

SOCIAL EMANATIONS: TOWARD A SOCIOLOGY OF HUMAN OLFACTION

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Within the discipline of sociology human olfaction is rich with social significance yet remains a poorly charted frontier. Therefore, the following discourse is aimed toward the development of a foundation for the sociological study of olfaction. It is formed by the dual goals of unearthing the social history of olfaction and of providing a viable sociological account of the manner in which smells affect human ontology. From these goals arise the following research questions:

1. Have the meaning and social relevance of odors and the olfactory sensorium changed throughout different periods of history?
2. How have those in the lineage of eminent sociological thinkers addressed the phenomenon of human olfaction during these periods?
3. What is the process by which aromatic stimuli are transformed from simple chemical compounds, drifting in the atmosphere, into sensations in a sensory field and then on to perceived objects, to subjects of judgment and interpretation, and finally to bases of knowledge which form and continually reform individuals in the world?

The weaving of the sociohistorical tapestry of smell is undertaken to provide examples from thousands of years lived experiences as to the fluid and sociologically complex nature of individuals' olfactory senses. This historical information is presented in a narrative format and is synthesized from data gleaned from books, advertisements, articles in popular non-scientific magazines, as well as from the findings of studies published in medical/neurological, psychological, anthropological, and sociological scholarly journals.

Regarding theoretical aim of this discourse, insights are drawn from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory of human perception for the generation of a

framework for the sociological study of olfaction. Merleau-Ponty's theoretical notions are modified, modernized, and refitted to more specifically fit the subject of human olfaction and to include all that has been discovered about the biological specifics of olfactory perception since the time of his writing. Taken in sum, this effort is an access point to the understanding of how olfactory sensory perceptions flow toward the ontological unfolding of individuals.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER I	EXPLAINING THE RELEVANCE OF OLFACTION IN SOCIOLOGICAL TERMS 1
CHAPTER II	METHOD OF STUDY 14
CHAPTER III	A SOCIAL AND SCHOLARLY HISTORY OF THE OLFACTORY WORLDS OF THE WEST 20
CHAPTER IV	THE FLOW OF CONCEPTS IN A PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEORY OF OLFACTION 68
CHAPTER V	TOWARD A HIGHER OLFACTORY CONSCIOUSNESS 89
CHAPTER VI	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS 106
EPILOGUE 114
REFERENCES 118

CHAPTER I

EXPLAINING THE RELEVANCE OF OLFACTION IN SOCIOLOGICAL TERMS

“What separates two people most profoundly is a different sense and degree of cleanliness. What avails all decency and mutual usefulness and good will toward each other – in the end the fact remains: ‘They can’t stand each other’s smell!’” -Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

In my own opinion, a self-proclaimed aromaphile, smell is powerful. Fragrances permeate individuals’ lives. We live surrounded by the ebb and flow of air currents that swell with aroma, and surprisingly large portions of humans’ brains, like those of all mammals, are but one neuron away from the receptors that sense the odors in our world. People are all constantly smelling and being smelled as well as emitting and perceiving odors, and these odors likely play important roles in many areas of social interaction: eating and drinking, health, medicine, the domestic sphere, religion, industry, class and ethnic relations, and impression management (Synnott, 1991). Odors are everywhere and are performing a wide variety of social functions, yet so little is certain regarding the very personal and intimate sense of olfaction. Smell, indeed, is a highly elusive phenomenon, and while the vast majority of research relevant to the topic has, to date, been of a physical nature, many challenges are to be met before even the biological sciences can claim a comprehensive theory of olfaction. However, for sociology, the sense of smell appears to remain as a poorly charted frontier. In the social realm many fascinating questions regarding human olfaction remain unanswered. For example, what do odors mean? How are their meanings constructed? Are any meanings universal, or are they all culturally relative? How do odors affect social interaction, and how do they shed light on our own culture?

This effort to gain greater insight into the social nature of the olfactory sensorium began with a fine combing of sociological literature for any evidence related to humans' sense of smell; very little was found. This dearth was not quite as pronounced in the disciplines of psychology and anthropology, and while medical journals were replete with studies on humans' sense of smell, most all were underpinned by anatomical, physiological, or pathophysiological theoretical frameworks. Olfaction, however, is much more than a biological or psychological phenomenon; it is cultural, social, and historical (Largey & Watson, 1977). Sociologists have rarely researched olfaction; yet, the subject is rich with the potential to be of immense social significance. Odors function in many ways: as boundary markers, as symbols of status, as distancing tools, as instruments for impression management, as signals of danger and disease, and so on. Because odors can define individuals and groups as well as mediate social interaction (Classen, 1993), the study of the sociological significance of smell could, therefore, be viewed as an investigation into the very *essence* of human culture.

The notion of a sociology of human olfaction is, indeed, fascinating. It could even be argued that it would be futile for researchers to analyze social tensions and conflicts without accounting for the different kinds of sensibilities that decisively influence them. The fundamental premise underlying the concept of a sociology of olfaction is that sensory perception is social as well as a personal, physiological act. That is, smell is not only an act of interpreting aromatic compounds but also an influential variable in relations between individuals, an avenue for the transmission of

social norms, and a form of social intermediary through which social actors construct experiences and locate themselves and others in social life.

Within a given historical and cultural context, olfaction generates a spectrum of meanings. Smell has a history of warning of contamination, and an abhorrence of smells, as it is often linked to practices of self-preservation, is imbued with its own form of social power. Malodorous stimuli appear to endanger social order, whereas a triumph of the hygienic and the sweet-scented promises to bolster its stability (Corbin, 1986). Individuals seek to avoid foul-smelling effluvia. To most, human waste, traffic fumes, sewage treatment plants, paper mills, and increasingly, cigarette and cigar smoke smell bad; thus, they are bad, toxic, carcinogenic, and nauseating. Foul-smelling individuals are judged in a similar manner. If a person is thought to smell bad or to stray from his or her culture's olfactory standard, the individual's odor may serve as a marker corruption. In other words, odor is a raw indicator of both the mortal and moral aspects of human beings. Historically, odors served as barriers erected between segments of society. Regarding class, Simmel categorized the sense of smell as "highly displeasing or antisocial" and stated that the "effluvia" of the working class posed a threat to social solidarity:

It may be true that if social interests should so dictate many members of the upper classes would be prepared to make considerable sacrifices in their personal comfort and forgo many privileges on behalf of the less-fortunate...Indeed, such privations and sacrifices would be accepted far more readily than would any direct contact with the populace, smelling as it does of

the “sacred sweat of its brow.” The social question is simply a moral question; it is a question of the sense of smell (as cited in LeGuerer, 1994, pp. 29-30).

It is likely more than mere conjecture that, in the beginning, the world stank. This is not surprising, as the human animal is a powerfully industrious machine for generating odors. While ancient humans’ first goals may have been to seek shelter from the elements and to learn to use fire, not so much longer afterward, they turned to the problem of conquering smells – particularly their own. However, odor, it was to be revealed, was an enemy that was not easily vanquished. Unlike the saber-toothed tigers and woolly mammoths, which could be subjugated with sharpened spears, the stench of humans and their environments was a much more complex problem.

Today’s history comes deodorized. Thanks to experts in art, architecture, and artifact, the public’s collective eyes have been opened to what the past looked like, and all who have immersed themselves in historical diaries, novels, and letters have had their ears attuned to the distant sounds of civilized life. Yet, so few historians have provided us with the smell of previous societies. Researchers have been all too silent, repelled, perhaps, with modern hygienic sensibilities from even contemplating the stench of the past. Smell, both as an emanation of material culture and as a part of the empire of the senses, likely plays an important role in human affairs, and yet seems to have been neglected by the vast majority of scholars.

In the world that came before today’s hygienic regimes, stench filled the nose, but they also filled the mind. Smell featured crucially in leading theories of life, disease, the atmosphere, and in technologies of health from the Enlightenment to the mid-19th

century heyday of the sanitarians (Corbin, 1986). Pre-Pasteurian orthodoxy held that sickness arose from pestilential miasmas (poisoned air) given off by the environment, by towns, and by their “fetid” populations (Glaser, 2002). To individuals living in this age, stench was, in fact, disease, and as experts increasingly sniffed out the sources of stench among the “great unwashed,” sanitary reformers and social engineers joined forces in campaigns against filth in all its modes – physical, moral, and verbal. In other words, public health must be seen as more than a milestone on the road of progress; it perhaps had its wider politics as one of the Foucaultian disciplines of social control (Foucault, 1979).

As stated before, many philosophers have given scant attention to the olfactory sense. Such a neglect reinforces the claim that olfaction has deteriorated in significance since the start of the modern period. Some even go so far as to contend that the development of the olfactory sense is inversely related to the development of human intellect (Kern, 1974). Unlike vision and hearing, esteemed on the basis of a perpetually repeated Platonic prejudice, the sense of smell is often regarded as having very little utility in today’s civilized society (LeGuerer, 1992). According to Count Albrecht von Haller, “The sense of smell was less important to [man], for he was destined to walk upright; he was to discover from a distance what might be his food; social life and language were designed to enlighten him about the properties of the things that appeared to him to be edible” (as cited in Corbin, 1986, p. vi).

All of these ostensibly scientific notions produced a whole array of prohibitions related to humans’ use of their olfactory sensoria. Sniffing to indulge in an object’s

aroma, a penchant for powerful visceral odors, the erotic effect of sexual odors, etc. became subjects of suspicion. Such interests were often thought to be essentially savage and to attest to humans' animal ancestry, lack of refinement, and ignorance of good manners. In short, they revealed a fundamental failure in individuals' social edification. This notion is supported by Kern when he writes, "I gradually came to see that recognition of the role of odors in human affairs was a good index to the extent to which society was willing to concede that human beings were indeed corporeal beings, closely linked, with the animal world. Both the hairiness of man and his smells were the most pressing reminders of his animal ancestry" (1974, p. 816).

Although a considerable amount has been written on Western visualism, most other aspects of the Western sensory order have been ignored by social scientists. Based on the literature used to inform this essay, there appears to be a preoccupation with analyzing the role of the "gaze" in Western culture, to the exclusion of the other senses. Scholars focusing all of their attention on visual symbolism perhaps remain ignorant of the symbolic function of the other senses and may remain closed to the alternatives to the Western sensory order that are offered by other societies. This is not to suggest that having a more olfactory-minded society or scientific community would either solve any social problems or allow individuals to harmoniously combine into a cultural perfume. To the contrary, as will be shown, olfactory codes can and often do serve to divide and oppress human beings as opposed to uniting them. The suggestion is, rather, that smell has been marginalized because it is felt to threaten the abstract and impersonal regime of modernity by virtue of its radical interiority, its

boundary-transgressing propensities, and its emotional potency. Thus, while olfactory codes may have an indisputable role in the reinforcement of social hierarchies, at least at a semi- or subconscious level, sight, as the most detached sense (by Western standards), remains the basis for the study of such hierarchies as well as most all other social variables in modern society (Classen, 1993).

This may be due, in part, to the shifting nature of aromas, that is, the fact that aromatic compounds cannot easily be contained. Instead, they seep and float freely across boundaries, unifying various entities in an olfactory gestalt. This boundary transgressing character of smells renders logical the notion held during the premodern era of the West that odors represented intrinsic “essences,” which were revelatory of inner truth (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994). Through olfaction, therefore, individuals interact with *interiors* as opposed to facades, as they do through vision alone. Further, aromas do not convey direct structural information about the shape, form, and discreteness of entities and, thus, confound the seemingly foundational idea of a “thing” or “object” as a bounded, apparent entity. Some may find such a sensorial paradigm to be contrary to the more modern worldview emphasizing that which is linear, tangible, concrete, discrete, and amenable to quantitative analysis. A consideration of odors and humans’ perception of them may not even be possible in the specific and quantifiable manner which conventional wisdom dictates as representative of “good science,” as aromas can not necessarily be named – at least not in the lexicons of European languages. “It smells like...,” one usually has to say when describing an odor, groping to express an olfactory experience through the use of

similes or metaphors. Nor can odors be recorded: there is no effective way of either capturing scents or storing them over time. Rather, in the realm of olfaction, individuals must typically make do with nebulous descriptions and vague recollections.

Academic studies of smell have tended to suffer from the same cultural disadvantages as smell itself. While the high status of sight in the West makes it possible for studies based on vision and visuality to be taken seriously, attempts to examine smell may be at risk of being classified as “soft,” frivolous, or irrelevant, which may explain why there is only a scant presence of information offered in sociological collections regarding human olfaction *de jure*. Even social scientists who agree that human olfaction is an area ripe for sociological research and indicate such in their publications stop short of adopting olfactory phenomena as a topic for their own scientific inquiry.

The present effort, therefore, is undertaken in an attempt to do just that. Its foundation lies in the dual goals of unearthing the social history of olfaction as well as providing a viable sociological account of the manner in which smells may affect humans' ontology. From these underlying goals arise three distinct research questions:

1. Have the meaning and social relevance of odors and the human olfactory sensorium changed throughout different periods of history?
2. How have those in the lineage of eminent sociological thinkers addressed the phenomenon of human olfaction during these periods?
3. What is the process by which aromatic stimuli are transformed from simple chemical compounds, drifting in the atmosphere, into sensations in

a sensory field and then on to perceived objects, to subjects of judgment and interpretation, and finally to bases of knowledge and action which form and continually reform individuals in the world?

The first two questions are essentially historical in nature, but in the quest to answer the lattermost, it is essential to have a clear theoretical underpinning or lens through which to view and explain olfactory phenomena. The nature of this question begs for an approach that facilitates an understanding of sensorial perception and consciousness, and thus, phenomenology emerges as a frame of reference with great explanatory potential. Specifically, the theoretical offerings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his work, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), seem to be of great salience and utility in explicating how the senses, olfaction included, catalyze a cascade of events that lead to the generation of meanings. According to his notions, perception of stimuli through the five senses is the background of all experience and is at the basis of every conscious action. The world is a field for perception; humans perceive objects in the field; consciousness emerges from an interaction between an individual's sensory experience and reasoning; the nature of the resulting consciousness guides the assignment of meaning; and finally, from meaning springs action. In other words, in contrast to Descartes', "I think, therefore I am," Merleau-Ponty's approach supports, "I perceive through my senses, therefore I think, therefore I act, therefore I am."

Merleau-Ponty is a philosopher of the body; to him, the sensorial body is the locus of human existence, and "The perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence" (1945, pp. 52-53). It is in and

through the body and senses that individuals experience all aspects of their existence, including spatiality, temporality, the intersubjective human world, as well as the objects of the natural world. Clearly, such a theoretical framework is of great utility in this specific study as it reinstates perception as foundational for all human experience and situates olfaction, along with the other senses, as a significant precursor for the generation of meaning. Also, importantly, it situates the senses in a decidedly subjective context which, in turn, allows for intersubjective and cross-cultural variation. Therefore, it is by way of phenomenology, by going back to humans' actual lived bodily experiences, that the manner in which human olfaction participates in "the dialectical process of living experience whereby we ourselves, other people and things come into being" (Langer, 1989, pp. 17-18) is rendered more clear.

The philosophy of Merleau-Ponty was clearly shaped by the notions of Husserl and was focused on disputing what he believed to be the dual propensities of Western philosophy, that is, empiricism and intellectualism, which is more often termed idealism or rationalism. A recharacterization of the connections between dualistic categories, such as subjects and objects, individuals and the world, etc., was at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's work and was accomplished primarily through a refocusing on the existential and corporeal body as the *sine qua non* of human existence. He argued that the significance of the body is typically undervalued by traditional philosophers whose inclinations are to regard the human body as nothing more than an object under the direction of a transcendent mind. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy was grounded in the notion of sensory perception as the most essential and elemental variable in human

existence. To him, a human's "embodied inherence" is more fundamental than his or her reflective capacities, or there is a "primacy of perception" such that knowledge is a derivative of and consequent to his or her body's exposure to the world (1945).

Again, he argues that traditional empiricism as well as rationalism are insufficient in describing the phenomenology of perception. Empiricists maintain that experience is the principal source of human knowledge, an experience which underpinned by sensory perceptions. Rationalists proffer that thought or reason is the primary source of knowledge, that is, knowledge does not depend on the senses or perception. According to Merleau-Ponty, empiricists are not able to explicate how consciousness influences humans' perceptions, and rationalist philosophy is inadequate in describing how individuals' sensory perceptions shape their consciousness. Taking olfaction as an illustrative case, rationalism is deficient in explaining how smells (sensory perceptions) may have been used as a justification for institutional segregation and racial oppression or as the basis for individuals' claims of superiority (nature of consciousness) over those who they allege insult their collective olfactory sensibilities. Rationalist philosophy is also insufficient in accounting for the link between Adolph Hitler's disgust with what he perceived to be the smell of Jews and his claims that such smells were symbolic of their corrupt moral condition (1942), as such a philosophical framework fails to account for the influential nature of the human sensorium on the resulting assignment of meaning, or "reason," which is given preeminence by rationalists.

Similarly, empiricist philosophy may lack the potential to explain why what could be described as the putrid, rancid, disgusting odors of long-aged cheeses (a sensory

perception) are the very qualities or markers of what many view as a true Epicurean delight (nature of consciousness), as such a philosophical framework fails to account for the cognitive mediation which occurs between sensory perceptions and the assignment of meaning. Therefore, in order to reconcile what he perceived to be the respective weaknesses of these two theoretical frameworks, Merleau-Ponty offered his own notion that perception is neither purely sensation, nor is it purely interpretation. Rather, consciousness is a process that includes sensing as well as reasoning. He believed that perception may be structured by associative forces (i.e., perception is cognitively mediated) and may be focused by attention. It is attention that directs subjects' focus toward any specific aspect of a perceptual field.

To him, every sensation belongs to a sensory field. The concept of a sensory field implies that every object which is perceived belongs to a field of other objects which are not perceived. Every perceived sensation, therefore, belongs to a field of other sensations which are not simultaneously perceived by the subject. Again, it is attention that guides subjects' awareness to specific stimuli within the landscape or "smellscape" in which they are immersed. According to Merleau-Ponty, the concept of a sensory field implies that all senses are spatial, and that all sensory objects must occupy space. This notion would potentially thwart an application of his *Phenomenology of Perception* to a study of human olfaction, as odors do not occupy any appreciable physical space, strictly speaking. However, he clarifies that space may be defined as a form of external experience rather than as a physical setting in which

external objects are arranged and that the relationship between objects in space (e.g., individuals and odors) are revealed by the experience of the perceiving subject.

Merleau-Ponty himself defined phenomenology as the study of essences. Smell, too, by its very nature, is concerned with essences. Thus, his *Phenomenology of Perception* seems to provide a clear, salient, and very useful conceptual model through which to trace the cascade of events underpinning a sociology of human olfaction as opposed to other theoretical frameworks which do not explicitly address the potent effect of the human sensorium upon the outcome of ontology.

