Thinking Multisensory Culture

in *Paragraph* 31:2, special issue on cinema and the senses, ed. Emma Wilson (July 2008): 123-137.

Abstract: The scholarly turn toward visual culture has left in place the sensory hierarchy that subtends Western philosophy. Yet given the commodification of sense experience, an inversion of the sensory hierarchy with the proximal senses of touch, taste, and smell at the top is not necessarily any more conducive to knowledge or justice. I argue that proximal sense experience may be a vehicle of knowledge, beauty and even ethics. Operating at a membrane between the sensible and the thinkable, the proximal senses have an affective dimension that permits an immanent epistemology. My examples and olfactory 'illustrations' emphasize the sense of smell, which I posit, given its intimacy with emotion and memory, gives rise to an 'olfactory unconscious.'

Visual and cultural studies were founded in the intention to correct the apparent elitism and disciplinary narrowness of art history and related disciplines. However, the turn toward visual culture has left in place the sensory hierarchy that subtends Western philosophy, in which only the distance senses are vehicles of knowledge, and Western aesthetics, in which only vision and hearing can be vehicles of beauty. It seems that the democratization of the object of aesthetic study to include high and low or popular arts has not really extended to non-visual objects, except for the audiovisual arts such as cinema.

The neglect of touch, smell, and taste (and to some extent, hearing) in visual culture descends particularly, of course, from art history, and generally, from the tendency to dismiss the proximal senses as inferior that underpins Western thought.

To include sense experience in our cultural analysis, we need to revisit the sensory hierarchy—while trying to retain the capacity for aesthetic judgement, knowledge, and ethics associated with the 'higher' senses. And we have to do it before the new marketing of all sense experience does it for us. Recent questions of the affective dimension of sensuous experience permit new dimensions of epistemology and ethics that are immanent, grounded in the particularity of experience. Sense experience operates at a membrane between the sensible and the thinkable, and as Jacques Rancière argues, art exacerbates this relationship: 'The place of art is the place of an adequation between a sensible different from itself and a thought different from itself.'[1] Thus a de-hierarchized aesthetics such as I am proposing would understand any sense experience as capable of opening in two directions, both potentially infinite: 'outward' to thought and 'inward' to the material.[2]

This essay is illustrated with smells, which of course cannot be reproduced. Ideally, so that you can undergo the olfactory experiment on which my argument rests, you should be able to smell these 'illustrations' without knowing what they are. Ask a friend to gather and number the olfactory items listed in this footnote,[3] but do not read the footnote yourself. For each example,

smell the substance but avoid touching it or looking at it. Note how it smells and any associations you might have with it. For the moment, deal with the slight discomfort of having molecules up your nose without knowing what they are.

Now, please smell substance number one.

Smell receives a variety of attention in the history of Western philosophy: Aristotle the empiricist included smell, but not touch and taste, among the 'noble' senses. Islamic kalam philosophers counted touch and sight as the senses providing reliable knowledge, while the other senses perceive only 'accidents.'[4] The term aesthesis was introduced into philosophy relatively late, by Baumgarten in the 18th C, and it was Lessing who defined aesthetics as the connection between the arts and the senses—but only the higher senses of vision and hearing.

In transcendental philosophy, knowledge (in Baumgarten's term, noeta, epistemology) must be emancipated from the senses, even though it may arrive through perception. The object of a sense perception (Baumgarten's term aestheta, perception) can be called beautiful, as long as it is a distance sense, vision or hearing. Kant and Hegel both developed a hierarchical relation between the two remaining senses deemed capable of aesthetic experience, with hearing, the inner, temporal, and more spiritual sense being above vision, the outer, spatial, and more physical sense.[5] For Kant, the bodily senses were capable of agreeable sensations, but not of beauty. Hegel argued that aesthetics is the transcendent rise from a sensuous particular to a universal truth, and was only possible through the distance senses:

> Smell, taste, and touch have to do with matter as such and its immediately sensuous qualities.... For this reason these senses cannot have to do with artistic objects, which are meant to maintain themselves in their real independence and allow of no *purely* sensuous relationship. What is agreeable for these senses is not the beauty of art.[6]

The place left for sensuous refinement is pleasure—the proximal senses are hedonic.

