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Olfactory Phenomenology:
Pheromonal Affects and Atmospheric Attunement

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Abstract

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This thesis is a phenomenological analysis of smell perception. It attends to the difficulties in proceeding from existential phenomenology's typical question-structure ("how does smell present itself to experience?"), characteristic of "ocularcentric" phenomenologies (ones that are correlationist and anthropocentric). Examining Martin Heidegger's concept of attunement (*Stimmung*) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writing on sensation, I argue that these two concepts are both preeminently "smell-like," yet they betray the smell phenomenon by culminating in a valorization of action, groundedness, and the self-enclosed subject. I present the pheromone, entrainment, and atmosphere as philosophical tools to reposition both attunement and the lived-body. An olfactory phenomenology will not only expound a "smelling subject," but will be the model for a more atmospheric subjectivity altogether. The main principles of an olfactory phenomenology will be moods, thresholds, diffusions, encounters, and affective atmospheres. This kind of phenomenology emphasizes material engagements and human/nonhuman entanglements.

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Introduction

“Is the whole body just one big eye?”

- J.G. Herder

This project does not have a single beginning. There was, at no point, a guiding question. It would be better to think of two questions, one which could not be asked without the other – not successively, but as two lines which would circle around each other, sometimes converge, then spiral off again. Like the emergence of an odor, there is no origin... only an event which would, with luck, linger in the air. But there was a “first” question. It was a simple, phenomenological one: how does smell present itself to experience? The problem was that phenomenology could not provide the tools to answer such a question in a phenomenological way. This is the case with Western thought as a whole since Plato: smell has been thoroughly useless to philosophy.

The second “question,” then, was a deviation that needed to be taken as a beginning – it was a care towards the constant detours, limitations, and departures from such a question; it was to engage in a non-anthropocentric phenomenology. It is the compounded history of philosophy and disdain for nonhuman others that has overdetermined the olfactory world as a non-issue. The philosophical sense, we can say, is sight. From Plato to Kant and onward, the valorization of the visible world has come largely at the expense of smell as animalistic and pathetic. The orientation of philosophy towards sight and seeing, towards how things “appear” as being present, manifest, and true, is more fundamental than what the eyes see. Sight is access. As Heidegger points out, sight is formalized as a general term “which characterizes

every access as access whatsoever to beings and to being.”¹ The relationship between philosophy and sight can be framed on a more specific level as the relationship between perception and cognition: to see is to understand (“I see, it is clear now”). Our problem is not new, and critiques of visuality in Western thought and culture have become fairly prevalent in feminist and postcolonial thought.² Sight, in a Cartesian perceptual scheme, delineates the boundaries of stable and knowable objects at a distance from a perceiver. Residing at the top of the sensorial hierarchy, it is the civilized, reliable, and controlled sense, with smell almost always dismissed as unrefined, fleeting, and effeminate. If vision is what distances, reflects, and projects, I wish to reorient the philosophical sense towards smell: that which is immediate, messy, and not distinctly human.

Smell seems uniquely outfitted to unsettle presuppositions of the insular human subject who may insert/withdraw their perceptual attention to various disconnected spheres of life (ecological, social, cultural, etc.). In other words, I am not advocating a “return” to a kind of undomesticated being-in-the-world. Such a return is neither possible nor desirable (although, a recent study with 32 UC Berkeley undergraduates is an amusing counterexample: in 2006 a team of neuroscientists laid down a trail of chocolate essential oil in a grass field and had the students, blindfolded and ears blocked, attempt to track the scent – which they eventually did quite successfully. The researchers concluded that humans have not evolutionarily “outgrown” the sense of smell, but that we are simply out of practice³ – thus further discounting Freud’s human, who, learning to walk upright, leaves the olfactory world of dirt and debris as they rise to civilization, the eyes, the family).

Most scholarship on smell takes the form of cultural anthropology, and prescribes to a shared problematic, or rather, accepts a similar narrative. Smells are repressed in modern Western societies. Playing a seminal role is Alain Corbin's *The Foul and the Fragrant*, an analysis of how French cities underwent a massive process of deodorization at the end of the 18th century when the control of odors became of great interest as a public health concern. Smells were dangerous to new standards of cleanliness, private space, and, indeed, the emergence of the individual person. But the idea of an "olfactory silence" (with its own classed, gendered, and racialized ramifications) is predicated on emphasizing the historico-cultural construction of the senses and sensory experience. The Western story is contrasted to many non-Western societies, in which the experience of odors denotes explicit and highly important ontological, social, and experiential meaning. A common example is the people of the Andaman Islands, whose conception of time is based on the cycles of fragrances emitted by certain blooming flowers. Rather than blocked or linear, it is a fluid and vibrant, scent-based temporality. We will, however, reject this narrative of the scent-masked West and the "osmological" non-West. Bjørnar Olsen gives us an alternative route, although for him it is an archaeological problem. Rejecting the idea that the culture of a people lies "underneath" inert things (i.e. the overstressing of social constructionism, being predicated on a Cartesian mind/matter divide), Olsen is instead interested in the "question of different ways of living with things, of linking (or combining) humans and nonhumans in countless hybridities without assigning any a priori precedence to who – to what – causes this difference."⁴ That is, we will not assign radically different experiences of materiality to cultural

difference. Rather, we ask what is in certain flows and federations of matter and perceivers that causes them to be experienced in certain ways – without hierarchizing of who comes “first” or who is “doing the experiencing.” To form this question another way: what is it about odors, about the entanglements of odors, the body, and society, that allows Andaman islanders to follow a temporality of flowers? While sight (and hearing) do dominate urban, post-industrial life, I wish to highlight the importance of everyday olfactory experience. Indeed, one of my central claims is that olfactory experience, while often diffuse and pre-reflective, invokes a radically immersive, participatory, and constitutive relation between self and environment.

Smell needs a phenomenology. This must come before any inquiry into smell as a socially constructed sense. In fact an olfactory phenomenology might entirely call into question such an inquiry, as it will likely deflate an approach which gives discourse, cultural fields, or human faculties the last word. This is not to argue that the senses are hard-wired and culturally-independent receptors for data about the world, nor is it to say that smell is not political, or that the “same” odor cannot be experienced with ranging specificities. But we will certainly not start here, and we will likely not end up here either. The qualities of smell as a phenomenon (which at this point will be outlined broadly) likely justified its marginalization in the history of philosophy. Here, they will be of great interest to us. Smell is immediate and transitory. It has no beginning, no end, no stable temporal or spatial delineations. It is unable to be located within discreet categories or objects, but instead is experienced in moments of variable intensity. The perception of smell remains within no projective moment, no individual body, no secure theory. Smell

perception is a profoundly material and emotional phenomenon – it does not place us at a distance from a perceived object, but rather, in affective and heterogeneous atmospheres. Smells emerge most intensely at thresholds: between rooms, between countries, between an “inside” and an “outside” – smells are always an outside, a dematerialization of borders, or, as Adorno and Horkheimer will say, when we smell we are “absorbed entirely.”⁵ Absorbed by and into what: who is the subject of absorption?

In the first chapter, I examine themes from various phenomenologies. Given that these resources are diverse and diverging, my intentions are not to synthesize them into a unified scheme. I will just let them float around. Sometimes they will draw out restrictions, others will be put to new uses, others will simply establish certain zones of attention. I begin with *Stimmung*, from Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Often translated as attunement or mood, though with overtones of a kind of “tuning,” *Stimmung* determines how the world shows up for us. As a backdrop for intentionality, it is the condition upon which things in the world can already matter, without consciously being given value. I then turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty to explore an embodied-attunement, particularly the chapter on sensing in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty’s writings on sensation outline the perceptual subject’s ability to commune with certain existential vibrations and rhythms, due to the intentional unity of the body-schema. I then turn to Teresa Brennan’s *The Transmission of Affect*, where she examines recent findings in psychoneuroendocrinology, particularly human chemosignals (pheromones), as being essential to the phenomenon of “feeling an atmosphere.” The mechanism of

transmission, called entrainment, works primarily through smell. In Brennan's argument, the neglect of smell as a powerful social force stems from the neo-Darwinian insistence on the self-enclosed and autonomous subject. I finally turn to Antonino Griffiero's atmospherology. For Griffiero, "everything is atmospheric (and, consequently, nothing *is* in the proper sense)."⁶ Atmospheres are not metaphors, but spatially diffused emotional charges. As being central to our lived experience, they are the capacity for the world to be expressive, vibrant, and meaningful before reflection. For Griffiero, too, smell "[exemplifies] the atmospheric perfectly."⁷ In these four thinkers, I wish to draw out a correspondence: all discuss a kind of "locking in." By locking in I mean a productive tuning, as the dynamic, emergent, and volatile existential-emotional rhythms (the "vibes") that flow between, within, and across bodies, human and nonhuman alike. I insist that this is a phenomenology of olfaction. I am keeping in mind a question: how is it that the self is "held together" in different ways? Both sides of this question will be considered: 1) that the self is indeed not already a given unity, but is held together through sticky-flows which challenge ideal/material distinctions predicative of the self-enclosed person, and 2) that such configurations can be assembled in new, more sensitive, and indeed more exciting ways.

