths



Photo: Niels Patrick Geisselbrecht

Helga Griffiths is a Germany-based Multi-Sense-Artist working at the intersection of art, science and technology. From 1986 to 1992, she lived in the United States. She has a BFA Degree from Mason Gross School of the Arts/Rutgers University (1991). From 1992–1994 she completed her Postgraduate Studies at Kunstakademie Stuttgart in Germany. In 1994 she continued with further studies in New Media at Hochschule für Gestaltung, Karlsruhe. She received several awards such as the First Prize at *Kunst auf Zeit* in Graz, an *Honorable Mention* at the International Paper Biennial in Düren and the *Lichtenberg-Award*, in Darmstadt (all in 1998), the *First Prize* at the Lightroutes - Festival in Lüdenscheid in 2003. She received grants for artist residencies at Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris in 2001 an NEA grant for a guest professorship at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas in Puerto Rico in 2004, *AIR* in Krems, Austria in 2009, and Schöppingen in 2016. In 2019, she was awarded a fellowship at Sacatar Foundation, Brazil.

Her work is in permanent collections such as at TBS TV Station in Tokyo, Deutsches Hygienemuseum, Dresden, Musée International de la Parfumerie in Grasse, France, Kunstmuseum Mülheim/Ruhr Leopold-Hoesch-Museum in Düren, Germany as well as Upper Austria Cultural Centre, Linz. She has exhibited her multi-sense-installations at the intersection of science and art in several international biennials such as Cairo Biennial, Curitiba Biennial in Brazil, Echigo Tsumari Art Triennial in Japan, Havana Biennial, Ljubljana Biennial and Seoul Media Art Biennial.

Her multi-sensory installations were featured in international museum exhibitions e.g. Bundeskunsthalle Bonn, Haus der Kunst Munich, Nevada Museum of Art, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo, Moderne Galerie, Saarlandmuseum Saarbrücken and Musée International de la Parfumerie in Grasse, MOCA in Shanghai and ZKM Karlsruhe. The survey exhibition *Crossing* was on view at Municipal Gallery Saarbrücken in 2017. The extensive one-person exhibition *C18 Memory of an Evanescent Landscape* was shown at Kunstmuseum Mülheim/Ruhr as part of the

project *Art and Coal* under the patronage of the German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. In 2021 the first introduction of her works to China took place at Museum of Contemporary Art in Shanghai. In 2022, an extensive monographic exhibition was on view at Moderne Galerie, Saarländermuseum Saarbrücken. Her work is on view at the exhibition *Light, Sound and Senses* at Heidi Horten, Collection Vienna. An interview with Christian Huther was published in *Kunstforum International Magazine*. Her work is featured in the publication *Lightart in Germany in 21<sup>st</sup> Century* by Kunstmuseum Celle. She was part of the encyclopedic show on *LightArt from Artificial Light* at ZKM Karlsruhe. Several of her light installations are featured in the publication *Women Light Artists Collected Light Volume I* published in London. In 2022 the monograph *Expanding Perceptual Horizons* discussing works from more than 20 years was published.

Anatomically speaking, our sense of smell is more directly connected to those parts of the brain that govern memory and emotion rather than vision, hearing, or any other sense. Even just a few molecules of some volatile substances, specific to each individual, can trigger an instinctive reaction – either positive or negative – or transport us in our imagination to some other time or place, which our memory cells happen to associate with that particular combination of olfactory stimuli.

For an artist like myself, this opens up many new areas for possible experimentation. By that, I do not mean just adding a scent to make an artwork more “realistic” – like a painting of a rose, that smells of roses, to use a trivial example – but by utilising the unique properties of the olfactory sense to communicate the intention of the artist in ways, and with a directness, that would not otherwise be possible.

A key point here is the individuality and subjectivity of the experience. Philosophers and physiologists may argue about whether the colour of a rose, that one person describes as “red”, induces exactly the same physiological response when viewed by a second observer, but scientists can measure the wavelength of the reflected light and determine the exact hue in an objective manner. Smell is different. There is no established method of measuring or defining the nature of a smell (as opposed to the intensity) with any kind of precision, despite the best efforts of chemists, with their gas chromatographs and mass spectrometers, and perfumers, with their long training and specialized vocabulary. Smell is essentially subjective.

But what may seem like a drawback can be turned into an advantage. It is the individual experience, which I, as an artist, am trying to convey, and the use of the sense of smell enables me – imperfectly, of course – to communicate my feelings and emotions about things that I cannot share physically with my “audience”,<sup>1</sup> such as events that happened long ago (if at all) or an imaginary journey to the planets of the solar system.

In the following, I will present some examples of my work in rough chronological order, in the hope that some of these ideas – despite the absence of olfactory assistance for the reader – will become somewhat clearer.

<sup>1</sup> Regrettably, there is no olfactory equivalent for the Latin *audientia*.

My first encounter with the power of smell in a work of art was as a student, in connection with my thesis exhibition at Rutgers University, New Jersey, in 1991. This was a room installation, consisting of life-sized concrete figures coated with metallic powders and treated with various chemicals, including vinegar, to create a distinctive patina. My intention was simply to enhance the sculptures visually, but the completed installation had a somewhat musty, earthy smell – not objectionably so, but clearly discernible – which intensified the experience for the visitors and quite definitely influenced the way the work was perceived and remembered. The olfactory enhancement contributed to the good reception of the show and encouraged me to experiment further.

In the years that followed, I worked with many different art forms, but returned again and again to room installations, especially what I call “multi-sense” installations, which stimulate more than one human sense, and I often focussed on works which translate technical data of various kinds, as well as other information, into experience spaces. This also led to works in which information, which is normally perceived by one particular sense, was transformed and presented in a way that allowed it to be experienced with a different sense, my intention being to expand perceptual horizons and offer new ways of viewing things.



*Out-SIGHT-In*, olfactory objects, steel, light, pumps, perfume cartridges, 40 x 40 x 10 cm, 2002. Photo: Christophe Schneider



My installation *Observatorium* for the CYNETart Festival in Dresden (2000, Deutsches Hygienemuseum), used an innovative device called a Sniffman (a name which obviously harks back to Sony's "Walkman" and "Discman"). This was a cooperation with the creative perfumer Karl-Heinz Bork and the company Ruetz Technology. The Sniffman was worn around the neck of the visitors, who were able to move freely around the exhibition space, and was capable of storing dozens of scents on a tiny chip, each of which could be released remotely by a signal from a computer. In this case, the release of the odours was programmed to coincide with specific scenes in a video. My conclusion from this experiment was that it was very hard for participants to smell, hear and see in a natural way, simultaneously, in an art installation and I observed that people were not really accustomed to this manner of perception. They often concentrated too hard in anticipation of a surge of smell when, in fact, the scents were very subtle and were supposed to work subliminally.

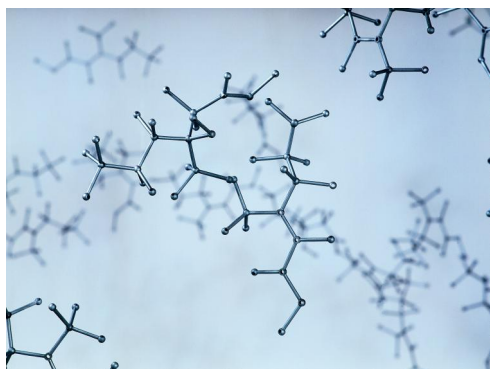
The art historian Dr. Annick Le Gu er may have been thinking of *Observatorium*, when she stated in a recent lecture at the Sorbonne University, that: "Helga Griffiths' multi-sense installations at the intersection of art, science, technology and smell are pioneering works".

In 2001, I used a six-month residency at the Cit  Internationale des Arts to create a smell map of Paris, which was presented at an exhibition (titled *Out-Sight-In*) at the Palais de Tokyo the following year. This was an early opportunity for me to investigate the relationship between smell and location which led me, in later works, to explore the use of smell in defining the identity of a place. During the same period, I worked with a blind Parisian women called Laurence Jamet, who accompanied me on some of my walks, taking photographs of things and places that she could smell, but not see.



*Out-SIGHT-In - blind walk*, 2002, documentation *Out-SIGHT* excursion in Paris. Photo: Christophe Schneider

Smell, as an expression of personal identity, was the subject of *Olfactory Analysis* (2004). A sample of my own sweat was analyzed and five of the most prominent molecules selected for this installation, which consisted of a cloud of many hundreds of suspended model molecules, which the visitor could walk through and touch. At the time, I was fascinated by the concept of sharing my own identity in the most intimate way possible, and concluded that my body odour is one of my most “authentic” attributes, which extends beyond the boundaries of my own body to interact with my social environment. Our dogs and cats are much more aware of this cloud that surrounds us at all times, than we are ourselves.



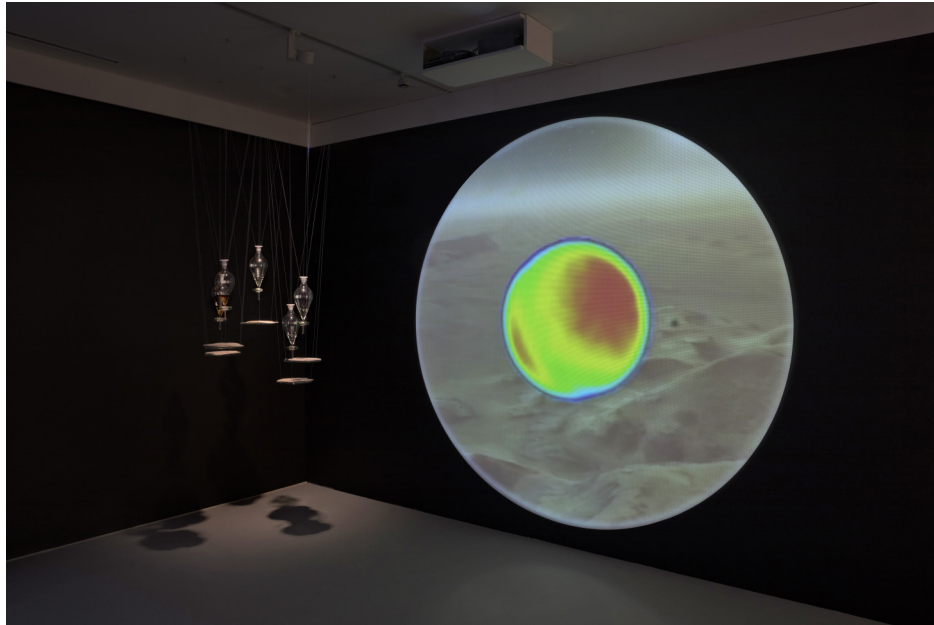
*Olfactory Analysis*, molecules and metallic paint 2004. Photo: Ute Döring



*Olfactory Analysis*, polymer molecules and silver paint 2012. Photo: Helga Griffiths

Odours can transport one instantaneously to different times and worlds. For the multi-sense-installation *Space Souvenirs* (2006, Museum of Applied Art, Frankfurt/Main), I created a futuristic souvenir – a set of olfactory samples from an imaginary expedition into space. The “essences” of different planets were created together with the perfumer Karl-Heinz Bork, my collaborator on so many projects, on the basis of interviews with experts from the Institute for Planetary Research in Berlin. The physical and chemical conditions on the planets were taken into consideration in creating these scents, but the critical aspect here was the interaction between perfumer and artist, testing different compositions to find one that represented the artist’s intention. The dry volcanic desert scent of Mars, the atmospheric, immaterial scent of lightning and extreme wind on Venus are contrasted with the arctic snow and ice smell of Uranus, with its 40-year winter. In the exhibition, the planetary scents are

deposited from glass dropping funnels onto circles of absorbent filter paper, which visitors are invited to take with them as mementos of their imaginary journey through the solar system. The synaesthetic experience of *Space Souvenirs* is complemented by video images which provide views of the planets, as they pass by the round portholes of a space ship.



*Space Souvenirs*, video: glass dropping funnels, acrylic glass discs, filter paper, scents, 2018.  
Photo: Hannes Woidich



For the installation *Dark Gravity* (2017, Kunsthalle Darmstadt), the scent *Trust* was created for a dark space with a video back-projection filling one wall, showing an animated flight over the landscape of my own brain. The space is provided with a specially-designed floor, which slopes gently towards the

middle, subconsciously guiding the feet of the visitors towards the center. The idea for the scent came from the hormone and neurotransmitter called oxytocin, which is sometimes known as *Liquid Trust* and has no perceptible odour. Once again, I worked with Karl-Heinz Bork to create a scent with similar properties to oxytocin – influencing in a very subtle, subconscious manner the social behaviour and empathy level of the percipients. Visitors to the installation (or, at least, those of them who took the trouble to read the printed hand-outs) were made aware of this attempt to take control of their feelings, and were hopefully provoked into considering which of their senses they trusted most (or least).

My most recent olfactory installation was created on the occasion of a large exhibition project organized by seventeen art museums in the Ruhr district of Germany to mark the occasion of the end of underground coal production in Germany. The solo exhibition titled *<sup>18</sup>C Essence of Coal* was shown at the Kunstmuseum Mülheim/Ruhr. The title of this project refers to the element carbon combined with the year of the exhibition, 2018.



*Dark Gravity*, specially constructed space consisting of wooden floor, carpet, rear video projection, scent diffuser 2018. Photo: Gregor Schuster

Carbon atoms – the essential components of all life on earth – are created exclusively in supernovae, far away from our solar system, and reach the earth as cosmic dust.

Coal is the result of an incredible process of transformation, which began with the long, long journey of carbon atoms from the exploding star to the earth,

continued with their reaction with oxygen to form gaseous carbon dioxide, followed by photosynthesis and incorporation into the primal forests of the carboniferous age. Then came the long phase of heat and compression deep under the earth and finally the harvesting of coal in the mine – and its combustion to create heat and produce steel, accompanied by re-formation of CO<sub>2</sub>. This transformational process (from the perspective of landscape as well as material) is – besides time and memory – a central aspect of this artwork.



*<sup>18</sup>C - Memory of an Evanescent Landscape*, video projection, still sculpture, diamond grown from coal, scent, coal, 2018. Photo: Hannes Woidich

The exhibition was preceded by a performance (documented in a video), in which an “essence” of a sample of the last coal to be mined in Germany was extracted by a process of steam distillation, in a laboratory environment. This essence was then used as the basis and inspiration for the creation of a scent, called <sup>18</sup>C, which was presented at Mülheim as an evanescent memory of a past age, which visitors could take home with them. Conceptually, coal is strongly bound up with the elements of time and life and symbolizes energy, warmth and the life force. The notion of coal as a spirit, or ephemeral memory of an altered and transformed landscape, which was once a primeval forest, is central to the concept behind the perfume.

Distillation is a process with historical connotations of magical and alchemical transformation, with the aim of extracting a few droplets – the essence – of a substance through two-fold transformation of the physical state (solid – gas – liquid). This transformation of a tangible solid to a volatile liquid symbolizes in this case the double transformation of the local landscape – through the harvesting of coal itself, but also through the following re-naturation processes and creation of new living spaces.



*L' Air du Charbon*, glass object filled under vacuum with ambient air from the underground mine inside steel cube, 2022.  
Photo: Tom Gundelwein



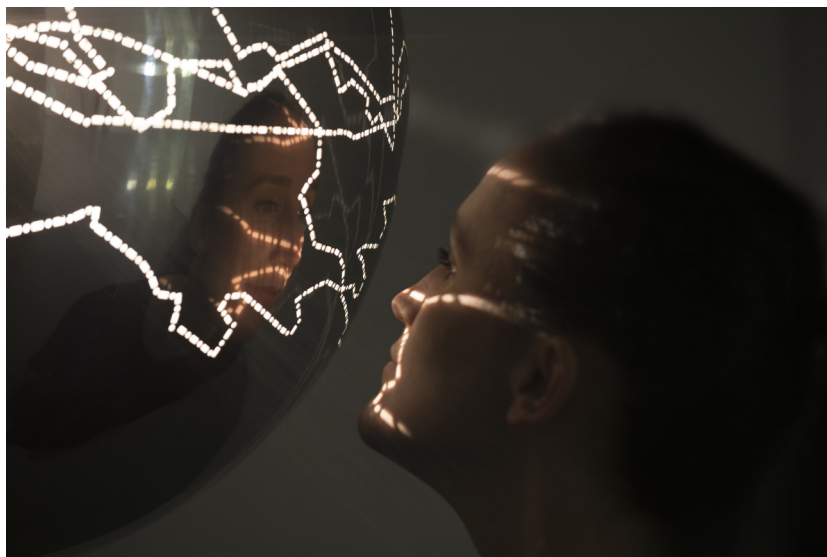
Hand blown glass flacon, coal, containing the perfume *L' Air du Charbon*, 2022. Photo: Ronny Koch

Another recent work, *Migratory Scent* (2017, Municipal Gallery Saarbrücken and 2018, Kunstmuseum Mülheim/Ruhr), also focusses on this idea of creating an olfactory essence of a place or a landscape. It was developed in cooperation with the Syrian refugee Mohammad Ghassan Arksousi who, in an interview, was asked to describe the smell of his home in Damaskus which had been destroyed by a bomb. With the help, once again, of Karl-Heinz Bork, I tried to recreate his remembered smell of home as a volatile essence which, besides being a precious souvenir for Mohammad, would also allow visitors of the exhibition to go on a mental journey into a landscape destroyed by the Syrian war.

Many people are forced to leave their homes for political, economic or climatic reasons. This also means that they lose the familiar smell of their homeland. They are not only confronted with a foreign landscape, strange food and a new language, but by an unfamiliar spectrum of odours. Migrants, even if they cannot carry anything physical with them from their homes, have still a vivid memory of smells of the landscape and the climate from which they originally came.

Researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology in Starnberg recently published their findings that birds find their way on their long migration routes by using their sense of smell, which can play an even more important role in their navigation than the sun or the Earth's magnetic field. Also, for humans, the smell of the landscape in which we grew up (the sea, the desert, the jungle or the megacity) has a strong influence on us and has been deeply engraved in our memories. Although modern technical tools (maps, satellite navigation) have partly replaced the ancient skill of orientation by using one's own senses, sensory perception is still an essential part of comprehending our environment and finding our place in it, and our sense of smell is an important element of this process.

These examples of my work illustrate many different aspects of using the sense of smell in the field of art. One of these is the application of odours to trigger memories or associations. This can be used to evoke emotion and influence behaviour at a subconscious level. Then, there is the concept of an olfactory “essence”, which can represent anything from a planet to a landscape, whether real or imaginary. A third aspect is the use of smell as a means of directly communicating my own feelings or emotions and, fourthly, there is the role of odour as an expression of identity.



*Migratory Sense*, polished stainless steel sphere, lasercut borders, halogen light, scent, 2017. Photo: Hannes Woidich



*Migratory Sense*, polished stainless steel sphere, lasercut borders, halogen light, scent, 2017. Photo: Anton Minajev

It also strikes me that odours, which – unlike visual and auditory information – have so far resisted the digitalization wave with its pixels and bits, possess an authenticity lacked by the other sensory inputs. Our brains do not “filter”, or “interpret”, or “censor” olfactory signals before we react to them, in the same way that they process visual images or sounds. There is nothing corresponding to an optical illusion in the olfactory world, as far as I know. I recently read an article claiming that when people meet for the first time, they make a subconscious judgement about each other (friend or foe?), even before they are aware of it, and I suspect that the sense of smell is involved in that process, too. In the early days of computing, the expression WYSIWYG (“What You See Is What You Get”) was coined to describe a true visual image. With the sense of smell, What You Smell Is (always) What You Get.



*Turbulent Souvenirs*, 30.000 perfume test strips, ultraviolet light, historic scent of „L'Heure Bleue“ created in 1912 by Jacques Guerlain, sound: interviews smell memories 2017. Photo: Anton Minajev

I will conclude with another quote from Dr. Annick le Gu  rer (2017):

She [Helga Griffiths] uses the power of smell to transport us in time and translate scientific knowledge and information into olfactory experience. She opens up emotional and imaginary worlds and expands our perception of time, allowing us to experience the intangible.