I propose that the proximal senses, touch, taste, and smell, are not only hedonic but may also be senses of knowledge (epistemology), vehicles of beauty (aesthetics), and even media of ethics. In this essay my examples focus around smell—somewhat artificially, since most sensory events combine the experience of several senses simultaneously, but for purposes of argument. Why smell in particular? Because smell often brings with it a freight of personal affect: it seems to be the least translatable and most personal of all the senses. Smells can be semantically coded, but less easily than other sense perceptions for this reason. If smell can be a medium of shared knowledge, then I'd argue any sense can. I also note that smell may be the sense that best shows the mutual limits of psychoanalysis and non-psychoanalytic affect theory, in that the former pays little attention to the singularity of sense experience, while the latter does not have a repression, both of which are important in the experience of smell.

What you have been smelling is oil of truffles, which many people find has a provocatively, even unbearably gamy smell. Note how it's reassuring to have a name associated with what you smelled. In fact, you may be able to smell it better now: studies show that an odor smells stronger when the smeller knows what it is. When you smelled what turned out to be truffles, you may well have thought you smelled human body odor, or some other organic smell that many people find noxious. Though semantically identifying the source of the smell probably makes it less noxious, you were in a sense right. Truffles have a chemical fingerprint that's close to human body odor. This is why female pigs are used to hunt truffles. Truffles secrete a steroid, 5-alpha-androstenol, that is the same steroid that male pigs secrete to advertise their sexual availability; it's also in human male perspiration and female urine.

This three-part smell story—smelling, associating, knowing—shows that the ideal semantic window for perceiving smells may be in the middle of their signifying spectrum. When we know too little, or too much, about a smell, it moves beyond the *heimlich*: it ceases to communicate humanly. The smell of truffle reminds us of what we have in common with other desiring creatures. It does *not* reveal the fundamental naturalness of smell; it shows that cultivated odors operate across a membrane from the material to the symbolic, the asocial to the communal. The base notes of perfumes, similarly, are often sexual or animal odors that we have learned to find noxious in themselves, yet are seductive when masked. A fine meal or elegant perfume both recalls and refines our animal and *vegetable* nature. Smell, the chemical communication, is uncanny because it reminds us what we have in common with pigs—and with mushrooms.

If sense experience is to be analyzed culturally, it must be communicable; we can ask, to what degree is sense experience culturally coded, to what degree is it asocial? I argue that all sense perceptions have aspects of both. The proximal senses are eminently teachable. Witness the cultivation of sense knowledges across cultures, as well as in the life of an individual learning archery, auto mechanics, Thai cooking, perfumery, or another multisensory skill. This educability of the sense extends to the level of neural plasticity. The educability of the proximal (indeed all) senses indicates that they can be means of communication, and thus of knowledge and aesthetics.

There is an aspect of smell experience that is learned but not communicable: namely, those olfactory events that are important in an individual's life but repressed as part of general socialization. Smell populates the imaginary, for it has intense personal associations that are difficult to communicate. Freud himself seems to have repressed the importance of smell, harshly criticizing his friend Wilhelm Fleiss who argued for fundamental connections between olfaction and sexuality. Recent findings in neuroscience support the psychoanalytic argument for links between olfaction and intense emotional experience, including repressed experience. The power of smell to elicit memory has partly to do with the unique 'wiring' of olfaction directly to neural centers for emotion and memory (the amygdala and the hippocampus), before it connects to cognition (the cortex).[7] Emotionally intense experiences (and (not all experiences) are likely to cement an association between the

emotion and the odor associated with the event (hence the olfactory imaginary), even if the event itself is forgotten. We may think of such events as lodged in a sensuous unconscious, which may be brought to consciousness, and its stories with it—as in the stories that tumbled from Proust's fragrant encounter with a madeleine dunked in a tisane of tilleul.

Thus the phylogenetic leaving-behind of smell that Freud posited in human history—where, in standing up, humans distanced themselves from each other's bodily smells and the knowledge that they provided—is recapitulated in individual human experience. Such a repression has occurred in recent histories of civilization as well: for example, Alain Corbin describes the eradication of 'unpleasant' smells as part of the construction of bourgeois experience in 18th-19th century France—smells of sewage, rot, corruption, body odor, in short the smells connected with death and impermanence were censored from bourgeois life and replaced by sweet, 'clean' smells.[8] In the resulting deodorized environment, smell ceased to be useful as an epistemological sense and became simply a sense for pleasure—and a very limited palette of pleasures at that. Smell ceased to be a means of knowledge, especially of knowledge to do with death and danger.