In the second chapter, I will lay out a few phenomenological principles of olfaction: Geosmin (the new "ground" of perception), Threshold (transience and the thresholded-body), Fade In/Out (spatiality and temporality as communion and fatigue), The Pheromone (a folding of self onto the world), Entrainment (a different

concept of Experience), and various “Bonus Features” that explore the participatory, entangled, and atmospheric dimensions of olfactory perception.

A note on terminology is necessary. There is, as nearly all smell scholarship points out, a problem of language and nomenclature. Olfactory experiences are extremely difficult to put into words. Our descriptions of smell are associative – being metaphors or simply referring to the other senses. Something smells light... like metal... like a spring night. This arises because smells are taken as they are – asignifying singularities: “what’s *that* smell?” Our goal is not to discourse this situation away. Many theorists who directly engage with smell (Brennan, Laura U. Marks, Uri Almagalor) will sustain an end in language and signification – even if it is a “new language” (i.e. Brennan’s claim that linguistic logic is split from other logics [hormonal, genetic, planetary], and that it is up to an “interpretation of the flesh” to match affect and word). I will instead maintain an attitude towards smell as asignifying but meaning-laden and expressive.⁸ Geographer Paul Rodaway is correct in pointing out that the language problem of smell is not an issue of vocabulary, but grammar: “The subject-object dichotomy of everyday language forces our description of olfactory experience into an inappropriate framework. Smells are not neatly defined objects in the sense of visual objects but experiences of intensities.”⁹ Smells are untranslatable because they are always escaping their object, always occurring at thresholds, and always emphasizing a porosity between bodies and environments.

Smells leave us speechless, being both highly singular and resisting classification within any order or object of representation. Does it even make sense

to refer to what we smell as an “odor” (or odorant), when olfaction always involves multiple actors? And when I say “olfaction” I do not mean what the olfactory receptors do. Even the word “smell” is tricky, and there is a problem of two smellings. On the one hand, there is the smelling of a specific odor, in which one is within a conscious but inarticulate intensive relation with a “something” or a “like-something.” There is also a largely unconscious smelling, as a continuous receptivity to odors as chemosignals and atmospheric components. I like the word smell, as it is helpfully ambiguous: “to smell” as both the perceptual intake of a smell, and as the emitting or “having” a smell. Both occur simultaneously, and it is inapt to try and disentangle the perception and emission of a smell. Smells are not born in the unity of the perceptual subject with the world; they find a home in no body, index, or term. Can it be said that smells both act on and unform the subject? That they constitute a new kind of subjective openness? Our use of the word smell, in its equivocality, will hold such difficulties, tensions, and double movements unresolved. Smell: a strange and messy relation.

A small word on my use of scientific articles and research is also necessary. I approach such material with little understanding and using mostly second-hand sources. Teresa Brennan’s application of entrainment – a chemical-neurological process between airborne chemicals and human affective states – will be of obvious importance. I approach this research timidly, or rather, not with the intention of garnering facts. Indeed, there have been more poetic applications of entrainment – such as in Ann Game’s essay “Riding: Embodying the Centaur,” in which she opposes

the primacy of human thought with entrainment,¹⁰ as an energetic co-becoming through a taking up of flows and rhythms of nonhuman others.¹¹

It is even worth mentioning that research into the still unknown mechanisms of human olfaction have caused an intense controversy in the sciences. Perfume-aficionado-turned-biochemist Luca Turin and his vibrational theory of olfaction take center stage here. Opposed to the more generally recognized theory that a smell character is based on a molecule's size and shape, Turin proposes that olfactory receptors sense odorants by their vibrational frequency and pick up odor signals through quantum-tunneling: the "lock and key" model vs. the "card swipe" model. Turin's paper documenting this, which was rejected by *Nature* (he claims because his theory was "too interdisciplinary") but eventually published in *Chemical Senses*, led to a storm of "provings" and "disprovings" by other teams of scientists, with consequent debates about peer review and scientific rigor in its wake.¹² I frame this controversy in relation to my approach to recent work in neuroendocrinology, Turin's vibrational theory, and research about smell's relation to the brain, memory, and emotion – I acknowledge that this work occurs in a discipline that I am not familiar with, and that is still developing. That is, my approach is not evidentiary. Whether or not the scientific information has been disproven, misapplied, or overstated is not my primary concern – I use such data only to think through the possibility of new subjectivities while emphasizing their material realities. Turin himself typifies his work in a specific kind of scientific research: "things which are interesting even if not true."¹³ I share a similar attitude, which is to see a productive potential in intentional naivety: something like critical-naivety.

What Jim Drobnick calls “olfactocentrism”¹⁴ – recognizing the strategic value in isolating the sense of smell from multisensorial perceptual life – will be employed. Smell will be our entry point into phenomenological questioning which decenters the primacy of visual-oriented (in other words, human) perceptual models, so: how does the sense of smell fit into a body-schema, what would perceptual life be like if it were posited to be, in general, “like smelling,” and what is the character of the corporeal and affective opening between perceiver and atmosphere (i.e. a phenomenology of vibes, of the direct and bodily interactions with environments)? I disagree with Tom Sparrow, who, pointing out phenomenology’s tradition of anthropocentrism, terminates it as a viable method to address the reality of bodies, stuff, and events.¹⁵ Smell will help us here. We will not only (with help from existential phenomenology) contest subject/object divides, but also actively challenge a championing of representation, human language, and cultural/material, active/passive, cause/effect, and social/biological dichotomies. We have no recourse to the privatized human organism, but must begin in participative currents of heterogeneous atmospheres. A careful phenomenology of smell will, I believe, allow us to look at – or rather, to smell – such ecologies, without a perfunctory resort to “flows of affect and intensity.”

An olfactory phenomenology can proceed, perhaps, from no better sentiment than political theorist Jane Bennett’s in *Vibrant Matter*. In the last chapter of *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett provides some strategies for cultivating an attentiveness to materiality and heterogeneous material-affective flows – an attention that horizontalizes the plane of actors in a given event-space, accepts (even celebrates)

the entangledness of human and nonhuman, and more broadly, recognizes the vitality and expressiveness of matter in its own right. Her most insisted upon tactic is strategic anthropomorphism. A second, however, is to “Postpone for a while the topics of subjectivity or the nature of human interiority.”¹⁶ My interjection is that we can still think about the subject, or rather, constellations of subjectifications, while rejecting anthropocentrism (has this not already been proved possible by the Anthropocene?). In looking at flows and rhythms of chemical-affective atmospheres, I do not wish to end by declaring that such instances happen below, alongside, and around the formation of human subjectivity. By focusing on olfactory perception, we can see how such flows literally get *inside* the subject, through complex cultural-physiological-emotional situations.

Rather than asking how this or that experience appears, we will ask how it smells. We are still doing phenomenology, but our confrontation of phenomenological limitations will not be resolved simply by “looking at other things” (i.e. smells, implying that the neglect of olfaction is a clean-cut “mistake” that can be fixed). Our phenomenological investigation of smell is only possible if we reposition, twist, and scramble its components (subjectivity, intentionality, Experience, the body). This phenomenology does not begin with a ground, but in the wind.

Notes

¹ Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Ed. Joan Stambaugh. Albany: SUNY 2010. Print. pp. 142.

² Donna Haraway, in "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," sums up the visual traditions of scientific observation, knowledge, and distanced judgment quite nicely: the primacy of vision indicates a leap from the body into an abstract and idealized gaze. Such "looking" is a distancing of the subject from what they (he) perceive – an operation that is central to patriarchal, capitalist, and colonialist histories and technologies.

³ Check, Erika. "People track scents in the same way as dogs." *Nature*. 17 December 2006. Web. <http://www.nature.com/news/2006/061211/full/news061211-18.html#B2>.

⁴ Bjørnar Olsen, *In Defense of Things: Archaeology and Ontology of Objects*. Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2010. Print. pp. 129.

⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 151.

⁶ Tonino Griffero, *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces*. New York: Routledge, 2010. Print. pp. 3, emphasis mine.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁸ That is, I am not trying to put a word to smell. The connection between smell and affect (as material flows of intensity that are passed between bodies and mediums of all kinds) should already be clear... and I refer to Claire Nouvet's point, in "The Inarticulate Affect: Lyotard and Psychoanalytic Testimony," that we can "wrong" the affect by making it speak. The same with smell – it has nothing to say (this does not mean that smell is not noisy... or even that it is not enmeshed in culture).

⁹ Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies*. New York: Routledge, 2010. Print. pp. 65.

¹⁰ Game borrows this concept from R.D. Laing, who writes: "Once open to the presence of someone else... you start breathing together, like a mother and baby breathing together. There is a rhythm of breathing which is a duet of breath... you entrain your rhythm."

¹¹ Lisa Blackman, in *Immaterial Bodies*, helpfully points out the difference between Brennan and Game's application of entrainment – one being more evidential, the other poetic.

¹² Agapakis, Christina. "Osmic Frequencies," *The New Inquiry*, published February 13, 2015. Web. <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/osmic-frequencies/>

¹³ Luca Turin, *The Secret of Scent*. New York: Harper Collins, 2010. Print. pp. 178. Turin has said of structure-odor relations that "all knowledge is anecdotal" (108).

¹⁴ Jim Drobnick in his introduction to *The Smell Culture Reader*. Drobnick employs the term not only in order to point out the "further inscription of visuality's predominance" in critiques of ocularcentrism (3), but also pointing to the shifting and mysterious nature of olfactory phenomena – its psychophysical and material/social confluences pointing to a rich and productive area of interest.