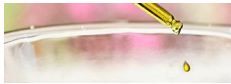
#### References:

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# RESEARCH ARTICLES

# Obraz a text, vztahy a odlišnosti

## Role jazyka ve vizuálních oborech

Kateřina Dytrtová

The paper explores the relationships and distinctions between pictorial and linguistic symbolic systems. It addresses the issue of the interplay between these media and symbolic systems. The paper explains why we cannot speak of any “pure” approaches and why it is necessary to be familiar with these mixed strategies. The central hypothesis is based on the idea of mutual “lending” of strategies and influences, leading to the emergence of a “new homogeneity,” or a new semanticity and conceptualization. The main question posed is: How does the linguistic symbolic system influence images, and how does the image symbolic system, in turn, influence language under contextual pressures? The first objective is to identify and analyze suitable examples of these pressures and “borrowings” to determine the domains of language and imagery. The analysis seeks to understand when these symbolic systems are most effective in their functions, when they exchange strategies, and what new meanings arise from this exchange. The second objective, derived from the first, is to defend the irreplaceability of the unique “message of the samples” (images) and how they symbolically create their version of the world in an irreplaceable way through words. Additionally, the paper aims to define a functional and irreplaceable space for words within the realm of visual art. | *Keywords: Language, Image, Instrumental Practice, Notations, Notation Systems, Interchangeable and Unique*

Mediálně propojené rozličné druhy umění, které jsou pro naši dobu charakteristické, a nám dostupný svět, který je vždy nějak medializovaný, vyvolávají teoretické otázky: jaká je role jazyka ve vztahu k vizuálnímu symbolickému systému, když po obou obrazech k jazyku víme, že jazyk realitu pasivně nenálepkuje, a když víme, že jazyk je podmínka pro myšlení a nástroj interakce se světem, skrze něj se mění i podoba, kterou svět pro uživatele jazyka má? Abychom mohli tyto otázky řešit, v goodmanovské dikci v textu stanovíme, co jsou notační systémy, a jak souvisí s jedinečností a zaměnitelností, kdy si zejména termín jedinečnosti spojujeme s obrazovým symbolickým systémem. Na tato témata se snaží následující text, členěný do osmi kapitol, nalézt odpovědi.

V kapitole nazvané *Svět medializovaný* je zdůvodněno, proč se nám realita nikdy, a to i v případě smyslového vnímání, nedává přímo. Ve shodě s Ladislavem Kvaszem naše smysly, chápané jako selektující

prodlouženou funkci mozku, srovnáváme s ostatními vždy nějak vymezenými médii. Další část vymezuje rozdíl mezi jazykovým abstraktním symbolickým systémem a *vzorky*, příklady barev, tvarů, tónů a gest, tedy symbolickým systémem vizuálním. Text uvádí tvorbu izraelské taneční skupiny Batsheva Dance Company, jejího choreografa Ohada Naharina, který vytvořil pohybový jazyk Gaga. Poslední část se věnuje výměnám mezi uměním a designem, mezi obrazovým a jazykovým systémem. Jako dílo, které tyto otázky vyžaduje koncepčně řešit, jsme vybrali tvorbu Jiřího Valocha.

Zkoumat roli jazyka ve vizuálních oborech je podstatné zejména pro obory, které slovem pojednávají, interpretují, kunsthistoricky, ale i teoreticky zasazují do kontextů daných oborů *obraz*. Úvaha zabývající se odlišností napsat/říct – namalovat/nakreslit/vyjádřit technickým obrazem je tedy nanejvýš potřebná. Každý kurátor, teoretik, edukátor výtvarných oborů se specializuje na tuto symbolickou výměnu obraz – slovo. Tedy je vhodné nejen intuitivně, ale vědomě pracovat s otázkami: co je nejobvyklejší doménou slov a proč, co daný symbolický systém umožňuje? Jaké jsou jeho *limity*? Kdy ho jiné obory, třeba vizuální, posouvají, čeho tím dosahují? Platí to i obráceně? Jaké jsou naopak limity vizuálních oborů? Tedy tato úvaha je důsledkem interdisciplinárního vzájemného pronikání nejen oborů světa umění, ale i běžného užití jazyka a obrazu, kdy dochází k vzájemným symbolickým tlakům, výpůjčkám a k prohazování funkcí.

Obrazy v naší době, která vyjadřuje obavy týkající se vlivu médií, televize a nedostatečné vizuální gramotnosti, jsou zkoumány v rozporném napětí.

Na jednu stranu se zdá být téměř očividné, že éra videa, kybernetické technologie a elektronického reprodukování zplodila s nevídanou energií nové formy vizuální simulace a iluzionismu. Na druhou stranu strach z obrazu, obavy, že „síla obrazů“ může nakonec své tvůrce a manipulátory zničit, je stará, jako vytváření obrazů samo. Modlářství, ikonoklastie, ikonofilie a fetišismus nejsou jevy výsostně postmoderní. Specifický pro naši dobu je právě onen paradox. (Mitchell 2016, s. 29)

Obrazy proto v rámci těchto úkolů budeme chápat v širším smyslu obrazových reprezentací a jejich vlivnosti.<sup>1</sup> Na jazyk budeme hledět poučení oběma obraty k jazyku: jazyk realitu nenálepkuje, průhledně neoznačuje, jako každý symbolický systém ji „sebou“ proměňuje.

To znamená, že vztah mezi jazykem a světem je podle Quina třeba vidět ne atomisticky, ale holisticky. Vztah jazyka jako celku ke světu jako celku není jenom hypostatickou výslednicí jednotlivých vztahů slovo-předmět; naopak, jednotlivé vztahy slovo-předmět jsou jenom hypostatickým a různými způsoby proveditelným rozdělováním holistického vztahu jazyk-svět, který spočívá v tom, že pozorovací věty jsou potvrzovány nebo vyvráceny pozorováními. (Peregrin 1999, s. 18–19)

<sup>1</sup> Příklad rozšířeného významu je například vznik označení „vizuální studia“, která zkoumají širší kontext společenské vlivnosti a funkčnosti obrazu, například způsoby, jakými se prostřednictvím vizuální kultury upevňují předsudky, normalizují společenské narativy, jak vizuální kultura odráží a utváří pojetí kolektivní identity, genderové a postkoloniální kritické perspektivy, či témata související s globální environmentální spravedlností a ekologickými tématy. Tedy ve zkratce – vlivnost obrazu v širším kontextu zkoumání společenských a humanitních věd.

Tedy v řešení výše předloženého záměru textu si jak u obrazu, tak u jazyka budeme všimnout, jak přetváří, „drží“, formuje označované/denotované, z čehož lze vyvodit, kdy je obvyklejší, nebo vhodnější, nebo subverzivnější použít pro symbolizaci jazyk a kdy obraz, což je jeden z cílů tohoto textu, a tedy i důvod výběru právě takových příkladů (autorů O. Naharin, J. Valoch).

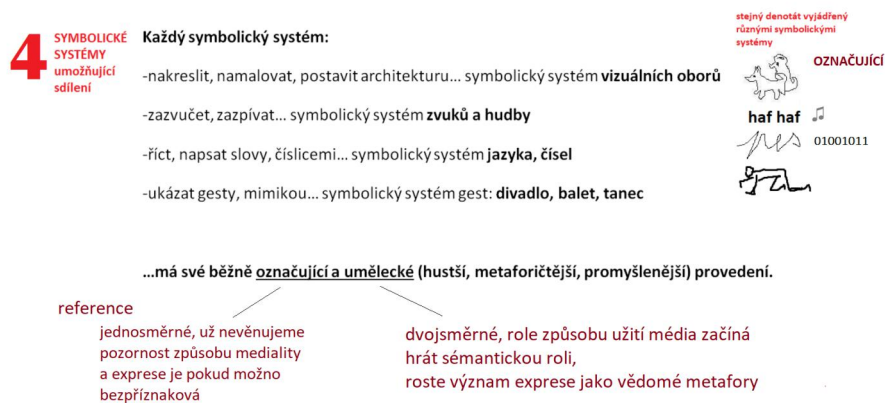
K řešení takto nastaveného problému je vhodné ověřit a prokázat hypotézu, která zní: je-li po dvou obrazech k jazyku shledán jazyk specificky vlivný, jak v kontextuálních tlacích jazykový symbolický systém ovlivňuje obrazy a jak obrazový symbolický systém zpětně ovlivňuje jazyk?

Abychom ji mohli ověřit, musíme být schopni použít metodu analýzy, která zohlední oba obraty k jazyku a bude analyzovat vybrané symbolické dílo tak, že v důsledku toho budeme schopni prokázat stupeň jeho kvality.

Hypotézu je proto nutné teoreticky zakotvit, proto budeme nejprve sumarizovat výsledky vývoje vztahů mezi symbolickými systémy a světem a následně uvedeme dva příklady průniků vztahů obraz – jazyk, na kterých použijeme metodu konceptové analýzy (Dytrtová 2019, 2023). Jde o to ověřit, jestli je její teoretický aparát dostatečně citlivý pro aktuální symbolická díla na straně jedné, a na straně druhé jejím použitím ověříme kvalitu a hermeneutickou přístupnost metaforického díla. Cílem je pokusit se odpovědět na otázku: jaký plyne nový význam z výměny strategií těchto dvou symbolických systémů – jazykového a obrazového? Abychom mohli ověřovat výše uvedenou hypotézu a naplnit cíle, v první kapitole přiblížíme podmínky, za kterých se zkoumané mediální a symbolické transfery uskutečňují.

## 1. Svět medializovaný

Obraz, myslíme tím v širším významu vizuální objekt, tvoří svou medialitou jistou cestu, průhled do reálných, ale také i do pouze myslitelných světů, tedy je právě svými prostředky zároveň vytváří. Video to činí jinak, fotografie také jinak, ač jsou oba technickými obrazy. Abychom se v celé situaci vyznali, je vhodné stanovit, kolik takových způsobů či symbolických přístupů k realitě vlastně je, a zabývat se tím, jak se od sebe jejich cesty vlastně liší. Kdy je vhodné použít jaký „dalekohled“, nazveme-li jejich transformát světa do právě takových mediálních podmínek *průhledem*.



Obr. 1: Čtyři symbolické systémy: běžné, umělecké užití symbolických systémů ve vztahu k jednosměrnosti a dvojsměrnosti (autor obrázku: Kateřina Dytrtová)

Na obr. 1 vidíme čtyři možnosti, jak symbolicky komunikovat, sdílet zážitek, viděné, či slyšené. Jestliže se mohutnost reálného či pouze myslitelného světa dá sdílet jen těmito čtyřmi způsoby: (1) z-vizuálně, (2) za-zvučet zvuky/hudbou, (3) říct/spočítat/zapsat, (4) vyjádřit gestem, pak je zřejmé, že každý takový symbolický transfer referuje či strukturuje jinak. Nebývale přesná pravidla symbolizace nabídne třetí způsob říct/spočítat/zapsat, a proto ho bude používat věda, ale nejen, protože slovy lze napsat i báseň a čísla v běžném užití upravuje grafický design a figurují ve světě umění.

Podstatné ovšem je, že se této nebývalé *komprimaci*, referenci o světě, čili symbolizaci světa do čtyř možností dá porozumět. Můžeme mluvit o čtyřech *cestách*, *dalekohledech*, či *transferech*. Do jejich možností, či *zrnitosti* (Kvasz 2015, s. 44) se nám proměnil svět *tam venku*. Tedy jednou z prvotních daností našich úvah je: svět je v těchto symbolických systémech vždy nějak z pohledu světa umění medializovaný, z pohledu instrumentálního realismu vždy nějak instrumentalizovaný, a mimo ně nám přístupný není.

K vyřčenému nabízí Kvasz úvahu (2015, s. 51):

Každá črta se odkrývá pomocí přístrojů, které mají dostatečnou rozlišovací schopnost a opět se ztrácí při měření pomocí přístrojů, které jsou o mnoho přesnější. Neexistuje přístroj, který by otevíral přístup ke všem črtám v jejich absolutní ostrosti – tj. k realitě samotné“, a uvádí příklad: „při pohledu z velké dálky je země malý bod, při lepším přiblížení začne být viditelný povrch a je možné rozpoznat tvar Afriky. Když se natolik přiblížíme, že vidíme tvary budov, tvar Afriky se ztratí. Pro každý jev podobně jako pro tvar Afriky tak existuje určitý interval měření, při kterém je ho možné registrovat.

Budeme-li tuto úvahu aplikovat do světa vizuálních oborů, můžeme si jednou představit pohled na slunce dalekohledem a podruhé vlastníma očima. Průhled „dalekohledem“ se zdá zprostředkovaný, zatímco smysl zraku považujeme za „přirozený“. V době médií Kvasz navrhuje i pohled očima chápat jako zprostředkovaný a oči chápat jako *biologický instrument*, který nechává uvidět také jen nějak, a v těchto souvislostech zavádí vhodná vyjádření, jako například: *interval měření*, různé *verze světa* (dané jiným intervalem a přesností) (Kvasz 2015, s. 56). Naš zrak by totiž mohl být bez těchto úvah interpretován jako *přirozený* a *reálný*, pak bychom museli opravit větu výše: svět je v těchto symbolických systémech vždy nějak medializovaný, vždy nějak instrumentalizovaný, a museli bychom dodat: mimo přirozeného zkoumání světa naším vlastním tělem a mozkiem (s jeho prodlouženými funkcemi smyslů). Pak by hlazení kočky rukou byla (naivní) *plná* reálná realita a video o hlazení kočky rukou *omezená* technická realita. Tím, že do zkoumání způsobů symbolizace vřadíme selektivnost/interval/zrnitost našeho vlastního vnímání a významnou výběrovost našeho vlastního myšlení, můžeme své *biologické instrumenty* srovnat s ostatními mediálními a *instrumentálními* možnostmi a získávat tak nadosobní pohled na problematiku symbolizace, a tím vždy nějakého selektování a nového strukturování.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Zde bychom mohli použít jako antitezi připomínku: „Ale predsa, nie je rozdiel medzi biologickými inštrumentami a umelými (artefaktuálnymi) inštrumentami?“ Ve smyslu utvorenosti daného symbolu a přirozenosti „biologického instrumentu“ samozřejmě rozdíl je. Ale Kvasz sleduje *princip zprostředkovanosti* přístupu k realitě, ten je zprostředkovaný instrumenty, a pak i naše tělesné orgány můžeme vyložit jako bílkovinné instrumenty (zprostředkováno čichem, sluchem, zrakem...).

Doba médií, která potřebuje zkoumat mediální odlišnosti, nahrává tomu, chápat zrak jako jeden z instrumentů, jako prodlouženou funkci selektujícího a záměrného mozku, abychom pochopili, že *transfer očima* je jen jedna z mnoha cest a tyto cesty jsou si rovny v tom, že svět nějak uchopují. Tedy termín *biologické instrumenty* nastavuje srovnatelnost „dalekohledů“ a umožňuje opustit předsudky, co je vlastně naivně prostě reálné a co transformované, abychom mohli zkoumat způsoby této transformace.

Tuto situaci zobecníme: jak každá medialita dělá to, co výše výstižně popisuje příklad s Afrikou? Když je v jednom systému vidět *A* (země jako malý bod), nemusí být vidět *B* (tvar Afriky), a v jiném rozlišení či „cestě“ se dokonce může objevit *C* (střechy africké vesnice), což dotváří komplexněji znalost o *D* (realitě samotné), protože vše byly jen jiné vrstvy přesnosti a rozsahu dané mediality či instrumentu při zkoumání *D*.

Kvasz k této představě průchodu realitou jednotlivými vrstvami příhodně připomíná, že vědci se sice snaží vytvořit dojem, že věda a její obraz skutečnosti jsou ve shodě se zdravým rozumem, ale to už od časů, kdy Newton zavedl síly, které působí na dálku, ani zdaleka není pravda.

Instrumenty se zpravidla nevyskytují izolovaně, mají tendenci se seskupovat do klastrů, které nazýváme instrumentální praxe. Každá tato praxe dokáže poznávat vždy jen určitý aspekt skutečnosti. Vědecké teorie, které se rodí jako konceptualizace nahromaděné instrumentální zkušenosti, vykazují podobnou míru fragmentárnosti jako instrumentální praxe, ze kterých vyrostly. Obraz připomíná diferencovatelnou varietu, tj. objekt zadaný pomocí souboru map. Příslušné mapy se částečně překrývají, přičemž v oblasti překryvu existují lokální zobrazení, spojené se svými inverzními zobrazeními, které umožňují přejít z jedné mapy na sousední. Je podstatné, že neexistuje jedna mapa, jeden obraz, jedna reprezentace, jedna teorie, která by dokázala zachytit celou skutečnost. Vzdálené mapy mohou být dost odlišné a nemusí mezi nimi existovat možnost přímého přechodu. Obraz skutečnosti je daný až pomocí všech map daného souboru, který se nazývá atlas. (Kvasz 2015, s. 56–57)

Tento citát vystihuje komplexní propojení symbolických systémů, kdy je nutné se vyznat v „jednotlivých mapách“ a přitom uvažovat vlivnost „atlasu“, jak se snaží aplikovat tento text srovnáním jazykového a obrazového symbolického systému. Podnětný je i úvahou o inverzi, která produktivně spolupracuje na sémantice celku. Tím pomáhá přiblížit principy tvorby, která je konceptualizací předchozí mediální zkušenosti, a vyjasňuje tak způsob analýzy díla využívaný v tomto textu.

Jak se tyto úvahy projeví v běžné tvůrčí praxi? Autor se, ať už intuitivně či vědomě, záměrně rozhoduje: mám toto téma ukázat gestem v performanci nebo natočit video či umístit zvukovou instalaci? Mám celkovou metaforu umístit do názvu napsaného slovem/slovy v napětí k provedenému dílu, nebo ji zachytím materiálově v konstrukci provedení a celek nazvu doslovně (vidím tři červené čtverečky a dílo se jmenuje *Tři červené čtverečky*)? Tedy se téma této části textu zásadně projevuje jak při volbě média, tak při hodnocení kvality díla.

Další úvodní informací je porozumění používaným pojmům. Text používá odlišení termínů reprezentace a její relace či vztah k denotovanému.<sup>3</sup> Tato představa smíchání informace s možnostmi *nosiče* je zavádějící v tom, že máme pocit, že jsou zde nějaké *čisté* informace, od kterých by snad šlo *odečíst zrnitost* daného média (exemplifikaci), a přeci jen bychom se k realitě propracovali. Problém z toho povstalý je nutné vyjasnit hned na počátku: *informaci* jen díky danému médiu vlastně máme, ono ji *vytvořilo sebou*, tedy toto *odečtení* není možné. K této danosti problému se vrátíme, až budeme konstatovat, že pro určitý typ symbolizace by tedy bylo velmi příhodné, kdyby nebyla vůbec zhmotněna, ale jak vysvítá, napětí mezi odkazováním, tedy mezi nehmotným myšlenkovým obloukem, či šipkou významu, a jejich smyslově vždy nějak viditelným, slyšitelným mediátorem, budeme muset řešit stále, je to velmi významný sémantický krok.

V tomto textu zkoumáme podmínky, za kterých se uskutečňují zkoumané mediální a symbolické transfery, což je podstatné k hlavní otázce tohoto textu: jak v kontextuálních tlacích jazykový symbolický systém ovlivňuje obrazy a jak obrazový symbolický systém zpětně ovlivňuje jazyk?

## 2 Digitálnost a abstraktnost jazyka

Tato úvaha srovnává jazykové a materiálové výtvarné/vizuální symbolizace, tedy způsoby vztahů k denotovanému. A jak z charakteru médií vyplývá, podstatné je nyní vysvětlit, co vyplývá z toho, že některé reprezentace jsou nespojité, tedy *digitální*, a jiné *analogové*.