Smell is thus triply repressed. Smell is so strongly associated with excrement, sexuality, filth, poverty, and other repressed contents of both individual and cultural history, that even innocent smells have a taboo, or at least asocial dimension. We have more smell experience than we are able to talk about, because smells are inextricable from bodily events that are repressed. Smelling in public, or even talking about smell, seems to violate a private realm, which I've here called the *olfactory imaginary*. Finally, there is an aspect of sense experience that is neither educable nor communicable, not associated with repressed experience, and indeed has little association at all. The 'wild,' uncoded dimension of smell shows that the senses can be vehicles of intensity that remains free, but that cannot communicate. Across the membrane between communicability and incommunicability, the proximal senses build an intensity that is not social but is the meaningful lining of experience.

The sensory hierarchy is not only a Western phenomenon: most cultures maintain some version of sense hierarchy, usually with vision or hearing at the top; but what is interesting is the way in which certain constellations of sense knowledge are cultivated. Anthropologists are perhaps most aware of the variability of sensuous knowledges in different cultures, as in David Howes's account of the complex auditory and olfactory epistemologies of Melanesian people.[9] In a relatively Western genealogy of the senses, classical Islamic civilization cultivated a multisensory aesthetics, the latter especially in the luxurious courts of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad. Arabic philosophers tended to adopt the Aristotelian conception of the body as integral to human happiness, and thus valued bodily pleasures in moderation. Al-Kindi (d. 866)'s writings on music adopted the Greek doctrine relating elements and humours to notes and rhythms. He developed a kind of multisensory therapy combining music, colors, and perfumes.[10] Islamic aesthetics generally created a place for all the senses, as when Ibn Al-Haytham (d. 1039), author of the *Optics*, described perception to

consist of a compound of sensations that are mentally compared, as in the sight, sound, and smell experienced by a man sitting on a riverbank listening to music and admiring lovely women.[11] Arab cultivation of olfactory knowledge and pleasure remains in customs like offering perfumes to guests, maintaining an interpersonal distance close enough to allow both parties to smell each other, and the cultivation of fragrant gardens as terrestrial reminders of paradise. And of course Arab and Indian olfactory pleasure was adapted by European wealthy classes of the Middle Ages, whose eagerness for pepper, cinnamon, cardamom, and myrrh spurred explorers to discover continents.

Recent scholarship is beginning to develop a multisensory Archaeology of Knowledge. Currently this is the domain mainly of sensory anthropology descending from Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong, as in the work of historian Constance Classen and anthropologist David Howes. Scholars of 'visual culture' and cultural history can pursue the questions: what are the cultural, epistemological, economic currents that inform the development of some sense knowledges, the repression of others, and relations among them?

Odor revalued, at a cost

The body and its senses have been embraced in scholarship and art practice, for a variety of laudable motivations. Non-dualist philosophies in the nineteenth century already twisted the sense hierarchy, as in Nietzsche's valuing of 'flair' or instinct and the inclusion of olfactory experience in C.S. Peirce's semiotic theory.[12] Emerging from critiques of dualism and idealism, contemporary materialist, feminist, and intercultural theories practically reverse the values ascribed to the sensory hierarchy by traditional aesthetics. While vision and hearing can be experienced as bodily senses, as we've 'seen' they are strongly associated with abstraction and transcendence because of their ability to seem independent of the body. The embodied nature of the close senses of touch, taste, and smell is more evident, and thus they link us to the material world, indeed bringing it close to or into our bodies. An understanding of sense experience as embodied resists transcendentalism, for it links perception and the perceived material world. Embodied perception, including the experience of all the senses, acknowledges the inextricability of perceiver from perceived and the groundedness of knowledge in local experience. The close senses, which index both the material world and the materiality of the body that perceives with them, insist upon *mortality*. Thus, a materialist aesthetics can find value in the close senses precisely for their grounded, provisional, and ephemeral character. The immanence and materiality of the proximal senses can thus be the ground of aesthetics, knowledge, and indeed ethics.