CHAPTER II

METHOD OF STUDY

As stated before, this research effort is primarily investigative and exploratory in nature. It is not intended as an end point but rather as a launching point for even greater endeavors in the study human olfaction. In *Varieties of History* (1954), Hofstadter described what he believed to be the difference between nonscientific historical compilations and what he termed a historical monograph. To him, historical monographs are aimed at analyzing, in some new manner, the meaning of a sequence of history in order to provide new information to those in a specific discipline. Thus, this work on human olfaction may be said to be monographic in its design. Hofstadter believed that a historical monograph, undertaken with an analytical approach from the social sciences, would no longer be “a poor imitation of science” but would “flourish as a kind of exploratory essay” (p. 362).

Further, he projected that future generations would likely see the development of an academic genre from the blending of history and the social sciences. Such a genre would benefit from a “cross-fertilization” of methods, substantive areas of focus, intellectual concerns, and professional perspectives. Hofstadter, himself a historian, wrote eloquently about what he believed to be the contribution of the social sciences to reporters of history, but the converse is, in my opinion, true as well. In an exploration driven by the notion that there is a sociology of human olfaction, it is likely beneficial to explicate its long and complicated history in order to situate the phenomenon temporally. Hofstadter wrote, “Our capacity to use history to enlarge our

understanding is not impressive. Contemporary discussion of mass culture, for instance, is often carried on as though no previous age had ever presented problems to specialized intelligence and cultivated sensibility" (1956, p. 365). He proffered that such a failing is widespread among social psychologists and sociologists "who forget that they need history very much" (p. 365), a notion also supported by Michelet who wrote, "He who would confine his thoughts to present time will not understand present reality" (as cited in Hofstadter, 1956, p. 365).

Hofstadter reminds that historical monographs are not intended for mere entertainment but that their authors are charged with the task of analyzing human experiences in such a way as to provide workable tools for the performance of certain tasks. In accord, it is hoped that the information that will be revealed in the remainder of this text will provide fertile ground for the generation of *a priori* hypotheses in future studies which may, in turn, generate information that better lends itself to some sort of pragmatic application or "workable tool." While this project was begun with no preconceived notions about human olfaction that would lead to the formation of testable hypotheses *de jure*, certain overarching themes began to emerge during the early phases of data gathering that seemed quite salient. These themes and their corresponding topics were linked together into a logical sequence from which the three above-stated research questions were generated and from which an organizational framework for the presentation of research findings was derived.

This discourse is presented in a narrative format and is synthesized from data gleaned from books, advertisements, articles in popular non-scientific magazines, as

well as from the findings of studies published in medical/neurological, psychological, anthropological, and sociological scholarly journals. Texts regarding historical accounts of health and medicine, mythology, poetry, and literature are also used to inform this study. Again, the fact that there have been few studies of human olfaction by sociologists themselves necessitates the integration of a range of findings from various other specialist disciplines (e.g., the histories of science and medicine, urban studies, public health, psychology, and literary criticism) in an attempt to capture the power exercised over peoples' lives by the combined forces of smell.

The quest for foundational resources began through the use of academic search engines. Various strings and combinations of search terms (e.g., odor, olfaction, aroma, smell, scent, social, sociology, etc.) were entered during the research process, which spanned an approximately four-year period of time, in order to capture the rapid expansion of electronic data. The resultant resources were read and analyzed as well as any seemingly fruitful resources listed in their bibliographies. The process may be best described as a sort of working backwards from a source, to the sources that it informed it, and so on, until the resulting literature was only scarcely or tangentially related to the subject to human olfaction.

While some of the findings used to inform this essay were derived from conventional, quantitative analysis aimed at causal explanations, many of the sources reviewed were, themselves, narrative in format. Thus, it is from an integration of these narratives that this sociologically directed account of human olfaction flows. In the last decade, considerable debate has taken place over the relative merits of narrative

analysis in sociohistorical inquiry (Griffin, 1993; Aminzade, 1992), but some claim that a paradigmatic shift is currently underway as textual examination and the deciphering of meaning have become common, accepted modes of inquiry (Fox & Lears, 1993). The main objective of this effort is not to engage in any grand theorizing, to explain what definitively “caused” an action, to identify any sort of statistical regularities in a group of cases, or to join in the search for universally predictive laws. It is not aimed at generalizing in terms of causes but in terms of narratives of individuals’ phenomenological experience of olfaction. Therefore, it seems that a narrative presentation of analyzed documentation that is, in some cases, itself, narrative in fashion is an appropriate and even warranted methodological approach.

This sort of sociohistorical framework is not made simply of a series of “snapshots” but of an unfolding of events in which complex actors, with acute olfactory sensoria and complex neurological structures, encounter even more complex stimuli. In a phenomenological frame of reference, there is a centrality of meaning that seems to beg for a narrative explanatory format. More specifically, because in a *Phenomenology of Perception* framework there are no independent causal variables, it would be nonsensical to apply a methodology that involves the identification of such variables or that is directed toward the discovery of predictive laws.

Such an approach is, of course, not without limitations. The totality of information about any category of human culture is likely inexhaustible. Likewise, it exceeds the capacity of any researcher to collect, absorb, synthesize, and relate it in its entirety. The overall body of literature used to inform this effort is necessarily limited

as well, and thus the themes that can be reasonably explored are limited in accord. Specifically, the subset of relevant documentation that will be examined in this discourse will necessarily be a function of the three research questions outlined in the first chapter.

Also, a sociohistorical approach itself may be seen as inherently deficient by those who hope to wed the social sciences with the natural science through the exclusive use of methods that allow for statistical analysis, statistical generalizations, and statistical prediction. To mitigate this deficiency, Hofstadter (1956) suggests that a historical approach is most rigorous and scientific in instances when researchers use it to explore a very narrow segment of reality. To him, "The answers to small questions sometimes shed bright but narrow beams of light on the larger problems of human behavior and the social process, and it is not unthinkable that they may have some important cumulative result" (p. 369). Hopefully, he would find the current endeavor to be sufficiently narrowed by the uniqueness of the subject matter of olfaction as well as by the above-stated research questions. What is also hoped for, however, is that, with an eye toward phenomenology, an applicability to manifold situations, epochs, cultures, and individuals will still be possible despite the specificity of the subject matter.

Finally, it might be argued that focusing on smell to the exclusion of the other senses creates a sensory bias and that, perhaps, the role of smell in culture is best understood within a multisensory context. However, as scientists, social and otherwise, have long excluded olfaction from their theses, choosing instead to focus on matter of the visual register without being accused of any sensory biases, a singular focus on

smell may serve to redress this long-standing imbalance. By bringing scents and their social sequelae to our collective noses, the neglect of olfaction as a viable sociological subject matter may finally begin to be rectified. By demonstrating the importance of odors and olfactory processes, I hope to bring validity to smell as an essential part of the multisensory and cognitively-mediated apprehension of reality in progress toward a greater appreciation of how the senses interact with each other as drivers of culture.

CHAPTER III

A SOCIAL AND SCHOLARLY HISTORY OF THE OLFACTORY WORLDS OF THE WEST

In this chapter, information about Western ideas regarding the olfactory sense from the days of Plato and Aristotle, through the range of Christian philosophers, to Hegel and Marx, and beyond is presented in an attempt to determine whether the meaning and relevance of odors and the human olfactory sensorium have changed throughout different periods in history. This chronology is presented along with the respective sociological thinkers who examined, wrote about, and perhaps influenced the social history of smell. Particular attention is given to shifts occurring in the hierarchization of the five senses and to the manner in which olfactory sensations were experienced and utilized during this historical continuum. Certain questions recur throughout this section, such as: are the senses, in general, and olfaction, in particular, valid or invalid ways to gain knowledge; is the act of smelling morally acceptable or is it viewed as primordial, animalistic, and corrupt; are olfactory sensations simply means to ends or are they qualified to stand alone; and, which of the senses are thought to be superior, and why?

To begin, conventional wisdom informs that the Greeks valued a sensuous existence; the nature of their games, sports, banquets, feasts, theater, erotic paintings, creative sculpture, and architecture lend support to the notion that those among the Greeks who were fortunate enough to maintain citizen status aspired to commodious living. Yet, there appears to be evidence of a distrust of the senses in the works of some of the earliest Greek philosophers, including Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides,

and Empedocles (Guthrie, 1962, p. 394). Parmenides, it seems, was one of the first to make the momentous distinction between the senses and reason. In a passage of a poem he wrote, a goddess warns him not to trust the senses but to judge by reason (Guthrie, 1965, p. 25). While Empedocles was also persuaded of the fallibility of the senses, he argued that the mind, too, is a feeble instrument. Indeed, in his view, the senses *are* a valid means to understanding, with no one element of the human sensorium being superior to the others: "Come now, observe with all thy powers how each thing is clear, neither holding sight in greater trust compared with hearing, nor noisy hearing above what the tongue makes plain, nor withhold trust from any of the other limbs [i.e., other sensory organs], by whatever way there is a channel to understanding, but grasp each thing in the way in which it is clear (Guthrie, 1965, p. 139).

Despite Empedocles, the Greek tradition insisted on drawing a clear distinction between the senses and the mind and on the epistemological and metaphysical superiority of the latter. The senses, such as olfaction, had a place, but that place was low, restricted as such to the animal part of humanity. All animals had senses, but it was the distinctive capability of reason that distinguished humans from the rest. This notion is rendered very clear in Plato's allegory of the cave in Book 7 of the *Republic*. The captive audience in the cave, trusting their senses, believes that the flickering shadows on the wall and the ringing echoes are "real." However, it is "reason," concludes Plato, not the senses, that is necessary for the understanding of "the real" and "the good" (1963 version, pp. 748-750, p. 764). Elsewhere, Plato argues that there

are three types of men: those of gold, of silver, and of bronze, who are ruled respectively by the head, the heart, and the belly, corresponding to reason, courage, and the senses. To be ruled by the senses is to be of the lowest type of humanity, fit only for menial labor, such as farming in the Republic. For Plato, the superiority of the mind over the senses was a given, and the social hierarchy of his ideal Republic (i.e., guardians/philosophers at the top, then warriors, and finally farmers/artisans) is clearly congruent with his philosophy (Plato, 1963 version).

Despite his disdain of humans' less-evolved functions, Plato did seem to have an interest in the senses, and he attempted to explain, mythologically, their origins. The most notable aspect of his discussion is the primacy he accords to the sense of sight as the foundation of philosophy and as the sense that leads to God and Truth. He writes, "The sight in my opinion is the source of greatest benefit for us, for had we never seen the stars and the sun and the heaven, none of the words which we have spoken about the universe would ever have been uttered...And from this source we have derived philosophy, that which no greater good was or will be given by gods to mortal man" (1963 version, pp. 1174-1175). Similarly, in the *Symposium* (1963 version, pp. 562-563), Plato argued that it is visual beauty which initially inspires the philosopher to mount the "heavenly ladder" to God, who is "Absolute Beauty."

Aristotle appears to have been equally enthralled with the sense of sight. Echoing Plato, he began *Metaphysics* with the linking of sight to knowledge: "All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others

the sense of sight...The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things" (1984 version, p. 1152). Unlike Plato, however, Aristotle did discuss and offer a ranking of all five of the senses. Sight, of course, was given the most privileged status. Aristotle devoted the majority of his writings on the human sensorium to the visual sense and described it as the most highly developed, clearest, and most preferred. Touch occupied the fifth and lowest ranking, as Aristotle believed that it was most "primary." In this instance, "primary" appears to have been used to connote the elementary or primordial nature of this sense. Aristotle believed touch to be so rudimentary because it belongs to all animals, as "many animals have neither sight, hearing nor smell," because it functions through direct physical contact (as did taste, he added, but taste, to him, was simply another form of touch), and because touch is essential not only for well-being or for the creation and sustaining of life itself (1984 version, pp. 658-660, pp. 691-692).

Touch and taste were "animal" senses, in Aristotle's view, as they made humans susceptible to lust and gluttony. In contrast, he pointed out that "in regard to the pleasures of sight, hearing, and smell, no-one is called profligate if his is in excess" (1984 version, p. 1950). The overall Aristotelian ranking of the senses, based on criteria such as clarity, purity, degree of development, desirability, honor, enlightenment, and a human/animal binary, is as follows: sight is highest, then hearing, smell, taste, and finally touch. Again, the first three senses were considered to be "human senses," and the two latter were "animal." To Aristotle, sight and hearing, whose special contributions to humanity and beauty and music, both could lead to God.

At the bottom of the hierarchy were the animal senses of taste and touch, which could be abused through gluttony and lust respectively, and which did not lead to God. In between was smell: it could not be abused, in Aristotle's view, but it also could not lead to God. References to this Aristotelian ranking appear relatively frequently in the historical literature related to the human sensorium, and Hegel's own hierarchy is quite similar, as will be presented later in this text.

Both Plato and Aristotle agreed that humans were equipped with imperfect olfactory apparatus. Plato stated that the "veins" were too narrow to perceive "particles" of earth and water and too wide to entertain those of fire and air (1963 version, p. 1190), while Aristotle blamed the width of the nasal passages for the lack of olfactory finesse and for the frequency with which humans sneeze (1984 version). Both philosophers also agreed on the nebulous and transient nature of aromas. According to Plato, odors emanate from a body that is undergoing change and that is therefore unstable. Created by an "intermediary state," by a change, odor "is a half-formed nature," (1963 version, p. 1190) which makes its perception difficult. For Aristotle, the sensations to which odor gives rise are exceedingly difficult to analyze. At the pivotal point between the outer senses of sight and hearing, which rely on some sort of external stimulation, and the inner senses (taste and touch) the sense of smell is ambivalent, neither one nor quite the other (1984 version). Finally, Aristotle saddles the human olfactory apparatus and odors with a third element of imperfection; that is, the close links that exist between the act of smelling and human emotions. To him, the fact that the perception of any odor is necessarily accompanied by some feeling of pain

or pleasure actually reveals a sense organ incapable of transcending its physical matrix (1984 version).

Indeed, this sort of emotional relationship is, to Plato, generally deemed responsible for humans' lack of a suitable olfactory vocabulary. The different varieties of smell, he contends, "have no name, and they have not many or definite and simple kinds, but they are distinguished only as painful and pleasant" (1963 version, p. 1191). Plato recognized as pleasures only those sensations that were independent of any need or desire, pleasures whose purity made them akin to wisdom and the intellect. He makes the distinction between the use of the senses in providing pleasures that elevate the soul and their function as a source of purely carnal indulgence, which distracts from knowledge and contemplation. Thus, to Plato, the status of human olfaction varies according to the pleasures it procures; it is positive when such pleasures are aesthetic in nature and negative when it ignites lust or desire.

The same ambiguity occurs in Aristotle, who set up a sort of ontological distinction between specifically human odors and those common to both people and animals. The first, which play no role in survival, have an absolute value. Their pleasant or unpleasant character is not established by a bodily need. They can thus serve as the source of aesthetic pleasures, which he believed were only enjoyed by humans (1984 version). The second sort of emanation is good or bad incidentally or by accident. For example, an aroma may be agreeable when one is hungry and unpleasant if one is not. Thus, its value, dependent as it is on individual objectivity, is relative. To Aristotle, the latter sorts of odors inspire a certain disapproval, as they can

abet lust and gluttony. For example, he contends that those who derive pleasure from the odors of things such as apples or roses are not to be qualified as unbalanced individuals; but those who relish the odors of unguents or culinary preparations are, as unbalanced persons derive pleasure from the fact that such odors remind them of the objects of their lustful desires (1984 version). Here, Aristotle is agreeing with Platonic thinking. The pleasures aroused by scents should be aesthetic, not carnal. To both, the sense of smell is the unstable point at which the pure and impure senses meet, stabilized only when it causes a certain type of sensation.

By further accentuating the opposition between the body and the mind already established by Greek philosophers, followers of Christianity began to increasingly condemn olfactory pleasures with an antagonism not found in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the Song of Songs is replete with sensual olfactory metaphors and comparisons of lovers' bodies to exquisite spices and perfumes. "Thy name is an ointment poured forth," says the fiancée to her betrothed; he is a "bundle of myrrh," a "cluster of camphire [camphor]." The beloved's cheeks "are as a bed of spices," his "lips are like lilies, dripping sweet smelling myrrh" (Song of Songs 1:13, King James Version).

In the New Testament, however, there is evidence of veiled criticism of the profane use of scent. When Mary Magdalene anointed the feet of Christ "with a pound of ointment of spikenard [lavender], very costly," Judas Iscariot asks, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" "Let her alone," Jesus replies, "against the day of my burying hath she kept this" (John 12:1-8). To counter

the indignant reaction of the apostles' treasurer at such futile waste, Christ legitimizes Mary's actions (for which she was to become the patron saint of perfume makers) by giving it a sacred significance; the costly lavender was poured out for a religious purpose, as a funeral rite.

To Christians, the senses were moral as they were created by God; yet they provided temptation, and intemperate sensory satisfaction could lead followers down paths to sin, damnation, and hell. As an example, Saint Paul warns the Philippians: "I have told you this many times before, and now I repeat it with tears: there are many whose lives make them enemies of Christ's death on the cross. They are going to end up in hell, because their god is their bodily desires. They are proud of what they should be ashamed of, and they think only of things that belong to this world" (Philippians 3:18-20).

Saint John Chrysostom contrasted the pleasing perfume of repentance and prayer with "the black and stinking smoke" that emanated from sinners. While the pure in heart gave off a delicate odor that obtained them pardon and protection, the sinners, sick with an "invisible plague," emitted a smell that brought down Divine wrath (1956, p. 362). Members of the Church railed not only against women who not only diverted aromatic substances from the pious use for which it was intended, but also those who turned their bodies into altars onto which they poured perfumes to honor a foul spirit. The only acceptable odors were those offered up by a fervent soul to God.

In his *Confessions*, Saint Augustine describes with remarkable frankness his ambivalence toward, and battles with, the senses. To him they were, on one hand, channels through which the glory of God was experienced:

You called me; you cried aloud to me; you broke my barrier of deafness. You shone upon me; your radiance enveloped me; you put my blindness to flight.

You shed your fragrance about me; I drew breath and now I gasp for your sweet odour. I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am inflamed with love of your peace. (1961, p. 232).

On the other hand, they were dangerous, as they served as catalysts of sin. Saint Augustine laments that, "The senses are not content to take second place. Simply because I allow them their due, as adjuncts to reason, they attempt to take precedence and forge ahead of it, with the result that I sometimes sin" (1961, p. 238). To him, all the senses were problematic in this way, but some were more so than others: "The sense of smell does not trouble me greatly with its attractions," but, he admits, "I am tempted through the eye" and "...more fascinated with the pleasures of sound." Saint Augustine loved music: "So I waver between the danger that lies in gratifying the senses [i.e., simply listening to music] and the benefits which, as I know from experience, can accrue from singing" (1961, p. 233). Augustine's conflict between the enjoyment and the renunciation of sensual pleasure is perhaps no better illustrated than by his famous line of prayer: "Give me chastity and continence, but not yet" (1961, p. 169).