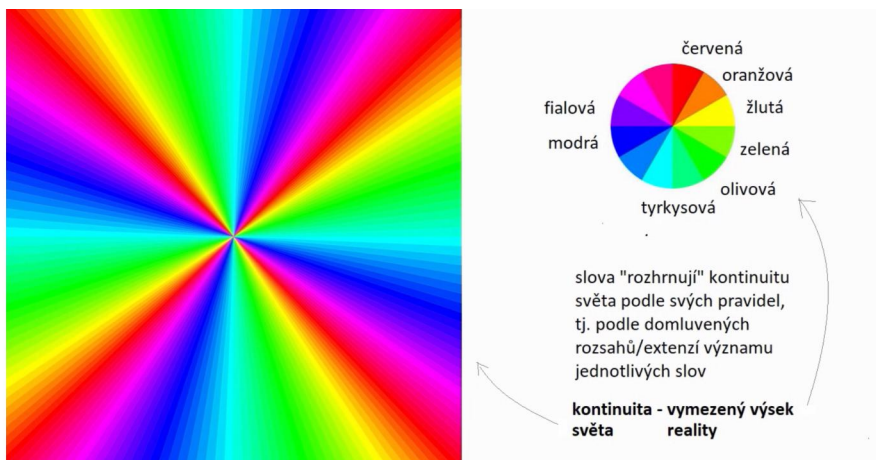
V tématu *mediálních výpůjček* nalezneme stereotypní představu, kterou je nutné vzhledem k cílům textu rozptýlit. Objektivizace/typizace představy médiem (namalovaný obraz barvami v ploše, technický obraz fotografie, performerova gesta atd.) nebývá za objektivizaci považována, zatímco mluvení nad díly ano. Proto mluvení je odmítáno jako likvidace prožitku z *materiálu*. Materiálové provedení, tedy zhmotnělé do možností média, jako likvidace nebo nepřesnost k předchozím prožitkům nikoliv. Bývá označováno jako *vyjádření se v médiu*, ač médium také objektivizuje/typizuje, protože strukturuje prvotní subjektivní prožitky *svou zrnitostí*, svými funkcemi. Odhalili jsme tak důležitý jev spojený s jazykovým vyjádřením. Tím, že se jedná o abstraktní kód, který není podobný tomu, kam odkazuje, je chápán jako více objektivizující.

V případě jazyka se jedná o předdohodnutý *razítkový/digitální* systém slov: slovo *žlutá* někde končí a začíná slovo *oranžová* (oddělené, *digitální* pole významu), ale přechod mezi těmito barvami v duze má nerozdělené (*analogové*) kontinuum pozorovatelných vlastností (Obr. 2).

Některé z výše zmíněných čtyř symbolických systému reprezentují svůj obsah tak, že z dynamické, spojité, proměnlivé a nestálé kontinuity světa *vyseknou* a *zastaví* vymezený dohodnutý jev, aby ho mohly uvažovat a komunikovat. Nejnázorněji tento proces *digitalizace* můžeme sledovat právě u jazykového označení barev.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Denotované či denotát je to, kam je odkazováno, jestliže odmyslíme způsob (exemplifikaci).

<sup>4</sup> *Digitalizace* je zde uvedena metaforicky ve významu výše uvedeném, totiž jako způsob oddělující diskrétní jednotky, což je opak k analogovému, tedy kontinuálnímu.



Obr. 2: Digitální a analogové, jazyk a kontinuita světa (autor obrázku: Kateřina Dytrtová)

O jazyce je nutno sdělit, že to je abstraktní arbitrární systém odtržený od vůní a haptických zážitků z kontinuity světa a není sám barvou, haptickým povrchem či tvarem. Ovšem nabízí smyslově uchopitelné akustické hodnoty rytmu a zvukomalby, tedy slova exemplifikují, předvádějí rytmus a zvuky (tříštvrtě, dvojdobý: klapat, jednodobý: vpich),<sup>5</sup> ale nejsou ikonická, tedy nejsou vizuálně podobná tomu, o čem se mluví, právě proto, že si zvolila akustickou „izolaci“ od viditelného světa, kde věci „nějak vypadají“.

Také je nutné zdůraznit, že jazyk navíc významně „šetří síly“ při denotování. Než by nově nazval všechny barvy, názvy si „půjčuje“, či lépe odvozuje od názvů již zbarvených předmětů (barvy olivová, tyrkysová). Síly při označování jazyk šetří z velmi dobrých důvodů, je to výsostný prostředek pro myšlení, tedy se nesmí zahrát množstvím oddělených jednotlivostí, protože potřebuje prostředky k rozehrání dynamického „pneumatického“ vztahu mezi vztahy konvergentními, tedy dostředivými, které naleznou jednotu v rozmanitosti, a divergentními, odstředivými, které dosáhnou rozmanitosti v jednotě.

Tím, že je jazyk arbitrární, neikonický a přitom je velmi tvárný, dobře označuje vymyšlené vztahy, souvislosti a abstrakce, které nemají žádnou *podobu*, a zdá se tak, že on jim sebou ani žádnou nevnucuje. Dokonce by se mohlo zdát, že jazyk jako by pouze znějšňoval hotové myšlení, ale přijetím takové myšlenky by se zatemňoval fakt, že „myšlení se tvoří jazykem, svět získává jazykem tvar. Významy neexistují předem, ale konstituují se až skrze konstituci jazykového systému“ (Peregrin 1999, s. 44).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Tato slova nazýváme motivovaná a přechodová mezi arbitrárními slovy a vzorky: současně předvádějí to, k čemu odkazují.

<sup>6</sup> Kniha Noama Chomského *Syntaktické struktury* (1957) přinesla naprostý převrat v lingvistické metodologii, tedy ve způsobu, jakým přistupujeme ke zkoumání jazyka. Do lingvistiky razantně vstoupila matematika. Chomsky navrhl chápat jazyk jako generativní a transformační systém, jako soustavu pravidel, jejich opakovaným použitím se dostaneme od nějakého počátečního bodu právě k těm posloupnostem, které tvoří gramaticky správné věty jazyka. Jazyk je spíše něco jako instinkt, jazyk není náš vynález, jakým je třeba hrncířský kruh nebo teorie relativity. „Základ gramatiky jazyka je člověku vrozen v podobě mechanismu s určitým počtem ‚volných parametrů‘ – a učení se mateřskému jazyku tak de facto znamená jen zafixování těchto parametrů pro daný konkrétní jazyk. Například to, že



Tedy spíše než že by byl jazyk prostředkem myšlení, je výronem myšlení a zpětně myšlení tvaruje svými vazbami, či extenzí jednotlivých výseků. Navíc svou akustickou a písemnou podobou aspiruje na výše zmíněnou snahu, aby označující/referující byl minimálně hmotný, právě pro tyto ambice, být způsobem pro myšlení. Přesto je jazyk také rezervoár expresí. Umí být výrazně apelativní a jindy téměř „bezpříznakový“ s minimální expresí, chce-li: texty inzerátů, návody apod. Toto záměrné tvarování potvrzuje Barthesovu myšlenku, totiž že „nulový rukopis neexistuje“, i realistický román musí zvolit takové prostředky, aby se realistický jevil (Barthes 1997).

Jestliže *dílo-věc*, čili reprezentace obsahu má mít smyslově vnímatelnou podobu, aby zpřítomnilo nepřítomné, aby fixovalo informaci napříč časem, aby ale třeba i umožnilo kolektivní provádění díla (text zpívaného oratoria), musí nějakou „hmotnou“ medialitu nakonec zvolit. Tedy ač se jazyk a jeho zápis/písmo umí chovat od téměř „průhledných“ k „vyzývavým“ a obor grafický design se na tuto „službu písmu“ za jistých záměrných podmínek specializuje, smyslově uchopitelnou podobu nemůže nemít a ta je vlivná: medialita mění. Tedy můžeme stanovit, že každé médium bude vlivné svými strukturními možnostmi, svou *zrnitostí* v souběhu se svou akustickou/vizuální podobou, což se tedy týká i tak abstraktního symbolického systému, jako je jazyk.<sup>7</sup> Jako hlavní vlastnost jsme stanovili jeho arbitrárnost a *digitálnost*, ve smyslu diskrétních oddělených, tedy nekontinuálních jednotek.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Kontinuita vzorků

Vrátíme-li se ke čtyřem symbolickým systémům na obrázku 1 v předchozí části, tři z nich: obraz, hudba/zvuky a gesta se od jazyka a čísel zásadně odlišují. Jsou to kontinuální *vzorky* (Goodman 2007) reálného světa, protože to, k čemu odkazují, také přímo předvádějí, čili to exemplifikují. Mohou předvádět barvu, tvar, strukturu, zatímco slova držená řečí, tedy akustickým projevem a jeho abstraktním zápisem, si nejsou (z logiky akustiky) s tím, co denotují,<sup>9</sup> zpravidla podobná. Vzorky předvádějí příklad, referují, ale nejsou už v původním kontextu světa, nesou novou koncepci danou vazbami v díle, tedy okolním kotextem díla. Vstoupily do nové role, cosi znamenají, a proto to jsou symboly.

má přísudek předcházet nebo následovat předmět, vrozeno výbavu není, to musí dítě empiricky zjistit. Ale jakmile to zjistí, je mu tím, podle Chomského, vnucena i celá řada dalších charakteristik příslušného jazyka. (Např. je-li přísudek předcházen, např. v japonštině, znamená to, že jsou nutné i předložky předcházeny jim příslušnými frázemi.) Tak jsou všechny jazyky z hlediska gramatiky srovnatelně bohaté. Neexistuje tedy nic takového jako primitivní jazyky“ (Peregrin 2003, s. 51–54).

<sup>7</sup> Posuny akustické podoby jazyka můžeme vidět v provedení Jaromíra Typlta a posuny vizuální podoby jazyka v tvorbě Jiřího Koláře. Typltovy zvukové proudy generované z možností řeči a dozvuku mikrofonu můžeme sledovat na odkaze Typlt (2003).

<sup>8</sup> Diskrétní signál je signál (fyzikální veličina závislá na čase), jehož okamžitá hodnota se na rozdíl od analogového signálu nemění spojitě s časem.

<sup>9</sup> *Logiku akustiky* uvádíme jako důsledek srovnání s viditelným světem. Ve světě zvuků si některá slova svou „vzorkovitost pamatují“. Motivovaná slova jsou příklady slov, která jsou akusticky podobná tomu, o čem mluví, čili jsou to akustické vzorky, ač jsou to slova: klapot, houpání, šumění, výkřik...

Pojďme si všimnout jejich nové koncepčnosti a zároveň vazby k realitě: barvy už ve světě jsou, ale nyní hrají novou kontextuální<sup>10</sup> roli v daném díle, jsou „nějak zamýšleny“ pod danou záměrností díla, což se může odehrávat i intuitivně. Čára a z ní vznikající kresba vyjadřují konturu nebo prostorové jevy, ale ve světě „nejsou“, protože musí být prostorově „vymyšleny“ při komprimátu D3 na D2, a proto to jsou význačné prostředky abstrakce. O koncepci obrazového prostoru asi není nutné přesvědčovat, protože je z logiky věci ve dvou dimenzích obrazového plánu vždy vytvořen souběhem předchozích vzorků barev a tvarů. Zvuky už ve světě jsou, šumí vítr, tóny například vyluzuje lidský hlas, ale nástroje k jejich dalšímu barevnému a výškovému rozrůznění, stejně jako technické zvuky přístrojů, byly vymyšleny.<sup>11</sup> Gesto: pohybující se živočichové ve světě jsou, ale gesto je z významně pohyb, který i před tvorbou ve světě existuje. Bude opět nutné pochopit jeho roli v daném díle. Stejně tak bychom se mohli podívat na již ve světě existující nepřeborné materiály, opět nás jejich způsob užití v díle v nějaké roli (tuk nebo plst v Beuysových instalacích) bude mít k tvorbě závěrů o jejich funkci v koncepci díla.

V čem je toto zavedení analogových, tedy kontinuálních vzorků světa a v mezních příkladech ready made zajímavé? Umožňuje rozlišit, kdy je červeně pouze červená, třeba jako barva na vlčím máku, a kdy je červená v nějaké funkci ke koncepci díla, tedy jako *metafora*, například na Newmanových velkoplošných malbách jemným štětcem. Kdy je vyhozené kolo na skládce jen vyhozené kolo, a kdy se stává součástí Duchampova díla jako *factum brutum*. Tedy nechá myslet roli, do které daný vzorek vstupuje.

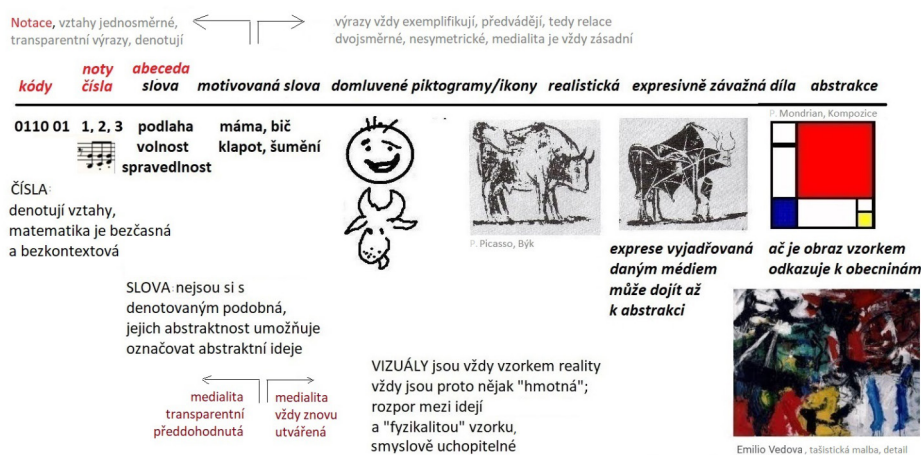
A také umožňuje zohlednit, jak dílo je, protože tato zvolená nebo utvořená medialita je vlivná i u dohodnutých, tedy arbitrárních označujících – není jedno, jak jsou zapsaná slova danou abecedou, arabské číslice, nebo noty evropského tonálního systému. Jsou důsledkem dlouho hledaného a vyladovaného systému, který drží vysoký grafický standard. Ale zastírá ho praxe užívání, kdy se daný systém naučíme v rané školní docházce a pak ho v *ještě čitelné* podobě užíváme jako čistě denotující, odkud ho svět umění s velkou oblibou těží (v poslední části tvorba Jiřího Valocha). Uživatelská praxe například pak *přeskakuje* a tím vylučuje disciplíny, jako je grafický design. Laikovi se zdá, že medialita a její způsoby se na *obsahu* informace projevují jen jako forma, která není důležitá.

<sup>10</sup> Pojem kotext (U. Eco) používáme pro nejbližší okolí sledovaného jevu v rámci daného díla a slovo kontext si tak uvolňujeme pro širší, například sociokulturní vazbu či vlivnost.

<sup>11</sup> Aristoteles (in *Metafysika*, přeložil Antonín Kříž, Praha 1946, s. 125–126) k tomuto výstižně říká: „Neboť všechno, co jest od přírody, má zřejmě počátek pohybu a klidu v sobě at z hlediska místa nebo kvantitativního růstu a úbytku nebo kvalitativní přeměny, kdežto lehátko, roucho a jiné takové věci jako takové a jako výtvořiny umění a řemesel nemají vrozené směrnosti ke změně...“ (podle Charvát 2017, s. 177–178). „To ve své podstatě znamená, že přirozené jsoucno je od přírody, a tudíž povaha změny [...] vyplývá z jeho *pozice* ve struktuře přírodního světa [...] Jsoucno, které není *od přírody*, vzniká z něčeho externího – v našem případě z technologie. Příčinou je člověk, který dané umělé jsoucno vyrábí za určitým cílem“ (podle Charvát 2017, s. 178).

#### 4. Zápisy a jejich průhlednost

Odchytky od grafického ideálu abecedy, číslic a not<sup>12</sup> existují, ale všechny znesnadňují jeho rychlé a plynulé užívání. U ručně psaného slova se běžně potýkáme s odchylkami danými specifickým rukopisem pisatele a zdálo by se, že notám a číslicím tyto spodoby nehrozí. Ale u obou těchto systémů mají při zápise zásadní roli mezery a kompozice, což zakusil každý, kdo například hrál podle laikem přepsaných not, který negrupoval a mezerami neregistroval pauzy, harmonické vazby, nebo vazbu melodie – slovo u zpívaných partů.



Obr. 3: Od vzorku, ikónu, k abstrakci: vlevo abstrakce, v některých červeně označených případech dokonce notace, směrem doprava přechodové případy (motivovaná slova), vpravo vzorky, ikóny jak geometrického (Mondrian), tak expresivního typu (Vedova), (autor obrázku: Kateřina Dyrtrtová)

Již výše bylo řečeno, že úvahy, jak dílo-věc je, umožňují domyslet případy, kdy by bylo nejlepší, aby se tato reprezentace stala jakousi nehmotnou šipkou, která by pouze ukázala na vyčleněné denotované, ale sama by nebyla hmotná. Tyto mezní případy je nutné připojit k předcházejícím úvahám, protože vysvětlují odlišné role a působnosti symbolizování vzorky od označování dohodnutými abstraktními systémy (napětí obraz/jazyk), které si nejsou s tím, kam odkazují, podobné (Obr. 3). Tyto nehmotné ukazatele by byly na konci řady nejvíce vlevo, byly by domyšlením cesty abstrakce a dematerializace reprezentujícího podobně, jako byly poslední obrazy (Malevičova *Bílá na bílé*) domyšlením cesty malby. Přesto ani kódy kombinací nul a jedniček, jako nejvíce denotovanému nepodobné a nejvýznamněji *šetřící síly* (systém má jen dva znaky: ano, ne), nejsou nehmotné.

Problém je v tom, že chceme danou referenci, tedy vztah mezi reprezentantem či symbolem a denotátem zapsat, zpřítomnit, fixovat, a tím uchovat. Nehmotný zápis je protimluv, který ale z druhé strany vysvětluje funkci médií, které vždy vyformují, a tím zprostředkují denotované sebou. Přesto připomeňme mezní

<sup>12</sup> Tento grafický zápis níže v textu nazveme notačním a stanovíme jeho podmínky, a to zejména proto, abychom porozuměli vědomým revizím či posunům a dalším metaforickým užitím těchto systémů, ke kterým docházelo snažením například Johna Cage, již zmíněného Jiřího Koláře, Olgy Karlíkové, Jána Mančušky apod.

případy: ani nepojmenuj, a v důsledku toho rozhodně nezobrazuj! Obrazoborecká hnutí se zabývají mezním případem *denotovaného*, který není rozhodně zobrazitelný, ale dokonce na něj nedosáhnou ani abstraktní označující jako slovo, číslo a tón. Není tedy ani pojmenovatelný, protože pojmenování je druh nadhledu, ovládnutí a tyto představy k *ovládnutí* nejsou.

Tyto mezní příklady nejsou jen učebnicové opakování známých jevů *nezobrazitelnosti Boha*, v praxi symbolizace se totiž jejich *tajemství nepojmenovatelného* v denotační rovině a uvažovaná (nerealizovatelná) nehmotnost zápisu v exemplifikační rovině setrvale projevují. Dokonce se staly způsobem užití, a tím i kvality dané záměrnosti: nezobrazuj, nepojmenuj, projevem pochopení problému.

Způsob použití vzorku vyjadřuje koncepti.

### VZOREK

přímé předvedení  
"kusu reality"

JEDINEČNÉ (intenzionální) EXEMPLIFIKACE JAK?  
DENOTACE CO?  
EXPRESSE *metaforický obsah*

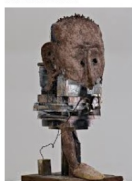
abstraktní systémy, nejsou si s tím, o čem informují, podobné

### TRANSPARENTNÍ

domluvená značka  
zápis se řídí pravidly

✗ (extenzionální) ZAMĚNITELNÉ

Huma Bhabha



vzorek tvarů, struktur

Asger Jorn



vzorek barev, tvarů, plasticity



vzorek gesta



vzorek gesta

mrkám -  
jsem  
nemocná



mrkám -  
dělám ti  
výzvu

1, 2

čistě označující, denotující

← PŘÍMO PŘEDVÁDÍ

JEN ODKAZUJE →

Obr. 4: Vzorky, předvádějící a denotující vpravo, vlevo abstraktní systémy. Abstraktní systémy matou tím, že vzbuzují dojem nezávislosti na způsobu zápisu, což text vyvrací. Čistá denotace neexistuje, rámeček JEN DENOTUJE je věcí dohody (autor obrázku: Kateřina Dytrtová)

Na obrázku 4 tento rozpor zachycuje užívané slovo *čistě* (jinde *běžně*) označující. Ale ona nejsou žádná *čistě* označující, jak bylo uvedeno. Ovšem v praxi se k jejich naučitelnému nebo zvykovému zápisu již nepřihlíží, *zprůhledněl, zběžněl*, což často musí napravovat oblast grafického designu, která na takovou praxi nemůže rezignovat. Stejně jako slova *domluvená značka* a *zápis se řídí pravidly* skrývají dost podstatné sémanticko-designérské výkony proměny například neum v evropskou notaci na právě pěti (už ne čtyřech) linkách a geniální čin Féničanů přestat zapisovat, na co myslím (piktogram), ale zaznamenat zvuk (fonogram), který používám, když *to* vyslovuji, a vytvořit mu funkční vazby odlišitelnosti od ostatních znaků při souběhu s rychlostí. Tyto termíny *průhlednost* a *neprůhlednost* (níže nazvané *symetričnost* a *nesymetričnost*) jsou vždy závislé na situačních okolnostech, na tom, co je účelné brát v úvahu a co naopak potřebujeme zanedbávat. Vždy, když zanedbáváme způsob zprostředkování a trváme jenom na potencialitě významové shody, musí být relace

transparentní, průhledná, či symetrická, protože by neexistovala žádná možnost, jak zavést opakovanou shodu.<sup>13</sup>

Tato hra na *průhlednost* se hraje i v naplňování rolí jednotlivých částí díla v jeho celku. Existuje hudební záměr napsat takovou hudbu, které si nikdo nemá příliš všimnout a je dobře, že ji *přehlídí*, zatímco ona na něj významně posluchačsky expresivně působí. Jedná se o scénickou hudbu, která je svou snahou *být zdánlivě nepřítomná* pověstná a vzhledem k filmu velmi funkční. Příklad uvádíme, protože se nejedná o žádné okrajové případy tvorby, ale o zásadní rozdělení rolí prostředků díla na hlavní, vedlejší a zdánlivě *nepřítomné*, ovšem skrytě velmi účinné. Jsou to tedy záměrnost a okolní situační kontext, které způsobují odhlížení od mediality, jako by byla transparentní.