¹⁵ Tom Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology: Metaphysics and the New Realism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2014. Print. pp. 13.

¹⁶ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*. Durham: Duke UP, 2010. Print. pp. 120.

Chapter 1: Mood and Chemical Affect

To begin anything, one must find a mood – that is, to lock in with one, or maybe it is to be swept away by one. To hook onto a certain mood: a productive mood, an agonizing mood, and so on. This is never, of course, achieved by a willing individual. Everything must “fall into place.” So we can say that philosophy not only brings its place with it, but perhaps is a moving from place to place. Which is the immense difficulty of starting anything.

Only after the fourth try I could begin writing today. There is no telling what will work – the frustration of simply not being able to concentrate, or the quiet and unremarkable victory of finding a place one can sink into (or away from?) – that is, of finding the right mood. Our entry into smell will not begin with the nose, but in a mood. Is it possible to begin anywhere else? If anything, the *Symposium* shows how central moods are to philosophizing. Philosophy as an erotic mood – *Symposium* itself is saturated with so much of it: flirtation, gossip, interruptions, shame, invitations to sit closer, the flute-girl or not the flute-girl, the missing person. Or there is Montaigne, the great thinker of moods, social energies, and feasts. Of smells he even writes, “I have often observed that they cause an alteration in me and work upon my spirits according to their several virtues... and to rouse and purify the senses, the better to fit us for contemplation.”¹ We will not only say that all of philosophy is mooded, but certain moods engender certain philosophizing.

What I will call moods are not psychological states, nor are they the unity of a context. They are not given emotional tones, like a thick fog, nor do they concern only living organisms. Moods are conglomerations; they are rhythms of speeds,

matter, bodies, feelings, technologies, colors, odors, contingencies, sounds, movements, densities, air, light, etc. Precisely for this reason, moods do not presume harmony. In fact it is more often that one picks up a mood in discord, when there is no chance of co-vibrating with it. The impossibility of working in a certain mood, or the way a productive period can collapse with the slightest thing – a comment overheard or a change in lighting. Moods are most discernable when they are impenetrable, but moods are primarily not discerned, and our phenomenological analysis seems to have no room to “step back” and observe. Moods are perceived, and to study them, we must reawaken the question of subjectivity – but a different subjectivity, because mooded experience always extends beyond the individual perceiver. We do not begin with a mood, but *in* one. To begin in mood is to begin without subjects and objects, but instead with the charges that grasp, entice, provoke, and, most importantly, go unnoticed.

Two Synchronizations: *Stimmung* and Sensing

From existential phenomenology I identify two immersive relations (moods), one in Heidegger (attunement) and a second in Merleau-Ponty (sensing). As I will argue, these concepts are preeminently “smell-like.” They both describe a kind of synchronization, a locking-in to a rhythm. They also share a limitation, which highlights the difficulty that traditional existential phenomenology presents to olfactory phenomenology. This limitation is that both concepts are anchored in an individual experiencing subject.

Stimmung

I wish to recalibrate Heidegger's concept of mood by emphasizing its affective dimension and tracing the onto-existential implications of doing so. The word Heidegger uses for "mood" is *Stimmung*, and it is considerably loaded. Heidegger was, on the one hand, invoking mood in the everyday sense. But *Stimmung* is related to *Stimme* (voice) and *Stimmen* (tuning, or to be in tune, in the musical sense). Temperament, feeling, musical pitch: *Stimmung* points to the ontological concept of *Befindlichkeit*, or attunement. The word is so clumpy and literally means something like "where-you're-at-ness" (Dreyfus) or "how-are-you-ness" (Gendlin) or "already-having-found-oneself-there-ness" (Richardson). Hubert Dreyfus uses the term "affectedness," although I will use attunement to emphasize it as a tuning. Attunement, along with understanding (*Verstehen*) equiprimordially constitute Dasein as a being who "is its there." To be its there means that Dasein is its disclosing; Dasein's thereness is the sense of disclosing itself in a situation. "Mood makes manifest 'how one is and is coming along.' In this 'how one is' being in a mood brings being to its 'there.'"² The everyday question "How are you?" points towards a fundamental existential – namely, that Dasein finds itself in a world in a particular way.

For Heidegger, moods are not psychological states; they are not inner feelings that then go out and mark the world. They are public.³ Moods can be anything from the atmosphere of a situation or gathering (a party, a classroom), a subculture, the temperament of an age, or an immersive feeling (tranquility on a morning walk). Even deeply personal moods, such as loneliness or the regret of not

speaking up, always point to our being-with others and a fundamental involvement in the world. Heidegger writes in the 1929-30 lectures: "Attunements are not side-effects... It seems as though an attunement is in each case already there, so to speak, like an atmosphere in which we first immerse ourselves in each case and which then attunes us through and through."⁴ Dasein is always already in a mood. There are always moods, and everything is mooded (even the most boring and colorless mood is a mood). Being in a mood, as a form of disclosing, reveals three fundamental ontological characteristics of Dasein: 1) thrownness, 2) being-in-the-world as a whole, and 3) the world as already mattering.

Attunement discloses thrownness. We could even say that this two-part formulation (disclosing-thrownness) incorrectly sets up attunement as making manifest thrownness, when, in a way, attunement is thrownness. Mood is a "primordial kind of being of Dasein in which it is disclosed to itself *before* all cognition and willing and *beyond* their scope of disclosure."⁵ Attunement does not look at thrownness in such a way as to reason about it. Mood discloses thrownness in the form of "turning away."⁶ We cannot get away or out of our moods, let alone by thinking about them. A friend will tell me I am in a bad mood, which will only plunge me deeper into the mood (regardless of whether I deny or validate their observation). In the "how are you" of moods we are delivered to ourselves as always already gripped by a mood in an ontologico-existential sense, that is, already concerned with the world in a certain way.

Mood arises in a fundamental relation to the world; it "assails."⁷ We are to take assail as a kind of constitutive-emergent relation to the world through

existence. Dasein directs itself towards certain things and has a project, which is grounded in its being-in-the-world as opened by mood. Attunement discloses being-in-the-world as a whole and “first makes possible directing oneself toward something.”⁸ Being frightened is a good and common example: if I am afraid, everything is fearsome. It is not the case that, because I am afraid, I decide this or that noise or shadow is frightening – my being frightened makes everything, the rustling of trees and dancing of light, terrifying in itself. Shame, as an essentially social mood, might be an even better example. When I feel shame, everything about who I am is horrible – nor do I fully understand why, and only know by way of others. The smallest movements of my body, indeed, my entire being, becomes shameful – I don’t know what to do with my hands and I crumple downward. All of my potential actions are dipped in this shame, and nothing is possible. Mood opens the world as a whole in a certain way, and Dasein will go on to understand its relation to its possibilities, to other Dasein, and to the world based on these horizons.

The second characteristic of mood was that it opens the world in a certain way to Dasein; the third characteristic is a veritable digestion of this phrase. Mood does not just open the world to Dasein, but is the openness to the world of Dasein. It is the condition for there being a world in which things matter, which allows Dasein to be affected by things before any reflection or judgment. “Something like an affect would never come about under the strongest pressure and resistance... if attuned being-in-the-world were not already related to having things in the world matter to it in a way pre-figured by moods.”⁹ Moods are not confined to the parameters of this

or that experience, but reflect a fundamental openness of Dasein. Attunement is the openness that allows Dasein to be struck, moved, influenced, and driven by things. Attunement is not just an opening but an openness. Which is to say that attunement does not denote a particular mode or type of being, but, as Heidegger writes, a “way” (*Wie*, a “how”)¹⁰ – it is the whole condition of a self-open receptivity.

Giorgio Agamben has pointed out that, for Heidegger, it is within an attunement that the anthropogenic becoming-Dasein of the human being takes place. This fundamental attunement – profound boredom – produces the human as Dasein. Boredom and the animal will be juxtaposed below, as attunement marks a shimmering closeness and a deep hierarchical break between the human and nonhuman.

The animal is characterized by its captivation, its poverty-in-world (as opposed to the human, who is world-forming). Captivation is a kind of attunement, a way the animal is open to its world. But this is an openness without the possibility of a dis-closing. The animal is its behavior; its perceptual world is absorbed by and closed into its environment – food, survival, shelter, sex – and devoid of any possibilities or understanding outside of this environment (Heidegger references an experiment undertaken by Jakob von Uexküll, in which a bee continued to suck honey even after its abdomen had been cut off). Dasein is similarly open to an opacity in the preliminary stage of boredom; in boredom Dasein is taken by things which offer it nothing. In this “open to a closedness”¹¹ the human and animal are, via attunement, brought quite close. This is why attunement leads Heidegger to reject Dasein as *Homo economicus*, human-as-rational-animal.¹²

But, in following the attunement of boredom, Heidegger only re-entrenches a hierarchy of human/nonhuman (this time on the level of being). The human, through boredom, can eventually set itself up against its possibilities through a refusal of them; through an initial withholding, the pure possibilities of Dasein are disclosed. If boredom once was a relative of captivation, it is also through boredom that the human exceeds any captivated relation to the world and becomes Dasein through the disclosing of its being.