The struggle against lasciviousness, a priority of Christian ethics, continued for centuries; indeed, in many veins, it continues today. The repression of sensual pleasure, a prerequisite for salvation, was preached constantly. The perfumed, adorned, and desirable body described in the Song of Songs gradually became nothing more than a mass of flesh that must, under no circumstance, arouse even the slightest stirrings of attraction or desire. While the origin of artificial fragrances, according to Judeo-Christian culture, was divine, as the Lord himself instructed Moses to create a perfume and gave him the formula of myrrh, cinnamon, cane, cassia, and olive oil (Exodus 30:22-24), perfuming and even incense fell into disfavor with the rise of Christianity in the fourth century (Classen et al., 1994). Incense was condemned as part of the trappings of idolatry, and early Christians went so far as to suffer execution for refusing to burn incense before the image of the Roman emperor, a standard test for imperial loyalty (Classen et al., 1994). The perfumes, in turn, were considered to be a frivolous luxury and bait which drew its wearers to lust and debauchery. Denial of the senses was to be the rule in all things Christian. Indeed, in their reaction against "pagan sensuality," many Christians even stopped bathing and were proud to reek of "honest" dirt, sweat, and the scents allotted to the human body by its "Maker" (McLaughlin, 1971, p. 11).

The perfumed high-life of the Roman elite, denounced as decadent by Christian and other ancient moralists, was dealt a final blow when invading Germanic tribes succeeded in dismantling the Empire in the fifth century. The conquerors, accustomed to a rough and ready life, had no patience for such upper-class niceties as perfumed

clothes and scented baths. According to the Romans, in fact, their clothes and bodies gave off a nauseating odor, which might have been due in part to the custom which prevailed among some of the tribes of using rancid butter as a hair dressing (Grant, 1976); however, their concern with the foreign stench was perhaps as telling of the Roman fears of incursion and cultural dissolution than of any real malodorous qualities.

While much of the art and artifice of the personal and aesthetic uses of aromas disappeared with the fall of the Roman Empire, scents proved to be too deeply embedded in culture to be completely cast aside. What happened instead was that Christians gradually incorporated and sublimated many traditional olfactory practices while making it clear that they were for use only in a religious context. Thus, by the sixth century, incense, as a symbol of prayer, had become an acceptable part of Christian ritual (Stoddart, 1990). Fragrant flowers and odors, in turn, figured into many Christian legends, perhaps the most ubiquitous of which was that of the odor of sanctity.

In early Christian tradition, all priests were thought to emit a sweet odor in literal accordance with Saint Paul's statement that "we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved" (2 Corinthians 2:15). This belief was likely made more credible by the fragrance of the rose garlands priests wore on feast days and the incense with which priests were often enveloped. The odor of sanctity, however, came to be particularly associated with anyone who was thought to be of exceptional holiness. The monasticism of this period was characterized by acts of extreme asceticism, and the particular form of renunciation practiced by the fifth-century monk,

Simeon Stylites, was the rather popular one of living on top of a pillar, which was thought to make one closer to heaven and farther away from worldly temptations. When Simeon was ill with fever, an incomparably sweet fragrance was said to have settled around his pillar, growing in intensity until he died some days later. To his fellow believers, who were well grounded in the association of the divine with supernatural fragrance, this was an incontrovertible sign of his grace (Harvey, 1992, as cited in Classen et al., 1994).

Such accounts abound in the lore of Christianity. The 13th-century Blessed Herman of Steinfeld, for example, was said to have exhaled such fragrant odors that he seemed to be in a garden of delightful flowers. The 17th-century Venerable Benedicta was likewise greatly distinguished for her odors; her body and clothes were said to be fragrant with divine perfume, a perfume that scented everything she touched and which became particularly intense when she was in a state of ecstasy (Brewer, 1966).

While an odor of sanctity was often said to have appeared during the lifetime of a holy person, its manifestation was particularly common upon his or her death. When Saint Patrick died, for example, a sweet aroma was said to have filled the entire room in which he lay. This miraculous odor was also reported to persist in some individuals' bodies long after their death. The body of Saint Isidore was said to have shown no signs of decay and emitted a "ravishing" odor when it was disinterred 40 years after his death in the 12th century and then again 450 years later when it was exhumed in order to be placed in a more elaborate tomb (Brewer, 1996).

The reported fragrance exuded by the bodies of saints offered a striking contrast with the customary putridity of corpses, especially in an age when most were all too familiar with the stench of death. The corpses of wealthier individuals were sometimes buried along with spices and herbs, which did temporarily abate the odor of their physical decay. In order to forestall any suspicions that the odor of sanctity might be due to such burial practices, reports of its occurrence are replete with disclaimers that no spices, herbs, ointments, or balms had been used to treat the deceased saints' bodies.

The odor of sanctity apparently demonstrated to Christians the power of God to place at least some mortals outside of the seemingly universal decay of death. At the same time, it also served as the antithesis to the stench of moral corruption. "Some men are good smelling and some are stinking to God," wrote the 14th-century theologian, John Wycliffe (Arnold, 1869, p. 107-108). Moral associations of fragrance and foulness appear to have been taken quite literally in the premodern West; a whiff of a pleasant aroma could signify divine grace, while a sulphurous reek hinted at eternal damnation.

Saint Thomas Aquinas's writings on the senses reflect his attempt to reconcile Aristotelianism with the Christian faith. There is no question that Aquinas, following Plato and Aristotle, privileged sight among all of the senses. He offered his own sensory ranking with vision at the top and taste and touch at the bottom and proffered that, "The highest and perfect felicity of intellectual nature consists in the vision of God" (1956, p. 199). However, he also speaks of the pleasures that may be procured

through the sense of smell by those who have the acuity to perceive them. Such elect individuals are, ostensibly, among the most holy and often exude a special perfume themselves. Their perfume, he proffered, was that of Christ offered as a sacrifice to God and was the aroma of Wisdom and Knowledge (LeGuerer, 1992). It appears, therefore, that Aquinas offers no definitive disparagement of the sense of smell, but values it only for its utility in the perception of that which is refined, pure, and spiritual.

From the 14th to the 16th century, evidence of the philosophical consideration of the sense of smell and odors appears to be few and far between. Throughout this period, during which the plague, after some six centuries of latency, reappeared in the West, writings on the apparatus of smell were often directed toward linking it in some way with the Bubonic epidemic and toward some sort of olfactory directed method of prevention. During the scourge of the Black Plague, vast quantities of perfumes, scented herbs, and potpourri of dried flower petals and fragrant woods were sniffed, daubed, crushed, strewn, sprinkled, and burned in an attempt to remove the plague from the air and to keep it away from the body. In the Dark and the early Middle Ages, it was widely believed that in every breath there could lurk a pestilence, and in fragranting the air, the scourge could be driven out. Stink was tantamount to disease, so if one avoided foul odors or covered them with pleasant perfumes, then he or she would avoid illness (Glaser, 2002). Vestiges of this notion are still seen today, as the term "malaria" itself means "bad air" (Stoddart, 1990, p. 1).

During the 14th and 15th centuries, doctors ordered huge fires of pine, fir, and other scented woods to be burned in the streets, one for every eight houses, and to be

kept alight both night and day. Recognizing their own vulnerability, physicians wore long robes made of leather which had been coated with honey-scented beeswax and gloves with long, thick gauntlets. They completely covered their heads with masks, fitted with glass windows over the eye holes and beak-like projections over the nose; before examining patients, the physicians filled the beak-like projections with fresh herbs to filter any noxious odors. For those attending the sick who did not own such protective garb, pomanders would be sniffed while an examination or caretaking was in progress. Early pomanders consisted of small sandalwood boxes or cloth sachets filled with amber, incense, and sulphur. If physicians had the wealth necessary, they often had a plague torch. The burner at the top of the torch held charcoal sprinkled with resins and gums to perfume the air in front of the torch's carrier (Stoddart, 1990).

The idea that foul odors caused disease can be traced back to three of the most famous names in medical history: the Arabian physician, Avicenna, the Greek physician, Galen, and Hippocrates (LeGuerer, 1992). Avicenna noticed that the odor of his patients' urine changed during sickness, and he used this new found knowledge in his diagnosis, as physicians still do today. From his observation developed the idea that it was the odor, which was so clearly related to the disease suffered by his respective patients, that actually caused the disease and its expulsion in the urine was part of the recovery process (Stoddart, 1990).

Several hundred years before, in the second century, Galen took the view that odors were perceived in the brain but that they gained direct access to the center of the brain via the olfactory nerves, which he assumed to be hollow. Further, he believed

that for plagues to strike, two criteria must be present. First, there must be an atmosphere, excessively different from the norm, which resulted in unhealthy air, and second, there must be individuals who are susceptible to disease because of their overabundance of blood and other bodily fluids resulting from indulgence in vices such as overeating, laziness, overactivity, emotional upset, etc. (LeGuerer, 1992). In other words, he believed that anyone who led a temperate, well-balanced life would escape the contagion.

Before Galen, Hippocrates claimed that air was an essential but dangerous element, as it influenced the physical and psychic constitution of all living things and was the cause of all diseases. Hippocrates believed that the beneficial or harmful effects of the atmosphere, which varied with the climate, were determined by what Aristotle had labeled its "elementary qualities" (i.e., temperature, consistency, dryness, and humidity). However, diseases were also linked to the presence or absence of pollutant and pathogenic emanations. Thus, illnesses and epidemics were thought by Hippocrates to have been caused by air that had been negatively affected by variables of climate or that had been infected with lethal emanations or "miasmas" (from the Greek word *miasma*: impurity) (LeGuerer, 1992).

Plagues were a part of life in medieval Europe, occurring throughout the 14th to the end of the 17th centuries. Science has now determined that the bubonic or Black Plague was spread by fleas infected with the bacillus, *Yersinia pestis* (Glaser, 2002). As an infected flea inserted its proboscis into the skin of a rat upon which it fed, the *Yersinia pestis* bacteria gained access to the rat's bloodstream. Upon the rat's death

from the bacteria, its fleas, being highly sensitive to its declining temperature, jumped off the rat's cooling body. Because rats and people lived in close proximity, the next available host for the fleas was often a human.

At the time, however, the humble flea was not suspected, and other, more sinister agents were often put forth as likely culprits. Many thinkers held that plagues were caused by astrological influences, such as a change in the alignment of the planets or an increase in the strength of the rays of the sun, while others sought to explain them as a curse from God. However, by far, the most widely accepted cause of the plague was the putridity that accompanied the disease; that is, its smell constituted the primary agent of the contagion (Classen et al., 1994). For those not content to leave it at that, this theory was easily combined with grander designs. Martin Luther, seeking a theological basis for the plague, proffered that evil spirits "poisoned the air or otherwise infected the poor people by their breath and injected the mortal poison into their bodies" (Norton, 1975, p. 20). To the contrary, those with a background of study in the physical sciences held that it was the sun and the planets which fouled the air with invisible poisons. Jupiter, it was said, being a warm and humid planet, drew up putrid vapors from the earth, which the hot and dry Mars then ignited, returning them to earth as a pestilential gas. Others argued that the corrupt air came not from the planets but from within the earth itself and was released into the atmosphere through earthquakes (Campbell, 1966).

The belief in pathogenic odors as vectors of the plague was strengthened by the fact that victims themselves often emitted a strong smell. One writer observed that "all

the matter which exuded from their bodies let off an unbearable stench...so foetid as to be overpowering" (McLaughlin, 1971, p. 8). Whether or not belching earthquakes or planetary gases engendered the plague, it was clear that it could be contracted through contact with a person who already had it, and smell, as the characteristic of the disease which most evidently was emitted by the victims, appeared the logical medium of contagion. Thus, as mentioned above, measures taken against the plague were, in large part, directed toward controlling and combating odors. Municipal authorities had bonfires of aromatic woods burned in the streets, and individuals fumigated their homes with spices, vinegar, and even gunpowder.

When pleasant aromas did not yield the hoped for effects, the notion began to spread that it might perhaps be possible to combat the plague with more potent smells or to fight stench with stench, such as that of goats or dead bodies (McLaughlin, 1971). In 1634, the physician Henri de la Cointe suggested neutralizing pestilential odors with even more objectionable ones. In support of his proposal, he cited his colleague, Thomas Jordanus, who had written that, "It is the custom to raise goats, which are stinking creatures, where there is pestilential air, so that all the bad or unpleasant smells can coalesce around them or so that their stench will overcome all the others and destroy in such wise that barely a trace remains" (Halle, 1785, p. 11 as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 77). Similarly, during a plague that ravaged Poland and Scythia, it was reported that citizens had been asked to kill all dogs and cats and to leave their corpses to decay in the streets "so that such malign and stinking vapor might waft up

into the air and pervade it, either to alter the pestilent air or to absorb it and consume it utterly” (Corbin, 1982, p. 123 as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 77).

As all remedies eventually seemed to fail, individuals often sequestered themselves in their homes with a stockpile of food and refused to see, or to smell, anyone until the plague abated. Others fled the cities for the countryside, often to be turned away by fearful country dwellers. Many of those who stayed in the cities and who had to venture from their homes carried with them some sort of olfactory prophylactic whenever they ventured out. They washed themselves with rose water, kept cinnamon or other spices in their mouths, and carried pomanders to sniff.

Aromatics were considered useful not only for prevention but also for curing disease (Classen et al., 1994), as the medical theory of the day, influenced by Galen as noted above, held that the nose gave direct access to the brain. Therefore, medications, remedies, and prophylactics that were inhaled were reputed to act more directly on the brain than those which were swallowed. With scores of sick and dead bodies reeking of decay, scented fires burning in the streets and houses, and aromatic remedies of all sorts being employed, the plague years must surely have been ones of intense olfactory stimuli, a notion which Daniel Defoe supports in his description of a church service in London during a plague outbreak:

This immediately filled everybody’s mouth with one preparation or another...so we perhaps as the physicians directed, in order to prevent infection by the breath of others; insomuch that if we came to go into a church, when it was anything full of people, there would be such a mixture of smells at the entrance,

that if it was more strong, though perhaps not so unwholesome, than if you were going into an apothecary or druggist's shop; in a word, the whole church was like a smelling-bottle; in one corner it was all perfumes; in another, aromatics, balsamics, and a variety of drugs and herbs; in another, salts and spirits, as everyone furnished for their own preservation (as cited in Stoddart, 1990, p. 2).

No one was above suspicion in the war against disease. The plague had the effect of generating immense anxiety about the odors of others and an immense desire to remain enclosed in a private olfactory bubble, shielded by walls of aromatics. Because seclusion did offer some degree of protection, it likely served to reinforce the belief of odor as a primary force for good or ill, life or death. As the flesh of bodies decayed from illness, the social fabric, too, began to unravel. Duties and functions were cast aside; terror-stricken physicians and municipal authorities fled, abandoning the sick and leaving looters to their pursuits. Because, in many areas, in order to avoid further spread, trade of any kind was forbidden, citizens had no supplies. Famine, accompanied by poverty and disease, created an atmosphere of dismay and devastation. In some instances, all feelings of solidarity were destroyed by the fear of contamination, and selfish interests moved to the fore, as people increasingly avoided others. Cities were in great disorder, as terror replaced sympathy and pity (LeGuerer, 1992).

In 1585, Michel de Montaigne recorded the "strange effects" produced by the epidemic. Besides the ravaging effects on the body, the stinking air also poisoned the

closest of relationships and dissolved even the most affectionate ties. Fleeing the plague with his family and seeking refuge, Montaigne learned, first hand, what it was like to wander from place to place and to find even friendly doors closed to him (1965). Despite having lived during a plague epidemic, much can be found in his writing regarding olfaction that harkens back to earlier, less medically concerned themes, and that seems to provide a philosophical bridge across the centuries in which most all others were distracted by more pragmatic concerns related to the sense of smell.

Perhaps foreshadowing modern aromatherapy, Montaigne remarked upon the varied effects that odors had on him, noting that they made changes in him and affected his spirits according to their properties (1966). He approved of the notion that the use of incense and perfumes in churches was intended to delight, to arouse and purify the senses, and to make individuals more fit for contemplation. Indeed, his examination of the whole topic of smells led him to suggest that physicians might derive more use from odors than they do (Montaigne, 1966). Montaigne believed that he had an exceptionally acute sense of smell. The smell from the canals in Venice and the mires of Paris “weakened his fondness” for these cities, and he considered any bodily smell to be disagreeable. Yet surprisingly, it was Montaigne’s humanist ambition and admonition to “smell as much as one can” (Moreau, 1966, p. 52) so as to explore the human condition, and he regarded the senses, including olfaction, as valuable instruments for knowledge and enjoyment.

Among all the philosophers who have lived fully with their bodies as well as their minds, Montaigne perhaps occupies a special place. In his philosophical musings, he

made no attempt to keep soul and body separate. Affirming the oneness of the human person, he sought to achieve a balance between sensual pleasure and spiritual delight. Although he felt that the senses should be governed by reason, he clearly believed that the human sensorium was the *sine qua non* of all knowledge:

they are our masters...Knowledge begins through them and is resolved into them. After all, we would know no more than a stone, if we did not know that there is sound, smell, light, taste, measure...Whoever can force me to contradict the senses has me by the throat; and he could not make me retreat any further. The senses are the beginning and the end of human knowledge (Montaigne, 1966, p. 443).

When reading this passage, one can almost hear the words of Merleau-Ponty, words that would not actually be spoken by him for some 350 years. Like Merleau-Ponty, it seems that Montaigne believed in a primacy of perception. While neither rejected scientific and analytic ways of knowing, they both chose to focus on the notion that such knowledge is always derived in relation to the sensorial body's exposure to the world.

Thomas Hobbes, while perhaps most well-known for his political philosophy, is also a theorist who clearly appreciates the human sensorium. In *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes begins with a theory of knowledge and opens the text with a chapter entitled, "Of Sense." In it he states firmly his materialism and the utility and value of the senses: "there is no conception in a man's world which has not at first, totally, or by

parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense" (1960, p. 7). To Hobbes, the senses are the foundation of thought, as thought is the foundation of politics and social life.

Rene Descartes developed his philosophy regarding the senses through a completely different theoretical lens than any that had gone before. Inspired by mathematics, with its deductive truths, he attempted to build a new philosophy and, to this end, adopted a method of systematic doubt. Rehearsing all the time-honored arguments concerning the fallibility of the senses or sense deception, he concluded that "it is easier not to trust entirely to any thing by which we have once been deceived." So, "I shall consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, or any senses" (1973, p. 145, p. 148). His famous, "I think, therefore I am," represents a mind-body dualism, or the chasm between thinking and sensing, perhaps at its most extreme.