### 5. Zaměnitelné a jedinečné

Výše zkoumané symbolizace jsme rozdělili na ty, které jsou kontinuálními vzorky barev, tvarů a struktur reálného světa, a odlišili je od abstraktních, které používají zápisy z oddělených a vzájemně odlišitelných jednotek (*B* nesmí splynout s *P*, číslo 2 nesmí splynout s číslem 3, osminová nota nesmí splynout se čtvrtovou). Způsob užití vzorků rovnou vyjadřuje koncepci díla a toto uspořádání je pak jedinečné, zatímco jazyk, matematika a hudba si vytvořily zápisy abecedou, čísly a notami, které Nelson Goodman navrhuje nazvat notačními.<sup>14</sup>

Jakmile se tyto zápisy naučíme, jsme při jejich zapisování zaměnitelní, protože nerozhoduje náš jedinečný způsob uspořádání, ale nutnost dodržovat pravidla jejich zápisu a operací s ještě uznatelnými odchylkami. V této perspektivě je zaměnitelné *pes*, **pes** a PES. Jak Goodman (2007) podotýká, z takto zapsaných děl z logiky věci nelze vytvořit falza. My můžeme dodat, že o tom, co je ještě zaměnitelné (*pes*, **pes** a PES, co se týče zápisu; statečný, udatný, chrabří, co se týče významu), rozhoduje kontext záměrnosti a daný obor.

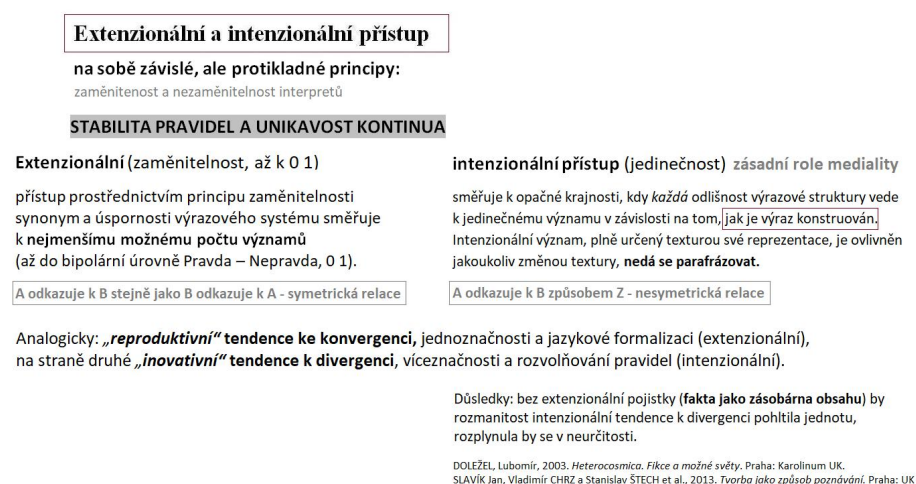
Synonyma svou funkcí hlásají zaměnitelnost, ale chovají se tak jen za určitých kontextuálních podmínek textu. Zatímco na jedinečné malbě se vyjasňuje, že jakmile pracujeme se vzorkem, tak samotné jeho užití již je projevem

<sup>13</sup> Problém je v tom, že výtvarné umění svět skutečně předvádí – exemplifikuje – takže nás ve svých dílech znovu a znovu staví před interpretace, které bychom dělali vzhledem k přirozenému světu (nevybaveni nástrojem). To znamená, že musíme nejprve objevit, *čeho je vzorek vzorkem*, tj. najít odpovídající kontext a v něm odhalit příslušné spoje: sémanticko-logickou strukturu. To u matematiky není: její nástroje nevyžadují náročnou interpretaci *materiality/hmoty*, ale už rovnou nás provádějí *světem idejí*, pokud je ovšem dokážeme interpretovat v jejich kontextu. Když matematika užívá zápis, jedná se o konvenčně zcela stabilizované, tedy transparentní znaky. Proto rovnou denotujeme, kombinatorika (hledání souvislostí) se tu nabízí mnohem dříve díky transparentnosti zápisu. Můžeme tedy mluvit o *utvořenosti* znaku – instrumentu světa vědy a *utvářenosti* vzorku naší aktivitou v interpretaci ve světě umění.

<sup>14</sup> Goodman (2007, s. 107–127) funkci notace stanovuje tak, že musí identifikovat dílo napříč provedeními, tedy oddělit ta provedení, která jsou realizacemi daného díla, od těch, která jimi nejsou. Navíc musí být zápis sám jednoznačně určen provedením v notačním systému. Tento zdvojený požadavek je velmi silný. A uvádí pět podmínek notačního systému, dvě syntaktické (oddělenost a rozlišitelnost) a tři sémantické (jednoznačnost, oddělenost a rozlišitelnost). Tedy notačním systémem vyžadované vlastnosti jsou: jednoznačnost, syntaktická a sémantická oddělenost a rozlišitelnost. Můžeme proto teoreticky rozhodnout, že každá značka přísluší nanejvýš k jednomu určitému znaku a že se objekt shoduje se zápisem nanejvýš jednoho určitého znaku. Tyto syntaktické podmínky oddělenosti a konečné odlišitelnosti splňují dobře známé abecední, číselné, binární, telegrafické a základní hudební notace. Jazyk například nesplňuje podmínku sémantické konečné rozlišitelnosti.

koncepte, kdy intenzionální význam je plně určen texturou své reprezentace a nedá se proto parafrázovat. Každé další provedení je buď plagiát, nebo epigonské dílo v záporné části osy, či postmoderní citační posun v kladném a zdůvodňovaném užití. Sémantická závažnost se proto u vzorků na rozdíl od notačních zápisů, které se nedostižným designem a dlouhým vývojem dostaly k pravidlům, odehrává i ve způsobu užití dané mediality.

Na obr. 5 můžeme domyslet spolu s citovanou literaturou (Doležel 2003; Slavík, Chrz a Štech 2013) důležitost pneumatického vztahu přelévané energie obou principů jedinečnosti a zaměnitelnosti, které se doplňují podle dané záměrnosti. Jsou to podstatné protilehlé způsoby organizace díla, které se nutně potřebují vyvažovat. Kdybychom operovali jen v intenzionálním přístupu a vše by bylo jedinečné, nemohli bychom uvažovat syntézy spojů a významů. „Bez extenzionální pojistky by rozmanitost intenzionální tendence k divergenci pohltila jednotu“. Naopak naprosté oddělení ano/ne, pravda/nepravda a ukování nerozborných pravidel by nemohly vyjadřovat kvas a proměny, nové typy jemnosti ve zkoumání světa. Kdy opustit být dobrá, ale dnes již zastaralá pravidla, je přeci běžná úvaha, která naše životy opakovaně provází, stejně jako nerozplynout se v nekonečnu rozmanitostí, které nutně potřebujeme *nějak* v úvaze uchopit.



Obr. 5: Extenzionální a intenzionální přístup (autor obrázku: Kateřina Dytrtová podle zdrojů Doležel 2003, Slavík, Chrz a Štech 2013)

Vrátíme-li se k designově detailně vyladěným notačním jednoznačným zápisům s jasnými pravidly, jejich velkou výhodou, kterou vzorky nemají, jsou fixace díla napříč časem – autor již zemřel, ale jeho román či oratorium opět vyšlo tiskem.<sup>15</sup> Umožňují také opakovaná provedení, Chopina lze interpretovat

<sup>15</sup> Opět by bylo možné podotknout kvalitu jednotlivých edicí, které se, přestože se jedná o notace, liší. Specializují se na dané autory, což se v edičním servisu (například Bachových děl) samozřejmě projeví.

rozmanitými způsoby, o tvůrčím uchopení, o platnosti a aktuální či dobové poučenosti jednotlivých interpretací se vede odborný diskurs.<sup>16</sup> Notace umožňují i kolektivní provádění díla – společný zpěv Gregoriánského chorálu „jako jeden muž v jednotě kroku, dechu a tepu“. Ovšem to, co zapsal Gustav Mahler notami, či Jan Skácel abecedou, stejně jako to, jak budeme tyto zápisy interpretovat, je již opět jedinečné. Notace jsou tedy velmi dlouho hledané a vyladované designové komprimáty s pravidly, do kterých lze *zabalit* a opět *vybalit* jedinečnost navzdory času a dokonce kolektivním sdílením (sborová praxe). Ovšem rozhodně nejsou *nevinné*.<sup>17</sup>

Proto Goodman navrhuje řešit tyto odlišnosti symbolických systémů pojmy alografická a autografická umění, (což můžeme spojit s pojmy digitální a analogové).

Nazvějme umělecké dílo autografickým tehdy a jen tehdy, je-li rozlišení mezi originálem a padělkem podstatné; respektive tehdy a jen tehdy, pokud ani jeho nejpreciznější kopii nelze považovat za legitimní dílo. Malba je tudíž autografická a hudba neautografická, čili alografická. Konečným produktem hudby je až její realizace. (Goodman 2007, s. 95–98).

V návaznosti na tyto úvahy můžeme připomenout jeden z předsudků tradovaných ve vizuálních oborech v důsledku toho, že si své notace (nejkřiklavěji malba, kresba) nevyvinuly. Totiž že pro tato umění jsou typické „svobodné volby jedinečnosti“ a dodržovaná pravidla charakterizují pouze naučitelné systémy, které svět výtvarných oborů neužívá. Tomu nahrává i umělecká praxe, která známé systémy buď narušuje, posouvá, nebo předskakuje, když se chce vracet pro inspiraci například do před-řečových či před-artikulačních stádií, tedy do analogových nejasných šerých počátků komunikace a vědomí.<sup>18</sup>

Jako oponující příklad této příliš zjednodušující úvaze, který ukáže, že tvorba plynule střídá polaritu jedinečného a zaměnitelného/synonymického jako dva protichůdné a tedy působivý kontrast vyvolávající prostředky (ve smyslu Obr. 5), jsme vybrali velmi gesticky a expresivně působivé provedení choreografie Ohada Naharina, významného současného izraelského choreografa, jehož dílo bychom rádi uvedli ve spojitosti s jím vyvinutým jazykem *Gaga*.

<sup>16</sup> Vynecháváme posouzení čísel a jejich instrumentální „mocnosti“, jen odkážeme do literatury, která se tím poučeně zabývá (Kvasz, 2015, 2020a, 2020b) a odtajňuje na příkladu matematiky, jak se chovají média – instrumenty. Autor v publikaci řeší například to, že naše zkušenost se světem není přímá, odkrytá v bezprostředním nazírání či intuici, ale je instrumentálně zprostředkovaná nástroji symbolické a ikonické reprezentace. Čísla jsou právě tyto symboly. Cílem knihy je popsat zprostředkování přístupu ke skutečnosti. Několikrát jsme tyto myšlenky výše již použili. Za velmi inspirativní nejen pro svět čísel lze k mediálnímu tématu našeho textu považovat například: „Každá teorie je prozatímní druh přesnosti odpovídající instrumentům doby.“ Jejich proměnou, tedy instrumentů i médií, získáme přístup k jinému typu vazeb a přesnosti „o realitě“.

<sup>17</sup> Níže nás čekají příklady *vzbouření* hudebního a vizuálního oboru proti těmto pravidlům, protože je pravda, že například oddělenost púltónů a tonální systém se samozřejmě do *jedinečnosti* tvorby propisují, jako každý symbolický transfer. Notací *komprimát* není průhledný a nevlivný. *Zabalení jedinečného* právě do něj má své důsledky. Jako ona *vzbouření* tedy chápeme Hábův čtvrttónový systém, také dodekafonii ku tonalitě, či analogový zvuk elektronické hudby od padesátých let ku oddělenosti/jednoznačnosti tónů zapsaných notami.

<sup>18</sup> Jak činí například Vito Acconti ve své *fyzické* sebezraňující řeči, když v sedmdesátých letech demonstruje v oblasti body artu hraniční tělesné zážitky.

Abychom následující příklady teoreticky ukotvili, uvedeme jednak Goodmanovy znaky charakterizující estetično, ale také způsob, jak chápe metaforu, protože tyto termíny text průběžně používá.

N. Goodman (2007, s. 192–194) rozeznává pět symptomů charakterizující estetično: 1. syntaktickou densitu (hustotu, neboli sevřenost ve skladbě výrazové formy); 2. sémantickou densitu (hustotu neboli sevřenost ve vyjádření významů); 3. relativní plnost, kde mnoho aspektů symbolu je významných, pak i nepatrná změna kompozičního uspořádání nebo průběhu linie vede k nápadné proměně kvality a působení díla; 4. exemplifikaci, kde symbol, ať už denotuje nebo ne, symbolizuje tím, že slouží jako vzorek vlastností, které má doslova nebo metaforicky; 5. vícenásobnou a komplexní referenci, kde symbol plní současně několik integrovaných a vzájemně interagujících funkcí.

Metafora podle Goodmana<sup>19</sup> záměrně srovnává soustavy, které k sobě nepatří, ale v jejich vnitřním smyslu souvislost lze najít. Metafora je účinná, když je nová a aktuální, a proto je nutné uvádět kontext děl, jak text činí, ve kterých se část významu odehrává, a my v důsledku toho můžeme novost a aktuálnost posoudit. Při interpretaci si význam metafory nevymýšlíme, jak se nám aktuálně hodí nebo chce, její význam je vygenerován doslovnými vlastnostmi díla (exemplifikace, vzorek) a právě jejich uchopením teprve vznikají srovnávané roviny, či soustavy, jak předvedou následující příklady.

V metafoře jde o to, naučit stará slova novým kouskům – užít staré označení novým způsobem. Metafora je flirtem mezi predikátem s minulostí a objektem, jenž se mu s protesty poddává. Metafora vyžaduje přitažlivost stejně jako odpor – tedy přitažlivost, která odpor překoná. Metafora není lež. Nepravdivost spočívá v chybném přiřazení označení, zatímco metaforická pravdivost spočívá v jeho přeřazení. V metafoře je pojem s extenzí (rozsahem) ustavenou zvykem užít jinde pod vlivem tohoto zvyku. Toto užití je zároveň přijímáno a zároveň odmítáno. Postupem užívání může minulost blednout, metafora vyhasíná a zbude dvojice doslovných užití. (Goodman 2007, s. 54–77)

## 6. Kontinuální pohyb a jazyk Gaga

Už jsme se zmínili o *Denotovaných*, které není radno pojmenovat. Také jsme vyzdvihli tvárnost, abstraktnost a *nehmotnost* jazyka, který umí odkazovat k jevům, které nemají vizuální předlohu, a vůbec netušíme, jak by mohly vypadat, a je velmi dobře, že je tak *podobou* vlivem označování ani nezatěžujeme.<sup>20</sup> Nyní je tedy vhodné představit sílu konceptů, které lze pouze předvést nebo ukázat, tedy zhmotnit, a uvědomit si tím nezastupitelnost vzorků, které vytvářejí *sebou* expresivně jedinečná, tedy nezaměnitelná mediální předvedení.

Toto navštívení v příbuzném oboru tance vybíráme proto, abychom rozvinuli příklad symbolicky pojednaného kontinuálního gesta, jako čtvrtého možného

<sup>19</sup> Metafora a její způsoby jsou oborově dlouhodobě zpracovávány, protože se jedná o zásadní prostředek světa umění, například Slavík et al. 2013; Dytrtová 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Vlivem neikonického zápisu a akustické izolace od viditelného světa v orální podobě je sice nezatěžujeme *obrazovostí*, ale zato je *vysekáváme*, a tím zbavujeme původní předřečové kontinuity, abychom je v dané rozlišitelnosti (například samohláska *a*) mohli myslet.



systému uvedeného na obr. 1, který je vzorkem, a ač zápisy má, nejsou notační.<sup>21</sup> Ale přesto tento obor využívá možnosti jazyka, tedy nám vznikne vizuálně podnětné podtéma: pohyb – jazyk, kterým bychom rádi obohatili zkoumaný vztah obrazu a jazyka o tyto dynamické *obrazy* limitované médiiem těla.

Jedná se o analogový *vzorek*, o předvedení a zdá se, že na těchto ukázkách, podobně jako v oblasti hudby, lze možná nejpřesvědčivěji zažívat nepřeložitelnost jedinečných expresí do slov. Významná účinnost takto symbolicky pojatého pohybu je zajištěna tím, že každý máme tělo a spoluprožíváme tedy společným, fyzickým médiiem, kdy je překvapující, jak známým (a všem společným) prostředkem lze dosáhnout tak nečekaných expresí a pronikání prostoru.

Zážitek z nich se stejně jako zážitek s realitou opírá o doslovné pohyby, barvy, tvary, struktury, o určité světlo. Lze je pouze předvést a nelze je *přeložit* do jazyka, ač je jazyk nejhodnější systém pro *myšlení o nich*. Příkladem by mohl být rytmicko-barevný koncept, který lze pouze zahrát na tabla, a pro zážitek z něj, pro jeho posouzení, není jiná cesta, než ho zahrát či vyslechnout. Jedná se v posunutém metaforickém smyslu o mediální *site specific*. Musíme za těmito vzorky *cestovat* do jejich jedinečné mediality, která používá *kusy světa* a předvádí to, k čemu referuje.

Jejich nebezpečí je proto v tom, že by nám mohly s realitou *splynout*, když to byly její *součásti*. Proto je tak zásadní uvažovat jejich novou roli a jejich novou vztahnost/funkci v díle, zejména když sami jejich tvůrci sdělují, že mají *znamenat samy sebe* (barva nechť znamená samu sebe, jak často uvádí ke svým bezrukopisným obrazům Frank Stella).<sup>22</sup>

Naše úvahy mají ambice zdůvodněně a pokud možno v plném rozsahu hájit nezastupitelnost obrazů, tvarů, zvuků, tónů, rytmu, pohybů (tedy vzorků), ovšem právě slovy. Stejně jako pojem *zážitek*, zmíněný výše, používáme jako široce kotvený sociokulturní výkon, nikoliv jako nějaký (samozřejmě, že také podstatný) důsledek náladotvorné situace.

Ohad Naharin<sup>23</sup> je izraelský tanečník a choreograf současného tance, bývalý umělecký ředitel společnosti *Batsheva Dance Company*<sup>24</sup> a autor pohybového jazyka *Gaga*, slovníku, který provokuje tanečníky, aby vyjadřovali vnitřní

<sup>21</sup> „Největšího uznání mezi notacemi navrženými pro tanec se zaslouženě dostalo labanotaci, která nese název po svém tvůrci Rudolfu Labanovi. Tato působivá soustava analýz vyvrací obecnou představu, že se plynulý, komplexní pohyb ze své podstaty vzpírá notační artikulaci. Zpochybňuje dogma, že úspěšný popis závisí na jakési přirozené strukturální úhlednosti popisovaného“ (Goodman 2007, s. 167).

<sup>22</sup> Pro pochopení limitů a mezi procesů symbolizace je nutné vědět, na co daná úvaha, která je zkoumá, v kontextu reaguje. Stellova další podobná úvaha, totiž že „na obraze je jen to, co tam je,“ reaguje na předchozí přesylené odkazování: Stella se tedy snaží vytvořit situaci hutných vnitřních funkčních vazeb a minimální denotace. Ač je ta snaha cenná hledáním meze, nemůže se zcela podařit, protože jednak vnímatel vždy přijde se svými rozvrhy „ve své hlavě“ a také nelze nepřipomenout *otevřenost díla* (Eco). Naopak například autoři minimalu chtějí tak omezit podněty plynoucí z díla, že můžeme pozorovat své vlastní vnímání jako nedílnou součást situace percepce díla. Oba příklady jsou proto velmi podnětné snahy porozumět vzorkům, jejich exemplifikačním možnostem při souběhu s dalšími referencemi.