However, the contemporary 'bodily turn' in scholarship raises new problems. An inversion of the sensory hierarchy with the bodily senses at the top is not necessarily any more conducive to knowledge or justice than the old hierarchy. Writes Carolyn Korsmeyer, 'One cannot simply add taste and the other bodily senses to philosophy as it has evolved and correct theories accordingly to be more comprehensive in their treatment of sensory worlds' (37). Instead we

must ask, what are the particular pleasures and knowledges we can get from different kinds of sensory experience?

Second, since the knowledge and pleasure gained by the distance senses is associated with transcendence, critical theory seems to have thrown aesthetics (and its presumption of a subject capable of transcendent experience) out with the bath water of dualism. Contemporary critical theory seems to have a lot of unease and bad faith about whether we can still speak of aesthetic objects. There is a certain theoretical squeamishness around the senses' ability to function epistemologically, as well as aesthetically. For contemporary visual studies, Hegel's dictum could almost be reversed: artistic objects *are not* meant to maintain themselves in their real independence from the material world and *can only* allow of a purely sensuous relationship. Bourdieu's semiotic revaluation of taste translates aesthetic pleasure into economic and social terms alone. Contemporary theory can speak of pleasure (considered subjective), and of politics, but not of beauty. Just when the proximal senses have been redeemed, there seems little for them to do—except go shopping (of which more in a moment). So it is still necessary to argue that the senses are means of knowledge and ethics as well as pleasure.

The contemporary popular tendency to reverse the sense hierarchy and reject the transcendental is not the answer. We still need to be able to ask, what knowledge am I gaining from sensuous experience? How can it make life worth living?

Fourier, writing during the Industrial Revolution (1851), believed a society could be judged by the degree to which it gratified and developed the senses of its citizens. The current stinking state of the world was a far cry from the multisensory order that Fourier imagined for the cosmos, where each planet corresponds to a musical note and to a fragrance: Earth emanates the odor of violet, Jupiter, jonquil, Mercury, rose.[13] Fourier's utopia is idealist, in its eradication of unpleasant odors, but it is decidedly corporeal in its appeal to embodied pleasure and knowledge. Marx adapted from Fourier the idea of liberation of the senses that are abused and impoverished in capitalist system of labor, such as the factory workers suffer from noise, heat, smell, and immiseration: 'the worker loses all notion of sensory refinement' and 'no longer knows any need...but the need to eat.'[14] As Howes notes, Marx had little interest in the sensuous dimension of life, but his call for humans to be able to cultivate our sensory capacities gave a political immediacy to Fourier's fragrant idealism. Sensuous experience can make life worth living by liberating *capacities* that are not contained by instrumental purposes. But where, and how?

There is a current popular tendency to embrace feeling over thinking, which seems to be especially embraced on the West Coast: it descends from feminist and other critiques of mind-body dualism and instrumental rationality, but has devolved into an anti-rationalism that is positively lazy. I am not sure how widespread this tendency is, but in my west-coast city of Vancouver 'Feel, don't think!' (like 'No worries'—when surely there are things we should be worrying about) is considered a positive slogan.

Fashionable anti-rationalism plays into the commercial *capture* of sense experience: the senses are being sold back to us as means not of knowledge but of pleasure. Consumer capitalism is conquering the bodily senses from nose to toes. Fourier's utopia is here, though not in the way he anticipated. The well-to-do people of the world are both educated and gratified in their senses—but for hedonic, not epistemological reasons. That is, contemporary post-industrial society affords its consuming classes an overwhelming wealth of sense experience and the means to refine our appreciation of them. Meanwhile the world's poor live in sensuous poverty not so different from that bemoaned by Fourier and Marx. Among the many inequities resulting from the global division of classes into the very rich and the very poor is an inequity of sense experience.

We the well-to-do of the Western and Westernized world still live in the deodorized bubble associated with the rise of the bourgeoisie, both European and global. Smell is an impoverished sense. We still use smell for survival reasons--to check for the presence of rotting meat, mold, infection, sewage, gas leaks, and other things that pose a danger. Smell knowledge is arguably most useful for distinguishing different kinds of car trouble—oil burning, brake friction, coolant leaks. Poor people are more likely to live with odors that index real events, including danger—and thus are objects of knowledge. But these are the few opportunities that smell has to exercise its epistemological potential.