What seems to be happening is that the fundamental power of attunement is eclipsed by understanding (projecting, the making of a situation rather than being in a situation). Heidegger himself writes that “this ‘one is in such and such a way’ is not – is never – simply a consequence or side-effect of our thinking, doing, and acting. It is – to put it crudely – the presupposition for such things, the medium within which they first happen.”¹³ I question the way attunement is regarded as a mere backdrop, as the ground upon which “activity” is built. Attunement and understanding are not a succession, but equiprimordial phenomena. It seems that Heidegger has betrayed the equiprimordial phenomenon of co-emergence in favor of an openness defined primarily by projective-understanding. This betrayal is precisely what produces the human as Dasein (against those other entities who are poor-in-world or worldless).

Attunement is not always sucked into understanding; attunements are not only constitutive of understanding, but can comprise a meaningful encounter independent from it. What is at stake here is the place we afford attunement in relation to intentionality. More broadly it is the agency to which we are willing to lend atmospheric forces that the subject is steeped in and taken by.¹⁴ The

equiprimordially of attunement and understanding need not entail the transcendence of one over the other – in other words, the arranging of an attunement as the ground or scene from which a Dasein is always setting itself off towards its possibilities (its humanness, or becoming-Dasein). Attunements are none other than the fundamental way in which a Dasein encounters, produces, and comports itself towards a world. Dasein is fundamentally attuned (attuned-being-in-the-world), but attunements are also like affects, or even what developmental psychologist Daniel Stern calls “affect attunement.” Affect attunement is the infant capacity for intersubjective understanding, of indicating and sharing internal feelings by pre-verbal and non-imitative means. Attunement is not representation, but an active feeling; Stern writes, “attunement renders feeling.”¹⁵ It is the way two partners may share and commune with an affective state unawares, through a process of co-feeling. Yet what we mean by attunement is not limited to intersubjective encounters. Moreover, what we mean by attunement also seems to pertain to what Stern calls the “emergent self” (which is active in infants seven months before the capacity for affect attunement occurs). The emergent self experiences the world as it is coming-into-being; it is a process that organizes a global (undifferentiated and nonlocalized) flow of intensities and sensations. The emergent self, who perceives amodally, does not experience discrete objects or impressions, but rather, intensities and patterns that are “dynamic kinetic terms.”¹⁶ That is, there are not referential objects of perception, but fadings, bursts, surges, and so on. This sense of self is both a process and a product¹⁷ – that is, the lack of a self-coherent subject comprises its own subjective domain. This domain remains

formative, and Stern will decisively reject characterizing it as a “stage” that is left behind as the infant develops and enters more “complex” subjective and social fields. The emergent self carries on through adult life. Olfaction is, in a way, an emergent-attunement; it is a global dynamic of feeling that refers to no secure experiencer or experienced-object. With both *Stimmung* and the emergent self in mind, and by affirming a multiplicity of attunements, do we find a new way of “openness,” a subject who is altogether different – relationally, perceptually, dispositionally? When central operations of subjectivity are not foreclosed in projection, but instead opened to the very forces that compose their *feel*, then both the grammars and possibilities of subjective practices and domains radiate with a new shininess.

It might not even be necessary to give a counter-ontology in order to rethink (or rather, reroute, reattune) an openness which highlights a multiplicative, biosocial, and enmeshed dynamics of “feeling.” Being attuned not only expresses but *configures* Dasein as open. We could, holding on to the simple fact that attunements produce, restart what it means to be attuned in the first place. We may even get a better lead through art than theory. Take the performance piece “The Electronic Life of Plants,”¹⁸ where artists Craig Dongoski and Duncan Laurie conducted a “sonification” of millivolt electrical signals produced by plants and rocks. These electrical discharges are translated into different sounds using a music sequencing software, and then amplified. The ensemble of rocks and plants slowly “adjusted” to the atmosphere. Those watching were encouraged to participate (although they already were, simply by being present). The rocks and plants respond to presence;

there are differences in voltages depending on who is touching them, who is breathing by or on them, the overall mentality of the audience, etc. What Laurie has consistently observed in other trials, aside from plant and mineral capacities for patterned and responsive expression, was an attunement to the environment. It is here that both Dongoski and Laurie wanted to begin: in collaborative, improvisational, and energetic biocompositions which form an assemblage of vegetable-mineral-computer-electricity-participant. The compositions became more complex as different people handled the rocks, touched and rubbed them in different ways, came and went. What is so helpful about this performance is that Dongoski and Laurie put aside paradigms of scientific objectivity and put the art-process first. Laurie would continually say (especially to those members of the audience who were skeptical, even outright dismissive) that he did not know exactly what was going on... he only knew that it was "something interesting." Art detonates the productiveness of an impasse.

In previous work, Laurie strived to isolate biosignals from "pollution" (external movements, noises, and bodies). He eventually abandoned this approach and instead observed the signals as immersed in their environments. In "Rock Music" he writes, "Attempting to reduce the phenomenon into a format for clearer scientific analysis usually resulted in the disappearance of the most responsive components. In a sense, the more we tried to take control of the signals and dominate them, the more they eluded capture! When we simply let go and focused on the joyous process of seeing rocks make music, the whole experience progressed exponentially!"¹⁹ In "Electronic Life of Plants," there was no interest in sterilizing

the performance space into a kind of laboratory setting, because the signals themselves gained consistency outside of a stimulus-response model. A can of La Croix was nearly touching a plant-musician, people were chatting and drinking alcohol, groups of participants emerged out of disorder: this, however, only made the observational setting more *accurate*. Here, we see attunement as creative co-immersion. This has everything to do with mediums, atmospheres, and moods as ethico-aesthetic and creative opportunity spaces (and not pollution, or a horizon). The end result is not music but the echoes of an atmosphere. Or rather, it is not that the plants and rocks are making music. The interaction between participants, software, and organic/nonorganic bodies engenders an atmosphere, which is a sonorously rendered mood. The art first and foremost is the production of an atmosphere – one that is both predicated on and generative of geoethical lines of response, enchantment, and unpredictability.

In this single artistic performance, which does not create an art-object but an alignment, or a resingularization of boundaries, there is an entry into thinking Heidegger's attunement in its gentle power. The eco-art of Dongoski²⁰ and Laurie creates new ways of thinking about and being-with others – all which center around artistic practices of "feeling-with," which take attunements as malleable, productive, and difference-laden spaces. The meshwork or layering of attunements that contributes to a vitally entangled perceptual life is always acting: always giving rise to new forms of life, new alliances, new "grounds." What is key in thinking about such possibilities, or indeed possibility itself, is the paramount and uncongealed role attunements play, at every point.

Merleau-Ponty and Sensing as Bodily Attunement

Our rethinking of Heidegger's concept of attunement will only be possible so far as attunements always turn on the body. Attunement is an embodied phenomenon *all the way through*. Mood always concerns the body; what David Levin accordingly calls "bodily attunement"²¹ is a tautology. The body is immediately at issue in attunement – the body's openness, its situation of being-open. In forging (bodily) attunement, I turn to Merleau-Ponty. I wish to examine how, with olfaction, the immense helpfulness of his writings on sensation will atrophy because they are confined to the body-schema – that is, a project.

The body, as the general vehicle for being-in-the-world, opens the world to us in a certain way through the originary activity of perception. The body is the structure of perception and perception is embodied – perception is itself a transversal of body, world, and project. Sensation is related to, but not interchangeable with perception. We will not consider sensation to be prior to perception, as this is part of a vocabulary that considers the body to be an object. Sensation simply accomplishes a certain facet of perception. It is not an input of raw data from the world, and "the sensory apparatus is not a conductor."²² Our senses are not instruments that collect pure impressions or qualities divorced from a lived situation, and sensation is not a raw acquisition that becomes more sophisticated by passing through perceptual, cognitive, and projective schemes. Sensation is a relation with the world that precedes subject/object terms, or is a folding of such terms. It is, as Merleau-Ponty writes, "literally, a communion."²³ I will examine what Merleau-Ponty means by defining sensation as a coexistence/communion.

There is not so much a hard distinction between sensation and perception, but rather, two kinds of sensing. There is “the senses before sensing” and “sensing before the senses.” The senses before sensing is an abstraction of sensation from its intentional power; it is pre-personal and anonymous (“it includes a seed of dream or depersonalization.”)²⁴ Sensation does not concern the personal being of a subject, “but rather another self that has already sided with the world, that is already open to certain of its aspects and synchronized with them.”²⁵ This poses sensation not as a series of events, but rather, a *sensitivity*. Sensation is a sensitivity: the way certain zones of the body are attuned to the world, they have, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, “sided with” it. Perception, then, presupposes a non-personal sensation, that is, an open channel of expression between the body and world.

But for Merleau-Ponty, sensation is subjective; it concerns the lived body and is implicated in a situation. I do not aim my vision towards a table, nor does an odor molecule “invade” my body through the nose: “In this exchange between the subject of sensation and the sensible, it cannot be said that one acts while the other suffers the action, nor that one gives sense to the other.”²⁶ Sensation is a sense-constituting relation. Every sensation provokes the body to settle into a posture, movement, or attitude. This taking up of an attitude, this union with the sensible, *is* sensing itself: “the subject of sensation is a power that is born together with a certain existential milieu or that is synchronized with it.”²⁷ Merleau-Ponty compares this relation between sentient and sensible with the way a sleeper is asleep: the subject of sensation is not so much a person who undergoes a state, or a state that besieges a person, but a relation, or rather: a power. Like the rhythm of breathing that can, at

most, only be summoned in order to sleep... sleeping involves the absolute plunging into this rhythm, that is, the living of it.