<sup>23</sup> Ohad Naharin, narozen 1952 v Kibutz Mizra, v Izraeli.

<sup>24</sup> *Naharin's Virus* performed by Batsheva Dance Company (2018).

pohyby, energie a pnutí navenek a vytvářeli tak přesné formy. Naharinův styl a technika se vyvinuly během jeho spolupráce s touto skupinou a vyznačují se úžasně flexibilními končetinami a zároveň šhubavou zraňující ostroší. Pracuje s do detailu promyšlenými kontrasty. Divákovi se dostavuje pocit hluboce zakotveného pohybu kontrastovaného s výbušným *roztržením hmoty*, s pocitem nesmírné vitality, která vtáhne diváka do hry.

Naharinovi tanečníci nenacvičují před zrcadlem. To jim umožňuje zbavit se naučených gest a názoru na zaběhanou *estetičnost* pohybu a cítit pohyb zevnitř.<sup>25</sup> K přesnějšímu pochopení typu tělesnosti a neobvyklosti pohybu vyvinul Naharin slovník s názvem *Gaga* (2018), který se skládá ze slov, která vyjadřují konkrétní způsoby, jak zahájit pohyb a jak ho spojit s částí těla propojenou pohybem. *Gaga* pracuje s vnitřními tělesnými impulzy i s individuálním nastavením konkrétního těla, s jeho vnitřním prostorem a jeho vnímáním. Jedná se o sadu vynalezených slov a frází, jejichž cílem je provokovat pohyby, střídavě ošklivé, nádherné a hloupé, které společně tvoří antitechniku. Je to způsob, jak uniknout osvědčeným stylům moderního a současného tance a proniknout k novému, k tělesnému na rozhraní vnějších a vnitřních energií. Je to nečekaný způsob, jakým se může tělo hýbat, pokud by ho bylo možné osvobodit od gravitace a slušnosti.

Uvedeme některé příklady. Jedním ze slov je *luna*, název, který odkazuje na masité, kruhové – jako měsíc, proto *luna* – regiony mezi prsty na rukou a nohou. Protože neexistuje vizuální vzor, který by mohli tanečníci nacvičit, tak reagují na slovní narážky v improvizacích cvičených konaných ve studiích bez zrcadel. Proto je pozornost věnována spíše vnitřnímu zážitku či energii těla než jeho obrazu. Zde oceňujeme abstraktní podobu slov, která nezanáší denotované žádnou ikoničností, ale umí vyjádřit typ energie a označit danou oblast těla. Proto jsou při těchto úkolech mediálně mnohem vhodnější než *vzorky*.

Další slovo je *lena*, je to „motor mezi pupkem a rozkrokem“ a zdroj síly pro pohyb. Nebo slovo *yoyo*, které nás má přimět k „sání tváří dovnitř, ale žaludkem a konečníkem“. Někdy se v *Gaga* tanečník pohybuje v metaforách, jako je *boya* („špagety ve vroucí vodě“), nebo ve frázích, které vyjadřují pohybové zkratky, například *zhroutit se*. Díky nim jsou tanečníci *Batshevy* tak pozoruhodně atletičtí a přesní, takže jsou schopni okamžitě reagovat na další situaci. „Když se podíváte na zvíře, jak se pohybuje a pracuje se svou tíhou a lehkostí, je to „puštění energie“, vysvětluje Naharin. „Abys byl výbušný a rychlý, musíš to pustit, musíš se zhroutit“ (Heymann, 2017).

Lexikon *Gaga* je neustále revidován. Některé termíny jsou pojmenovány podle mentorů a přátel, některé jsou morbidní, například *mika*, což znamená „vytrhávání kostí z měkkého masa“, ještě jiné zřejmě narážely na izraelskou politiku: *Bibi* znamenalo pohyb s pocitem, že „nic není trvalé“ (a bylo nedávno

<sup>25</sup> „Zbavit se estetičnosti“ – kdy a proč (?), je možná otázka, kterou lze uspořádat průhled na dějiny umění, kde tuto praxi nalézáme vždy při proměně stylu či slohu nebo strategie. Ovšem z teoretického hlediska zde chybí slovo (v kontextu zbavit se estetičnosti) *předchozí* nebo *vyčpělé*, nebo *z-formalizované*, protože je jasné, že se pouze ustavuje *nová estetičnost*, nejčastěji revizí nebo negací té předchozí.

odstraněno ze slovníku). Mnoho z nich souvisí s nesčetnými způsoby, jak můžete zvlítnout pánev. Jazyk *Gaga* je v tomto smyslu v našem textu ukázkou toho, jak nečekaně vysoké abstrakce má pohyb ambice exemplifikovat a zhmotnit.

## 7. Jednosměrné a dvojsměrné

Předchozí část textu pojednávala a uvažovala protiklad: kontinuální pohyb a *digitální* tedy oddělená a *zastavená* slova. Chtěla tak upozornit na podstatnou funkci jazyka, která má ve vizuálních oborech nezastupitelnou roli. Umí z nekonečných vlastností *kontinuity vzorků* vyseknout, ohraničit danou vybranou vlastnost a zpětně, či v *protisměru* ji denotovat.

Jazyk *Gaga*, generovaný izraelským tanečníkem a choreografem Ohadem Naharinem, byl příkladem kontinuálního vzorku (pohybu těla) organizovaného pojmy tohoto slovníku s pokusem stanovit, co jsou domény *analogových vzorků* a co síla a funkce *digitálních slov*. Bylo tak vysvětleno, jak slova jako arbitrární abstraktní systém mohou snadno a lehce stanovit koncepci vzorků, co z nekonečných možností pohybů vybírat, co a jak vyjadřovat. Výběrem v konkrétních vztazích a kontrastech tento slovník ustanovil Naharinovu koncepci a vytvořil situace: ty bez vizuálního předobrazu, nečekané, zhroucené, roztržené, hnané motorem pupku, výbušné, cítěné mezi prsty, sáním dovnitř žaludkem a konečníkem, čímž vytvořil prostředky antitechniky při vysokých ambicích, například ukázat pohyb s pocitem, že nic není trvalé. Slovo a koncepce předchází zhmotnění pohybem *zevnitř po vstupu slovem*, a proto tento dynamický koncept nemá mít vizuální předlohu. Odehrává se zde cesta *abstrakcí* k tělesnému na rozhraní vnějších a vnitřních energií, což je podstatná schopnost jazyka.

Na obr. 6 v zastaveném výseku videa z Naharinova díla *Last Work* (Batsheva Dance Company, 2015)<sup>26</sup> čteme výběr slov, která denotují vlastnosti a exprese v kontinuálním a mnohoznačném vizuálu. Zpětné denotování viděného i metaforického jazykem se nyní vlastně užívá jednosměrně a symetricky, protože relace vytvořená jazykem používá notační systém abecedy, který je předdohodnut a není vzorku podobný. Označená symetričnost a nesymetričnost na obr. 06 je teoretickým vyjádřením ohledu k medialitě (reference je nesymetrická) a odhlížení od mediality (symetričnost).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Naharin použil ukolébavky v jazycích, kterým nerozumí. Čtyři ukolébavky, všechny v rumunštině, tak pronikly do Naharinova díla s názvem *Poslední dílo*.

<sup>27</sup> Symetričnost a nesymetričnost řeší problém zvolené mediality, která informace transformuje *sebou* vždy, ale zároveň ji nelze nepoužít. Nesymetričnost vyjadřuje vztah: A odkazuje nějak k B, ale B zpětně neodkazuje stejně k A, vmezeřila se vlivnost média. Tedy A referuje k B způsobem Z. Zatímco symetričnost vyjadřuje: A odkazuje k B a B stejně tak odkazuje k A, jinými slovy, jak se do lesa volá, tak se z lesa ozývá. Symetričnost by mohla platit jen pro takové *čisté denotující*, které by bylo průhledné a také dematerializované, tedy nehmotné jako daný myšlený vztah, což je protimluv k potřebě (a) sdílené myslitelnosti, (b) fixace daného vztahu, viz výše. K symetričnosti proto přistupujeme po dohodě, jak dále rozvíjí text, totiž když je kontextuálně výhodné od vlivnosti mediality odhlédnout. Na opačné straně od symetričnosti pak stojí komplikované symbolizace, jako například exprese jako metaforická, sociokulturně kotvená reference: A referuje k B způsobem Z v kontextu K (ArB; Z, K). Dále také (Chrz, Nohavová a Slavík 2015).

SYMETRIČNOST A NESYMETRIČNOST REFERENCÍ

EXEMPLIFIKACE ■ ⇔ šedý čtverec ...

Předvedení vlastností zpřesněné denotací.

DENOTACE ⇔ šedý čtverec →  
SYMETRICKÁ REFERENCE

Jmenovité označení, tj. symetrická reference.

EXPRESSE ■ ⇔ nuda, prázdnota, neurčitost, ...

Předvedení spojené s hodnocením a zpřesněné metaforickou i doslovnou denotací (interpretací) s dvěma možnostmi ověření: *autentifikací a evidencí.*

SYMETRIČNOST denotace  
A odkazuje k B, B odkazuje k A  
NESYMETRIČNOST exemplifikace  
A odkazuje k B způsobem Z  
NESYMETRIČNOST exprese  
A odkazuje k B způsobem Z  
v kontextu K



Ohad Naharin, Last work

SYMETRICKÁ reference denotace, jmenovité označení, odhlíží od mediality, výhoda jazyka: není podobný tomu, o čem mluví

NESYMETRICKÉ reference exemplifikace a exprese vyžadují tvořivý interpretační výkon: vybrat, co z nekonečných vlastností pojmenovat, jejich interpreti nejsou zaměnitelní, podstata tvorby

předvedení vlastností zpřesněné v protisměru

■ ⇔ šedý čtverec ...

⇔

sevržené propojené zahuštěné tělesné

rozšířené do základny akumulovaná energie vytyčené dlaněmi mnoho posilující jedno mnoho zadržující jedno mnoho stavějící jedno

Obr. 6: Goodman: symetrické a nesymetrické reference (autor obrázku: Kateřina Dyrtrtová)

Medialita slov se zbavila akustickou a grafickou abstraktní *izolací* ikoničnosti, a zdá se, že její označení nezanáší referenci *svou medialitou* (když je jednosměrné a pouze čistě denotuje). Její abstraktnost je v této perspektivě pohledu na problém symbolizace velmi výhodná a jeví se průhledně. Zde je vhodné připomenout úvahu Kvaszova citátu v první části textu: „každá črta otevírá přístup k realitě jiným způsobem“. Právě jsme se dostali v praxi k tomuto příkladu s Afrikou, která jen v určitém úhlu pohledu a přiblížení připomíná hlavu koně. V jiné vrstvě přiblížení a *zrnitosti* vidíme střechy africké vesnice a v důsledku toho „Afrika – hlava koně“ zmizela.

Tedy v pomyslné *vrstvě přesnosti* úvah o symbolizaci, kde každá relace mění, protože zhmotňuje záznamem *vždy nějak*, by denotování jazykem symetrické být nemohlo. V této jemnosti (v předchozích částech úvahy Peregrina, Chomského) jsou všechna označení z logiky *zhmotnění* nehmotného vztahu asymetrická *vždy*, tedy jejich medialita *vždy* mění. Ale abychom mohli každé médium používat na škále mediální závažnosti od nuly (mediálnost nezávažná, odhlížíme od ní) k nejvíce závažnému a expresivně pointovanému, dohodli jsme se i o způsobu užití jazyka, potažmo každého média, také *jako* o čistě denotujícím. Tedy za určitých kontextuálních podmínek *jako* o mediálně průhledném či bezpříznakovém.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Těmito úvahami se zabývá text o tvorbě Taryn Simon (Dyrtrtová 2017), kdy je médium fotografie jednou v roli *jako u soudu*, a pak jsme přistoupili na výklad, že je na ní zachycená realita (v dohodnuté vrstvě přesnosti a způsobu argumentace). Jindy v roli *jako umění*, kdy ale očekáváme nějakou závažnější koncepci, důvod vzniku technického obrazu právě tak a ne jinak. Medialita pojednou vstupuje do hry jako sémanticky závažná a *jak fotografie* je se stává součástí významu díla. Tedy u každého média potřebujeme měnit parametry podle záměrnosti, do jakých rolí mají jeho možnosti vstoupit (u fotografie například ostrost, pohled apod.). Stanovujeme způsob *užití* podle záměru. Tohoto problému pohybu na stupni závažnosti *jak médium* je se dotýká také pojem ne-fotografie jako záměrné pozvání předchozích *chyb a omylů* do světa umění. Jejich předchozí označení *jako chyby* je vždy věci zvyklostí a dohod, tedy dobových výkladových kontextů a praxí.

Je to dohoda designově a funkčně velmi důležitá. Z kontextuálních důvodů, a ty právě nastaly na obr. 6, potřebujeme myšlením *denotovat předvedení*. Samotný tanec je symbolem, je to Naharinem vytvořený, vysoce energeticky závažný a významný performativní objekt. Tím, že potřebujeme uvažovat a vzájemně sdílet, co tam je důležité, metaforické, kvalitní, nebo naopak nedůležité, musíme tento mediální/pohybový *vzorek* zpětně denotovat slovy, *myslet ho*: jak dílo je? Sevřené, zahuštěné, tělesné, dlaněmi *vystavěné* apod. A v této situaci je pro komplikovanost nutné odhlédnout od toho, že sama slova mění (nejsou symetrická), protože lepší prostředek pro komunikaci nad dílem nemáme.

Proto je výhodné v této rovině či vrstvě funkcí a vztahů jazyk užívat *symetricky*, jakoby označoval *průhledně*, což je věc důležité dohody. Proč je tato dohoda funkční? Potřebujeme upřít pozornost na způsob jednou popisu slovy a podruhé metaforou (vyjádřené slovy). Tedy interpretace slovy ve fázi popisu přistupuje na *průhlednost* slov, ač nejsou nevinná. V této vrstvě *zrnitosti* tvar „Afriky jako koně“ mizí, protože potřebujeme zkoumat „střechy africké vesnice“, to jest odlišnost popis/metafora, tedy odlišné způsoby interpretace díla Naharina.

Způsoby symbolizace musí zdatně přepínat mezi jednotlivými vrstvami, kdy je jaký prostředek funkční, co jím získáváme, podobně jako u dalekohledů. Lpět vždy na tom, že slova *mění svět* (což je pravda), by znamenalo, že bychom se v některých případech nedomluvili. Proto je velmi podstatné jednotlivé *zrnitosti* funkcí a přesností daných prostředků používat pod danou záměrností vědomě.<sup>29</sup>

Kdy je vhodné slova užívat jako *čistě denotující*, tedy jednosměrné a symetrické? Kdy je vhodné zabývat se naopak jejich zvukomalbou a vědomě ji tvořit – vnímat? Kdy je fotografie v roli „jako u soudu“? Kdy v roli „jako umění“? Kdy používám video jako prostředek k tvorbě metafor a kdy snímám chování mravenců z důvodů vědeckého zkoumání? Kdy posouvám nasnímané chování mravenců jako součást metafor? Tyto funkční proměny rozeznávat a vědomě užívat je nutností zejména v oboru, který operuje na rozhraní všední – metaforické, tedy za určitých podmínek chápané „jako umění“, jindy „jako inzerát“, jindy „jako epitaf“, jestliže jsme si směli vypůjčit metaforu ze způsobů užití jazyka.

Proto můžeme zavést symetrickou referenci denotace, jmenovitěho označení, kdy (z dobrých kontextuálních důvodů) odhlížíme od mediality. A posléze ji umíme *přepínat* tak, abychom ji mohli posouvat do rozmanitých funkcí (záměrně *bezpříznakově*, záměrně „jako epitaf“...). V těchto užitích nesymetrické reference exemplifikace a exprese, kde je zásadní, jak jejich medialita je, vyžadují tvořivý interpretační výkon: vybrat, co z nekonečných

<sup>29</sup> Toto odhlédnutí od mediality, kvůli například rychlosti, poškozují z uživatelského hlediska tak významný obor, jako je grafický design. Zejména, je-li jeho řešení funkční (rychlá čitelnost slov, serifové držení řádku, signální vlivnost plakátu apod.) Totiž pak tak přispívá dané situaci, že mu uživatelé přestali věnovat pozornost, podobně jako výše u scénické hudby. Z odborného hlediska je to úspěch: tak *být ve službě*, že není můj výkon vidět a *stroj* běží hladčeji se mnou, než beze mě. Ovšem nepoučený uživatel, který ani netuší, proč se mu tak dobře čte, či vyhledává, tyto dobře vymyšlené prostředky přehlídá a pak je ani nevyhledává a sám mnozí neutěšená grafická řešení (například časté nepřehledné a vizuálně/funkčně neúnosné webové stránky).

vlastností (v protisměru, obr. 6) denotovat/pojmenovat. Pak jejich interpretaci nejsou zaměnitelní a interpretaci můžeme považovat za tvorbu, protože jsme teoreticky vytvořili prostor (užít nesymetricky/symetricky), kde můžeme selekci, editaci a novými spoji tvořit.

## 8. Výměny mezi obrazovým a jazykovým

Shrňme předešlé charakteristiky procesu symbolizace, tedy utváření vztahu mezi reprezentací a denotátem s ohledem na designovou vyladěnost přesných notačních zápisů, či opačně: vždy nově utvářenou tvorbu mnohoznačným *vzorkem*.

Každý z existujících symbolických systémů (hudebních, vizuálních, gestických a jazykových/ číselných) generuje za určitých podmínek čistě denotativní užití svých prostředků, pak mluvíme o jednosměrné a symetrické referenci denotace (obr. 6). Expresí takového symbolu se příliš nezabýváme a způsob mediality, tedy to, jak je symbol utvořen, zde hraje roli již domluveného designu, od její (mediální) vlivnosti odhlížíme. Ovšem každý z těchto systémů své prostředky užívá také v symbolicky bohatších a vzájemně souvisejících referencích, mluvíme o dvojsměrných referencích. Takové symboly jsou nositelé často komplikovaných expresí a pak není jedno, v jakém kontextu a jak je použito dané médium, které tuto referenci zajišťuje svým specifickým způsobem, protože právě toto užití danou expresi spoluutváří.

Dohoda odhlédnutí od vlivnosti zápisu či mediality, tedy arbitrárnost či *průhlednost* se týká všech oborů. V mimice a posléze například v grafickém designu značka palec nahoru/dolu je domluvená, ikona panáček/panenka jako označení toalet je domluvená. Získává se tím velká a potřebná rychlost při rozpoznávání (průraznost signálu, jednoznačnost značky, rychlost čtení písma). Ale ve skutečnosti každý z těchto příkladů musí být způsobem zápisu/záznamu záměrně a důkladně utvořen, jinak by své roli neobstál – být rychle rozpoznatelný a odlišitelný od ostatních. Podobné zakázky často plní grafický design, čímž se liší od volného umění, kde samotnou *zakázku*, proč tvořit, proč *o tom vůbec mluvit* koncepčně tvoří autor. Proto je design umění „ve službě“ a umění samo je označováno jako „volné“.