After the olfactory whitewashing of Westernized middle-class life, pleasing new odors flooded the blank canvas. In the past couple of decades the use of smell, and the other bodily senses, for pleasurable and refined consumption has accelerated. The tasteless processed foods that signified modernity in the 1950s and 1960s[15] have given way to a great variety of fresh produce, often locally grown, as well as exotic imports, because of industrial diversification and faster shipping methods. The canned Maxwell House of 20 years ago has given way to a bewildering array of specialty coffees, a marvel of niche marketing—North Americans drink less coffee than they did in the 1960s but they spend more on it. Wine, which those of us who were alive in the 1970s knew in the categories red, white and rosé, is now produced and marketed in bewildering variety, requiring middle-class consumers to become, or act like, connoisseurs. Dish soap comes with aromatherapeutic promises, soothing or stimulating; etcetera.

The reason for this explosion of sensuously pleasing products is of course the exhaustion of markets and the need of corporations to induce consumers to continue to spend. Multisensory products promise to: enhance individuality: consumers are encouraged to design signature scents, express themselves through gourmet cooking, etc.; confer cultural capital: connoisseurship of wine, coffee, chocolate, 'artisanal' bread and other luxury goods and the concomitant opportunity for snobbism; and enhance sensuous pleasure. This they probably do: it is a great thing to savor good wine, choose among many varieties of international tasty food, inhale stimulating fragrances in the hurried morning shower, and bury one's nose in Dove cleansing pads for a brief respite from screaming children, holiday in-laws, and airport delays (scenarios provided by Dove).

However, as these descriptions of pleasure begin to indicate, multisensory products are conceived to defray the pressures of contemporary life where most people, even middle-class people, are working too hard and have too little time. Many aromatherapy products and bath products emphasize the *time* of consumption, 'time for me'; they sell a product in the name of creating free time, and their principal target seems to be harried, hard-working women.[16] Sensuous pleasure is sold to us fundamentally to ensure that we get back to work—relaxed, refreshed, and ready. Thus one of the most cynical promises of the new sensuous commodities is that they will give people more time.

Sensuous refinement now serves mainly hedonic ends; the aesthetic, epistemological, and ethical dimensions of sensuous experience are far from the commodity landscape. The 'emancipation of the senses' envisioned by Fourier is only a further enslavement if our senses are marshaled only for the purposes of consumption. The proximal senses, in their intimacy, relation to memory (especially smell), and affective intensity, are the very senses most resistant to mass communication. Sensory commodities that invade and encode the private space of the proximal senses are threatening this resistance.

Odor's affective space

Please turn to your olfactory illustrations and smell substance number 2.

Two years ago I returned to the Souk al-Hamadiya in Damascus. This souk, where people have plied their trades in carpets, silks, blown glass, hammered brass, and other handcrafted goods has expanded its focus with the changed direction of global trade, as well as the vast expansion of the Syrian factory economy. You can get everything there—cheek by jowl with the metalworkers' souk are now the plastic kitchen equipment souk, the imported biscuit souk, and the outrageous ladies' underwear souk. But I was confidently in search of essential oils: the attar of rose, jasmine, amber, *fil* (a tiny flower with overpowering scent), and other locally extracted scents that perfumers have imported from the Orient for hundreds of years. You are now smelling jasmine, which just possibly might come from the Souk al-Hamadiya. This time I noticed that the expert Syrian knockoff artists, who have flooded Arab markets with camouflage Nike and misspelled Calvin Kline garments, now include 'noses' capable of discerning the elements of a composite perfume—for it is possible at the fragrance souk to buy reasonable facsimiles Coco Chanel, Tommy Hilfiger, Hugo Boss, and other commercial fragrances for a tiny fraction of the price. Indeed it's my research dream to visit a Syrian perfume factory and meet the great 'nose'—but given the Bush administration's practice of bombing Iraqi perfume factories during the last Gulf war, this is probably not likely any time soon. The perfume monger fills the little vials with a syringe of precious oil, then in a jolly manner sprays the remaining drops at customers, who spread out their arms to be engulfed by fragrance. It's a social atmosphere of shared smelling.

This time I happened to look at the vat from which the vendor syringe-extracted the precious oil of jasmine that is so typical of this part of the world. It –this jasmine you are perhaps smelling—was a German synthetic. Complex original smells are being replaced by synthetic smells at what ought to be the

center of original smells, the library of real smells, the Damascus perfume souk. Synthetic jasmine is like a photocopy of jasmine, approximating its complexity with a compound of a few chemicals and a strong base note of petroleum. (By contrast, it seems to me that real jasmine has a base note of excrement, which is perhaps why jasmine is planted outside lavatories.) Such economically driven smell replacements worry me the way a film archivist would be worried if all the 35mm reels were replaced by MPEGs. What will we study in the future; with what will we enrich and educate our senses?