However, Descartes does not completely avoid discourse on the senses themselves, as one would perhaps project based on his philosophical profferings. He was not only a philosopher, he was also a scientist, and his most direct and explicit opinions regarding olfaction were, apparently, offered while wearing his scientist's hat. According to Descartes, humans breathe in small fragments of earthly matter which float in the air and which activate the olfactory nerves, inspiring "various odorous feelings" in the soul. Like all the senses, he believed that smell exists only intellectually; that is, smells are "mere feelings" that have no existence outside the mind, and feeling and thinking are but a single phenomenon. The scientific value of olfactory data and the testimony of all the senses, in general, he rejected. To

Descartes, the senses teach humans nothing about the true nature of things; they only serve to inform them whether things are useful or harmful (Descartes, 1973).

To the contrary, in his *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690), Locke described the senses enthusiastically as “this great source of most of the ideas we have,” and as one of the two “fountains of knowledge” (1964, p. 90). He insisted that nothing can be within the intellect which was not first in the senses. Locke, like Hobbes, began with the very senses which Descartes had rejected, but David Hume went even further. Hume found philosophy to be profoundly depressing and put no faith in reason. He insisted, instead, that “all knowledge degenerates into probability...that all our reasoning concerning causes and effects are derived from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures” (1969, p. 231, p. 234). Hume particularly appreciated the senses for their capacity to ameliorate at least some of his philosophical melancholy:

Since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds [of depression brought on by so much doubt], nature herself...cures me of the philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all the chimera. I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse and am merry with my friends (1969, p. 316).

Philosophers during the age of the Enlightenment seemed to further establish the importance of the senses in the acquisition of knowledge, which likewise raised the status of human olfaction. The newfound favor of the sense of smell is clearly reflected in the famous example of the philosopher, Condillac, who also sought to demonstrate

that all forms of intellectual activity have their beginning in sensation. He proposed endowing a statue with each of the senses, beginning with the one he believed to be least suited to participate in knowledge: "We thought it fitting to begin with the sense of smell, since of all the senses it is the one that seems to contribute the least to the operations of the human mind" (1930, p. xxxi). Further, he wrote:

Having proved that our statue is capable of focusing its attention, of remembrance, of comparison, of judgment, of discernment and imagination; that it can deal with abstractions and concepts of number and duration; that it can recognize both general and particular truths; that it is capable of desire, of feelings, that it loves, hates and wills; that it can hope, fear and be amazed; and, finally, that it can form habits; we must therefore conclude that with but a single sense the understanding has as many faculties as it would were it in possession of all five senses (Condillac, 1947, p. 239 as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 165).

Rousseau, too, held the senses in high esteem, as to him their operations determined the development of reason. He wrote, "Thus, man's true mind is not formed independently of his body – far from it: in fact, a good physical constitution facilitates the mental processes and makes them reliable" (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 167). To Rousseau, the senses and emotions were of fundamental importance, and the nose was one of the "earliest teachers of philosophy" (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 167). His particular philosophy was inspired by Condillac and, perhaps to an even greater degree, by Buffon.

When Buffon came to consider the sense of smell, he drew a very clear distinction between animal and human smell:

A universal organ of feeling, [the nose] is an eye that can see objects, not only where they are, but even where they have been; it is a taste organ by which the animal can savor not only what he can touch and seize upon, but even that which is far away and unattainable; it is the sense by which he is first, most frequently and most certainly given warning, by which he acts, by which he decides and by which he recognizes what is either suited or contrary to his nature, the sense, finally, by which he perceives, feels and chooses what can satisfy his appetite (Leclerc (Comte de Buffon), 1954, p. 331).

In humans, whom Buffon believed to be guided by the higher principles of judgment and reason, the sense of smell occupies the lowest position in his unusual sensory hierarchy, which begins with touch and is followed by taste, sight, and hearing. Therefore, it is not surprising that Rousseau, who had read and admired Buffon, also posited two kinds of smell – one primary and common to both animals and “natural” man, the other more refined and an attribute of civilized individuals. According to Rousseau, the “natural man,” limited by his own appetites like beasts, develops only the faculties most needed for his own protection. Primarily used for “attack and defense,” the savage’s sense of smell is extremely powerful. Thus, it is of no surprise that Rousseau proffered the illustrative cases of American Indians who he claimed could track Spaniards by smell, like the finest dogs, as well as Canadian Indians who

developed a sense of smell so keen that they could hunt without animal assistance and “acted as their own dogs” (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 168).

However, Rousseau’s natural man, as opposed to more civilized sorts, was deprived of the aesthetic enjoyment of odors:

Our otiose sensations – the wafted fragrance of a bed of flowers – must be hardly perceptible to men who walk too much to enjoy strolling and who do not work enough to enjoy the delights of repose. People who are always hungry cannot take great pleasure in odors that do not represent something to eat (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 168).

Clearly, the transition from a state of nature to civilization is accompanied by a change in adaptive tools; instinct guides those in a natural state, while reason guides civilized individuals in their social environs. Abandoning their animal existence, civilized humans’ senses become dulled, according to Rousseau, but the same individuals become capable of using their imagination to reexpand them in a way not open to the savage. The faculty of imagination, latent in humans in a natural state who dwell only in the present and who are “devoid of foresight and curiosity,” can only be utilized by civilized humans (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 169). Although Rousseau claimed that odors, in and of themselves, represented weak sensations, he believed that they could “move the imagination more than the [other] senses, and their effect is due not so much to what they offer as to the anticipation they create” (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 169). In other words, what human olfaction loses in power it gains in refinement.

Whether to establish the importance of the mind's reliance on the physical body or to address the theoretical role of the human sensorium, the philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment appeared, in general, to have renewed interest in the sense of smell. Their curiosity, however, was not unanimous. Immanuel Kant, in particular, stood apart from the trend. According to him, the sense of smell occupies the most lowly position among the senses and has minimal participation in the acquisition of knowledge. Furthermore, while tasting is almost always a deliberate act, olfactory perception is almost always involuntary: "Smell is like an intermediary taste; others are forced, willy-nilly, to share in it..." (1974, p. 40).

Kant's all-out condemnation of human olfaction may be best summed up by the philosopher himself:

To which organic sense do we owe the least and which seems to be the most dispensable? The sense of smell. It does not pay us to cultivate it or to refine it in order to gain enjoyment; this sense can pick up more objects of aversion than of pleasure (especially in crowded places) and, besides, the pleasure coming from the sense of smell cannot be other than fleeting and transitory (1974, p. 46).

Based on the research undertaken to inform the discourse, such overt condescension regarding humans' sense of smell is unrivaled. Clearly, to Kant, the inconveniences of olfaction far outweigh its ephemeral appeal, and its sole redeeming factor lies in its capacity to indicate what is best to avoid: "As a negative condition of well-being, when it prevents us from breathing in unhealthy air (emanations from furnaces, the stench of

swamps and corpses) or from eating spoiled food, the sense is not wholly without importance" (1974, pp. 40-41).

Hegel was not quite as scathing as Kant in his description of humans' olfactory capacity but ranked it as the lowest among what he believed to be the four human senses nonetheless. The origin of his profferings was in the position of the human nose on the face in relation to other features. To Hegel, the nose is a connecting organ, occupying a strategic location between two disparate zones of the face. One is the "theoretical zone" (i.e., the forehead, eyes, and ears) where the mind resides, and the other is the "practical" area (i.e., the lips and mouth) which is designed for nutrition (1975). Although he located the nose in the "practical" zone, Hegel contended that it belonged to both systems and was, consequently, a mere vassal at the service of whichever of its neighbors is momentarily more powerful.

He developed an explicit and somewhat complicated hierarchy of the senses for both animals and humans. In describing the relation between animals' anatomy and sensorium, he writes:

In the formation of the animal head the predominant thing is the mouth, as the tool for chewing, with the upper and lower jaw, the teeth and the masticatory muscles. The other organs are added to this principal organ as only servants and helpers: the nose especially as sniffing out food, the eye, less important for spying it (1975, p. 728).

The rank order of the sense organs for animals is, therefore, mouth, nose, then eyes, with the mouth as the principal survival mechanism and the nose and eyes as “servants and helpers.”

To the contrary, in humans, Hegel argues that, in the upper part of the face, the “soulful and spiritual relation to things is manifested...in the intellectual brow and, lying under it, the eye, expressive of the soul” (1975, p. 729). In the lower part of the face, the mouth serves as a practical organ of nourishment, which Hegel classified as an animal function. While he notes the significance of the nose’s intermediate location between the two anatomical zones, he, in the end, ranks smell as the lowest of the senses, as it is relegated to the “service of the mouth and feeding.” In sum, Hegel’s ranking of the senses, from highest to lowest is: vision, hearing, taste/feeding, and finally, smell. Like Plato, Hegel did not discuss the sense of touch, an omission which might suggest that he actually believed it to be the least important of the senses. Also like Plato and Aristotle as well, Hegel was fascinated by vision. He observed: “If we ask in which particular organ the whole soul appears as soul, we will at once name the eye; for in the eye the soul is concentrated and the soul does not necessarily see through it but is also seen in it” (1975, p. 153).

In contrast to the protruding muzzle of animals and the less refined sensory hierarchy which he believed accompanied their anatomy, Hegel notes the Greek profile as the ideal form of the human head, as it is characterized by an almost unbroken connecting line from forehead to nose. To him, a high and pronounced nose bridge represented the triumph of mind over nature. It appears that he is referring to the

mouth as “nature” and to its relatively recessed location, as compared to the nose, in the stereotypical Greek or Roman profile. To Hegel, there was no break, conflict, or flaw in what he believed to be a noble, serene, and confident Greek visage. It was the embodiment of ideal beauty simply because there was a continuous flow of the line between the upper and lower portions of the face.

In the writings of Marx, like those of Hegel, the differences between animals and humans is addressed, but to Marx, the differences had nothing to do with the ranking of the sensorium and everything to do with the animalization of humans living in the capitalist mode of production. It is of note that his beliefs regarding the human sensorium are expressed more implicitly than *de jure* and must be carefully teased out of his philosophical profferings. Also, he chiefly refers to the human senses as a gestalt, with no evidence, uncovered during this effort, of any one being selected for individual analysis.

To begin, Marx put the satisfaction of human biological and sensory needs above all:

[We] must begin by stating the first presupposition of all human existence, and therefore of all history, namely, that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to “make history.” But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing, and many other things. The first historical act is, therefore, the production of material life itself. (1963, p. 75).

Unlike most other scholars acting in the Western tradition which emphasized thinking and reason, Marx believed that humans were affirmed not only by the act of thinking

but with all of their senses and that “the *forming* of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present” (1972, pp. 140-141).

For Marx, the degree to which humans were able to be fully actualized was based on their relation to the means of production. The “bestial barbarization” of the workers in a capitalist system denies them of simple “animal” necessities, such as light and air (Marx, 1972). His burning indignation at the sensory deprivation of the proletariat was logical, as he believed that it was through the senses and the body, in productive and reproductive labor, that individuals became fully human. The negation of the senses under capitalism bred alienation, dehumanization, and animalization. Marx, therefore, moved the puzzle of senses away from the endless debates over whether they are good or bad, how they should be ranked, or which of the senses pertain more to animals than humans and, instead, situated his discourse on the senses within the area of real, material life.

Apparently, Georg Simmel found the sense of smell to be, at times, all too real. Like Kant, he categorized it as “highly displeasing or antisocial” and stated that the “effluvia” of the working class posed a threat to social solidarity:

It may be true that if social interests should so dictate many members of the upper classes would be prepared to make considerable sacrifices in their personal comfort and forgo many privileges on behalf of the less-fortunate...Indeed, such privations and sacrifices would be accepted far more readily than would any direct contact with the populace, smelling as it does of the “sacred sweat of the brow.” The social question is not simply a moral

question; it is a question of the sense of smell (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, pp. 29-30).

Simmel believed that different races were prevented, on the basis of olfactory intolerance, from coming together as well. In 1912, he wrote, "It would appear impossible for the Negro ever to be accepted into high society in North America because of his bodily odor, and the frequent and profound mutual aversion that has existed between Germans and Jews has been attributed to the same cause" (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 27). In other words, the notion of ideal harmony and equality between different classes and races runs against the brick wall of an invincible disgust inspired by the sense of smell.

Several years prior to his proffering of the ideas above, Simmel put forth a more general thesis of the senses. It was mostly focused on vision, as he believed that, of all the sense organs, "the eye has a uniquely sociological function" (Park & Burgess, 1969, p. 358). Nonetheless, he proposed that it is through the medium of all senses that individuals perceive their fellow humans. To him, this fact had two aspects of fundamental sociological significance, which he labeled "appreciation" and "comprehension." Regarding "appreciation," he explained that sense impressions may induce affective responses of pleasure or pain, excitement or calmness, tension or relaxation, generated by the nature of the person being perceived, by the tone of his or her voice, or even by his or her presence in the same room. These affective responses, however, do not enable the perceiver to *define* the other person; that is, the emotional responses to one's own sensory impression of another in no way reflect the "real self"

of that person. Logically then, Simmel introduces the concept of "comprehension," which is the use of sense-impressions to reach an understanding of the "real" person or object. To illustrate, he offers the example of speech. The sound of one's voice may immediately produce attraction or repulsion ("appreciation"), but the content of one's speech (i.e., words) enables listeners to understand not only the momentary thoughts but also the inner self of the speaker ("comprehension") (Park & Burgess, 1969, p. 357). While Simmel maintains that each of these variables is present in all sensory impressions, the only explicit mention of olfaction is made in the illustrative case of a rose, whose fragrance may be experienced "as a joy engendered in the soul" or as "a conscious endeavor" (Park & Burgess, 1969, p. 357).

Ludwig Feuerbach and Friedrich Nietzsche were two philosophers who rebelled against the discrediting of the sense of smell even though their efforts, to mix metaphors, appear to have fallen on deaf ears. Feuerbach, a pupil of Hegel, was to break with his mentor's idealism and came to conclude that what his unworldly elder lacked was a wholly carnal doctrine, based "not on philosophy without body, color or name, but on a logic of flesh and blood" (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 180). Feuerbach took great issue with Hegel's absolute idealism, which held that any true apprehension of the world was impossible owing to the inability to accept the truth of sensory impressions, and with Christianity, which he believed produced an ideal that is "castrated, bodiless, abstract" (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 179). He condemned what he believed to be Hegelians' and Christians' impoverished and biased thinking, which distorted both the body and the senses and which he felt led ultimately to

humans' alienation and division. In emphasis of this point, he wrote, "I categorically reject such absolute, vague speculation, turned in on itself as it is, speculation that feeds only on itself. A whole world separates me from such philosophers, who would blind themselves the better to think: I need my senses to think" (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, pp. 179-180).

Feuerbach's notions regarding olfaction are part of the "flesh and blood" humanism which was found in 1843 as an alternative to the idealism that he flatly rejected. In it, he frames his ideas in terms of being in harmony with the body:

Whereas the old philosophy began with the proposition, "I am an abstraction, a purely thinking entity, my body is not part of my essential being," the new philosophy begins with the proposition: "I am a real being, a feeling being; yes, my body in its totality is my selfhood, my very essence (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 180).

This belief that human beings are not the product of reason alone but of the "total being" led Feuerbach to reevaluate the "lower" senses and to reclassify them among the highest. Smell and taste he deemed capable, like sight and hearing, of being separated from humans' animal nature and of achieving an autonomous significance. In the process of becoming truly "human," however, individuals' olfactory acuity is diminished as they evolve and their societies develop. Yet, according to Feuerbach, what is lost in strength is gained in liberty and universality:

If man's sense of smell is inferior to that of a dog, it is because, no longer subject merely to a few particular effluvia, it is now sensitive to odors of every

kind. Far from being a sense with strictly destructive relations with objects, smell is capable of "spiritual and scientific actions" that can serve knowledge as well as art (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 181).

Nietzsche's reevaluation of the sense of smell was to be far more radical. While Feuerbach had focused on redeeming a sense depreciated by idealistic and Christian thinkers, Nietzsche called for the recognition and embracing of humans' animality. He believed that the restraints humans have placed on their own instincts have been their downfall:

Man suffers from man, from himself: the result of a violent break with his animal past, of his leap, his fall, into another state of being, into new conditions of life, of a declaration of war against those former instincts upon which all his strength and pleasure, all that once made him formidable, were based (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 182).

Regarding olfaction, in particular, Nietzsche claimed that the nostrils were the most subtle instruments in scientific observation:

The nose, for example, of which no philosopher has ever spoken with veneration and gratitude – the nose is, albeit provisionally, the most delicate instrument at our disposal: it is an instrument capable of recoding the most minimal changes of movement, changes that escape even spectroscopic detection (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 184).

His veneration of smell, however, immediately takes a metaphorical turn, with his profferings of it as tantamount to intuitive knowledge. He links smell with wisdom,

mental penetration, and sympathy and casts it as the sense of the psychologist, who, guided by instinct, is adept in "scenting out" truth. He elaborates on olfaction as a formidable ally of truth that can plumb the depths of the human heart and mind and continues his metaphorical treatment of smell with references to a ubiquitous stench of the guilty consciences of those forced to live under the oppression of the false values flowing from idealism and Christianity.

His campaign against such oppressive morality and false values is replete with olfactory metaphors. For example, he claims that his initiative against idealism and Christianity is undertaken without "the slightest scent of powder [gunpowder/violence]" and that it offers "quite different and far more agreeable perfumes" to "sufficiently subtle nostrils." He believed that he could "scent from a distance" the corruption and rot inherent in idealism and Christianity and that "One need only read any Christian agitator – Saint Augustin, for example – to understand, to get a really good sniff of, the filthy kind of spokesman with which one is faced." To Nietzsche, the nauseating stink of the "shady den in which such ideals are cooked up," ideals that "stink to high heaven of falsehood," obliged him to "hold my nose" (as cited in LeGuerer, 1992, p. 187, p. 186).

Nietzsche's work is a goldmine for those investigating human olfaction through a sociological lens. It is clear that he valued the sensorium for its basis in humans' animal instinct, for its utility in the quest for truth and wisdom, for its sensitivity to the fake and the illusory, and for its service to human intuition or "sixth sense."

Freud, like Nietzsche, spoke of an overall renunciation of instincts but felt that it played a necessary part in the development of civilization (Stoddart, 1990). In 1930, Freud advanced the hypothesis of a primitive sense of smell that was superior to that of modern humans, a hypothesis which was similar to one set forth by Darwin in 1871. Noting the preeminence of the sense of smell in animals, Darwin, in line with his notions on evolution, concluded that the olfactory sense must have undergone a transformation over time and that its present inferior status was due to the fact that it was of little use to humans. To Darwin, the modern sense of smell was only a distant vestige of some far-off ancestor in whom it was a predominant characteristic (Classen et al., 1994).