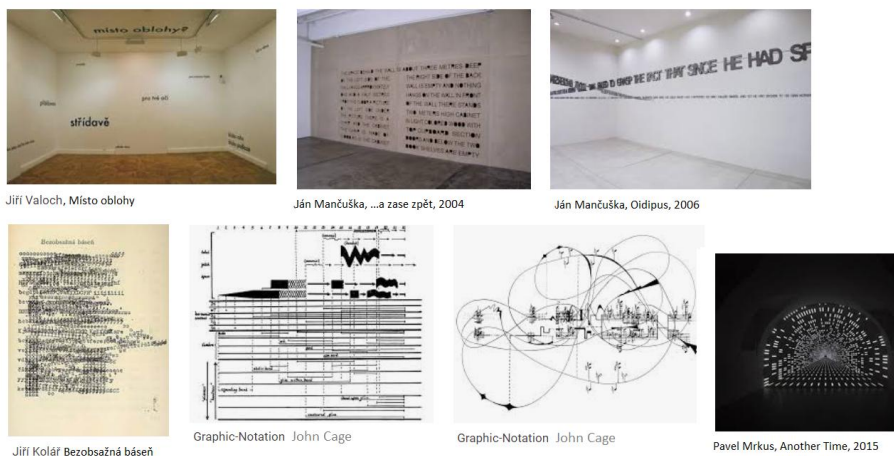
V designu je v určitých oblastech funkce prvku daná jeho účelností: usednout (antidekubitní sedák), kvalitně chodit (propracovaná bota), rychle se orientovat (orientační systém). Ale v jiných je také vytvářena metafora, exprese a úzce spolupracuje s oblastí umění, používá jeho strategie. V umění se funkce prvku teprve tvoří interpretačním úsilím, jak tvůrce, tak vnímatel stanovují nebo zjišťují: v jaké roli je zde tento prvek? To proto, že se výsledná metafora či obsah díla teprve hledá a tvoří, zatímco u účelového designu se cíl stanovuje předem: chci, aby nevznikaly proleženiny, jaké vrstvy, materiály vymyslím? Chci na sebe v promíchaném a hypertextovém prostoru internetu strhnout pozornost, jaké grafické možnosti zvolím a proč?<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> O charakteristice, nelidskosti a fragmentárnosti tohoto prostoru, který nutně potřebuje uspořádat, Charvát (2017, s. 249) píše: „Počítač determinuje nové formy zkušenosti (simulace, virtuální realita), pro něž je zásadní princip modularity. V rámci kyberprostoru totiž nejde o poznání transcendentního typu, ale o rhizomatické uspořádání afektů a třepů kultury, respektive zlomků vědomostí a znalostí, které volně plují v ne-lidském prostoru

Tedy dochází ke střídání výkladových oblastí a záměrností o daný kontext v režimu účelnosti (design) a hodnověrnosti (umění) díla. Pak se liší cíle. Cíl uspořádat chaos na ulici mapou, semaforem nebo značkami není cíl: vytvořit existenciální zážitek, úvahu, či situaci. Proto je důležité, aby oba obory, design a umění, přepínaly a vyměňovaly své strategie. Tak jako ve volném umění jsou také některé procesy ryze účelové, design může usilovat o metaforu, o tvarovou, barevnou či prostorovou expresi.

Proto plné pochopení problému vlivnosti mediality a zápisu v procesu symbolizace je opět dané kontextem užití, což je nejlépe vidět na záměrně užitě „šedé banalitě“, která se za určitých podmínek může stát průraznou O okolní kontext. Například užití ready made o okolní kontext toho, jak bylo na začátku 20. století chápáno umění: ušlechtilé materiály, historizující tematika, estetika vznešenosti a ladnosti, přetížená symboličnost, filosofičnost, reprezentativnost atd.

Autoři, kteří posunuli abstraktní notační systémy do tvůrčího procesu, učinili z nich vzorky z jednosměrných a minimálně expresivních → dvojsměrné a expresivní



Obr. 7: Posun notačních systémů (autor obrázku: Kateřina Dyrtrtová)

A proto právě běžně denotující užití a systémy doposud známých pravidel jsou pro umění častým rezervoárem inspirací k posunům a novým užitím. V textu předchozích částí jsme téma výměny mezi obrazovým a jazykovým několikrát naznačili, nejčastěji při konstatování pravidel notačních systémů, které mají vysokou designérskou úroveň. Svět umění při revizi vztahů „mezer a dat“ pravidelně utvořené a stabilizované jevy napadá, pomáhá uvidět jejich meze a připomenout si jejich vlivnost, to, že nikdy nejsou *průhledné*, protože se v běžnosti (po dobré dohodě) právě *průhledně* používají. Každý systém cosi umožňuje a z logiky své uspořádanosti také omezuje, či lépe vymezuje.

graficky strukturovaného pole.“ K tomuto vyjádření dodává Slavík: „Celá kultura v praxi je ‚rhizomatické uspořádání afektů a třepů kultury, respektive zlomků vědomostí a znalostí, které volně plují v lidském prostoru strukturovaného pole‘. Když jdu po ulici, může to být totéž, jako když brouzdám po internetu, rozdíl je jenom v míře angažovanosti těla“ (nepublikovaný text).

Dohodnuté, vyladěné notace a běžná užití ostatních symbolických systémů se z jednosměrných a expresivně nevzrušivých stávají dvojsměrné a expresivně inovativní (Obr. 7).

Grafický design je v této souvislosti tedy (u určitých provedení) disciplína, která *dohodnutým* notacím dodává vlastnosti *vzorků*, komponuje je jako obrazy, dodává jim expresi a metaforu, používá je jedinečně pod danou záměrností, tedy je znovu-utváří a vrací je procesu, ze kterého se pod kontextuálními tlaky vymanily. Na obr. 7 vybraná díla tentýž proces používají ve světě umění. Dochází k vzbouření proti předjednaným *digitálním* notačním systémům kontinuitou zvuku, šumu a ruchu (Cage), jazyk je zpětně lokalizován, ač kompozitnost jako sémanticky vlivnou z dobrých důvodů opustil (Mančuška, Valoch), abeceda je zbavena čitelnosti, a tak je odkazováno k poetické expresi jazyka (Kolář), datové toky jsou používány jako metaforické světelné procesy (Mrkus) atd. Tedy sledujeme výpůjčky, prohazování funkcí mezi jednotlivými symbolickými systémy a jejich vzájemné tlaky, kdy se neustále proměňují podmínky symbolizace. Těm je z těchto důvodů radno rozumět.

Jestli jsme se tedy v úvodu ptali, co je nejobvyklejší doménou slov a proč, kdy je jiné obory (výše zvukové, níže vizuální) posouvají a čeho tím dosahují, na uvedených dílech můžeme odpovědět. V kontrastu k výše uvedeným si ze statických a vizuálních vybereme dílo Jiřího Valocha.

Jiří Valoch, jehož *Instalace* jsme měli možnost vidět ve Veletržním paláci v roce 2009 (anon., 2009), „blízko rohu“ vkládá blízko rohu, či zdvojení „čtyři slova na podlaze“, která jsou opravdu na podlaze a opravdu jsou čtyři, „náznak horizontu“ umísťuje *do dálky*, tj. asi tak proti našemu pasu, či *neviditelně* zviditelňuje na nepřehlédnutelném místě. Výkladovou oblastí vzhledem ke kompozitnosti je znalost instalační praxe, kam se co v galeriích instaluje a ovšem také konvence úběžníkové perspektivy a běžné způsoby řešení transformace D3 do D2. Způsob symbolizace těží z vtipu, že jazyk je schopen tyto vztahy a lokalizace zachytit a rychle označit, aniž by na daných konkrétních lokalitách musel být umístěn. Tedy je ve Valochově *Instalaci* „znásilněn“ dělat i to, o čem je schopen nemateriálně, *čistě denotačně*, tedy abstraktně a přitom již tak dost přesně mluvit (a zapisovat).

Je to analogické, jako bychom byli odsouzeni červenou náplní pera psát jen deriváty slova *červené*. Je tak vlastně pominut celý vývoj písma a jazyk je navrácen a odsouzen splynout s tím, o čem mluví, či komentovat *svou polohou* (*náznak horizontu*). Zbortil se tak pestrý vějíř abstraktních způsobů jazykové symbolizace, která z podstaty nebýt obrazem nelokalizuje.

Ovšem to není jediná strategie autora, kdy používá plošné možnosti zápisu, jako je obyčejné převrácení pro komplikovaný temporální a psychický jev (vzpomínka na vzpomínku) a umístění napsaného do prostoru, kde může být pošlapán (na zemi napsané *zanikající*). Tedy promíchává obsažnost, co je označováno (denotaci) a doslovnou praxi s materialitou liter a její lokalizací (exemplifikaci). A nebyl by to takový rozpor, když by si vybral médium, které umožňuje pracovat se vzorky, ovšem Valoch volí notační abecedu a symbolický



systém jazyka, tedy ty způsoby, které se z této praxe z důležitých důvodů (pracně) vymanily. Tedy vzhledem k výčtu symbolických systémů volí nejvíce myslitelný rozpor, jaký zvolit může: notace nutí chovat se jako vzorek a přitom jim nechává komplexní a komplikované abstraktní a temporální obsahy (vzpomínka na vzpomínku, zanikající).

## 9. Závěr

Text jako hypotézu vymezil předpoklad vzájemného propůjčování strategií a vzájemnou vlivnost odlišných symbolických systémů: jazyka a obrazů. Pro ověření této hypotézy si dal za úkol zkoumat možnosti symbolizace a poskytnout nadhled nad symbolickými systémy, které si v intermedialní době propůjčují své strategie, různě se mezi sebou proplétají a činí si vzájemně kontextuální tlaky. Po teoretickém ukotvení byly tyto výměny prokázány na příkladech tělesného pohybu a jazyka Gaga vytvořeného pro gestické vzorky a na tvorbě Jiřího Valocha, na nichž se text snažil odpovědět na otázku: jaký plyne nový význam z výměny strategií těchto systémů? Kdy je vhodné slova užívat jako čistě *denotující*, tedy jednosměrné a symetrické?

Jako podstatná funkce jazyka na prvním z příkladů byla stanovena tato: potřebujeme myšlením, tedy v jazyce *denotovat předvedení*. Samotný tanec je symbolem, je to Naharinem vytvořený, vysoce energeticky závažný a významný performativní objekt. Tím, že potřebujeme uvažovat a vzájemně sdílet, co tam je důležité, metaforické, kvalitní, nebo naopak nedůležité, musíme tento mediální/pohybový vzorek zpětně denotovat slovy, *myslet ho*: jak dílo je?

Podstatná pro symetrické nebo nesymetrické užití mediality je funkce, v jaké je daný jev symbolizován. Proto jsme se zabývali vyladěnými a dlouze vyvíjenými notačními systémy, které jsou (nejen) z perspektivy světa umění stabilními formáty, do kterých lze dílo *zabalit* nezávisle na času a přítomnosti autora. Dovolují kolektivní sdílení i provádění děl světa umění, ale jejich užití provázejí stereotypní úvahy. Jeví se průhledně, protože jsou arbitrární a jejich interpretaci mohou být zaměnitelní. Proto jsme uváděli příklady jejich tvůrčích užití (Typlt, Naharin, Valoch, Cage, Mrkus, Mančuška, obr. 07). Na jejich mezním příkladu systému s přísnými pravidly se nejlépe zrcadlí možnosti světa umění, který sestupuje do mezer známých systémů, čímž jednak může vynalézat nové, ale také zpřesňovat známé. Výběrem těchto příkladů jsme se snažili naplnit jeden z cílů textu a odpovědět si: co je doménou jazyka a co centrem obrazovosti? Kdy jsou tyto dva symbolické systémy nejsilnější ve své funkci, kdy si vyměňují strategie a jaký z toho plyne nový význam?

Toto téma – role jazyka ve vizuálních oborech – je podstatné pro ty oborové úvahy, které operují na rozhraní slovo a obraz, a tedy je lze považovat za nutnou výbavu a znalost profesí kurátor, teoretik a edukátor oboru. Ovšem text se snažil informace vztáhnout i na plodné rozhraní tvůrčích disciplín design a volné umění. Plnili jsme tím i druhý cíl, totiž obhájení nezastupitelnosti jedinečné *zprávy vzorků*, (obrazů), způsob, jak symbolicky (slovy nezastupitelně) tvoří svou verzi světa, ale také vymezení funkčního (a nezastupitelného) prostoru pro slova ve světě vizuálního umění.

Důležitým závěrem textu je tedy to, že čistá denotace, čisté nematerializované odkázání vlastně neexistuje, protože každý symbol je nějak utvořený/materializovaný, což je vždy vlivná *nesymetrie*. Proto je nutné zdůraznit, že neexistují symetrické a nesymetrické symbolizace, ale dohoda, *kdy* a *proč* se na vždy nějak nesymetrické dívat „jako na symetrické“. Tyto podmínky zjišťovat byl cíl analýzy obou vybraných děl, kdy jsme sledovali funkci daných elementů. To potvrzuje zásadní význam ko-textu a kontextu pro tvorbu a zdůvodnění *funkce* daného prvku v rámci setrvale dynamicky chápaného díla, které může s každou dobou a interpretací vstupovat do nových rolí, z čehož významně těží kurátorská a edukativní odborná veřejnost.

Text by tak rád rozpustil několik oborových předsudků: naivní představu, že volné umění je *volné* a design je naopak pouze *služebná* profese. Také názor, že slova a mluvení nad obrazy nadbytečně zatemňují a komplikují, co již tu dílem je. Objektivní danost výskytu díla nezaručuje jeho porozumění. Tuto pozici text určený pro poučenou komunikaci nad dílem, šířeji pro oborový diskurz, preferoval nejvíce.

Vede ho k tomu přesvědčení autorky, že umění je obor, který reviduje a pročišťuje veřejný prostor jasně deklarovanými postoji a hodnotami, že tvorba není jen *nějaké* sebevyjádření, ale osobní kriticko-poetický příspěvek v době, která ve své komplikovanosti často osobní přelévá nadosobními a nepřehlednými vlnami politického, sociálního a environmentálního. Právě jejich z-osobnění a nalezení kontextuálně bohatě kotveného hlediska, ze kterého jsou revidovatelné, dalo náboj výše uvedeným dílům a dalo úhel pohledu, který si text zvolil.

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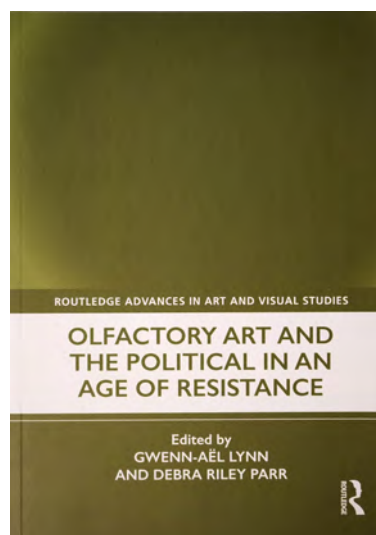


# BOOK REVIEWS

# Review of *Olfactory Art and the Political in an Age of Resistance*

Nicola Di Stefano – Maria Teresa Russo

Lynn Gwenn-Aël and Debra Parr (eds) (2021) *Olfactory art and the political in an age of resistance*. New York: Routledge, ISBN 9780367544751.



*Olfactory Art and the Political in an Age of Resistance*, edited by Gwenn-Aël Lynn and Debra Riley Parr, is an insightful, interdisciplinary, and comprehensive journey in the diversified landscape of olfactory art (Lynn and Parr, 2021). This volume – which collects essays from artists, philosophers, psychologists, curators, critics, and educators – grounds on the central tenet that the sense of smell and its objects have unique potential to address and raise socio-political issues. The thematic discourse throughout the book underscores the transformative potential of olfactory art in the realms of identity, resistance, and representation.

One of the central themes of this volume is the political potential inherent in olfactory art. Lynn and Parr aptly distinguish between “politics” and “the political,” defining the former as the strategies deployed by individuals and institutions to obtain power, and the latter as a passionate, philosophical

inquiry into coexistence and communal life. They argue that olfactory art's unique characteristic lies in its ability to engage with the political through its embodied and unmediated nature. As the editors note (Lynn & Parr, 2021, p. 4), "the most compelling unique characteristic of olfactory art lies in its political potential".

This leads to the second foundational theme of the volume, namely that smell is one of the best candidates, if not the only candidate, for resistance to the hegemony of vision in Western cultures. Smelling, unlike visual representation, is a direct and intimate experience that enters the body and engages the mind, creating a profound sensory impact that can be harnessed for political expression and resistance. As observed by Lynn and Parr (2021, p. 4): "When one smells something, the scent enters the body through the nose and lungs and limbic system of the brain, becoming a body–mind experience. Smelling is, thus, an unmediated sensation, an embodied experience". Such a position resonates with the phenomenological tradition, and especially with Merleau-Ponty's embodied account of human perception, in which odours, at the interface between memory and emotions, contribute to shaping our lived experience in the pre-reflective and bodily engagement with the environment.

At the same time, the nature of olfactory objects has attracted a growing body of interest from scholars working in the field of the philosophy of perception (e.g., Barwich, 2019; Millar, 2019). One general question typically raised in the current debate deals with the puzzling nature of those entities that are referred to when people talk about "odours". Compared to visual objects, odours would appear to lack key properties that should constitute perceptual objecthood, such as figure-ground segregation and perceptual constancies (e.g., Barwich, 2019, though see Millar, 2019). Speakers normally identify odours indirectly, that is, by referring to their source, saying, for example, the smell of a rose. This would appear to reveal some fundamental properties of olfactory objects, given that we can perceive the scent of the rose or jasmine in the absence of the source object, as happens normally in the case of fragrances. In contrast, the visual perception of a rose is not veridical if the object 'rose' is absent.

The idea that olfaction is unique among the senses has been fuelled by additional evidence from the broad field of cognitive science. Scholars have drawn attention to the poverty of language when it comes to describing odours (Yeshurun and Sobel, 2010). Focusing on the way language is used to refer to odours, Dubois (1997) pointed out that in most languages (e.g., English, French), there are no names specifically for odours, and instead the naming of odours is often achieved by naming the source instead (e.g., think only of the smell of lavender; though there are, of course, many fragrances, or smells, that most people struggle to attach a source object to, see e.g., Croijmans and Majid (2016). The impact of language on odour perception has been empirically proven in speakers from the same culture and, separately, by comparing those from different cultures (and languages) (e.g., Herz and Von Clef, 2001; De Valk et al., 2017).

Scholars have also evidenced the neurophysiological basis of the lack of a developed lexicon for describing olfaction in humans. Olfactory stimuli are mainly processed in the limbic system, mostly concerned with the organisation of visceral body functions and the processing of emotional states. The limbic system, however, is not concerned with the abstract symbolic activity of language processing. Due to the relatively poor neural connections between those areas devoted to language processing and the sub-cortical limbic structures, scholars have argued that it is apparently impossible to adequately synchronise the cerebral organisation of olfactory perception with the language processing areas of the brain so to have a stable lexicon of olfaction (see Olofsson and Gottfried, 2015, for a neurocognitive framework for olfactory language).

The ephemeral nature of the sense of smell is a popular topic in the history of Western philosophy, with clear implications for how smelling is assumed to contribute to knowledge and cognition. For Aristotle and Kant, for example, smell is a less precise and informative way of acquiring information about the world. For Kant, in particular, the transitory and subjective nature of olfactory experiences contrasts with the more stable and intersubjective experiences provided by vision and hearing. That being said, however, the idea that the human sense of smell is underdeveloped and weak compared to animals' and humans' other senses remains controversial (see McGann, 2017). Like other mammals, humans can distinguish among an incredible number of odors and can even follow outdoor scent trails. Human behaviours and affective states are also strongly influenced by the olfactory environment, which can evoke strong emotional and behavioural reactions as well as prompting distinct memories. Odour-mediated communication between individuals, once thought to be limited to animals, is now understood to carry information about familial relationships, stress and anxiety levels, and reproductive status in humans as well, although this information is not always consciously accessible.

The hegemony of vision has profoundly influenced the conception of the arts, resulting in the dominance of visual and spatial arts such as painting, sculpture, and music as the most important forms of artistic expression. For over two millennia, the chemical senses have not been considered a significant part of artistic production, raising long-standing questions about how they should be integrated into the arts. Many of the contributors of this volume offer a positive answer to this question, by providing clear examples of how olfactory art disrupts the conventional sensory hierarchy and inviting a reevaluation of how art can be experienced and understood. The olfactory resistance to visual dominance emerges as both a philosophical and a political stance, opening up new avenues for social critique through the reshaping of sensory engagement. Following Deleuze, the editors assert that "olfactory art is also an act of resistance, with a difference, or an intensity, since it already operates within the sphere of art, but at the margins" (Lynn and Parr, 2021, p. 6).

The perceived superiority of vision is mirrored in the perceived superiority of visual cultures over non-Western cultures and, more broadly, of WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) individuals. As Lynn

(2021, p. 52) put it: “A scent is never ‘just a scent.’ It is not only an olfactory sensation; it comes with deep cultural meanings and significance”. This makes olfaction and smell a social issue, with the theme of race naturally emerging. Pitchaya Ngamcharoen’s chapter focuses on how scents orient individuals within social and spatial contexts. Smells can delineate territory and social boundaries, acting as invisible – though still perceptible – markers of identity and difference. This sociological perspective on olfactory art underscores its role in shaping social interactions and community dynamics, highlighting the power of scent in creating and dissolving social boundaries. As Ngamcharoen (2021, p. 32) explains, deodorisation is used as a method of colonisation: “Smells act as invisible boundaries that can both create and dissolve territories, influencing social dynamics and community interactions”. In a similar vein, Dorothée King explores whether shared olfactory experiences can foster empathy and understanding among diverse groups of people.