Through the body we synchronize with existential rhythms. By defining sensation in this way, as a power of synchronization or coexistence, Merleau-Ponty is getting to the point that sensation is intentional. He writes, "If qualities radiate a certain mode of existence around themselves, if they have a power to enchant... this is because the sensing subject does not posit them as objects, but sympathizes with them, makes them its own, and finds in them [its] momentary law."²⁸ For Merleau-Ponty, sensation is assimilative and there are no worldly rhythms or radiances that are not co-vibrated with – precisely because the existential rhythms that Merleau-Ponty suggests are not outside of the perceptual subject. They refer to the relational power of sensation, that is, sensation's ability to take up the living signification of the sensible in a certain situation. Sensation is intentional because it is the proposition and response, the sympathetic relation, between sentient and sensible, in which a certain mode of existence is contingently expressed, communed, and acted with.

The intentionality of sensation is predicated on the unity of the body-schema. The body-schema, for Merleau-Ponty, is a dynamic, open, and indefinite system of nascent bodily knowledge. The body schema is the body-in-situation, the body-in-the-world. The lived body is always, existentially, towards its tasks and its situation ("My body is wherever it has something to do").²⁹ Our ability to commune with the world is at heart our ability to engage with the sensory world in terms of our projects. A situation always involves sensation and sensation always involves a

situation, that is, something to do. The openness of the body in sensation seems to be, then, not so much ecological as it is pragmatic. A pragmatics of sensation: we are not blitzed by the sensible, and our very ability to do things – to drive a car, write, speak with a friend – would be impossible were we not able to pull together our sensible and personal lives, to sense by way of our projects. Motility (both actual and virtual movements) expresses the unified relation of a body to a task: chopping a carrot, I do not, in discrete movements, stabilize the carrot's body, slice with the knife, and adjust my fingers further and further down the vegetable. My whole body chops: the pressure on the stem, downward motion of my hand gripping the knife, and recession of my fingers all work in a synchrony of the task.

The lived body requires the unity of the senses. Merleau-Ponty rejects the “constancy hypothesis,” or the strict correlation between a sensation with a sense organ. The senses, in lived experience, overflow, jumble, and gear into one another, and synesthetic perception is “the rule.”³⁰ This is to say that seeing is not necessarily visual, nor hearing audible, (nor smelling olfactory), because “vision or hearing are not the simple possession of an opaque quale, but rather the experience of a modality of existence, the synchronization of my body with it, and the problem of cases of synesthesia receives the beginnings of a solution if the quality is that of a certain mode of movement or of a behavior.”³¹ Movement (as in movement-project) is the unity of the senses. The senses communicate a manner of being to our entire body, and on the basis of a unified body-schema we are open to this communication. I walk down the street and smell cinnamon: this distinct sensation does not make my other sensory fields fall away, but they change; buildings will slightly and

warmly curve over, noises are drawled out, my gait becomes more narrow, and everything seems more pleasant. That is, my entire body is in sympathy with the cinnamon; it is a cinnamon day.

In this sensorial system, Merleau-Ponty is giving direct and explicit prominence to vision (notwithstanding his interest in touch and use of sonorous language). One can wonder to what degree, and to what consequence, an ocularcentrism directs Merleau-Ponty's body-subject. So where is the nose in the body-schema? Olfaction seems to preeminently characterize a pre-analytical absorption in the world, an embodied attunement. It is the sense of permeability: we find in smell the very entwining of sentient and sensible, the very openness of the sensing body. And yet, olfaction falls away from the kind of body Merleau-Ponty describes. A movement-project is what defines the intersensory body-subject, but olfaction seems to be outside any project.³²

An olfactory phenomenology must inhabit the elusiveness and non-evidentiary character of smell phenomena, opposed to visuality and ocularcentric phenomenologies of perception (which value action and the centrality of projects). This is to make the simple claim that there is something special about smell perception, something that might reveal a stubborn humanism in Merleau-Ponty's body-subject. The more we try to fit the nose within the synchronization of the body-subject, the more we seem to lose the particular synchronization of smell – that is, the singularity of the smell phenomenon.

Olfaction orbits around a certain sensitivity, a fundamental open-mood. It is then necessary to resist this openness as culminating in understanding or a body-

intentionality, and thus to rethink the lived body. This is not a question of what lies beyond the “I-can” subject. It is more a matter of how this subject will be reconstituted – its powers, its perspective, its borders, its joys, defeats, communions, and possibilities – if we are to take seriously the olfactory phenomenon.

There is a neurophysiological basis in linking smell with mood – which supports the already well regarded smell-body-mood connection (the basis of ancient aromatherapeutic practices common in Egyptian, Greek, Chinese, Indian, and Roman societies). The olfactory bulbs are directly connected to the limbic system, the brain structures responsible for emotion and associative learning. This pathway is unique to the sense of smell alone. The Jay Gottfried Laboratory at Northwestern University is just one case of a growing interest in the psychophysical and neurological accounts of odorant perception. Research by the Gottfried lab, published in *Psychological Science*, demonstrates that supraliminal detection of odors has a psychological effect on individuals, including social behavior.³³ However, many of these studies on smell and emotional response treat odorants merely as primers that activate memories or mental experiences.

Aromatherapy has largely given way to “aromachology,” which is basically R&D that studies how odors affect human feelings such as relaxation, happiness, exhilaration, precision, and the willingness to spend money. Following research³⁴ that suggested the diffusion of certain odors increases productivity and reduces stress, a joint venture development between one of Japan’s largest civil engineering firms, Shimizu Corporation, and a fragrance company, Takasago, unveiled the “Aroma Generation System,” in which liquid fragrances are converted into mist and

pumped through a central air system. Scents are blasted at workers through office vents: lavender to relax, cypress to invigorate, or lemon to reduce typing errors. I use this example not as a slightly terrifying example of affective management, but to note the ambient power of smells and the ambivalent agency that persons and institutions have in their instrumentation (the situation is almost comical). Attempts to commodify smells, are, as Laura Marks points out, generally unsuccessful: from Smell-O-Vision theaters in the 1950s, to digital scent technology and electronic noses (including the notorious failure of Digiscents, the company that tried to digitize and embed smells in web pages and emails in 1999).³⁵ This claim will hopefully be demonstrated as a phenomenological fact, due to the emotional-chemical ambiguities of the smell experience itself. The smell-mood connection will not be reduced to a corporatist utility nor to reductive scientism. These approaches, following Marks, treat smell as an exchangeable symbol, and not a singular experience. Instead, we must favor the beauty and mystery of the smell phenomenon. This is not to grant olfaction an innocence, nor to claim that it cannot be or has not already been mobilized in marginalizing, capitalistic, and regulatory formations. This applies even in nature; one of the most useful instantiations of smell, as a way of territory marking, follows a kind of proto-capitalist logic. Smell is perhaps the most privative, privatized, and flexible of the senses, which makes for a dangerous concoction, being vulnerable to solipsism, possessiveness, and a kind of essentialism – especially in terms of marking “what is yours and what is mine,” who is bad and who is good. An olfactory phenomenology will hopefully associate smell

as it is both a wonder and a danger – precisely by connecting the body and the social as mutually constitutive.

Olfaction, rather than vision, will be the entry point into a phenomenology of the body's openness, its sensitivity. It will be a phenomenology of synchronization that is not, hopefully, too quickly eclipsed by a project.

Entrainment

There is a common experience of walking into a room and “feeling the atmosphere.” A house will throb with joy and lightness during a party, or a room will be frozen with embarrassment. This kind of scene is the starting point for Teresa Brennan's *The Transmission of Affect*. Understandably so, as it is a rich phenomenon. How is it that we are attuned to an environment – whether it be one we contribute to, one we fail to notice, or one that sharply announces itself? Environments are spaces with a certain emergent tonality. These tonalities arise through psychosocial processes of transmitting, sharing, and projecting affects. But atmospheres, as Brennan attends to them, are profoundly material phenomena, both in their transmission and reception. She writes, “the transmission of affect, if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject. The ‘atmosphere’ or environment literally gets into the individual.”³⁶ Brennan approaches affect through a rejection of the neo-Darwinian perspective, which considers subjects to be self-enclosed and genetically-determined individuals. The self-contained individual – with an endogenous emotional disposition, secure self/other borders, and free choice – is a hubristic, Eurocentric, and, as Brennan will

argue, biologically untenable model. It stems from what Brennan calls the “foundational fantasy” of Western thought. The foundational fantasy is simply the fantasy of self-containment. It is not a set position, but rather a tendency to think in terms of a form/matter, active/passive, subject/object distinction – one that has particularly flared up in Aristotelianism, Cartesianism, psychoanalysis, and the natural sciences. The assumption of self-containment is predicated on processes of “othering,” of projecting negative or aggressive affects onto others (usually the mother, the oppressed, the unfamiliar) and blaming them. Rigid demarcations between self and environment (or others) are thus founded on destructive patterns of energetic and affective transmission, where negative affects are dumped on others. This happens not only on an interpersonal level. It is one that takes on tremendous force by gaining consistency in economic, social, and familial relations (i.e. how the atmosphere of a classroom, a hospital, or a stock exchange are transsubjective). Consequently, the perilousness of global capitalism is that it makes life increasingly stressful and tiring, that is, it propagates atmospheres that are destructive, energy-depleting, standardizing, and ossifying. Brennan’s central point is that our affects are never our own, nor are our shared affects contained in a strict dyad between two people – they are “in the air.” That affects take on consistency and self-organize into certain dynamics, all outside of the individuals experiencing them, points to the fact that atmospheres have “a life of their own.”