Similarly, Freud established a connection between weakened olfactory perception and civilization but went on to make a series of conjectures as to the cause. In a letter to his colleague, Fliess, he wrote:

I have often suspected that something organic played a part in repression. I was once before able to tell you that it was a question of the abandonment of former sexual zones and I was able to add that I had been pleased at coming across a similar idea in Moll. *Privatum* I concede priority in the idea to no one; in my case the notion was linked to the changed part played by sensations of smell: upright carriage adopted, nose raised from the ground, at the same time a number of formerly interesting sensations attached to the earth becoming repulsive – by a process still unknown to me. (He turns up his nose = he regards himself as noble) (as cited in Stoddart, 1990, p. 124).

This notion of an olfactory “repression” was further developed by Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1961). In this text, he proffered that role of smell had become less important as humans began to assume an upright position and to distance themselves from olfactory stimuli, allowing visual sensations, which favored the sexual process and attachment to one’s partner, to become preponderant and to outweigh the formerly exciting powers of sexual/bodily odors. To Freud, it was a shift away from the intermittent nature of sexual odors (as fertility is signaled in lower animals) to the more constant sexual excitation from visual sensations which led to the foundation of the family, which he believed to be the first step toward civilization (1961).

Because Freud was more of a scientist than philosopher, it is perhaps surprising that he made no mention of the vomeronasal organ, which was discovered in humans decades prior to his medical training. In 1809, Ludwig Jacobson, a Danish scientist, first found the vomeronasal organ, or Jacobson’s organ, in an adult male, and it was later proven to be common in most mammals (Stoddart, 1990). However, it is thought to disappear or to become completely vestigial in humans after the first few months of life, which corroborates his thesis that the sense of smell had regressed organically. While Freud appeared to have been unaware of or to have ignored Jacobson’s work, he does link the repression of smell to humans’ “verticalization” and to their break with animals. In sum, animals were quadruped, had discontinuous sexuality, and lived in relative isolation, while humans stood upright, were characterized by continuous sexuality, and lived in groups.

As a necessary part of the civilizing process, the regression of the sense of smell, according to Freud, was nonetheless fraught with danger. The limitations it places on the libido lessen the individual's capacity for happiness and can become the bases for psychoses and neuroses. Both Freud and Nietzsche linked the depreciation of olfaction to instinctual repression and to potential harmful effects on individuals. Freud, though, assigns it a much more definitive role, establishing as he does a direct relationship between the organic sublimation of the olfactory sense and the earliest stage of the civilizing process (Stoddart, 1990).

A thesis, similar to that of Freud, was put forth by Herbert Marcuse as well. Like Freud, Marcuse believed that olfaction was the victim of the sort of repression necessary to legitimate the goals of civilization. Mostly distinctively, however, Marcuse's theory included a second, more sinister, repression reality. He claimed that smell, as well as taste, were repressed more severely than the other senses due to the fact that the intense physical pleasures they provided impeded the regimentation and exploitation of individuals. That is, "Their unrepressed development would counteract the desexualization of the organism required by its social utilization and as an instrument of labor" (1962, p. 36).

To Marcuse, smell provides a good example of the reciprocal relationship between primal repression and conscious repression, which constrains individuals without contributing to the ends of civilization. Unlike Freud, who viewed the repression of olfactory instincts as the very essence of civilization, Marcuse envisages a civilization that will be less coercive owing to the abolition of conscious repression.

However, he neglects to indicate how exactly the eradication of conscious sublimation will liberate individuals without endangering the primal sublimation of the sense of smell, which he believed enabled humans to evolve in the first place.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1979), Horkheimer and Adorno also seem to yearn for the days before the diminution of the importance of olfaction, which they too appear to believe was a victim in the evolution toward the “intellectualization” of humanity in modernity. However, it is in a lengthy passage regarding fascist anti-Semitism and their belief that what is most hated is most often imitated that their most overt treatment of olfaction is presented. In this passage, they wrote:

There is no anti-Semite who does not basically want to imitate his mental image of a Jew, which is composed of mimetic cyphers: the argumentative movement of hand, the musical voice painting a vivid picture of things and feelings irrespective of the real content of what is said, and the nose – the physiognomic *principium individuationis*, symbol of the specific character of an individual, described between the lines of his countenance. The multifarious nuances of the sense of smell embody the archetypal longing for the lower forms of existence, for direct unification with circumambient nature, with the earth and mud (p. 184).

In addition, they contend that, of all the senses, olfaction is the one in which individuals most readily succumb to their desires to imitate, to lose themselves in, and figuratively to become the “other.” To them, smell is the most expressive of the senses, because “When we see we remain what we are; but when we smell we are

taken over by otherness" (p. 184). Further, Horkheimer and Adorno claim that it is this sort of unification of the perceiver and the perceived that has resulted in olfaction's status as a "disgrace to civilization" and as "the sign of lower social strata, lesser races, and base animals" (p. 184). However, based again on their notion that that which is most loathed is also that which is most often imitated, they contend that an individual, under the pretext of seeking out "bad" smells in order to destroy them, "may imitate sniffing to his heart's content, taking unrationalized pleasure in the experience" (p. 184). In other words, civilized individuals are only to indulge in such pleasure when it is situationally validated by the rationalization that it is undertaken in benefit to practical ends. With such rationalization in evidence "the civilized man 'disinfects' the forbidden impulse by his unconditional identification with the authority which has prohibited it; in this way the action is made acceptable" (p. 184). Thus, whether pertaining to anti-Semitism or to the repression of the sense of smell, the "memetic function" allows that which is despised to be indulged in shrewdly.

In the works of Jacques Derrida and as well as in those of Gregory Ulmer, many of which are based on his readings of Derrida, evidence is found related to the metaphorization of the senses in Western philosophical thinking. Derrida offers a critique, operating at the level of the human sensorium, of Western metaphysics, which he contends uplifts the senses of vision and hearing through stripping ridding them of their corporality and promoting them to a solely cerebral, intellectual level (1982, 1986). In support of his argument, Derrida writes that, "...metaphorization (origin and then erasure of the metaphor, transition from the proper sensory meaning to the proper

spiritual meaning by means of the detour of figures) is nothing other than a movement of idealization" (Derrida, 1982, p. 226). In other words, Derrida is concerned with how, in Western thought, the senses have been subdivided into categories of objectivity (i.e., sight and hearing) and subjectivity (i.e., smell and taste) and with how philosophers have raised the objective aspects of the senses to found conceptual knowledge while leaving behind that which is immersed in the subjective, namely smell and taste.

In *Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys*, Ulmer (1985) presents his own impressions regarding the restrictions of ideas, thoughts, and theory present in a system of philosophy based on the objectification of vision and hearing, which he believed to be a byproduct of the "metaphorization of the senses" that occurred in Western philosophical camps. Ulmer contends that included in Derrida's new, alternative sensorial initiative is an allowance for the chemical senses (i.e., olfaction and taste) to escape from the usual Western philosophy by establishing a novel "metaphorology," one created to move the foundation of the human sensorium toward a more robust consideration of the role of taste and olfaction and away from the "eidos" of hearing and vision (p. 36).

"Decomposition," in Ulmer's opinion, is foundational in the alternative metaphorology proposed by Derrida, as it provides analogies for thought that are not dependent upon vision and hearing, or the objective senses. Ulmer notes that the experimentation that Derrida used to underpin his notions of decomposition was based on a hierarchy of the human sensorium originally proffered by Hegel. According to this system, the basis of thoughts is sound and light. Human voices animate such sounds,

allowing for the progress from a basic neurological perception to the figurative existence of a concept. It is this exact system which Ulmer reports Derrida to be challenging. As an alternative, the “dialectical process” of raising the “sensible” to the “intelligible” is to be deconstructed or reversed, with the initial step being to invert the course of the metaphors such that the senses typically excluded from theory are, instead, at its helm (Ulmer, 1985, p. 54).

According to Ulmer’s reading of Derrida, smells are capable of challenging the limitation of meaning seen in the Western metaphysics based primarily on vision and hearing. To Derrida, objects are made sense of through the terms that describe them; however, olfactory sensations are not conceived of as objects but gain meaning via associations. Such an absence of a plainly defined form as well as the complexity in categorizing aromas are what give olfaction an completely different quality *vis-à-vis* the certainty of form and the clear division between subjects and objects, which are characteristic of the more objective senses of hearing and sight. This difference in quality evident in the chemical senses is what Derrida believes provides for the possibility of a new metaphors counter to traditional Western philosophy.

Pierre Bourdieu also alludes to the distinction between the forms of senses, as they relate to taste, preference, and lifestyle differences between classes, in his work, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984). The distinction between high culture and popular taste manifests, in many cases, as a difference between the “higher” and “lower” senses: visual rationality and visceral sensation (1984). Bourdieu believes that knowledge is an embodied manifestation of a set of socialized dispositions,

or habitus, a knowledge that he describes as sentient, socially constructed, and intelligent (1984). His notion of habitus is one that reveals sensory perception, olfaction included, as the product of daily practice in time and place and casts the sensorial human body as not only a physical receptor of sensory input but also as a storehouse of historical and cultural knowledge. Accordingly, he writes, "There is an economy of cultural goods, but it has a specific logic. Sociology endeavors to establish the conditions in which the consumers of cultural goods, and their taste for them, are produced..." (1984, p. 1).

Therefore, according to his thesis, olfactory appreciation, positive or otherwise, is constructed through teaching and training and is conditioned by one's own class or culture. Olfactory taste and sophistication vary among groups, the highest of which would be those who have been formally trained (e.g., parfumeurs, tea-tasters, chefs, and oenophiles.) To Bourdieu, olfactory differences among classes would be seen in such cultural drivers as food, drink, perfumes, and the aromatic qualities of individuals' homes and bodies. Regarding the aromatic quality of one's body, Bourdieu included in the survey used to inform his text, a question regarding personal hygienic practices. He found that 43% of French women of executive, industrialist, or professional status, bathe or shower at least once a day, as compared to 10% of those in farm worker households and 17% of women in manual worker households. In sum, Bourdieu writes:

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the

beautiful and ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed (1984, p. 6).

Conventional sociological wisdom might send someone interested in the topic of human olfaction to the works of various other scholars, such as Foucault, Turner, or Berger and Luckmann, as they are all renowned for their philosophical profferings on sociological concerns of the body. Interestingly however, their musings on such topics as the alienation from the bodily self, the control of bodies in politics, human sexuality, prisons, schools, the idealized body in the media and advertising, the social sequelae of an infirmed body, and various other sociobiological topics are made without any evidence relating to scents, smells, or the olfactory sensorium. This is not shocking, as vision is the essential sense of philosophy and science, championed as such by Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Locke, Hegel, and innumerable others notable for their scholarship and philosophical influence. Sight functions as the sensory foundation for most all of the systems and methods used for examining the universe. The detachment of the visual sense, or the separation of the spectator from the object under investigation, makes the treasured objectivity of many researchers possible. It must be reminded, however, that such an objectivity is still founded upon a specific frame of reference or viewpoint of the universe, and bird's eye though it may be, it is a perspective that is inescapably constrained and conditioned by the characteristics of the visual sensorium (Howes, 1992). As researchers and academicians are so accustomed to conceptualizing their worlds through sight-based frames of reference, they are often scarcely conscious of their sensorial biases and are, thus, prone to conceiving of frames

of reference as neutral or abstract as opposed to modulated sensorially. Not only has the human olfactory sensorium lost ground against concerns of the visual register but all of the other senses as well. The ebbing importance of the auditory sensorium since innovations in print allowed for its widespread disbursement is the sensory decline most elaborated by scholars (Classen, 1993). Yet it still appears that no sense has endured such a setback in social fortune as that of olfaction, from its heyday of power and sensuality in premodern Europe, to consideration as anathema among senses in the modern West.

According to the notions of Walter Ong, many qualities of modern Western philosophy, such as the importance of analysis over synthesis, objectivity over involvement, and form over substance, are at least partially due to the Western emphasis on visuality. In accord, he wrote:

Sight reveals only surfaces. It can never get to an interior as an interior, but must always treat it as somehow an exterior. If understanding is conceived of by analogy with sight alone...rather than by analogy also with hearing...as well as with smell and taste, understanding is *ipso facto* condemned to dealing with surfaces which have a "beyond" it can never attain to (1967, p. 74).

Olfaction, to the contrary, is by its very nature involved with essences. The profound intimacy of humans' capacity to smell lies, perhaps, in the reality that an individual is actually inhaling or taking into his or her own body the emanations of another human being; that is, aromatic chemical compounds emanating from one person actually become integrated into the being of another. This blending of the

internal and external in a dynamic olfactory interchange must certainly offer an access point for a unique theoretical model through which to garner knowledge and understanding *vis-à-vis* epistemological models underpinned by visuality alone. Perhaps the notions presented in the text above lends credence to the fact that the repression of olfaction in Western society is a phenomenon with a complex history and that a higher olfactory consciousness is not necessarily commensurate with a lower status on the academic evolutionary scale. Perhaps, too, it provides for a modicum of vindication of the human olfactory sensorium as a delicate and even refined instrument of scientific observation as did Friedrich Nietzsche when, in *Twilight of the Idols*, he penned:

In the quest for truth the sense of smell – which is also the sense of veracity, drawing as it does upon the sure sources of animal instinct that give the body its great wisdom, providing the tool for a psychologist in search of the fake and the illusory – dethrones the chilly logic that emerges when man struggles against the instinctual. Above and beyond its primary function, smell thus serves as a “sixth sense:” the sense of human knowledge (as cited in LeGuerer, 1994, p. 187).

CHAPTER IV

THE FLOW OF CONCEPTS IN A PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEORY OF OLFACTION

The second part of this literary piece is a continuation of the discourse on a sociology of human olfaction but is focused on the generation of a theoretical model through which to study this phenomenon. As stated before, the model is mostly based on the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, but is recast to more specifically fit the subject of human olfaction, a topic which Merleau-Ponty never addressed *de jure*. A refitting of his theoretical premises is also called for as much more has been discovered about the biological specifics of olfactory perception than was available to Merleau-Ponty at the time of his writing. Interestingly though, these newer discoveries situate well into his original theoretical structure about how individually unique sensory perceptions flow toward the ontological unfolding of individuals, a fact which seems to even further support the applicability and goodness of fit of this framework to the study of human olfaction.

A chemical compound, a scent, a nose, a brain, an individual, a society, the world...what exactly is the relationship between smells, humans, and their respective being in the world? In what manner do individuals perceive their environments, and how do olfactory sensory impressions determine action? There are likely many theoretical lenses through which to view and theorize about the connections between individuals and their aromatic surroundings, each leading a researcher to different conclusions about the manner in which people perceive their environments, the relative influence of human variables versus the influence of environmental variables on the

formation of thoughts, and the ontological unfolding of a person over time. What follows is a description of a model in which human perception, olfactory perception included, is the *sine qua non* of ontology. According to this understanding, an individual's ontology is not one of passive, static *being*, but rather one of *becoming* within his or her aromatic environment (Hosek & Freeman, 2001). Individuals are defined as forming through embedding themselves in their surroundings and are viewed as biological, intentional structures acting in the world. Smelling, as well as all other forms of perception, plays a crucial role their developmental unfolding, and it is presupposed that individuals have a nervous system complex enough to construct their own history, to use this history to contextualize their actions, and to engage in behavior based on predictions of the future from their collective experiences.

To understand more fully the model itself, it is perhaps helpful to provide a context for its inception. Its originator, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, is situated under a phenomenological umbrella, but along with Jean-Paul Sartre, he is more specifically associated with the philosophical movement of existentialism, yet devoted much of his time to refuting and reworking what he believed to be Sartre's dualistic and "Cartesian" ontology (1945). Merleau-Ponty hoped to reshape the public's notions of the relationship between subjects and objects as well as between individuals and the world. He maintained that the importance of the body, which he termed the "body-subject," is ubiquitously undervalued. To him, the body is not an object ruled by a transcendent mind, as Sartre contended; instead, he focuses on an embodied inherence in the world, with perception guiding every conscious action. Although he claimed that perception

itself is intrinsically cognitive and that individuals can not separate themselves from their perceptions of the world, he did not completely reject scientific and analytic ways of knowing, preferring instead to focus on the notion that knowledge is derived in accord with the more fundamental influence of the body's physical experience of the world.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty takes to task traditional philosophical dichotomies, in particular the notion of a mind-body duality. The Cartesian *cogito*, "I think, therefore I am," is of particular focus because the establishment of the body as an object is, to Merleau-Ponty, the linchpin upon which the construction of an independent world which exists "out there" turns. Therefore, when this sort of characterization of the body is problematized, the entire notion of an external world which is completely separate from the thinking, perceiving, smelling subject is problematized in accord.

Merleau-Ponty, as mentioned before, is critical of both rationalism and empiricism, as he feels that they are inadequate tools for use in the conceptualization of human perception, experience, and ontology, and he devotes much of his writing to a critique of these philosophical camps. Because definitions of sensation and perception are debated in contemporary scientific circles, what follows is a description of each; and, because a distaste for the empiricist and rationalist approaches to conceptualizing olfactory sensation and perception served as the impetus for Merleau-Ponty's formulation of his own brand of phenomenology, a description of the problems he found to be inherent in each is presented as well.

Both the empiricist and rationalist models define sensation as the primary process by which individuals' sense organs detect objects in the outside world via sense receptors and import sensory forms by neurological pathways, and proponents of these models define perception as the exercise of reason to interpret those forms. Empiricists describe the vehicle of the sensory forms as information that is processed, stored, retrieved, and combined in accordance with logic. Rationalists describe the sensory forms as representations that, likewise, are imported from sense data, stored, recalled, and manipulated according to the laws of reason and emotion (Hosek & Freeman, 2001). In a phenomenological model, however, the vehicles of information and representation are replaced by the notion of meaning.

Regarding the more specific sense of smell at a micro, neurological level of investigation, empiricists study the cells involved in olfactory sensation and their reaction to stimuli. This approach is characterized by the assumption that elements of the outside world cause sensory impressions in a deterministic fashion with a one-to-one correspondence between stimuli and the resulting sensations within individuals. The approach of rationalists is similar in that it also includes a one-to-one, unidirectional correspondence between small bits of the outside world and sensory impressions, yet it differs in its assumption of preexisting perceptual categories in the brain. By rationalists, it is thought that knowledge about the outside world is organized into predetermined categories based on a similarity of features. These categories may be seen as similar to Kant's *a priori* categories of knowledge, through which *a posteriori* knowledge of the world is gained. The rationalist approach also differs from that of

empiricists' in its concept of representations. Rationalists assume that individuals take in sensations from the world, convert them into symbols or representations, and manipulate them to understand and predict the world (Hosek & Freeman, 2001). However, as Merleau-Ponty contended, what is lacking in both models is the potential to explain the phenomenon of consciousness, the goal-directedness of perception, and the correlated subjective awareness of the outside world as secondary to intentional engagement (1945).