Hsuan L. Hsu’s chapter on Black diasporic olfactory art explores how scents are used to evoke memories and histories of displacement, resistance, and identity. Olfactory interventions by Black artists highlight the political stakes involved in everyday encounters with smells, drawing attention to issues of environmental health and racial atmospheres. Hsu (2021, p. 10) explains, “Recognizing the olfactory experiments of Black artists requires reframing olfactory aesthetics not only as a conceptual practice whose interventions target the deodorised Western art world but also as a struggle over everyday encounters with smells that have profound cultural and biochemical consequences”. Viveka Kjellmer looks at how perfuming the body can be an act of resistance and a way to assert subversive identities, while Alanna Lynch discusses the use of unpleasant smells in art to provoke political and social commentary.

The inherent discriminatory nature of odours is evident in the role that gender plays in discussions about olfactory art and odours in general. Debra Riley Parr’s chapter delves into the gendered nature of scents, highlighting how the perfume industry and marketing strategies perpetuate binary conceptions of gender through olfactory products: “The perfume industry continues to designate most of its products as feminine or masculine” (Parr, 2021, p. 22). Parr discusses how scents associated with femininity or masculinity influence perceptions and experiences of gender, often reinforcing traditional roles and stereotypes. The contributions by Sandra Barré and Dorothy Abram delve deeper into the feminine world of scents, by examining how female artists use scent to represent their bodies and challenge traditional gender norms (Barré) and exploring themes of seduction and power in the literature of Katherine Mansfield (Abram).

Queer theory is another important framework within the volume. Matt Morris’s exploration of perfume and drag highlights how olfactory art can be a site of queer resistance. By reinterpreting and reclaiming scents, queer artists challenge capitalist and heteronormative structures, creating spaces for alternative identities and expressions. This theme of queer resistance through scent illustrates the intersectionality of olfactory art, where issues of gender,



sexuality, and politics converge. By embracing and reinterpreting scents, queer artists challenge dominant norms and create spaces for alternative identities and expressions.

Olfactory art proves challenging for scholars in aesthetics and philosophy of art, due to the ephemeral nature of perfumes and scents as artworks that challenge the norms and practices of traditional art institutions and artistic objects. By incorporating scent, artists question the visual-centric nature of galleries and museums, advocating for more inclusive and multisensory approaches to art. This critique extends to broader cultural institutions, as olfactory art invites audiences to reconsider how sensory experiences are mediated and controlled. In this line, Brian Goeltzenleuchter introduces the concept of the olfactory counter-monument, where scent is used to engage museum visitors in active smelling and critical reflection. Lauryn Mannigel invites us to rethink the aesthetics of smell moving beyond Kantian passive contemplation to active, sensory engagement. In his *Enteric Aesthetics*, Arnaud Gerspacher explores the relationship between smell and the gut, considering how olfactory experiences can influence our understanding of bodily processes and health.

An additional issue that emerges with olfactory art regards the criteria that artists use to create their olfactory artworks. These criteria seemingly oscillate between idiosyncratic, individual choices and the search for perceptually meaningful and more consensual criteria to establish broader agreement. The latter can be based on shared meanings associated with odours, which might mediate crossmodal associations between odours and other sensory stimuli (see Deroy et al., 2013; Spence, 2011). It might be worth mentioning here the early attempts to use odours in artistic performances, often deliberately combined with other sensory stimuli, such as music. For instance, in 1891, a pioneering adaptation of the *Cantique des cantiques* of Solomon by Paul-Napoleon Roinard was performed in Paris at the Theatre d'Art, to present the novel idea of theatre as multisensory art by engaging the audience's senses of sight, hearing, and smell. Inspired by symbolist aesthetics, Roinard conceived a synaesthetic multisensory work in which original music, words, vowel sounds, colours, and scents were to be harmonised (Halperin, 1988, p. 199; Stokes, 1972, p. 167). For each poetic section, Roinard provided the details for the exact combination of music (e.g., 'in C'), colour (e.g., 'pale purple'), and scents (e.g., 'frankincense') (Roinard et al., 1976). A total of nine scents (namely, frankincense, white violets, hyacinth, lilies, acacia, lily of the valley, syringa, orange blossom, and jasmine) were released into the theatre, while the audience simultaneously listened to words and music (see, also, Spence and Di Stefano, 2022; and Di Stefano, Murari and Spence, 2022, on odours, poetry and music).

The volume also expands on environmental themes, particularly in chapters that discuss eco-olfactory art. Eleonora Edreva and Clara Muller focus on how artists use scent to highlight environmental issues, such as air pollution and climate change. By making these invisible threats perceptible, olfactory art mobilises public awareness and action. This ecological dimension of olfactory

art emphasises its potential to engage with urgent environmental crises and advocate for sustainability. Olfactory art has the capacity to make the invisible visible, bringing attention to the environmental crises that often go unnoticed. In a similar way goes the concept of olfactivism, introduced by Jim Drobnick, to refer to artists' use of scent in urban environments to provoke thought and action on social and environmental issues. D. Rosen explores rituals that involve scents shared between humans and other species, highlighting the interconnectedness of all living beings and opening to the mysterious role of chemosignals in interactional dynamics. Finally, Lindsey French discusses various artworks incorporating natural and artificial scents to draw attention to environmental degradation, climate change, and the human impact on ecosystems. She argues that olfactory art can create a more visceral and immediate awareness of environmental issues, encouraging viewers to consider their own sensory experiences and their relationship with the environment. By using scents to evoke natural landscapes, pollution, or the loss of biodiversity, artists can provoke a sensory response that complements visual and auditory elements, making environmental art more impactful and engaging.

In conclusion, *Olfactory Art and the Political in an Age of Resistance* presents a compelling case for the political and transformative potential of olfactory art. The thematic exploration across gender, race, environment, and institutional critique highlights how scents can serve as powerful tools for social critique and resistance. By proposing a radical alternative to the dominance of visual culture and engaging with the embodied nature of smell, this volume opens up new possibilities for understanding and experiencing art. It is an essential read for scholars and practitioners interested in the intersections of art, politics, and sensory studies, offering valuable insights into the often-overlooked world of olfactory art.

After reading the book, however, one might be left with an additional, fundamental question. The volume emphasises art, particularly olfactory art, as an activity fundamentally aimed at political and social resistance, such as against social stereotypes, pollution, and ultimately the circulation of powers that impede free self-expression and mutual relations. However, such an apparently Foucaultian thesis, if driven by a commitment to opposition for its own sake, might be exposed to the risk of circularity. Don't we need criteria for distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable forms of power, and thus those in need of resistance? Or, paradoxically, is any form of power worth resisting?

Recognising the power of art to dismantle traditional certainties and prejudices, one might wonder whether these forms of resistance also call for an explicit theoretical or anthropological foundation—an underlying idea on which to base the critique of the present. Novel forms of art, integrating the so-called lower senses, hold the promise of shedding light on these questions as well, helping us understand, at the end of the day, who we are and how we integrate with one another in societies.

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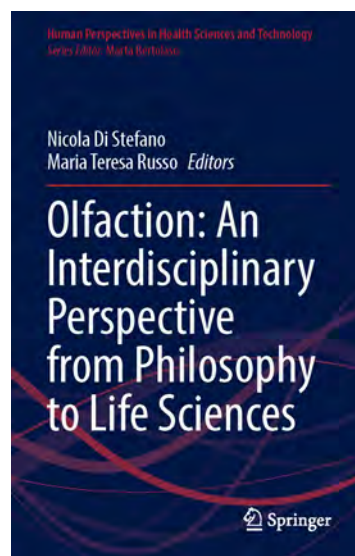
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# Review of Olfaction: *An Interdisciplinary Perspective from Philosophy to Life Sciences*

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Di Stefano, N. and Russo, M.T. (eds) (2022) *Olfaction: an interdisciplinary perspective from philosophy to life sciences*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer. ISBN: 978-3-030-75204-0.



*Olfaction: An Interdisciplinary Perspective from Philosophy to Life Sciences* (2022), edited by Nicola Di Stefano and Maria Teresa Russo, features essays by prominent scholars who collectively assert that all perception is crossmodal, or to use Shivani Kapoor’s expression (chapter 2) “intersensory”. This notion of the olfactory and the other senses truly operating as one threads together the four sections of the book. The contextual complexities of interpreting the meaning of smell also play out across many of the essays.

The first chapter is aptly titled *Smell as a Way of Thinking About the World: An Anthropology* by David Le Breton and sets the stage for the rest of the book. It provides a global overview of olfaction through time. It declares that, even though in the Western tradition the senses are often researched separately, they, in fact, never operate in isolation of each other. Le Breton acknowledges what is generally agreed upon by almost everyone who has written on olfaction: Historically the Western tradition relegated smell to a very low rank in the hierarchy of the senses, especially during antiquity and in the Enlightenment (Le Breton, 2021, p. 5). He then contrasts this historical Western prejudice with world views drawn from the anthropology of other cultures, particularly the Ongee of the Andaman Islands, studied by David Howes and Constance Classen, or the Umedas of New Guinea, where smell is much more central to their cosmology, their conception of the body, etc. (7). Le Breton then leans on more recent scholarship about the smells of “hate” (15). He makes the judicious observation that smells in themselves do not inherently convey meaning, rather the social group collectively invest smells with meanings, and these meanings differ from one group to another (12), and therefore become conducive to “othering”.

Shivani Kapoor’s chapter *The Smells of Caste – Body, Self and Politics*, stands out in this collection as the only contribution rooted in the Indian experience, but also by problematising how olfaction has been theorised in the West. In India, according to Kapoor, castes structure the value of odours. In her argument, it is as if caste dictates how members of one caste olfactorily perceive members of another caste (Kapoor, 2022, p. 22). In post-colonial theory, the other is often somebody belonging to another race, i.e., Indians perceived as other by the British. A number of stereotypes and value judgments are then attached to this ‘other’ (as already explained in Le Breton’s chapter). In the case of India, one caste is the other to another caste, i.e., the Scheduled Castes to the Brahmins.<sup>1</sup>

According to Kapoor, the structures of power are reflected in the ordering of the senses. In India, the politics of caste are inherently intersensorial (Kapoor, 2022, p. 25). Furthermore, in South East Asia, smells are never dissociated from other sensory modalities (Kapoor, 2022, p. 27). Because of the ordering of the senses mentioned earlier, to the Brahmins, the Scheduled Castes must smell foul and look dirty (even if they do not). Hence the ordering of the senses is reflected in the social body: Kapoor writes, this order maintains “the denial of bodily and moral integrity to those who are considered lower than oneself through restrictions on access to material and moral resources” (Kapoor, 2022, p. 27).

When the British colonised India, to ascertain their power, they sought to control the social body, and therefore the complex castes’ interactions. The British administration used their visual apparatus to classify and control the Indian social body, which mapped onto the caste system based on distance

<sup>1</sup> Kapoor chooses to use the noun “untouchables,” however, this expression is problematic within the Indian context, just like Dalit (another word for untouchables), therefore this review sticks to the official expression: “Scheduled Castes”.

and repulsion. Hence, seeing became “a form of evidence in a knowledge-based system where ‘meeting the other’ was a ‘discovery’ instead of ‘a contact or an encounter’” (Kapoor, 2022, p. 30).

To conclude, Kapoor evokes the literary example with which she began her essay, of reversing olfaction as an act of resistance: where the Brahmin finds that the Scheduled Castes smell foul, Kumud Pawde finds that the Brahmins’ smell is unbearable, as their odour of buttermilk and *shikakai* revulses her. To the oppressed, the oppressor also smells bad, demonstrating the potential of odours as a form of resistance.

Chapter 3, *Not Only Olfaction: The Nose, Protagonist of the Diversity and Individuality of the Human Face* by Elisabetta Cilli and Giorgio Gruppioni, stands out in this collection because it is the only essay that does not deal with olfaction *per se*, but rather with the morphology of the nose. This chapter draws extensively on biology, genetics, morphometry, and a mix of other exact sciences to explain how there are no two human noses (nor two faces) alike in the world. It would be possible to argue that this chapter is an outlier in this collection, as it studies an organ that has been perceived primarily as part of the breathing apparatus, and secondarily as the organ of olfaction, especially since it is the olfactory bulb located at the bridge inside the nose that is really the organ of olfaction. However, given the interdisciplinary premises of this book, it makes perfect sense to describe the nose as part of an olfactory system whose bulb is only one component. Indeed, the humidity of the nasal cavity is both essential to our breathing and to our olfactory capabilities. It turns out that the morphology of the nose conditions the humid state of our nose. One could also argue that olfaction is fundamental to breathing as it will warn us of foul smells that could hurt our lungs, and therefore our life.

A good portion of this chapter is dedicated to how climatic conditions influenced the evolution of the human nose. For instance, a wider nose is more suitable for hot and humid climates, while a narrower nose protects one better from cold air. During the last ten thousand years of human evolution, the nose changed in response to glaciation or warmer periods (Cilli, 2022, p. 38). Another hypothesis states that during the migration outside of Africa by the genus *Homo*, the nose operated as an organ of spatial orientation, another explanation for the dual respiratory and olfactory functions (Cilli, 2022, p. 39). Furthermore, the relationship between nose morphology, olfaction and climate supports the fact that olfaction operates better under hot, humid conditions, and lower barometric pressure.

The authors review the genetic evolution of the nose and end by applying all this research to facial reconstruction, and particularly that of the nose, based on cranial features. They discuss the different techniques that have been in use, dating back to the late nineteenth century. One of the areas of application of these techniques is to provide humanity with a plastic representation of past hominid appearance for both scientific and popular purposes. One such successful example is the re-creation of Dante Alighieri’s face, the author of the *Divine Comedy*, who, incidentally, had a very prominent nose.

As its title indicates, Madalina Diaconu's chapter, *Being and Making the Olfactory Self. Lessons from Contemporary Artistic Practices*, engages with olfactory art practices. First Diaconu examines the role of olfaction in identity formation (Diaconu, 2022, p. 56). The self is often thought of in contrast to the collective: there is a boundary around the self that makes it distinguishable from the collective. However, olfaction, with its atmospheric nature disturbs this definition. Diaconu then selects some artistic examples to illuminate, from various perspectives, some concepts of identity (Diaconu, 2022, p. 59) organised along the following categories: emplacement, trust and anxiety, individual recognition, self-acceptance and recognition, becoming animal, and gender. She concludes by observing that olfactory artists raise awareness about how olfaction constitutes different levels of individual and collective identity. Olfactory artists also challenge the traditional anthropological categories that distinguish humans from animals and rehabilitate an "animalic" sensitivity (Diaconu, 2022, p. 71).

Tonino Griffero, one of the main proponents of atmosphere theory, along with Madalina Diaconu, investigates the atmospheric qualities of olfaction in his chapter *Sniffing Atmospheres: Observations on Olfactory Being-In-The-World*. Atmospheres are intangible, have no clear boundaries, and fluctuate. Olfaction is a sense of proximity that is not representable but is "diffuse" (Griffero, 2022, p. 80). Philosophers of the past denigrated olfaction because they deemed it an animalic sense, but in contemporary philosophy, this animality elevates olfaction (Griffero, 2022, p. 78) because we are embracing again the intuitive, the emotional, and the irrational. Like Jacques Vignaud before (Vignaud, 1982, pp. 14–15), Griffero notes that out of all our senses, the verb "to smell" is the only one that is both transitive and intransitive. In other words, one uses the same vocable to indicate the emission of smells as well as their reception. The author ends by noting that all our attempts at philosophising about olfaction work against its atmospheric nature. Nevertheless, he wants to continue laying the groundwork for a rehabilitation of an olfactocentric discourse, balancing its atmosphere with a revaluation of this sense (Griffero, 2022, pp. 87–88).

Chantal Jaquet's *Smell as a Carrier of Value* investigates whether olfaction can be a carrier of ethical or aesthetical norms, and how these norms change with time. First, Jaquet methodically deconstructs the mechanism of olfactory othering, a process described in both Le Breton's and Kapoor's chapters. After reviewing some philosophical attempts in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to classify and judge smells, Jaquet tallies the many forms that olfactory othering takes on: ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender. She then gives some examples of how a social group remedies this "othering," be it through repulsion, as in the example from Kapoor's chapter, or through ritual purification to sanitise the other: Jaquet gives the example of rose water being sprinkled onto guests in Morocco to, at once, welcome them and purify them of their "otherness" (Jaquet, 2022, p. 97).

Jaquet relies on Constance Classen's research in the centrality of smell to the Ongee people, from the Andaman Islands, to demonstrate that olfaction has ethical value. She then cites Edmond Roudnitska's *L'Esthetique En Question*,



published in 1977, well before “the olfactory turn” noted by Jim Drobnick (Drobnick, 2016), where the perfumer called philosophers to task: set aside the prejudices from the Enlightenment, olfaction can be beautiful and challenging (Jaquet, 2022,100). Jaquet then proceeds to describe recent olfactory artworks, and remarks that their ephemeral quality makes olfaction particularly suitable for installations. Thus, an olfactory aesthetic is nascent. Madalina Diaconu and Tonino Griffero would perhaps venture to say that this is one of the consequences of a philosophy of atmosphere.

In the second half of this collection of well-researched essays, the editors shift our attention to matters of aesthetic, scientific, and technological concern in the olfactory experience. The final chapter, for example, presents detailed, technical diagrams for an Electronic Nose, which arguably is the next step in developing a machine that can surmount the difficult challenges of capturing scent and analysing it. The authors, Marco Santonico, Giorgio Pennazza, Paul Brinkman, and Arnold D’Amico, propose an apparatus that might replace the currently used headspace technology, although their article does not mention this tool most often found in chemistry laboratories or in the field like those in operation by Roman Kaiser at Givauden, for example. The prospect of storing olfactory data in the cloud as a means of experimenting with and expressing “the detected world experience to others,” seems exciting in its novelty and at the same time builds on a historical interest in human breath (Santonico, 2022, p. 219). The authors note that thousands of years ago Hippocrates urged “his students to smell the breath of their patients” (Santonico, 2022, p. 220). There is still much to be learned in terms of interpreting humans’ breath with its “hundreds of volatile organic compounds” (Santonico, 2022, p. 220).

One could imagine that the medical applications of olfactory gizmos like the Electronic Nose, might aid in the smell tests mentioned in Rachel Herz’s essay, *The Psychology of Aromatherapy and Health Benefits*. Beginning with a discussion of the vagaries of olfactory experiences, dependent as they are on deep personal and cultural differences, Herz’s essay ends with a catalogue of conditions in which the loss of smell is an early indicator of declining health: Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s, and COVID-19. The potentially healing capacities of materials, terpenes found in essential oils like lavender for example, or the invigorating effect associated with peppermint, are highly contingent, as Herz argues, on context and specific emotional experience. Nonetheless, such fragrances might in certain instances bring about some therapeutic results. Herz outlines the use of smells in medical experiments on people subjected to pain—administered through electro-shock or exposure to intense heat or cold—reminding us that the behind-the-scenes operations of testing whether certain smells might be efficacious in pain management, rely on subjecting test subjects to real pain. Herz speculates, however, about what she refers to as “smell training,” suggesting that the efficacy of odours in the treatment of pain may be simply a matter of discipline. She writes, “through daily olfactory training individuals become more disciplined and better able to control their thoughts and feelings, which in turn helps them in other situations, such as dealing with pain” (Herz, 2022, p. 199).