Yet the socialness of the perfume souk at Hamadiya involves another dimension of smell experience that is perhaps more durable than smell itself.

I have mentioned a few times the ethical dimension of multisensory experience, and it is high time to explain this seeming oxymoron. it has to do with the position of the proximal senses on the membrane between shared and private, codified and uncodable experience—on the middle bandwidth of sense experience. Korsmeyer, a philosopher, argues (against Bourdieu) that the philosophical baby can indeed be retained when we toss out the bath water of purist aesthetics: the issue is what kinds of philosophical treatment do the close senses invite? (66) Her answer involves the nature of the proximal senses as both objective and subjective: capable of being directed outward (epistemological), and inward (hedonic) within a set of bodily and cultural limitations (94-98). Thus the proximal senses operate at the literal border between the intimate and the communal. Knowledge and communication that makes use of them may lose in 'objectivity' but it gains in depth, trust, and sociality.

Recall that incommunicable dimension of sensuous experience, which I qualified as comprising an olfactory unconscious. We might refer to this incommunicable dimension, adapting Spinoza's ethics, as affect. Between passive and active, affect is a passion (Spinoza): an intensity, an 'excess,' a suspension of the linear progress of narrative.[17] As in the affection-image of Deleuze, it is a moment of gathering force, which may or may never be acted upon. This is a volatile moment. It's when a person feels the great pressure and potential of the virtual—of the broad realm of possibilities one of which can be summoned into being. It is not yet communicable.

To what degree can affect be experienced in common, socially? The concept of excess from film theory, for example, shows that affect is marshaled around a common image, as when audience members all cry at a movie like the classic 'weepie' Stella Dallas, salivate emotively during Chocolat, or feel the urge to slay Persians while watching 300. However, I would argue that affection-images allow people to respond as they will—not necessarily all in the same way. What the participants in an affective situation have in common is that some affection-image stimulated their affective response—this intensity, this passion, not yet bound as emotion, and not yet communicable—and they had the response together. So they would attribute to the affection-image, be it *Stella Dallas*, *Chocolat*, *300*, or a sudden rush of jasmine, the ability to arouse affect in them. This is Brian Massumi's reasoning when he argues that the television

addresses of former President Reagan unleash affect, which makes people feel good, and vote for the man, even without knowing why (pp. 39-42).

Affect arises from a break in the continuity of experience, a shock in Benjamin's sense. It may thus have the critical ability to disrupt the clichéd narrative of daily life. For example, I'm working at my crummy telemarketing job and someone passes wearing the perfume my mother wore when she used to kiss me goodnight years ago. I feel the giddy vertigo of travel, between actual and virtual, then a resurgence of the original emotion (love? safety? excitement? jealousy?) before the memory resolves itself. For this is how smell memory works—first you experience the disruption, then you feel the emotion, then you identify the source. Such an experience could well make me burst into tears in my nasty little cubicle *and* remind me of the vast powers of the virtual hovering below the surface of my crummy actual life.

The closer the sense, the stronger the affect: smell seems to be the perception capable of the most powerful affection image, though I note that music seems to have an effect exactly analogous to smell—a heard fragment of an old song arouses piercingly specific memories in just the same way as a whiff of a scent from long ago may. Physical gestures, tastes, and colors can also sometimes call up intensely embodied emotional memories, though less often than smell and music.

In an essay titled 'The Logic of Smell' I argued that smell cannot be a basis of communication.[18] I still believe that smell's asocial nature is a great virtue of this sense. The charged individual responses that *may* gather around particular smells protect olfaction from ever being completely culturally coded. This is a value in an economy that is forever finding new ways to encode meaning in sensory experience in order to eke out more profit.