An example of this contention may be found in the assessment of qualia, or the qualities of a perceived object, such as the softness of silk, the pungence of rotting meat, or the sweetness of lilies. These qualities are not inherent in the silk, meat, or lilies; they exist in the minds of observers. While the subject of qualia are difficult to address with any model, unidirectional empiricist models cannot begin to account for this phenomenon that so obviously depends on interaction between the observer and the stimulus. Arguably, they cannot even explain how observers can be conscious of the silk, meat, or lilies, a consciousness that Merleau-Ponty believes depends on expectancy, or intentionally created specific states of excitability. According to Merleau-Ponty, empiricists' and rationalists' accounts of perception ultimately fail because they do not have an adequate formulation of the essential concepts of intentionality and meaning. To most analytic philosophers, intentionality denotes the relation between a mental representation and the object it represents, thus invoking the Cartesian subject/object dichotomy. Similarly, some theories of knowledge (e.g., information theory) begin with the assumption of a difference between meaning and information

and deal only with the latter. Yet to Merleau-Ponty, an observer's perception of an object is the meaning of that object for the observer. There are no context-free rules that govern how symbols are manipulated in the minds of individuals; rather, regularities that shape knowledge and actions are learned through interactions with the world, and they alter as subjects develop and assimilate into the world. Input is not bound but instead leads to creations that are the meaning that the input has for an organism over a certain time, creations that are intimately linked to how the organism is becoming during that time.

Having discussed what a model of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy is not leads next to a more in-depth discussion of what this third approach to sensation and perception entails. Foremost, it is clear from his writing that, to Merleau-Ponty, a mind-body dualism does not exist. Individuals are their bodies, and the mind, in all of its amazing capacity, is still part of that same biological process. Also, it is clear that humans are cumulatively shaped by their actions in the world and the resulting sensory consequences. Not only does this take the meaning of the perceived object into account, it implicates sensation and perception in the formation and continuous reformation of the individual in the world. This notion is labeled, by Merleau-Ponty, as an intentional arc; that is, an individual acts and seeks stimulation from the world, which shapes its future action in a *perpetua mobile* that is always searching for an optimal engagement of the body with its environment (1945).

Turning now to the example of human olfaction as an illustrative case, it is clear that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach remains sound throughout all levels of

the perceptual experience, from the microscopic events unfolding in the nose and brain to the more profound unfolding of an individual's life in the world. What follows is a description of the neurological events that occur during olfactory perception, the specifics of which Merleau-Ponty was not aware during the time of his writing, as they had not yet been determined with such a degree of specificity. Yet, as mentioned before, his model remains free of perceptual notions that are contradictory to what is now known about the neurological specifics of olfactory perception, despite having been penned years before.

Beginning at the most fundamental level of smell, olfactory receptors in the nose connect with chemical compounds in the air during inhalation. These compounds activate the receptors, which send signals down their axons to the olfactory bulb in the brain where the electrical signals are topographically mapped. There are about 100 million olfactory receptors in the nose but only about 100,000 receiving cells in the brain, thus the mapping is not one-to-one but convergent (about 1000-to-1). This implies that even at the earliest stage of perception, input that is not corroborated by other input will ebb away. When the receptor input reaches the olfactory bulb in the brain, there is a macroscopic electrical destabilization over the entire bulb; that is, the activity in the olfactory bulb goes from a low-energy state to a high-energy oscillatory state. This global pattern of oscillation is engendered by the input from the sensory receptors, but it is not a direct translation of the input. In other words, the oscillation is not imported from outside; rather, it is constructed endogenously, based on the prior synaptic changes that define and express the history, context, value, and the meaning

of the stimulus for an individual. This step is the threshold of perception (Hosek & Freeman, 2001). It consists of abstraction of the intended figure from the background and generalization to assign it to an appropriate class that is selected by intention and that has been shaped by experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Olfaction is a clear example supporting the philosophical notion that the knowledge of events is created within. Individuals can not know the exact chemical components of aromatic compounds nor the exact electrical information sent by their olfactory receptors with each sniff; they can only know what the olfactory bulb reports to their brains after the macroscopic activity, constituting abstraction and generalization, occurs.

Another reason that an explication of the minute biological, neurological happenings in olfaction is fundamentally important to a phenomenological theory of perception pertains to what happens after sensory information has been detected, processed, and perceived. Specifically, after sensory stimuli have made their contribution to the construction, modification, and selection of neurological activity, they are washed away. Sense organs, such as the nose, express all contacts with the environment in momentary electrical activity with no temporal continuity. Therefore, contact with the world does not exist in the Cartesian notion of the mind but in the sensorial components of the brain which receive and process stimuli (Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

The model of olfactory sensation and perception presented thus far is a biological description of first intention. Second intention requires the integration of multiple sensory inputs into gestalts and the organization of gestalts into the flow of human

experience. Meaning is derived from sensations when an aroused subject encounters an olfactory stimulus with which he or she has had prior experience. For example, individuals may begin to move about and search for a source of fire when they smell smoke in their homes. The pattern of neurological activity triggered by the inhalation of smoke is related to the prior experience of fire in the presence of such an odor. The development of a pattern of neurological activity is dependent on prior learning, a process by which connections are made and strengthened between nerve cells which react in a unified manner when encountering a familiar stimulus. Olfactory perception may also be influenced by input from other sensory organs as well. For example, if someone is hungry, the sensation of hunger pangs may coincide with a particular pattern of neurological activity when food is smelled, one that is different from the pattern of brain activity upon smelling the same food with a full stomach. This is further evidence to support the notion that meaning emerges from within a complex perceiving subject and is not just based on some interior neurological map of an external stimulus. Merleau-Ponty refers to the latter notion as the "constancy hypothesis," or the idea that the basic inputs to consciousness have constancy in their correlation with stimuli such that the same stimulus will produce the same sensation and perception. He rejects the constancy hypothesis and claims that the basic perceptual qualities are not in this way constant with the proximal stimulus to the organism; rather, they are determined by more than just that stimulus, or as he states, the perceptual apparatus is "not just a transmitter" (1945, p. 10).

Perception is the process by which individuals assimilate into their environments at specific moments in time and in a lifelong trajectory of these moments. Of course, olfactory perception does not stand alone; instead, it is connected with other sensory inputs and unified across experience. The human sensorium provides information that is filtered, neurologically speaking, through a complex web of former perceptions that have been combined to create perceptual gestalts. Accordingly, objects are not just seen or smelled; rather they are seen or smelled as things that fit into larger concepts or types. Successive experiences with sensory input combine into a lifelong trajectory through the development of specific neurological patterns in the process of learning. The cumulative experience of individuals forms a background which is ever-present during each new sensory experience. The relative importance of previous encounters changes, but there are no compartments, divisions, or edges in experience. All past is brought to bear upon every new action, that is, every olfactory perception incorporates the whole of an individual's aromatic experiences, and an individual's action is based on the sum of these experiences in the world.

For Merleau-Ponty, unlike Descartes, humans are their bodies; that is, they do not connect with their bodies as some sort of secondary entity. For example, if individuals wish to smell a rose, they do not have to reflect on the location of their noses or the act of inhaling prior to doing so. The act itself is done intentionally, but it is a single and unified act as opposed to an action that requires reflection at each step in the process. The act of smelling does not need to be formulated linguistically or reflectively in the mind of an actor, and it is this sort of fundamental coordination

between an individual and the world which underpins Merleau-Ponty's notion of a corporeal schema. To him, such a schema is an integrated bodily know-how or perceptual comprehension of the world from the frame of reference of the body. Typically, individuals are not aware of, in a reflective sense, the ways in which they use their bodies and sensory organs. Bodily experiences are ordinarily experiences of the world, via the body's sense organs, not experiences of one's own body as such. However, exceptions to this typicality do occur. Leder (1990), expanding on Merleau-Ponty's notions, notes that when individuals are ill or in pain, they may begin to become more aware of their bodies. Pain reminds individuals that they have a body and reminds that they do not usually notice that they do. Another example of this notion, as it relates to olfaction, is the shift in perception and reaction to certain aromas by women whom are pregnant. Conventional wisdom dictates that pregnancy is often accompanied by an increase in olfactory sensitivity. Women may suddenly be disgusted by aromas that were hardly noticed or even enjoyed prior to pregnancy, and they may go to great lengths to avoid strong olfactory stimuli. Conversely, those whom are affected by nasal congestion may become acutely aware of their diminished sense of smell and the effect that it has on their enjoyment of food.

It is unmistakable, however, that Merleau-Ponty never intended for his contention that we are our bodies to be interpreted simply. He does not intend to deny the cognitive aspect of human existence, but emphasizes that mental processes are inseparable from individuals' corporeal, situated nature. It is for this very reason that he thought it best to refer to individuals as body-subjects as opposed to bodies, as

mentioned before. In accord, behaviors and actions of body-subjects are inseparable from the perceiving body-subject, as it is through their sensorial physicalities that they have contact with the world. In other words, perception always involves sensorial subjects in a context, as opposed to situating them as spectators who were somehow able to abstract themselves from their situations. Therefore, it may be said that there is always an interdependency between perception and action.

Some may contend that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory does not grant an adequate degree of attention to humans' capacity for thinking, judgment, and reflection. Conversely, it may be asserted that not only does his philosophy accommodate reason and cognitive sophistication, but it also situates them in a suitable place. Clearly, his philosophy affirms the primacy of perception and the pragmatic action from which it is inseparable, and fortunately, this is not accompanied by the sacrifice of humans' capacity for rationality or reason. Rather, it situates them in a perceptual context and buttresses the concept that human reflection is never free of its origins in perceptual experience. Merleau-Ponty himself states that there is "a privilege of reason, but precisely in order to understand it properly, we must begin by replacing thought amongst the phenomena of perception" (1964, p. 222).

Reasoning and the cognitive manipulation of perceptual data is addressed by Merleau-Ponty with his concept of judgments, which are defined as the understanding of a relationship between any objects of perception. A judgment may be a logical, seemingly typical interpretation of the signs presented by sensory perceptions, but it is neither a purely logical activity nor a purely sensory activity; judgments may transcend

both reason and experience (e.g., stinky cheeses are, to some, a gastronomic pleasure). Of course, Merleau-Ponty gives greater emphasis to experience, more specifically sensory experience, in determining judgments and the actions that follow from them. Thus, it may be said that the meaning of smells lies in the life experiences of individuals and are unique to each person's biography.

Most all phenomenologists are unwavering in the claim that "objective" knowledge is always situated on experiential bases. In accord, Merleau-Ponty states, "To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is" (1945, introduction). In this quote, one can nearly hear Husserl's motto, "To the things themselves!" and appreciate the link between the two scholars. When Merleau-Ponty refers to "that world which precedes knowledge" in the quote above, he is referring to the one that researchers and theorists tend to ignore, thereby confusing, according to his example, maps (conscious thought) with actual territory (sensory perceptions) (Chalquist, 1997).

That is, the perceptual paradigm that entails passively experiencing an olfactory stimuli and then simply interpreting the sensory impression is, to Merleau-Ponty, an inaccurate one. Just as Heidegger suggests that individuals can not hear pure noise but experience it instead as the noise of some activity, the stimuli that individuals experience in their environments are always of a distinct nature and relevant to their

personal perceptual histories. People can not step into a dominion of abstracted thoughts or objects; thus, perception is never simply passive in its service to sensory stimulation but is, instead, a "creative receptivity."

Empirically speaking, if individuals were simply passive recipients of sensory input, it would not be possible for them to appreciate varying aspects of a stimulus or for different individuals to interpret a specific stimulus in diverse manners. There are numerous popular examples of diagrams which highlight the capacity of individuals to see, for example, a vase or two visages looking at each other, depending upon which aspect of the stimulus that they establish as the foreground. Such examples appear to strengthen Merleau-Ponty's elemental claim that humans are never merely passive recipients of sensory input but process experiences in a way that allows for variations in resulting impressions while variables native to the stimulus remain unchanged. When viewing such diagrams, what is reported to be seen by individuals is affected by a countless number of variables which assures that the connection between subjects and the objects that they perceive is not one of exclusion; that is, subjects and objects gain existence through their dialectical relationship with the other. It is from this manner of defining the perceiving body-subject that Merleau-Ponty bases his enigmatic conclusion: "Inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself" (1945, p.407).

However, if human sensory perception is based in neither a pure objective nor a pure subjective component, it may appear to have a volatility that it obviously does not have. In Merleau-Ponty's examination of the human tendency to seek stability and

balance through skillful coping, which is what he termed "habituality," he establishes how perception is learned, mainly by way of imitation, in an embodied and social milieu. It is possible that perceptions may change, but such changes occur over long periods of time with relative stability in evidence in perceptual experiences from any one moment to another. Habits and the establishment of equilibrium in the objectives of everyday living, "give our life the form of generality and prolongs our personal acts into stable dispositions" (1945, p. 146).

It is in his passages of text that relate to habits, generalities, and stability, such as one from which the quote above was taken, that one can tease out Merleau-Ponty's beliefs regarding ontological freedom. It is clear that he believes that individuals' development is not free, at least not in the Sartrean sense. To him, there is no absolute freedom; rather, there is a degree of possibility or potential within a situation or field. Merleau-Ponty refers to a "transcendental field," a concept that seems similar to Schutz's life-world, characterizing it as an individual and the portion of the world with which he or she is interacting at some specific time in the process of achieving equilibrium. Thus, freedom in thought and action exists within a given field of possibility and is always relative to it. In olfactory terms, it might be said that an olfactory field, or scent-world, is the total sphere of aromatic experiences of an individual encountered in the pursuit of the pragmatic objectives of living. The limitation that Merleau-Ponty places on freedom relative to situations or fields seems particularly salient in a discussion of olfaction, as individuals can not receive meaning from an odor that they have not experienced personally. Odors may be described

through language by those whom have experienced them, but if the neurological mapping of an odorous encounter did not occur first-hand, such a description is without meaning. An illustrative case involves the retelling of the personal experience of a physician and rescue worker in the aftermath of a hurricane disaster in Louisiana. The physician stated that it was difficult for those not present to truly apprehend the magnitude of event. Even though the news media documented many cases of the treatment of victims, and millions of individuals saw and listened to such accounts, he felt that these descriptions fell far short of the reality, because it was impossible to "smell" what it was like to be there (Vankawala, 2005). Although physical objects to which individuals refer may be accessible to others, associations one makes, as well as the perceptual meanings generated are unknown and incommunicable.

The centrality of a first-person experience and embodied inherence is further made clear by Merleau-Ponty in his musings on the omnipresence of the body and the fact that its absence is inconceivable (1945). In accord, the body can not be cast as an object offered for examination, as it is not something that can be done without. Merleau-Ponty again emphasizes that it is the mistake of many in the empirical sciences to regard the body as an object, as an object "is an object only insofar as it can be moved away from me, and ultimately disappear from my field of vision. Its presence is such that it entails a possible absence. Now the permanence of my body is entirely different in kind" (1945, p. 90). The olfactory sense provides a clear example of the centrality of the body and its perceptual apparatus, as individuals are powerless to escape their sense of smell so long as they wish to continue breathing. Simply stated, olfaction

can not be switched off; with every inhalation of life-sustaining oxygen individuals are subjects to their own sensory receptors and are, perhaps, reminded of the inescapability of their own bodies.

In further support of this existential nature of humanity, Merleau-Ponty writes:

If I try to study love or hate purely from inner observation, I will find very little to describe: a few pangs, a few heart throbs - in short, trite agitations which do not reveal the essence of love or hate... We must reject the prejudice which makes "inner realities" out of love, hate or anger, leaving them accessible to one single witness: the person who feels them (1964b, pp. 52-53).

This assertion, too, is particularly applicable to olfactory phenomenon, for as mentioned before, language is particularly impotent as a means for characterizing and communicating aromatic sensory impressions. Although olfactory descriptions may be expanded by formulaic compositions (e.g., "the smell of _____," or "it is a _____y smell," as in "it is a fishy smell,") they are necessarily limited and are often derived from gustatory terms. Those speaking English are not even afforded the linguistic capacity to differentiate between the acts of inhaling and emitting odors (i.e., "I smell something" as opposed to "something smells"). Therefore, to extend Merleau-Ponty's assertion above, the true smell of something or the exact nature of an olfactory experience of an object is available to only one individual: the one who smells it.

It seems as if researchers in various academic fields concentrating their work on olfaction have employed dichotomies, perhaps as a best possible means of dealing with the nebulous nature of olfaction and the deficiency in precise descriptors and

classificatory systems for olfactory experiences. As mentioned before, the “odor of sanctity” provided a differentiation between what is holy and evil, and in regard to gender, vast differences may be seen among the names and scents of the respective fragrances designed for men and women. Cohen’s (1988) study of a lane in Bangkok is also based on a good/bad system of assessment but illustrates how complicated and seemingly paradoxical olfactory classifications can be. In his study, he reports that the lane was populated by a highly mobile group of singles, mostly girls, working in tourism-oriented prostitution. His observations were that the lane was littered with “heaped-up refuse” and “stagnant, swampy water” and had large rats living under the broken wooden planks of the footpaths (Cohen, 1988, p. 42). He reported that the girls under study were quite preoccupied with their own personal hygiene and cleanliness and that their careful attention to bodily odors extended to their customers as well. “Body odor is a cardinal criterion of choice: most girls are less repulsed by a man who is old, ugly or obese, than by one who exudes bad body odor” (p. 44). He noted that many girls refuse to accept Arab customers, given their prejudice that they are malodorous. Despite the fact that Arabs were thought to reward them more than European customers, monetarily speaking, antipathy and rejection persisted. During his study, Cohen used the phrase “olfactory dualism” in his effort to understand the manner in which olfaction became bound with personal cleanliness and the environment and, more specifically, why the inhabitants of the lane were seemingly unaffected by the smells emanating from their surroundings yet possessed an acute sensitivity to human body odors. In this case, clearly, smell did not remain at the level of binary

(good/bad) perceptual assessment but figured significantly in the meaning-endowment, thoughts, and actions of individuals in their objectives of everyday life. Cohen's study provides an obvious example of why straightforward classificatory systems used to explain how individuals structure olfactory realities are inadequate. Structural polemics, as in the contentions that what smells good is good and what smells bad is bad, are obviously far too simplistic in olfactory analysis. For example, pleasant aromas may be objects of suspicion when interpreted as a cover or veneer over something that needs to be concealed (Miller, 1997). Miller contends that many foul odors may be found acceptable when information as to their origin is rendered clear. He writes, "[the odor of] Strong cheese is much more tolerable than if thought to emanate from feces or rank feet" (1997, p. 247). Miller's and Cohen's examples provide even further support for the complicated, personal, phenomenological nature of olfaction. Using a phenomenological theoretical lens through which to view perceiving individuals and their olfactory environments seems to allow for adequate respect of the evocative power of olfaction, of its ability to generate thoughts and emotions, and of its potential to give meaning to the different spheres of humans' social worlds, and of the power of odors to generate the very reality to which they seem to draw attention.