The possible connections between olfactory sensations and feelings and emotions, not under control, but unleashed, summon up other questions about the efficacy of smell to shape experience. To get at some of these questions, authors Nicola Di Stefano, Maddalena Murari, and Charles Spence analyse and document the intersections of the olfactory and literature and music in their chapter, *Crossmodal Correspondences in Art and Science: Odours, Poetry, and Music*. They begin by underscoring the distinctions between synesthesia and metaphor, that is the important differences between experiencing colour or sound as smell, for example, and the linguistic or musical act of evoking smell through colour or sound. Again, associations are contingent. They note that “Romantic aesthetics rated perfumes, especially floral scents, as a particularly evocative source of poetic inspiration” (Di Stefano, 2022, p. 164). In many of the texts cited, from William Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* to John Keats’ *Ode to a Nightingale*, the smell of violets operates as a conventional signifier that readers would recognise as a call to the emotions. References to a bed of violets or even a singular flower might reliably, across centuries, accompany a whirl of sentiments in which lovesick ecstasies intertwine with fading memories. Indeed, violet is one of the most volatile of fragrances and can leave one wondering if one really smelled it at all. That writers often link the experience of such fleeting smells with sound leads to the second section of the essay in which music, too, connects to feelings conjured by scent. Indeed, the authors argue that, although difficult to explain in words, there is an important “role of emotion in mediating both olfactory perception and smell-sound associations” (Di Stefano, 2022, p. 181). This mediation is evidenced in a fascinating review of multisensory artistic performances such as Paul-Napoleon Roinard’s *Cantiques des Cantiques* (1891), Sadakichi Hartmann’s *A Trip to Japan in Sixteen Minutes* (1902), the Australian Art Quartets *Scent of Memory* project (2016), and Chang Hee Lee’s *Essence in Space* project. These artistic investigations point to significant interest in the exploration of combining sound and scent together to be experienced in the same space. The authors pair these quite disparate performances with scientific explorations by G.W. Piesse in his book *The Art of Perfumery* (1855), which lays out clearly a historical precedence of thinking about scent in musical terms.

Rhett Diessner considers whether scent, on its own, can—like poetry or music—claim the status of art. His essay, *The Psychology of the Appreciation of Olfactory Beauty*, guides readers through a series of thoughts about beauty, and again, the argument here leads toward a discussion of emotions and the possibility of a sensory experience being perceived as beautiful. A classic concern of aesthetic theory, defining the category of the beautiful opens the consideration of scent having a structure—a form—that can be predicted, controlled, and repeated. Diessner finds philosopher Edmund Burke’s assertion that “smoothness is beautiful,” (Diessner, 2022, p. 143) “weird”, but the idea, along with the fact that scent is structured, gives credence to the possibility of scent being beautiful, and therefore possible to consider as art. A footnote on the famous perfume Joy (1929) points out that the fragrance, according to Luca Turin and Tania Sanchez “was purposefully designed as a Platonic archetype”

and as they also note, Joy “does not smell of rose, jasmine, ylang, or tuberose. It just smells huge, luscious, and utterly wonderful” (Diessner, 2022, p. 147). The chapter ends with a round-up of observations on spicy, fruity, woody, floral scents, and with the acknowledgement that while “beauty is still a mystery” (Diessner, 2022, p. 151), one’s appreciation of anything beautiful is contingent on cultural context.

The importance of context, including inculcated values and positions as determinants in olfactory experience threads the second half of the collection together. Danièle Dubois’ wide-ranging essay, *Towards a Situated Cognitive Approach of Olfactory Experiences and Languages*, begins with the assertion that the study of olfactory experience must be considered as “a cultural experience within a situated approach of human cognition” (Dubois, 2022, p. 118). That is, smell is entangled in the complexities and “infinite variations” of chemical composition of odours like roses, “caraway and spearmint” as well as in the “diversity of human practices” including the intricate workings of language. (Dubois, 2022, p. 119) The French and Li Wanzi languages provide case studies, and while Dubois does not mention the situation of the colonial relation between France and Gabon, nor the extractive nature of the relation, with Gabon’s rich uranium mines essential to the development of France’s nuclear program, she does note the problematic of being “biased by ‘our’ visuo-centric view of the senses” (Dubois, 2022, p. 133). The analysis of the connection between odour cognition and the Li Wanzi language runs up against cultural taboos and dwells mostly on smells related to the body, cooking, and hunting, while the section on French linguistic connections to odour discusses perfume and the smell of the Paris subway.

Rosalia Cavalieri continues this thematic of the contextual in her essay *What a Good Nose Knows: The Role of Smell in the Appreciation of Food*. She writes,

Smell has a special connection with knowledge. It is a sign of common sense, of intellectual acumen. After all, the Italian word ‘sagace’ (shrewd) derives from the Latin *sagire* – to smell, understood as to perceive acutely with the intellect—and today it still evokes quick-wittedness. It implies that sixth sense or sense of intuitional knowledge celebrated by the greatest olfactory philosopher, Nietzsche, who affirmed, ‘my genius lies in my nostrils’. (Cavalieri, 2022, p. 110)

What we can know through our sense of smell is critical in detecting food that has gone bad, but it is also more than a supporting actor in the pleasures associated with eating. For Cavalieri, the delicate interplay of *orthonasal* and *retronasal* olfaction may actually make people smarter—or at least it might “compensate for the large loss of genes of the olfactory receptors that human beings have lost over their evolution” along with the “development of a bigger brain” (Cavalieri, 2022, p. 113). Cavalieri argues the knowledge that comes from understanding how olfaction works in all the activities of the kitchen and the table expands one’s capacity to enjoy aromas and perhaps helps us recognise what the nose knows.

In conclusion, *Olfaction: An Interdisciplinary Perspective from Philosophy to Life Sciences* presents its readers with an array of essays arguing that the complexity of olfaction is not possible to understand without understanding the histories of the senses and the contextual entanglements of the meanings and values humans attach to smells. The volume explicates Western notions of hierarchy and their impact on the ordering of the senses, languages, and cultures in relation to one another. The book prompts many questions about the residual and extant powers of the West, and whether the desires to investigate olfaction are complicated, and perhaps compromised, by the hegemony at play in such inquiries. Laudably, the editors evince a commitment to an interdisciplinary approach to thinking about olfaction, bringing together scholars in the fields of philosophy, anthropology, medicine, linguistics, poetics, aesthetics, and music among others. This crossmodal approach seems propaedeutic to future, truly global and more inclusive, understandings of olfaction.

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# Review of *Kapitoly z estetiky múzických umení*

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Kopčáková, S. and Kušnírová, E. (2024) *Kapitoly z estetiky múzických umení*. Prešov: Vydavateľstvo Prešovskej univerzity. ISBN 978-80-555-3262-2



If a theorist contemplates art in the 21st century, they may encounter a situation reminiscent of artist Robert Irwin's humorous observation that contemporary theory has stretched the concept of art to such an extent that its original meaning has blurred. As the parameters for defining art continuously expand, theoretical reflection becomes increasingly specialized and fragmented. Art theory, as a discipline, requires navigating with insight and knowledge across a varied context. Given that current theories in aesthetics and the arts often fail to clarify, refine, or define key terms, there is an urgent need for texts that provide readers with a basic orientation through concise yet expertly informed content. In the performing arts realm, this need is addressed by the

undergraduate textbook *Chapters in the Aesthetics of the Performing Arts*, co-authored by Slávka Kopčáková and Eva Kušnírová, and published by the University of Prešov Press, which aims to provide an overview of key theories in the field.

Publications introducing readers to specific discursive areas of aesthetics are scarce in the Slovak book market, making the reviewed text a welcome addition. The authors of the textbook engage in this discourse from the outset by focusing on the field of *múzických umení* [musical arts],<sup>1</sup> as indicated in the title. While they explore areas involving live interactions between artists and audiences, they refrain from using the more contemporary term performing arts. Instead, the authors clarify the semantic distinctions between *múzické umenia* and performing arts. This clarification of terminological specificities and the precise use of basic terms are crucial aspects of the textbook's quality. The statement emphasizes the textbook's role as an essential resource, providing fundamental information for students and those wishing to update or expand their knowledge and understanding.

One positive aspect of this text is that it maintains a unified interpretative approach while extending beyond traditional art disciplines to underscore the interdisciplinary connections between fields such as aesthetics, philosophy of art, and art theory. Kopčáková and Kušnírová transcend the boundaries of conventional textbook introductions, emphasizing a broader artistic and theoretical context, and the text displays several characteristics of a monographic work. As both authors have previously published monographic works, including textbooks, the stylistic and morphological depth of this text is expected. In the present work, the authors effectively synthesize and organize key aesthetic-philosophical and art historical approaches pertinent to the performing arts. They consider the essential body of knowledge in the field of aesthetics of the performing arts and introduce foundational theories of performativity, referencing scholars like Wittgenstein, Austin, Goffman, and Eco. They focus on the development of performativity theory, tracing its implications from social sciences to the philosophy of art and subsequently to theoretical reflections on art itself. While the textbook is primarily aimed at students and teachers of aesthetics at Slovak universities, its interdisciplinary nature makes it relevant for a wider audience, including students of art and art science.

The authors skillfully elucidate the broader contextual background of the so-called performative turn by using examples from the fields of music and the performing arts, including figures like Cage, Kaprow, Kubkovič, Piaček, and Abramovič. These sections are relevant not only for their clarification and description of the artistic context but also for demonstrating why it was necessary to move toward the partitioning and specification of terms in theoretical reflection. Drawing on Central European aesthetics and art theory, the authors utilize key and established theoretical works while addressing the terminological specificities of terms such as performance, performativity,

<sup>1</sup> In the Slovak context, the use of the term *múzické umenie* (from the Latin and Greek word *muse*) is an old expression to refer to what is called in English *performing arts*.

happening, and event. The chapters are systematically and logically structured, providing an understanding of the social and philosophical contexts in which these theories were articulated.

The textbook comprises four well-structured chapters: *the Philosophy of Performativity and its Aesthetic Consequences*, *Performativity and Performance in Music*, *Performing Arts in Theatre and Aesthetics of the Performing Arts*. Slávka Kopčáková authored the first two chapters, while Eva Kušnírová wrote the third and fourth. The authors map key theoretical backgrounds and present the latest domestic and international approaches and works. The interpretation style is didactic, avoiding complicated academic language and unnecessary technical terms,

The first chapter, *The Philosophy of Performativity*, considers the position of the performing arts within the broader arts system. It systematically categorizes and conceptualizes the aesthetics of the performing arts, clarifying the key theoretical frameworks underlying current definitions. The chapter emphasizes the interactions and connections between *muzickými uměními* and performing arts, contextualizing their transformation within the art scene. The author broadens the discussion by incorporating interdisciplinary theoretical contexts and specifying key notions such as performance, performativity, happening, and event. Focusing on connections between experiment, performing art, and art-based research, the author identifies developmental shifts in the theoretical reflection on experimental music. The chapter maps out the philosophical-theoretical connections between significant 'turns' in 20th-century art history, such as the performative turn and the psychological turn, and refines the meanings of terms like experimental and avant-garde music.

The second chapter, *Performativity and performance in music*, defines key terms such as performance, action (event) and happening, focusing on the philosophical-aesthetic context in which these terms emerged within 20<sup>th</sup>-century theoretical reflection, with an emphasis on the contributions of Cage and the Fluxus movement. The author elucidates 'performativeness' not only as an art category but also as a principle emerging from experimental and postmodern music approaches. The chapter highlights the differences in theoretical approaches using examples like Marek Piaček's event model of music and Ladislav Kupkovič's initiatives. It also explores the distinctions between the terms event and happening within art disciplines, emphasizing key theoretical works from the domestic environment, including those by Kajanová, Martináková, and Piaček.

The third and fourth chapters, *Performing Arts in the Theatre* and *Aesthetics of Performing Art*, outline the theoretical frameworks for terms such as performativity, performance studies, and performance in contexts related to the performing arts. The author clarifies the terminological and conceptual distinctions between happening, event, performance, and action within the field of theatre. This exploration extends to the use of the concept of performance beyond the theater, providing insight into the cultural and social contexts in which this new model of art emerged. The chapter *Performing Arts in the Theatre*



maps the application of concepts and principles related to the 'performative turn' across various art forms, particularly music and visual arts. The chapter *Aesthetics of Performing Art* goes deeper into the origins and connections of performance as a process that enhances the interactions between objects, subjects, place, and time. The author pays particular attention to the interdisciplinary connections of aesthetic theories of performativity, focusing on four attributive properties: materiality, spatiality, corporeality, and sonority, while emphasizing the processual nature of the phenomena analyzed.

These chapters also provide a comprehensive examination of the theories of performativity by Fischer-Lichte and Schechner. The unifying theme of the presented theories, in addition to the performative turn, is the perception of art as a social act. Kušnírová further explores new concepts of viewer perception, emphasizing experiential aspects often linked to the active participation of involved actors.

In addition to its comprehensive content and focus, it is important to highlight that the authors of the reviewed text made a concerted effort to adhere to didactic principles suitable for university textbooks. Unlike many texts claiming to be university textbooks but lacking key parameters, this work maintains didactic principles, especially in clarifying key concepts and terms. The text is consistent and logically structured, facilitating an understanding of the relationships and connections between individual theories and concepts. Clarity and comprehensibility are further enhanced through graphical elements, such as the use of different typefaces and the marking of key concepts in bold or italics, which improve text clarity and help the reader navigate the textbook.

Each chapter is of adequate length, and the formal arrangement is appropriate. The authors employ tables as extratextual components, though the absence of a picture appendix is a drawback given the textbook's focus on the performing arts. Despite this, the chapters flow seamlessly from one to the next. The authors include common terms used in the Slovak environment for individual key concepts, thus expanding students' terminological knowledge. In conclusion, this textbook is well-founded and versatile, appealing not only to students of aesthetics but also to experts in artistic disciplines. It serves as an excellent foundation for further research, making it valuable for both students and scholars.

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# CONFERENCE REPORTS

# Freedom in Music: Contemporary Challenges

1st International Conference of the European Network for the Philosophy of Music (ENPM)

Porto on April 18–20, 2024

Slávka Kopčáková

From 18-20 April 2024, the first international conference of The European Network for the Philosophy of Music (ENPM) took place in Porto, Portugal. The topic of the conference “Freedom in Music: Contemporary Challenges” has focused on thematic issues connecting to creating music, performing music, consuming music, reception of music and its defining. The general aim of the platform ENPM is to promote and enhance the study of the musical phenomenon broadly understood from a philosophical perspective, and hence, the philosophy of music in Europe. The host institution for the conference was the Institute of Philosophy of the University of Porto (Instituto de Filosofia da Universidade do Porto, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto). The first ENPM conference was held as a kick-off event with the participants from European countries as well as the United Kingdom, Israel and the US. | *Keywords: European Network for the Philosophy of Music, Freedom, Music*

The European Network for the Philosophy of Music (ENPM) was established in spring 2023. It represents a network of scholars interested in the philosophy of music coming from philosophy and related disciplines (such as musicology, aesthetics, history of art, sociology, psychology or computational sciences) as well as professional musicians and practitioners, working primarily, but not exclusively, at academic institutions in Europe. ENPM was established on the initiative of researchers from Spain and Italy, with Nemesio García-Carril Puy (Complutense University of Madrid, Spain) as its main coordinator. The founding members and members of the steering committee are: Lisa Giombini (University of Roma Tre, Italy), Vitor Guerreiro (University of Porto,

Portugal), Dusan Milenkovic (University of Niš, Serbia); Alessandro Arbo (University of Strasbourg, France), Alessandro Bertinetto (University of Torino, Italy), Mario De Caro (University of Roma Tre, Italy), Krzysztof Guzczalski (Jagiellonian University of Krakow, Poland), Eran Guter (Max Stern Yezreel Valley College, Israel), Slavka Kopčáková (University of Presov, Slovakia), Elzé Sigutė Mikalonytė (University of Cambridge, UK), Vitor Moura (University of Minho in Braga, Portugal), Chiara Palazzolo (University of Tulsa, US), and Rūta Stanevičiūtė (Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre in Vinius, Lithuania).

The general aim of the European Network for the Philosophy of Music is to promote and advance the study of the musical phenomenon broadly understood from a philosophical perspective, and hence, the philosophy of music in Europe. Its specific goals encompass: fostering and enhancing connections and partnerships among European-based philosophers of music via conferences, workshops, interchange of visitors, collaborative research projects, formation of research groups; fostering and facilitating the dissemination of information concerning the philosophy of music within the network; supporting and enhancing the visibility, accessibility, and impact of philosophical inquiries into music both within academic circles and the broader community; promoting interdisciplinary research with related disciplines.

From 18-20 April 2024, the first international conference of the ENPM took place in the sunny city of Porto, Portugal. The host institution for the conference was the Institute of Philosophy of the University of Porto (Instituto de Filosofia da Universidade do Porto, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto). The conference was also the official inaugural meeting for the functioning of the platform, including the official approval of the statute and confirmation of the platform's objectives. The first ENPM conference was held as a kick-off event with the participation of 30 researchers from European countries as well as the United Kingdom, Israel and the US.

The event was devoted to exploring the topic of freedom in music in the face of contemporary challenges. Thematically, the conference was divided into five separate panels, each of which was devoted to one of the following strands: Creating music (authorship, copyright, appropriation, digital music, new composing practices, including AI); Performing music (professional ethics, ethical responsibility in performing music, new performing habits, improvisation); Consuming music (new consumption habits: streaming, web, participation, live music); Receiving music (political & social values of music: manipulation of taste, propaganda, censorship, music as a form of protest and resistance; the emancipatory dimension of music, music education, critical practices, educational implications for the general public); Defining music (the nature and meaning of music: consequences for ontology, epistemology, normative theory: music universals, cross-cultural issues, medium).

The conference session included 30 papers, in which individual speakers brought remarkable and interesting topics, and innovative perspectives to the conceptualization of the studied phenomena in music. Let me mention at least

the contribution of Alessandro Arbo (University of Strasbourg) *Freedom in the musical work, between aesthetics and ontology*, a pioneering philosophical reflection on the set theme of the conference. Ewa Schreiber (University of Poznań) in her presentation *Composers' self-reflection – “amateurish philosophizing”?* brought her own psychologizing scheme of the process of philosophizing about music, which takes place in the musician's psychological setting. A particularly fruitful discussion was provoked by Alessandro Bertinetto (University of Torino) with his paper *Improvising habit(s) of musical freedom*, which brought new perspectives on the ontological issues of improvisation as a mode that has been displaced from European art music during its historical development but is nowadays highly topical. Dušan Milenković (University of Niš) in his paper *Aesthetics and Contemporary Global Music* brought an updated perspective on the operativity and meaningfulness of the concepts of “world music” and “global music”. Israeli philosopher Eran Guter's (Max Stern Yezreel Valley College) presentation *Looping down to patterns of life: The emancipatory dimension of music* explored freedom in music in relation to the mechanisms of the emergence of thinking about music liberated from established schemas and connected to the art of living. Rūta Stanevičiūtė (Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre) in her paper *Ethical Turn in Aesthetics and Reception of Music* and Férdia Stone-Davis (Kunstuniversität Graz | University of Cambridge | Chair of the RMA Music and Philosophy Study Group) in *Epistemic injustice: what is heard and what is not heard* both presented ethical and epistemological theses concerning the reception of music. Two researchers from Slovakia, Markéta Štefková (Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava), Slávka Kopčáková (University of Prešov) and the Czech philosopher Josef Fulka, presented the state of musicological and philosophical reflection on 20th-century music in the former Czechoslovak context.

The first ENPM conference can be considered an extraordinary success and at the same time the first initiative event of a platform that has set very ambitious goals for its future activities. Among these, the intention to organise a scientific conference at least once every two years resonated in particular. Local seminars and workshops, and outreach initiatives using social media and digital communication channels are also part of the platform's research strategy. Applying for and implementing research projects under European Union programs in line with ENPM's objectives also appears to be key in the near future. In 2025, the Society is planning a scientific conference in Strasbourg (France), where it will expand its network of members by including experts from Europe but also from other parts of the world.

Music's cultural significance lies in the fact that it organizes and cultivates our perception in a very specific way – and yet it is the most abstract of the arts (immaterial, non-verbal). Its semantic possibilities are much smaller than those of the other arts, thanks to which it is able to develop a non-rational side of the human being (in the spirit of the Enlightenment balance of reason and emotion). In the words of Immanuel Kant, music presents aesthetic (as well as philosophical) ideas, although they are different from rational ideas that

can be expressed verbally and conceptually. Music cannot be accused of spreading ideological ideas; this has never been proven. However, it can make us happier and freer: making music can support our health as well as our personal integrity and morality, virtues that are part of *ars vivendi*. These considerations briefly outline the common subject matter that belongs to both music and philosophy, which is regaining its importance in the 21st century. In the past, music has been considered a philosophy, a worldview, even a language or mathematics; in every age, it has carried an ethos. Today, in a world marked by the disintegration of democracies, the rise of populism and the return of certain ideological motives in cultural policies, I consider research in the field of the philosophy of music (or, more broadly, the philosophy of art) to be necessary and socially beneficial. In this sense, I see the goals of ENPM as an important embodiment of these theses.

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