The complex social and physiological interlocking of affect calls for a definition that focuses more on affect as transmitted rather than thought of, acted on, or experienced. Affects are not feelings. Feelings are states of emotion or

intensity that signify. Affects are, in a way, the passing of feelings; they are ripples of energy that “enhance or deplete.”³⁷ This, for Brennan, is an explanation for the rise in psychosomatic disorders such as ADHD, chronic fatigue syndrome, and fibromyalgia, which are all disorders of energy. Brennan’s thesis, as she describes it, “stands neo-Darwinism on its head,”³⁸ in the sense that it looks for such instances where the social literally gets inside the individual, where social life and physiological processes are a continuum. In order to do so, we must abandon the self-contained individual in favor of a horizontal channel of affect. Olfaction becomes the primary vector for such a channel.

The Transmission of Affect is a rigorously transdisciplinary work of philosophy, jumping around from crowd psychology, neuroendocrinology, theology – subjects that I am not familiar with. I approach Brennan specifically to rethink the lived body, which can be thought outside the framework of the self-enclosed individual.³⁹ Of great relevance will be Brennan’s use of psychoneuroendocrinology, the study of the effect of hormones on emotions and behavior, particularly the effect of airborne chemicals on mood. Brennan deploys the process of entrainment as a concrete mechanism for the transmission of affect. Entrainment is a process in which the hormonal systems among a group of people are synchronized. This happens primarily through smell.

Entrainment is useful in a “hyper-ontic” sense. Hyper-ontic is the name I give to an approach that borrows from Guattari’s ethico-aesthetic paradigm⁴⁰ and weak ontology.⁴¹ Part of the difficulties Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty present for an olfactory phenomenology is that they make broad ontological claims that fail to

account for olfaction. Or rather, the broad ontological claims of both philosophers work by implicitly excluding olfaction. We subvert a counter-ontology by modestly affirming the legitimacy of naivety, wonder, and speculation; this means we will reconsider the lived body at the ontic level. A hyper-ontic method favors the singularities and ruptures of a phenomenon, rather than its integrity within a larger ontological program. It is for this reason that I describe my whole phenomenological approach as hyper-ontic. This is not to say that we cannot draw conclusions from a phenomenon (otherwise, we would no longer be doing phenomenology). But doing so can never be so firm as to render any ontological claim as absolute. The hyper-ontic approach treats ontological precepts as undecided, ontology as a process, and “ontic” instantiations (in this case, biological entrainment) as un-bracketable. Everything gets smaller. It is an approach from multiple and dynamic perspectives, rather than an overarching gaze (of stepping back). Hyper-ontic phenomenology sees molecular, physiological, and supraliminal processes like entrainment as playing a key role in intentionality and subjectivity – rather than shuffling them under the existential umbrella of the world-forming individual.

Chemical entrainment works primarily through unconscious olfaction. So, given the scene in which one walks into a room and feels the atmosphere, a more precise account would be, along with noticing things like silence, facial expressions, or the proximity of bodies, that one actually *smells* the atmosphere. This goes against the common assumption that we pick up emotional, affective, and social cues primarily through visual signals – body language, facial composition, etc. This is not to say that visual cues do not contribute to social dynamics in very real and

powerful ways. Nor is it to deny that sonority (the prosody of language), haptics (the rhythms, intensities, and contours of a touching), or proxemics (distances and the crossings of space) are not integral to social communication. Smell, however, is rarely mentioned as a form of nonverbal communication, yet there is biochemical evidence that it might be the most powerful. As Brennan writes, when assumptions of self-containment are rejected, “Only then does olfaction emerge as a material force adequate to Freud’s hypothesis that actions are willed through unconscious intentions.”⁴²

Hormonal entrainment hinges on the presence of pheromones. Pheromones, as one researcher describes them, are “pollenlike” chemicals that are emitted externally and are diffused in the air. They play an extremely important role in the social and sexual lives of mammals, and are well documented in insects and some plants. When a member of the same species comes in contact with a pheromone (predominantly through smell, but touch also) it triggers a behavioral or social response. Pheromones (also known as chemosignals) are basically chemical messages that members of the same species can send to one another. The pheromone, being a kind of “message,” challenges theories of intentionality that do not account for its biological interventions and mechanisms.

While experiments, like those conducted in the Gottfried lab, demonstrate a smell-mood link in humans, the isolation and identification of a human pheromone has yet to be found. Brennan will sometimes refer to pheromones, but also to “hypothetical pheromones” or “pheromone-like substances.” There is, as we have noted, documented evidence of alterations in human physiology and mood (related

to judgment and behavior) by olfaction, and pheromones are simply a reasonable, although not proven, hypothesis for how this happens. Human pheromones are interesting both in their possibility of being scientifically proven but also as a philosophical tool.

Diane Ackerman calls pheromones “the pack animals of desire.”⁴³ Their transmission, which can trigger a variety of effects, is highly powerful. So Ackerman is correct if we define desire broadly, or in Deleuzio-Guattarian terms: as productive, social, and conjunctive material flows. While pheromones are often used to attract, detect, and select a mate, their use is not limited to reproductive functions. There are territorial, trail-marking, alarm, status-signaling, primer (physiology-altering), releaser (behavior-altering), signaler (information-carrying), and modulator (physiology-synchronizing) pheromones. Pheromones have no single definition because they play no definite role – they are blueprints, traps, and perfumes. They are folds in space: deployments of lines, pathways, escape routes, and hotspots. Despite the fact that an isolated human “pheromone” has not yet been discovered, pheromones present compelling evidence that necessitate a rethinking of the relation of the individual and environment. Those conceptual strongholds of the subject – consciousness, intentionality, and agency – must be radically redrawn as social phenomena, or better yet, as atmospheric ones.

Entrainment would be the process by which one person’s hormones could affect another person’s hormones, via pheromones. The key here is connecting hormones, which percolate through the bloodstream, with pheromones, which are “in the air” and picked up primarily through smell. Hormonal systems have long

been regarded as important to human emotional and social life; as Brennan writes, “Hormones direct human action and response in fields from reflection to stress, growth to aggression, as well as sex and reproduction; there is no field of human action that does not involve hormonal messages.”⁴⁴ Entrainment by pheromones is one possible explanation for the way the hormonal system of a person or collective can align with another’s. Brennan, quite strikingly, suggests that these hormonal interactions condense into collective dynamics. That is, there are biochemical factors at play in relationships of domination, comfort, fear, and elation – a person is attuned to their environment through pheromones, which transmit affects of joy, stress, aggression, guilt, and so on. The secretion of hormones and subsequent change in my nervous system during my stressful state, for example, can in turn form or influence an “atmosphere” in which the neuroendocrine integration of others is affected.

Channels of sensory information and affective dispositions congeal into social dynamics, relationships, feelings, and a sense of self. But we will not follow Brennan in advancing the therapeutic practice of discernment. Discernment puts embodied logics of the senses into words, in order to resist and redirect affective transmission. Discernment is an openness to the other (i.e. the environment) and an active understanding of unconscious flows of affect. It involves the translation, understanding, and communication of embodied processes such as chemical entrainment into language, in order to better discern them into a living attention – because there is not “less precise information to be gathered by olfaction but rather that this is the sense of which we have become most unconscious.”⁴⁵ The self-

enclosed individual of the foundational fantasy, which valorizes mind, representation, agency, and is founded by its borders and its lack, considers such embodied knowledges and logics to be crude, ignoring their power and thus “closing consciousness off to olfactory knowledge.”⁴⁶ Brennan is arguing that cognitive/linguistic knowledge can be realigned with olfactory knowledge. In doing so, we become aware of the material, chemical, and sensuous pathways that inform destructive interactions between self, other, and environment. It becomes clear that for Brennan, affects are generally bad. They are especially bad when they are not coded and communicated through language.

Kelly Oliver, in “Living A Tension,”⁴⁷ is correct in affirming a positivity of affective transmission. The transmission of affect (through hormonal, chemical, material, and energetic processes) is a phenomenon that has possibilities for constructive circulations of energy. There are many such flows, transmissions, circulations, back-and-forths, projections, sharings, diffusions, extensions, and attunements of affective energy that, even without the possibility or desire for self-reflection and discernment, are moments that inspire a radical openness towards others and the environment. Such an openness, following Heidegger, is a condition of existing in the world and cannot be looked at or controlled in a reflective way. Moreover, unreflective affective openness, the being-saturated by a mood, is none other than a condition for creativity, tenderness, joy, and excitement. Think of collective art-making, an intimate silence, daydreaming, intense concentration; the way one can “kill the mood” simply by becoming aware of it. To kill the mood, or disrupt a “vibe,” is to make a mood one’s own when it does not belong to oneself.