It was not until the last of his career that Merleau-Ponty began to address the manner in which he believed sensory perceptions figured into the relations between individuals. His ideas were never brought to full literary fruition, as he died while writing the text, *The Visible and the Invisible*, in which he had begun to address the issue of the other, or "alterity" and "chiasmic ontology," as he referred to them. Before

his death, he composed three relatively complete chapters and working notes for the remainder the book, which were compiled and published posthumously.

Merleau-Ponty's concept of "chiasmic ontology" guarantees that in some manner the other is always entwined with the self or subject. To him, the self and others are but the "reverse" and "obverse" of one another; that is, they are relationally defined by their potential to be reversed. For example, smelling another person always includes the tacit appreciation that we too can be smelled. Where olfaction is concerned, this is rendered clear by the experience of Diamond Jenness, who reported a frank exchange with a Copper Eskimo on the subject of ethnic odors during the Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913-1918:

There seems to be quite a distinctive odor exuded from their skin different from that of white people. An old woman once asked me whether I had noticed an objectionable odor about them when I first arrived in their country. I stated that all our party had noticed it, and she answered "That is not strange, for we noticed the same thing about you" (1923, p.39).

However, rather than simply oscillating between these two modes of being (e.g., the smeller and the smelled), as Merleau-Ponty contends his friend and rival, Sartre, would have it, he proffers that each encounter is bound to the other in such a manner that individuals are never merely a disembodied smeller or a "transcendental consciousness." Instead, the alterity of another is always preemptively involved in the subject, and while there is an interdependence between the self and non-self that pertains to these entities overlying and interweaving with each other, it is without ever

being reduced to one and same. A clear application of this notion to the substantive area of olfaction may be seen in the boundary-transgressing nature of aromas which mandates a connection between two individuals as one person is breathing and inhaling the emanations of another; molecules emitted from one person, literally, become incorporated into the body of another and vice versa. The emanations (sensations) emitted from one person are always already present in the lungs of another prior to his or her attention to and resulting perception and judgment of them, thereby inherently linking the self and the other, yet, never reducing them to each other.

As odors are composed of molecules that can be inhaled by more than one person, they have the potential to be part of a shared social and sensory experience. Derrida, in his musing on the metaphorization of the senses in Western thought, asserts that olfaction generates different philosophemes from hearing and sight and perhaps forms a sociality, or relationship between subjects, all its own (Borthwick, 2000). In elaboration of Derrida's claims, Borthwick (2000) contends that:

There still remains part of the other within the subject; in this way something escapes sublation; all is not reduced to an externalized object to be taken in to the dialectic. Olfaction opens the possibility, through the actual embodiment of the other, of another kind of sociality that acknowledges the interconnection with, not the complete separation of the subject and the other (p. 6).

Likewise, Horkheimer and Adorno comment, "When we see we remain what we are; but when we smell we are taken over by otherness (1979, p. 184).

CHAPTER V

TOWARD A HIGHER OLFACTORY CONSCIOUSNESS

Again, the fundamental premise underlying the concept of a sociology of olfaction is that sensory perception is social as well as a personal, physiological act. That is, smell is not only a means of apprehending physical phenomena but also an influential variable in relations between individuals and an avenue for the transmission of social norms. All of the information presented above is intended to support the notion that olfaction is a form of social intermediary through which social actors construct experiences and locate themselves and others in social life.

Within a given historical and cultural context, olfaction generates a spectrum of meanings. As Merleau-Ponty contends, each individual's perceptual experience is constituted within certain conditions of possibility, yet the potential remains for that experience to run contrary to olfactory perceptual typicalities. Olfaction forms a basis for apprehending sensory information in the world as well as for an appreciation of the world so gathered. It functions as a social medium as it contains "social meanings because of the meanings brought to it by persons in the interaction process. [These] meanings remain stable over time but frequently they must be worked out and negotiated... by meaning attributing, interpreting beings who interact through time" (Benson and Hughes, 1983, p. 21).

Olfaction is amazingly powerful in its capacity to influence thoughts and emotions, yet interestingly, there is no evidence of any research on this substantive area in the literature related to the sociology of emotions. Turner and Stets (2005)

contends that the study of emotions is now at the forefront of microsociology, and increasingly, emotions are viewed as the crucial link between micro and macro levels of social reality. Perhaps a model of olfaction like the one explicated here would situate well into current inquiries into the sociology of emotions, as leaders in this area are quick to remind that the nature of emotion and its intensity are driven by biological processes and that the activation, experience, and expression of emotions are intimately connected to the body (Turner & Stets 2005).

By employing a phenomenology of perception theoretical orientation in the exploration of the roles of smell as a social intermediary, the taken-for-granted aromatic aspects of everyday life take on considerable significance in the life experiences of individuals. As mentioned above, olfaction functions as a social channel employed by individuals in many ways, including the judgment of others. It has the potential to be employed in the stereotyping of others based upon the expected and presumed. Categorization is not predicated on the visual alone (e.g., skin color, clothing, weight), it also transpires via the olfactory as well, arising from an individual's expectations of others and their smells.

It is often said that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but as Voltaire and Darwin observed, beauty is also in the culture of the beholder (Synnott, 1991). Similarly, smell is in the nose of the smeller and is also in the culture and historical context of the smeller. The perceptual realities that are generated from an individual's cumulative experiences form a basis for the evaluation of others; that is, smells are

social attributes, real or imagined. In few other passages can these notions be rendered clearer than in the one related to George Orwell's argument:

[The] real secret of class distinctions in the West...is summed up in four frightful words...*The lower classes smell*...[No] feeling of like or dislike is quite so fundamental as a *physical* feeling. Race-hatred, religious hatred, differences of education, of temperament, of intellect, even differences of moral code, can be got over; but physical repulsion cannot...It may not greatly matter if the average middle class person is brought up to believe that the working classes are ignorant, lazy, drunken, boorish and dishonest; it is when he is brought up to believe that they are dirty that the harm is done" (1937, pp. 159-160, his emphasis).

As olfactory preferences and aversions tend to be deeply ingrained in humans, neurologically speaking, Orwell may be correct that evoking or manipulating odor values is a common and effective means of generating and maintaining social hierarchies. This may explain why smell is enlisted to create and enforce not only class boundaries, but also ethnic and gender boundaries as well (LeGuerer, 1992). Thomas Jefferson gave a voice to such a notion when he stated that Blacks have "a very strong and disagreeable odor;" Edward Long, a Jamaican planter, wrote in 1774 that Blacks have a "bestial or faetid smell;" and, Dr. Benjamin Rush, a noted abolitionist, agreed and attributed this smell to leprosy (Jordan, 1969, pp. 459, 492, 518). Likewise, Alain Corbin, an historian of 18th- and 19th-century French society, reported that almost every population subgroup was said to have its own distinctive odor. Peasants, nuns, redheads, Jews,

Blacks, Germans, Finns, the poor, virgins, and prostitutes were all thought to smell different, with the associated odor tending to reflect the imagined moral status of the population: virgins – good, prostitutes – bad, and sailors – among the worst:

His [a sailor's] customs are debauched; he finds supreme happiness in drunkenness; the odor of tobacco, wedded to the vapors of wine, alcohol, garlic, and the other coarse foods that he likes to eat, the perfume of his clothing often impregnated with sweat, filth, and tar make it repulsive to be near him (1986, p. 147).

Thus, an individual's perception and characterization of odors may be seen as a sort of moral labeling, and as the above as well as other similar examples support, such labelings of class, ethnic, and other groups are accompanied by very real social sequelae. As Gunnar Myrdal observed:

The belief in a peculiar "hircine odor" of Negroes, like similar beliefs concerning other races, touches a personal sphere and is useful to justify the denial of social intercourse and the use of public conveniences, which would imply close contact such as restaurants, theaters, and public conveyances (1944, p. 107).

Yet another example of the social and political consequences conferred by olfactory perceptions, real or imagined, is offered by John Dollard in his discussion of the belief "very widely held in the North and the South" that "Negroes have a smell extremely disagreeable to white people." He described it as one of many "defensive measures" adopted by racist Whites: "a crushing final proof of the impossibility of close association between the races" (1957, p. 380).

Class prejudices are equally supported by imputations that those of the lower classes are foul smelling and must be avoided if one is sensitive to such odors. In accord, Simmel wrote:

no sight of the proletarian's misery, much less the most realistic account of it, will overwhelm us so sensuously and directly...that we can smell the atmosphere of somebody is the most intimate perception of him...and it is obvious that with the increasing sensitiveness toward impression of smelling in general, there may occur a selection and a taking of distance, which forms, to a certain degree, one of the sentient bases for the sociological reserve of the modern individual (1908, p. 658).

North Americans are far from alone in their perceived superiority over those who they allege insult their collective olfactory sensibilities. As mentioned before, Adolph Hitler deplored what he perceived to be the smell of Jews and claimed that their malodor was symbolic of their corrupt moral condition:

Cleanliness, whether moral or of another kind, had its own peculiar meaning for these people. That they were water-shy was obvious on looking at them and, unfortunately, very often also when not looking at them at all. The odor of those people in caftans often used to make me feel ill...but the revolting feature was that beneath their unclean exterior one suddenly perceived the moral mildew of this "chosen race" (1942, p. 42).

For Hitler there was a clear union of exterior and interior, outer and inner impurity, odor and morality. To him as well as to many others, foul smells are not just unpleasant, but they actually symbolized inner decay.

Odors, therefore, both real and imagined, may serve to legitimize the inequalities of both class and race and may function as a criterion by which a negative moral identity may be imposed upon a particular population. Although smells, in this context, are employed to justify hegemony, the same tactics may also be used by those whom are typically subjugated to challenge the unequal status quo, with the terms of this diametric debate appear to be just as intimate, blunt, and unrefined. For example, George Orwell observed that "...orientals say that we smell. The Chinese, I believe, say that a white man smells like a corpse. The Burmese say the same – though no Burman was rude enough to say so to me" (1937, p. 174). The Japanese used to describe the Europeans as *bata-kusai*: "stinks of butter" (Gibbons, 1986, p. 348), and Malcolm X remarked that Whites "were different from us – such as...the different way that white people smelled" (1965, p. 17).

Such examples make it clear that the olfactory contentions of those such as Jefferson and Hitler have not remained unchallenged by the aromatic politics of opposing groups. However, while social codes and biases based on olfactory perception have, at times, been discussed as frankly as the instances above suggest, it is perhaps more common that they remain unspoken or even unnoticed, as they tend to function below the surface of conscious thought, yet serve to affect social relations with very real consequences nonetheless. According to Synnott, olfaction is not only a

physiological phenomenon, it is also a moral phenomenon, and it is this moral dimension of olfaction which makes smell of such compelling sociological significance. In elaboration, he writes, "Odor is a significant component of the moral construction of reality and our construction of moral reality" (1991, p. 443). It is what individuals think about odors, both metaphorically and symbolically, not the odors themselves that is important, as odors are simply chemical compounds floating in the air, or as Synnott suggests in his paraphrase of Hamlet: "There is nothing either fragrant or foul, good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (1991, p. 443).

Given the potential for aromatic impressions to have such far-reaching social consequences, it is not surprising that various practices developed by which olfactory identity and odor settings may be manipulated. To establish and maintain a socially acceptable olfactory identity, individuals often engage in two basic practices: deodorization and reodorization (Largey & Watson, 1977). The first entails the removal of socially discreditable odors through bathing, gargling, and the cleansing of teeth, while reodorization involves the perfuming of the self and, perhaps, of one's surroundings. At the level of the body, for instance, deodorants suppress unwanted odors while perfumes and colognes allow for the creation of an ideal olfactory image. At the level of the workplace, the concern is with how to develop an attractive olfactory atmosphere that will stimulate and refresh workers. In the marketplace, businesses are increasingly concerned not only with new ways of marketing perfumes, such as home fragrance goods and the seemingly ubiquitous aromatherapy products, but also with

the addition of synthetic fragrances to a variety of merchandise, from processed foods to houseplants (Sardar, 2000).

In Japan, studies indicate that exposure to certain fragrances, even subliminally perceived, have effects that result in increased productivity of workers. Some companies pipe scents through central ventilation systems. Tests indicate that in a fragranced environment (lemon or cedar) typists typed 14% more strokes per hour, and made 21% fewer errors. Citrus fragrances are used by one company to stimulate workers in the morning, and after lunch; floral scents aid concentration in the late mornings and afternoons; and, woody fragrances (cedar or cypress) relieve tiredness at midday and in the evening. The senses may now be utilized, not only by individuals to apprehend their world and to communicate with others, but also by others to maximize productivity, lessen fatigue, enhance performance, or induce calmness. Therefore, some may contend that the senses are not only a medium of communication with others but also a medium of control by others.

Borthwick (2000) contends that, in the current age of consumer capitalism, olfaction has shifted from the nasal to the visual register, as an image frequently defines an odor before the odor is experienced. This occurs in a vast array of products, including, most obviously perfumes, deodorants, and cleaning products. After a brief history of Listerine advertising images, Classen et al. comment, "We may say that the effect of Listerine and other ads for deodorant products was to open a gap between self and body, and to insinuate the product being promoted into that gap" (1994, p. 186). Borthwick (2000) claims that, in the process of modern advertising, olfaction has been

taken from the perceptual body and mediated through images, and the smell of the body is now separated from a sense of self by images of desirability and cleanliness and represented back to individuals' olfactory sense as a deodorized body.

It is, perhaps, just such distancing, processing, and modifying of the corporeal aspects of smell that have led researchers to define olfaction as the postmodern sense (Classen et al., 1994). Some believe that the Western ideal of society is one in which everything has been sanitized and sterilized, all messy and smelly organic processed have been or will come to be replaced by artificial processes and aromas, and the aromatic environment will be increasingly modified by fragrance engineers and commercialized by marketers. To these individuals (Classen et al., 1994)

"Postmodernity is...a culture of imitations and simulation where copies predominate over originals and images over substance" (p. 203). "It is akin to the olfactory simulacra of synthetic scents and flavors that are evocative of things that are not there" (p. 205).

In Britain, it is estimated that an increasing number of individuals, accounting for between 15% and 30% of the population, are affected by multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS). According to Sardar (2000), these individuals have serious reactions to scented products (e.g., headaches, nausea, dizziness, and breathing difficulties) and that this increased sensitivity is a result of the fact that individuals are inundated with smells that are artificially created, chemically enhanced, and amount to a "poisonous stench" (p. 25). Sardar further clarifies his political position on the olfactory front with his contention that:

Now, only the poor stink...Smell is a class issue. It reminds us of the existence of a premodern, unreconstructed waft of humanity in our middle-class, hygienically wrapped, postmodern world of artificial odours. Only the poor know the truth – that our olfactory tolerances are a measure of our atrophying compassion and concern. So, if you want to save your humanity, save your children, save the world, then save your sense of smell. Go out and smell some real bullshit. It would do you a world of good (p. 27).

Advancements in antiseptics, cleanliness, and sanitation infrastructure have been invaluable in improving individuals' survival rates and the mean of human life expectancies, but it is the very basic human odors that remain that often assist medical professionals in diagnosing and providing life-saving treatments for patients. Medical literature is replete with training modules used to instruct students and practitioners on the diagnosis of diseases and disorders based on the smell of patients' bodies, bodily fluids, and breath. A "sniffing bar" is often used to educate practitioners in emergency services who must assess poisoned patients who may be unconscious and unable to provide information about their own medical history or the toxins that they have encountered (Goldfrank et al., 1982). For example, those who smell of wintergreen may have been poisoned with methyl salicylate; those who smell of bitter almonds may have been exposed to cyanide; and, children who smell of peanuts may have ingested some types of rodenticide or rat poison (Goldfrank et al., 1982). The odors of patients' breath and urine also factor significantly into the diagnosis of various disorders, particularly inborn errors in metabolism. Individuals affected by phenylketonuria are

often said to smell like horses; those with Oasthouse disease, a form of mental retardation caused by the inability to process certain enzymes, are said to produce urine with a strong, celery-like smell; and, often the first indicator of another inborn metabolic defect that, left untreated, can lead to coma and death within the first year of life is the production of urine with a marked smell of maple syrup (Mace, Goodman, Centerwall, & Chinnock, 1976). In scholarly, peer-reviewed medical journals (e.g., Smith, 1982), descriptors such as dead fish, rancid butter, overripe Camembert, rotten apples, sewer-gas, grape-like, and stale beer have all been linked with certain diseases and are touted as useful indicators in the diagnostic process. Some smells are so closely linked with specific pathogenic processes that the disorders themselves have been named after the odors (e.g., Fish Odor Syndrome (marked by neutropenia, anemia, and splenomegaly) and Odor of Sweaty Feet Syndrome I (a defect caused by an enzyme deficiency resulting in mild mental retardation, acidosis, and dehydration)) (Lockman, 1981). Some very recent studies suggest that biosensing mechanisms may soon be available to "sniff out" certain diseases. Trials are currently being conducted on one such device, Cyranose, for its reliability as a sort of "electronic nose" designed detect certain compounds exhaled in the breath of individuals who have an underlying lung cancer (Laino, 2003).

It is clear that in medicine as well as in countless others realms of social life, smells form classificatory systems in which the "order" of things is given by the "odor" of things. As mentioned before, olfaction is not merely a means of apprehending physical, biological phenomena, but it also guides the transmission of values, the

formation of social classifications, and the development of understanding. However, an undervaluing of olfaction in many academic and scholarly realms in Western culture has been argued by a number of scholars. Regarding the history of aromas in France, Alain Corbin writes, "The sense of smell has suffered from an unremitting process of discrediting since the [18th century]" (1986, p. 5). Further, it is argued that this olfactory decline has been escorted by an increase in the importance of sight. The rising value of vision and visual imagery, beginning during the Enlightenment, is discussed in detail in the works of those such as Walter Ong, Michel Foucault, and Donald Lowe. Lowe, for example, in his *History of Bourgeois Perception* writes that in the late 17th and 18th centuries "a new perceptual field, constituted by typographic culture, the primacy of sight, and the order of representation-in-space, was superimposed over the previous ones [in which the nonvisual senses were emphasized]" (1982, p. 13). Literacy, and particularly print, is generally recognized as the major cause of this visualism; however, other related causes are postulated as well. As early as the 1920's, sociologist Georg Simmel noted an increased visuality which he believed to result from the reduction of interpersonal communication in urban life. He proffered that, unlike in a village, where everyone knows and greets everyone else, in a city, where most all are strangers to each other, individuals are relegated to simply "looking" at one another (1921). Michel Foucault has explored the development of sight as a medium of control in public institutions such as schools and prisons, designed so that their inmates can be kept under constant surveillance (1979), and Stuart Ewen and others have examined the dominance of the visual image in modern consumer

culture (1988). Ewen believed that because we are surrounded by television and magazine advertisements, billboards, company logos, and store window displays, we inevitably consume the products and socioeconomic values of our society above all through our eyes.