However, smell is also, like the other senses, a social sense. As Korsmeyer points out, taste is a social sense because one brings one's memories associated with particular foods to the present encounter. Smell functions similarly. Being in the presence of smells familiar from the past sometimes has the quality of socializing with a community, even if others are absent. Such associations are a virtual presence that may be actualized. So too, smell, though it is even less codifiable than taste, can be a social sense as the virtual experiences it evokes are actualized, and communicated, by the smeller. What's rich about these experiences is their virtual depth: the degree to which more is going on, more is potentially present, to each individual and to the group. The thickness of communication includes what is not communicated, what may not even be identified as more than a potentiality. Affect is incommunicable per se; and that is its virtue. People may respond in common, but that response will be enriched and complexified by a core of absolutely individual and relatively incommunicable experience. People cry at the movies, even happy movies, because the passage from virtual to actual is exquisite—it is painful. I cried once when an unanticipated smell (freon, melted plastic and cigarette smoke) reminded me of my grandfather because the love he gave me has slipped forever back into the virtual. Affect reminds people of missed appointments with love.

In its autonomy, affect is the foundation of an ethics. Massumi writes, 'The autonomy of affect is its participation in the virtual' (p. 35). Even when affect is expressed as emotion, 'Something remains unactualized, inseparable from but unassimilable to any *particular*, functionally anchored perspective [original italics]' (35). Affect, to the degree to which it remains free, is the force underlying emotion and action.

In certain ways the protection of the freedom of affect is a conservative goal. Its result is not for example social action but a retaining of the quality of life. Any social or political effect comes later and not necessarily. If people could believe that the virtual powers with which they came into contact through affect could really be actualized in the social—they would not just weep, they would proceed to fight.

To conclude with another look at that sensory hierarchy and the dualism it subtends. I've mentioned that we may think of sense experience, and the affect that it sometimes brings forth, as a membrane between several pairs: between social and private, between communicability and incommunicability, between codified experience and uncodifiable experience. In a certain way this membrane reinstates a duality, not between matter and spirit but between actual and virtual. Sense experience is one of the ways of traversing this duality. Smell (which, as the ancients remarked, was the only perceptible object that actually comes into contact with the brain itself) could be the mascot of that creative traversal.[19]

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[1] Jacques Rancière, 'What Aesthetics Can Mean,' translated by Brian Holmes, in From an Aesthetic Point of View: Philosophy, Art and the Senses, edited by Peter Osborne (London: Serpent's Tail, 2000), 19.

[2] Gilles Deleuze argues that an immanent infinite is to be found in the particularity or *haecceity* of experience, in 'The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy,' *Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, translated by Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); see also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'What Is a Concept?,' What Is Philosophy?, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 15-34.

[3] 1. Truffle oil. 2. Jasmine oil.

[4] Alnoor Dhanani, The Physical Theory of Kalam: Atoms, Space and Void in Basrian Mu'tazili Cosmology (Leiden, New York, And Köln: E.J. Brill, 1994), 63.

[5] Jonathan Rée, 'The aesthetic theory of the arts,' in Osborne, 57-59.

[6] Cited in Carolyn Korsmeyer, Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 61.

[7] Mark Stopfer and Gilles Laurent, 'Short-term memory in olfactory network dynamics,' Nature 402 (9 December 1999), 664–68.

[8] Alain Corbin, The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination, translated by Miriam Kochan, Christopher Porter, and Roy Prendergast (Oxford, 1986), 140-141.

[9] David Howes, Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

[10] Doris Behrens-Abouseif, Beauty in Arabic Culture (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1998), 69.
[11] Nasser Ahmad Nasir, 'Ibn Al-Haitham and His Philosophy,' in Ibn Al-Haitham, edited by Hakim Mohammad Said (Karachi: Hamdard National Foundation, 1969), 85.
[12] Charles Sanders Peirce, 'The Principles of Semiology,' in Philosophical Writings of Peirce, edited by Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955), 74-97,
[13] Constance Classen, The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender, and the Aesthetic Imagination (New York: Routledge, 1998), 39.
[14] Cited in Howes, 206.
[15] Warren Belasco, 'Food and the Counterculture: A Story of Bread and Politics,' in The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating, edited by James l. Watson and Melissa L. Caldwell (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 221.
[16] I thank Suzanne Lindgren, a student in Art and Culture Studies at Simon Fraser University, for pointing out this temporal-olfactory paradox.
[17] Brian Massumi, 'The Autonomy of Affect,' Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation (Minnesota University Press, 2002), 26.
[18] Laura U. Marks, 'The Logic of Smell,' Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 113-126.
[19] I thank two groups of listeners for their helpful responses to this paper, at Project for the Study of Visual Culture of the University of Southern California, and the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages at Cambridge University.