Rather than just squashing certain bad moods, there is a feeling of fullness and intensity that is perhaps the heart of being afflicted by moods in the first place. Besides, feeling an atmosphere, or a mood, is a rich phenomenon in itself – one we do not so quickly want to shoo away saying “language, language!” This is not so much pointing out a flaw in Brennan’s analysis, but extending it elsewhere: she was certainly aware of positive instances of transmission, but seemed to focus more on how affects can congeal, slow us down, and wear us out.

Additionally, there is a phenomenological limitation of pheromones themselves, as they are, by definition, conspecific. The phenomenological importance of olfaction is not encompassed by chemosignals, as there are so many aesthetic and subjective pathways that are biosocial refrains. Smell is a mixed sense, it is the sense of entanglement. An olfactory phenomenology will not split olfaction into separate modes or categories. It will instead see it as a layered experience. This is a question of what unconscious hormonal attunement means to subjectivity. And certainly this cannot be limited to an interpersonal – as in strictly human – subjectivity.

What I take from Brennan is a rejection of the self-enclosed person, who is based on a valorization of cognition, the ego’s boundaries, and ocularcentric assumptions of sociality and self-awareness. Indeed, the philosophical theorization of this “self” is predicated on a repudiation of the other, a degradation of the body, and a dichotomy between the individual and environment. Olfaction becomes key in rejecting this paradigm and highlighting the materiality central to the affective, social, and open subject; olfaction itself is the permeability of self and environment

(other, atmosphere, nonhuman). What kind of new existential fields hinge on this olfaction-based argument? I say this because there is no such thing as an individual. Forget postmodern academics – any 16 year-old millennial could tell you (or better yet, show you) that “it is never an individual who thinks, never an individual who creates. An individual who thinks and creates does so within a network of institutions (schools, theaters, museums, libraries, etc.), technologies (books, electronic networks, computers, etc.), and sources of public and private financing; an individual immersed in traditions of thought and aesthetic practices – engulfed in a circulation of signs, ideas, and tasks – that force him or her to create.”⁴⁸ This anti-humanist, post-individual sentiment so often takes the form of (much necessary) social critique: the way the “faculties” of an individual are not natural, but are invested by techno-social networks that constitute and interpellate subjects within neoliberal and bureaucratic mechanisms. We need, however, to extend (or maybe slow down) this point to the level of experience. Olfaction is this anti-individual sentiment taken as a phenomenological fact – this is one way we can address contemporary forms of management and surveillance in a way that avoids a draining cynicism. The work of Maurizio Lazzarato, who is quoted above, is refreshing in that he does just this, not only attending to apparatuses of “social subjection” (taken from Deleuze and Guattari: the way capitalism manufactures processes of subjectification which categorize and assign roles and functions to the individual-as-subject, that is, as speaker, worker, user, consumer, man, woman, unemployed person, etc.). Lazzarato, like Deleuze and Guattari, goes further: he is interested in how the pre-individual is siphoned through pre-verbal and pre-

cognitive interventions on the affective, infrasocial, and desiring register. These two apparatuses of power, one individuating, the other de-individuating, are different but not separate – they drain into, play off, and augment each other. The increasing mediation by biotechnical, informational, and communicational networks calls for an attention not only to social subjection but to incursions of the not-yet subject, which, as Stern tells us, is still an active domain in adult life. Considering subjectivity through the focal point of smell grants us a loyalty to the a-subjective – in all of its terrifying infiltrations, but also in its suppleness, vitality, and possibilities of reinscribing new subjective responses. It is never an individual who thinks or acts... but it is likewise never an individual who feels a certain way, is in a certain mood, has a body, loves, is stressed, or perceives. These meaningful forms of communication, feeling, and comportment are possible only in a subject that is always already networked and biosocial, referring to what Cynthia Willett calls “subjectless sociality.”⁴⁹

Following Brennan, we will say that there is not so much an individual but always an individual-in-environment. This is not to put forth a flattened ontology, where I am no more myself than I am the building I see, the chair I sit on, the computer I type on, or the friend I am texting. That I am always a self-in-environment does not mean that I am a blob, but rather, that nothing is totally contained. In other words, the self-consistency of an individual person is never a reified fact. Affects are “in the air.” Social dynamics are emergent, tumultuous, and have a materiality. My perceptions are never my own – they always happen in the middle, before circumscription of discrete categories, identities, objects, and

emotions. My perceptions are not to be founded by their functionality in a project but are like a dance: lively, mixed, and open.

What is paramount is that an olfactory phenomenology will not just give us a “smelling subject,” but new subjective processes and practices altogether – ones that, as we have been emphasizing, attend to embodied, material, transpersonal, and pre-individuated lines of subject-formation. We are always selves-in-environments. To borrow a useful formulation from Merleau-Ponty: we are not “in” environments; we “inhabit” them. That is, we must think the self in more atmospheric ways. Atmospheres are never pre-given; as entrainment shows, atmospheres get inside of us, and there is a permanent affective horizontal between us and an atmosphere. There is no individual, only atmospheres that gain certain volatilities, densities, “odors.”

Atmosphere

The preparation for an olfactory phenomenology hinges on a theory of atmosphere. I turn to Tonino Griffero’s “atmospherology” to give weight to what I have been referring to as atmosphere (or environment, mood). Atmospheres, while ubiquitous, have been philosophically mistreated. Griffero butts-in to what he sees as the reduction of atmosphere into projectivist, sentimental (overly subjective), or metaphorical definitions. Atmospheres are not primarily projected, interpreted, or cognized. They are climactic impressions: predualistic emotional situations that touch us on the affective-corporeal level. As Griffero writes, “Like other elusive qualitative entities, marginalized by the hegemonic reism (holes, shadows, clouds

void, waves, perceptive phantoms, fumes, etc.), atmospheres should also be taken seriously, both aesthetically and ontologically.”⁵⁰

Griffero’s analysis, in some ways, doubles-back on the three figures I have focused on thus far – Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Brennan. The question at the heart of Heidegger’s concept of attunement is: how is it that one finds themselves in a here and now? Griffero asks the same question, but outside the framework of Dasein. He poses it, or rather, turns it, to objects themselves (windows, trees, traffic flows, storefronts, a home), though in conversation with the lived body of Merleau-Ponty. And while Griffero fails to even indirectly engage with Brennan’s work, he similarly gives a peculiar importance to smell, as “one mostly smells an atmosphere, breathes it in...”⁵¹

Everything has an atmospheric charge, or better yet, everything is atmospheric; “just as we always necessarily are in a certain mood, we are forever and always atmospherically involved.”⁵² Atmospherology begins by assuming the universality of atmosphere. This is not to say that there is a single atmosphere, nor that all atmospheres are the same, nor that they are perceived the same way. Atmospheres are absolutely heterogeneous, both in their makeup and manifestation, with differences in materiality, intensity, duration, discernibility.

Atmospheres are not internal states, but they are experienced, which means they pass through a perceptual subject. “An atmosphere can overwhelm us, it can find us in tune with it, it can be recognized without being really felt, it can elicit a resistance that pushes us to change it, it may... be perceived differently in the course of time, and it may be so dependent on the perceptual (subjective) form that it

concretizes itself even in materials that normally express other moods.”⁵³ An atmospheric play is what gives our encounter with the world its variety, mutability, and richness. For example, the vastness of the sky will gear into a mood – the clear sky burgeons with joy, or the clouds invoke playfulness, or the yellow of dusk invites gloominess. Yet the clear sky, in a bad mood, can weigh down with an unbearable stupidity. But the sky is not a metaphor for our emotions – we do not project an interior “good or bad mood” outwards. In giving oneself to the sky, we find that there is no good or bad mood without it. (Even following Merleau-Ponty: “I abandon myself to [the sky], I plunge into this mystery, and it ‘thinks itself in me’”).⁵⁴ We see in the example of the sky that the difference between Griffero and Merleau-Ponty is a configurational one. Atmospheres for Griffero are not a bilateral perceptual power, but, as a self-described leitmotif, a movement from “outside to in.”

Atmospheres are feelings diffused in space; they are external from a feeling-subject, yet, in perception, return as a supersubjective/superobjective experience. An atmospheric phenomenon can be tied to a subject: I feel my own “atmosphere” when I walk into a room and notice a different one, and this discrepancy, which is itself an atmosphere of contrariety, brings about personal affects in me, say, nervousness, confusion, awkwardness. Or, atmospheres can “anchor” themselves in a thing or confederation of things: the way a city (with its style of architecture, its privileging of pedestrians, cars, or bikes, its green spaces or congestion) can gear my mood, and even my personality, to a certain speed, tone, or rhythm. Have we so far said nothing at all? As Griffero writes, almost taking pleasure in its generality, a philosophy of atmospheres is in some sense just a philosophy of situations: “nothing

but the reflection on the atmospheric power of situations.”⁵⁵ Atmospherology comes down to balancing the singularity of an atmospheric expression, that is, a situation, with its enormity as an phenomenological noncategory (what isn’t a situation? And this potent generality is perhaps due in part to its disregard by philosophy!). We cannot reject a vague definition of atmospheres, as they are themselves vague. It is the omnipresence of atmospheres that makes them all the more productive – hence the title of Griffero’s introduction: “Not to Leave Vagueness (but to Stay in it in the Right Way).” In order to better understand the atmospheric, which is always a lived experience, we must stay in the indeterminacy of an atmosphere and do phenomenology. The goal here is not so much to give a catalogue of atmospheres (which would be endless, because everything can be called an atmosphere: the desert, a hotel room, terrorism, nonchalance). What I wish to do is highlight the way atmospheres configure the subject-in-environment.