This effort was undertaken to form a foundation and point through which to access the infinite path of possibilities for future studies in human olfaction. Weaving together the social history of smell and providing a theoretical framework that is true to what is current in the neurology of olfaction are the first steps for me in the formation of what may hopefully be a lifelong theme for study. The field of olfactory research is ripe and the questions within it are seemingly unending.

For example, olfactory pollution is increasingly being debated and researched as a risk to health and comfort, raising smell to a legal matter. Another practical, empirical matter for a sociology of olfaction is environmental fragrancing. Virtual reality technologies may soon allow, for the sake of entertainment, for enhancements in the sense of place through the addition of smells. The aroma of an ocean, a garden, gunpowder, or burning tire rubber in a car chase would make such scenes and the objects within them seem more realistic. In Japan, computerized environmental fragrancing systems are already in place to clean the air and to circulate aromatic compounds within houses, offices, hotels, hospitals, prisons, nursing homes, and subways (Green, 1993). Grants have been given for studies, all involving expansive time frames, regarding the effect of the daily use of fragrance on the mood of women in midlife, the effect of fragrance on the levels of stress and anxiety reported by those

undergoing magnetic-resonance imaging (MRI), and the effect of odor-memory in stressful situations experienced by autistic and non-autistic children (Green, 1993).

On a more theoretical level, three areas of study seem to be teeming with unanswered questions as to their relationship with humans' olfactory sense: time, space, and language. The phenomenological vividness of smelling has a clear temporal dimension. The perception of a distinctive odor can bring to the present a memory of some previous event or occasion and allow for a sort of shifting forward and backward between two contexts which share a similar smell. Unlike measured and equal units of time which are common temporal concepts, time which is preserved through the olfactory sense has a subjective dimension. Questions arise as to the incompatibility between the temporal flow as experienced through smells and the objective time units of the culture in which an individual lives. In Patrick Suskind's literary work, *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, he gives the perfect example of this phenomenon when describing the main characters reaction to a scent, which reminded him of something he had experienced 10 years earlier:

...and then it retreated to his solar plexus, and then rushed up again and retreated again, and he could do nothing to stop it. This attack of scent had come on too suddenly. For a moment, for a breath, for an eternity it seemed to him, time was doubled or had disappeared completely for he no longer knew whether now was now and here was here, or whether now was not in fact then and here there (1986, p. 124).

However, unlike the phenomenology of other senses, an individual can not conjure the smell of an odor simply upon recollection of an object or event with which the odor is associated. So, why is it that this flow of events, from the encounter with an odor, to the conjuring of a memory associated with it, and to the consequent experience of powerful emotions, is unidirectional in olfaction but not in the other senses? Why can humans envision people meaningful to them, feel the rush of emotions associated with them, but not smell the signature perfume that they wore for decades?

Regarding language, the phenomenological world of smell is one of the most meaningful in the human experience, yet the unique aromatic experiences of individuals are not amenable to discourse. Wittgenstein stated, "What we cannot speak about must pass over in silence" (1961, p. 7). To what degree is this true in olfaction? Perhaps there is a qualitative difference in style in which communications about odors take place. There are references to actual objects (i.e., oranges, peppermint, smoke) which are imbued with olfactory meaning, and then there are discussions of personal olfactory experiences. If someone refers to another's skin as smelling of "warm, smooth stones" or to a baby as smelling like "sugar cookies dipped in vanilla milk," the references are to actual objects, but not necessarily to typical odors known to everyone in a society. One might argue that in these and other similar descriptions it is a poetic image or the creation of ambience rather than a reference to a specific meaning of an odor that is central. To what degree is the "language" of olfaction private, and to what degree and in what manner may it be put into social use? Because odors themselves

can not be carried around and shared, individuals are left only with words as a means of sharing their experience of them. Would legislators far removed from a terribly foul-smelling factory be as willing to hear the desperate pleas of those living in its midst if they had not had their olfactory senses assaulted personally? To what degree would highly poetic, metaphorical language be effective in generating meaning and in communicating the degree of stench? What is to be done when odors can not be captured and transported, one can not elicit an odor memory simply by talking about it, and when the English language is so impoverished in odor descriptors?

Ironically, it is not an academician but a writer of fiction who explains the power of olfaction with, perhaps, the most clear, compelling, and visceral style. In *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* Suskind writes of an orphan boy growing up unloved and outcast in the stinking streets of medieval Paris. Having no body odor of his own, he is cloaked with a degree of invisibility which enables him to creep up on people and to inhale the aromas of their bodies. With a rising obsession which forces him to become a mass murderer, he extracts the body odors of young women in order to concoct for himself the perfect odor, the very essence of beauty, the root of all excitement, domination, and contentment. Of the fundamental significance of scent in human life he writes:

...people could close their eyes to greatness, to horrors, to beauty, and their ears to melodies or deceiving words. But they could not escape scent. For scent was a brother to breath. Together with breath it entered human beings, who could not defend themselves against it, not if they wanted to live. And scent enters

into their very core, went directly to their hearts, and decided for good and all between affection and contempt, disgust and lust, love and hate. He who ruled scent ruled the hearts of men (as cited in Stoddart, 1990, p. 120).

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This work draws insights from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory of human perception for the development of a foundation for the sociological study of olfaction. The weaving of the sociohistorical tapestry of smell in the third chapter was undertaken to provide a broad set of examples from thousands of years lived experiences as to the fluid and sociologically complex nature of individuals' olfactory senses. This effort is in no way intended as an end point but, rather, as an access point to the investigation of these concepts.

Some may contend that a search for knowledge that is not underpinned by the scientific method is inherently deficient, is without merit, and is not worthy of consideration. However, it may also be argued that science itself is a social institution, as opposed to a set facts and knowledge supported by numbers. When viewed as such, the serial contribution of individual scientists and researchers, all with differing methodologies, can be appreciated. Perhaps those who champion the scientific method in the social sciences have fueled the "ascendance of the objectivized subjective realm" (Maynard, 2000, p. 323), but forcing a phenomenon such as olfaction to fit into that which it can not is to commit an injustice in the name of such scientific rigor.

In final summary, it is likely warranted to offer an overview of answers to the original three research questions posed in the first chapter. In regard to whether or not the meaning and social relevance of odors and the human olfactory sensorium have changed throughout different periods of history, the above-presented material supports

a clear affirmative. Perfumes have gone from profane, to holy, to an industry worth billions, while the appreciation of odors has shifted from an essential part of a sensuous existence in the heyday of the Greeks and in Old Testament writings to anathema in the austere lifestyle of those thought to be righteous according to New Testament profferings. The perceived hazard of being exposed to aromatic stimuli also shifted with the emergence of Pasteur's findings. During the Plague years, odors themselves were thought to be vectors of disease, while sweet-smelling aromatics were considered curative. However, changes in such notions occurred when modern discoveries in microbiology revealed that, while smells might be unpleasant or even nauseating, microorganisms and not the odors that often accompany them are culpable in the spread of disease. What has remained relatively stable throughout history is the conventional wisdom that what smells bad is typically thought to be bad and what smells good is, likewise, thought to be good. There does, however, appear to be some shifting away from the latter part of this notion as more and more individuals are being affected by Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS), as noted in the fifth chapter above. Homes, bodies, and work environments that are deodorized and then scented with artificial fragrances are thought to be at least one of the contributing factors in MCS. Therefore, what smells too good might well not be good for one's health. What smells bad, however, still seems to suffer from a ubiquitously pejorative assessment, but it is prudent to remind that there is tremendous variation in what individuals find to be pleasant or offensive.

In a recap of how those in the lineage of eminent sociological thinkers addressed the phenomenon of olfaction, or the second research query laid forth in the first chapter, it may be seen that Plato devalued the human sensorium, believed that only the lowest of individuals are ruled by it, and felt that the superiority of the mind over the senses, olfaction included, was a given. Later, Aristotle provided a ranking of senses, with smell occupying the lowest of what he believed to be the three "human" senses (sight, hearing, and smell), as opposed to the "animal" sense of taste and touch, and appears to be groundbreaking in his linking of olfaction with variations in human emotion. Both Plato and Aristotle agreed that olfaction, for purely aesthetic purposes, was acceptable, whereas olfactory sensations inspiring lust or gluttony were impure. As noted above, Old Testament writers used sensual olfactory metaphors and wrote of perfumes and exquisite spices, while New Testament passages condemned sensuality, noted the stink sin, and warned of temptations brought on by the senses. Saint Thomas Aquinas also offered his own hierarchy of the senses, which was quite similar to that of Aristotle, with olfaction occupying the middle of his ranking. He, like many others, believed that holy individuals exuded a special, natural perfume and valued olfaction for its utility in the perception of that which was pure.

Montaigne, while himself living during a Plague epidemic, wrote eloquently about the positive effects that smells had on his mood. His writings seem to foreshadow modern aromatherapy with allusions to the variations in mood-effect relative to the properties of the odors being inhaled. Also, he suggested to physicians that aromas might be used medicinally and to Christians that they might be used to arouse

churchgoers and make them more ready for religious contemplation. It is also Montaigne who wrote of a true inseparability of one from his or her senses, or the phenomenological notion of a primacy of perception. Hobbes, too, valued the senses, olfaction included, and believed that they formed the foundation of all thought.

Descartes took an extreme opposite approach. To him, the senses revealed nothing about the true nature of things and smells were nothing more than a transient feeling. Conversely, Locke, Hume, and Condillac all thought the senses to be at the foundation of all knowledge and intellectual activity, while Rousseau, also a champion of the senses, subdivided smell into two forms: one common to animals and uncivilized individuals, the other a refined attribute of civilized individuals. To him, as individuals evolved, the strength of their olfactory sense diminished but its sophistication increased.

To Kant, smell occupied the lowest position among the senses and was the most dispensable. He believed that pleasures coming from olfaction were fleeting, and repulsion was the much more likely outcome of any one inhalation. Also, he disliked the involuntary nature of olfaction, that is, the fact that humans are forced to share in smells as they must breathe to live. Hegel also ranked smell as the lowest among the senses but without the scathing of Kant. He believed that, in animals, olfaction was important, as evidenced by the protrusion of their noses or muzzles. However, as humans evolved, their noses came to lie more in line with their foreheads, and their senses of smell regressed in importance in accord.

Marx was a champion of all of the senses, believed that individuals were affirmed by the satisfaction of their sensory needs, and felt that a negation of the senses under capitalism contributed to the alienation and animalization of workers. Simmel, like Kant, focused on the unpleasant aspects of smell and felt that the fractures between different classes and races were due in part to olfactory disgust. Further, he proffered that such a primal disgust could never be overcome and, thus, social solidarity was forever unattainable. Feuerbach, in counterpoint to his teacher, Hegel, was enchanted with the idea of a sensual or sensory basis of knowledge and reclassified smell and taste, typically thought to be among the lower senses, as being among the highest. He contended that smell was not just for aesthetic enjoyment but could serve human knowledge as well. Nietzsche, too, called for a recognition of the importance of the human sensorium. He linked smell with wisdom, with the intuition to sniff out truths, and cast it as a great scientific instrument capable of detecting minute shifts in variables under study.

Darwin and Freud both noted what they believed to be a regression in olfactory acuity as human evolution progressed. Freud contended that when human ancestors achieved an upright posture, their noses were farther from the ground, and they no longer needed such a keen sense of smell. Further, the sight of and relationship with one's partner came to outweigh the formerly important factor of smell in sexual matters, which was to Freud, an important step in the foundation of the family and toward civilization. Marcuse also thought that the repression of human olfactory acuity was necessary in the march toward greater civilization. However, unlike Freud, he

believed a more sinister element to be in evidence; Marcuse contended that smell and taste were repressed more severely than the other senses, as they were potential sources of intense physical pleasures, pleasures which would in turn make the regimentation and exploitation of individuals more difficult. Likewise, Horkheimer and Adorno find olfaction as a victim in the drive toward modernity. They write philosophically about the function of olfaction in losing oneself in another or the unification of the smeller and the smelled.

Derrida and Ulmer take a more theoretical approach to olfaction with their discussion of a movement away from the objective senses (sight and hearing) to the chemical senses of smell and taste. To them, objects have meaning through the words that describe them, but smells are not understood as objects; thus, they must surely have a completely different system, one contrary to traditional Western philosophy, from which meaning is derived. It was the exploration and explication of such a nontraditional type of system that intrigued Derrida and Ulmer. Finally, Bourdieu was interested in the human sensorium because of its function as the vehicle through which preferences in all matters of culture are formed. Art, music, food, wine, and perfumes are experienced by human beings through their senses, but their reactions to them are conditioned by the social milieu in which each of them is immersed.

The third research question set forth in the beginning of this text was in relation to the cascade of events in the transformation of aromatic compounds into bases of knowledge and action in the ontological unfolding of human beings. In summary, that process begins when aromatic chemical compounds floating in the atmosphere are

inhaled into the nose where they bind with receptors. The receptors are activated and send electrical signals down pathways to the olfactory bulb in the brain, which is where the signals are topographically mapped. The manner in which the mapping is perceived is based on prior experiences that a subject has had in the presence of such a stimulus; that is, the judgment of a smell is conditioned by prior learning. Interestingly however, the pattern of mapping of the same exact smell can be different based on the internal state of the perceiving subject. For example, the topographical mapping of the smell of a particular food looks different when a subject is hungry than it does when he or she is full. The meanings that smells have for individuals are based on ingrained neurological patterns that are strengthened over subjects' lifetimes. Thus, while changes in the judgment of smells can occur, they unfold slowly over long periods of time, giving stability to individual olfactory dispositions and behaviors.

Again, it must be reiterated, that this work is not exhaustive, comprehensive, or the end point of any sort of inquiry into the phenomenon of human olfaction. Simply, it is an access point, a foundation, and a framework for further investigation in this substantive area by an individual who is passionate about it and who could not, despite a deeply committed effort, find any such informative and foundational compilation in existence. Another individual, standing in my shoes, may have chosen a different path of inquiry into olfaction or even an empirical study involving human subjects. Yet, heading full-tilt into such uncharted territory with no foundation upon which to build is, to this author, reckless and rash. From here, however, with the modernized, modified, and customized version of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as a framework, the

possibilities are endless in the search for understanding of meanings that are made of olfactory sensations as bodies and matter meet and as the neurological pathways through which humans' perceive conjure the sensuous histories that their brains have stored.

EPILOGUE

The day that I defended this dissertation, I was elated, overjoyed, high from the adrenaline of having reached such a milestone, and no less relieved that a much anticipated event had come and, thankfully, passed. The penning of this piece was more difficult and consuming than anticipated, and just as I thought that my oeuvre was complete, an insightful professor had one final query. At the conclusion of my defense, this individual, one I assume must have a tendency to feel cheated by stories without good endings, asked what all this hubbub about smells and our olfactory senses really meant to *me*. He asked where my own voice was in this austere assemblage. I gulped! I retreated without answering on the promise that I would. Indeed, you are correct Dr. Sadri, my response to your question does seem like a fitting ending, so here goes.

Life, to me, is all about collecting experiences, experiences that are burned into my mind through the senses that created them, and personally, smell is the sense through which I gain the greatest experience of pleasure. It is wonderful to hear great musical compositions or to gaze upon a breathtaking vista, but these pleasures are no comparison to the deep, heady, visceral rush that I get from inhaling some divine, intoxicating aroma. The smells that waft around me by chance as well the ones that I intentionally seek are what paint the beauty into my life; they are magic!

As far back as I can recall I have understood my world in large part through an aromatic context. As a small child, I remember becoming tearful when I smelled *Opium*, my mother's "special" perfume that she only wore when going out for an

evening with my father, as I knew it heralded her departure and the arrival of a babysitter. Also, I recall the smooth, cool, chalky, flinty, earthy, mineral-like smell of the tiny pebbles of pea gravel that paved an area behind my house. I was so enchanted by the aroma that I often gathered a few to taste, not because I liked the flavor but because it heightened my perception of the smell. Everyone seemed to notice my penchant for pleasing aromas, so around the age of seven or eight, I was given a child's perfume-making kit as a gift. I blended different concoctions with the zeal of a black alchemist, all with the same two-note aromatic result: roses and insect repellent.

Still today my avocations turn around the hub of olfaction, mostly via gastronomy. Shopping for or growing culinary spices and blending fragrant ingredients into gestalts that, when cooked, spread their heavenly aromas throughout are two of my favorite pastimes. Wine, too, is an object of my fascination. One deeply contemplated whiff can reveal its approximate age, the grapes from which it was made, as well as the country and region in which the grapes were grown. In contribution to my pursuit of a more highly trained nose and palate, my spouse serves a wine to me blindly on most evenings, and I must attempt to guess its varietal, its country, region, and subregion of origin, as well as the year it was bottled. There have been several occasions when my specification of each of these variables is so precise that my spouse accuses me of having peeked at the bottle label, yet he is painfully reminded of my integrity in the game when my conjectures are incorrect by the margin of an entire continent or decade. In such instances, my nose is tricked, defrauded, and scammed

by enigmatic emanations that, though not what they appear to be, are fancy tickling nonetheless.

Conventional wisdom holds that those who lack or lose one sense may become more acute in their perception through those that remain. Helen Keller, born with neither vision nor hearing, provides an excellent illustration of the wellspring of knowledge endowed in olfaction for those keen enough to distinguish it. She believed adult individuals to have a certain "person-scent" which was strongly correlated with their respective personalities. In explanation she wrote, "Sometimes I meet one who lacks a distinctive person-scent, and I seldom find such a one lively or entertaining. On the other hand one who has a pungent odor often possesses great vitality, energy and vigor of mind (as cited by Synnott, 1993, p. 188).

Another account of the rich and vivid nature of smell is given by an individual who, as a side effect of a seizure disorder, experienced a three-week-long episode of hyperosmia, a condition of extremely acute olfactory sensitivity. In reflection upon the occurrence, he wrote:

I went into the clinic, I sniffed like a dog, and in that sniff recognized, before seeing them, the twenty different patients who were there. Each had his own olfactory physiognomy, smell-face, far more vivid and evocative, more redolent, than any sight face. That smell-world, that world of redolence...So vivid, so real! It was like a visit to another world, a world of pure perception, rich, alive, self-sufficient and full. If only I could go back sometimes and be [that] dog again" (as cited in Synnott, 1993, p. 189).

While my own olfactory sense will never be so keen, I do believe that a great nose, like a great palate, may be acquired. Unlike the two illustrative cases above, however, such refinement and acuity will not be gifted but must, instead, be acquired through disciplined and contemplated smelling. I think I am up to the task! To you all, in matters of life do trust your *nose* – it will always *know*!

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