Atmospheres are perceived, which is to say that we are not “in” them but that they arise in our relation with the world. The particularity of an atmospheric perception only happens once its components are made slippery, when they bleed into one another as an affective event. Griffero writes, “Atmospheric perception... does not concern cohesive, solid, continuous objects mobile only through contact, nor discrete forms and movements, but rather chaotic-multiple situations endowed with their own internal significance...”⁵⁶ Experience is thus constituted as a “situation.” A situation is the subjective dimension of *being touched* by a desubjectifying (undetermined and external) charge or feeling. What Griffero calls a “chaotic-multiple situation” would be the situation of an atmosphere: an

arrangement of diverse elements that take on an autonomous significance. The atmospheric situation is essentially a feeling that is poured out into space, and this feeling grips us.

The atmosphere involves the body on the affective-corporeal level, which at once gives us a nonpsychologicistic theory of emotions. Because it is both an emotion and something in the air, "Atmospheric perception is therefore a holistic and emotional being-in-the-world."⁵⁷ For perception to be holistic means that the question of whether a subject or object "caused" the perception is impossible, in short because atmospheres are always in-betweens. Take the feeling of joy: "In a holistic joyful atmosphere, the joy is not so much my joy, but rather a joyous situation, in which the subject and the object are not independent and isolable parts."⁵⁸ I do not have joy, but participate in it. To feel joy is to participate in a joyous situation, in which my feelings, the feelings of others, the space and things around me will expand into each other in a transversal atmosphere. Which is to say that perception is social; it happens in the porosity of a perceiver and environment. It adopts a certain polymodal tonality, a mood, that crosses human, affective, inorganic, and climactic lines.

To perceive an atmosphere means to be involved in the world on the affective-corporeal level ("precategorycally, synesthetically, kinesthetically"), and is manifest subjectively in the certain way we feel about being in a certain place, at a certain time – in a situation. What is implied by atmospheric perception is that precategorycical and prepersonal perceptual "contents" are bilateral, and that they furnish an emotional situation (composed of rhythms, qualities, tensions, and

orientations that are not-yet assignable to a subject or object), which in turn constitute “complex” atmospheres, such as brands, cities, days of the week, cafes, secrets, and concerts. What is not meant by an atmospheric co-presence of subject and object is a kind of jumbled perception, in which nothing is comprehensible, workable, or consistent. Atmospheres are only a certain way of looking at phenomena in which nondualistic lines of significance may arise, that is, ones that do not center on a subject-perceiver (because it is a perception not tied to vision, a project, knowing or thinking... but all kinds of receptions and nonreceptions: sharing, overlooking, enhancing, steering, destabilizing). Atmospheres are less cognitive and more participative. This is to emphasize perception as an emotional situation.

How do atmospheres emerge? How are they made? A miniature model of the Castillo San Felipe del Morro, which sits on my desk, radiates a certain atmosphere. As I finger the trinket, this atmosphere takes on a density, I am swept up by it: I think about the person who gave it to me, I think of her visit to Puerto Rico in 2011, my fingers sweep across the jaggedness of the mini stones, I think of chambers and tunnels, even though they are not visible in the model. This atmosphere collects different affects, memories, times, spaces, and movements. How is it that an atmosphere congregates some things, memories, people, and not others? What is excluded by way of this atmosphere? (I no longer pay attention to the TV in the other room, the view outside my window). What other atmospheres become dim? (I no longer am focused on my work, or on the anticipation of tomorrow). To say that this situation is simply a result of my projecting of emotions is to destroy it entirely.

It is not the case that I missed this person, and in my sadness, picked up the castle. Something called me to the castle; the co-phenomenon of tinkering-feeling activated different affects, memories, and movements. The nonstructure (or bilaterality) of this phenomenon is the point: in this way we are fundamentally attuned.

Griffero, like Merleau-Ponty, discounts the projectivist (cartesian) thesis. But Griffero pushes further with a theory of emotional “affordances.” The likeness of Merleau-Ponty’s body-schema and James Gibson’s concept of affordances is striking; both suggest situational (or ecological) meanings that offer a perceiver, through unthematized motor-suggestions, the ability to act, behave, and use. But affordances, especially atmospheric affordances, are not of the pragmatic-behavioral type. The pragmatic-behavioral dimension of an affordance/motor suggestion is emphasized by both Gibson and Merleau-Ponty – for Griffero, there are not only behavioral affordances, but emotional affordances. The communication between body and world occurs on an emotional level; the body is affectively-attuned.

Griffero thus uses the term “felt-body” rather than “body-subject.” The felt-body is the feeling body, the body that feels – it is, in a sense, the body as it is present in the world. Before being a site of skill, the body of lived experience occupies space by way of orientations, patterns, rhythms, and affects. The humanism of the body-subject is soft, but stubborn, and could explain why Merleau-Ponty gives particular attention to behavior. But to introduce, as Griffero does, an emotional-attunement that is also physiognomic is to grant a particular agency to a meshwork of asubjective forces, entities, and refrains. We not only respond to an affordance with a behavior, by using or handling, but by being struck, influenced,

and moved. Griffero calls this a “corporeal tuning,” which, like the body-subject, is a collapsing of subject and object. However, by emphasizing how this happens as an emotional situation, Griffero lends a liveliness to things that is not granted by Merleau-Ponty, writing “we must reiterate, however, that we experience atmosphere *as if it came* from the object only because *it actually comes* from the object!”⁵⁹

Atmospheric attunement, while always implicating a perceiver in experience, is rooted in things. This brings us to a significant ontological point: “things” are expressive. The projectivist thesis is fully overcome if we lend the world a free capacity for expression; expression is the “glue” of atmospheres. If we are attuned to our environment, to atmospheres, in that they can encourage and produce affects and feelings in us, it must be emphasized that this is not due to a body-schema, species-specific pheromonal interactions, or human psychology. Attunement is not a kind of “sixth sense” or ability to synthesize what is perceived, but rather, atmospheres are “sensible qualities and meanings immanent to the object.”⁶⁰ This immanence, which is the power of expression, implies “a ‘reality independent of conscience’ and certainly not projectively externalized ingredients.”⁶¹ Atmospheres are the expressive ability of things to move us, call on us, and exist outside of us. This shifts the basis of ontology towards expression (which is always aesthetic). Everything is expressive: the smell of a house, birdsong, a waterfall, the intonation of words. By “expression” we do not mean determinate expressions, but an expressiveness. Expressiveness, not expressions: expressiveness as a consistency of expressions in communicative and dynamic situations. Expression would be a

certain power of ecstasy, which is basic to the nonhuman world (even to materiality itself; wood expresses a genuineness and protectiveness, plastic an aloofness and standardness, maybe even a parodic one: “Materials are in fact ‘bearers of magical messages; instead of a readable text they communicate feelings, they address the deeper layers of our perception.’”) ⁶² This expression of a feeling, immanent and objectual, is an atmosphere. Defining atmospheres as emotions poured into space is to identify an immanent expressiveness as the engine of atmospheric charge.

Atmospheres themselves (conglomerates of expressions) are what Griffero calls “quasi-things.” We can say that quasi-things are not nouns but verbs, they are what they do (as in what they express); quasi-things can be colors, wind, trademarks, an ant colony. What an “all out” atmospheric ontology implies is a realism of expressiveness – which is to identify an aesthetics at the heart of existence, to resist “thingification” ⁶³ in favor of a more active, relational ontology. The multiplicity of smells, sounds, contours, and rhythms that populate the world are expressive only of an agency of expressiveness, which belongs to all things – sentient and nonsentient, organic and inorganic, fast and slow.

Griffero considers olfaction as both an instance and a model of atmospheric perception. Smell is operationally analogous to the way we are atmospherically involved. Odors collapse distinctions between subject and object, sign and meaning; they are ineffable, of no localizable cause, and tied to emotional passages and shifts. Perhaps most importantly, both retain a pure phenomenality resistant to compartmentalization. Griffero writes, “just like atmosphere, [odor] is an absolutely phenomenic quality and it is therefore irreducible to an attribution of a

substance.”⁶⁴ Smells, like atmospheres, are purely expressions, or pure expressive-phenomena. There is nothing “behind” a smell, only the smell itself. It is for this reason that olfaction raises issues to empirical observation, particularly felt by those doing work in the cognitive sciences. Neither the molecular character of chemical compounds nor its subjective reception taken alone can adequately explain smell, which has made olfactometry and qualitative analysis extremely difficult.

Philosopher and historian of science Ann-Sophie Barwich ascribes this difficulty to “the common characterization of smells by static units of analysis such as percepts, properties, and objects... [which] fails to capture the underlying dynamics and variability involved in smell perception.”⁶⁵ Barwich subsequently makes the case for a process-understanding of olfaction, which aligns with our characterization of smell as an expressive-phenomena. By smelling, we do not apprehend the “what” of an expression, but the phenomenon of expressiveness itself. The breathing in of a smell makes us communicate with an atmosphere, being “a tuning or a fusion (positive or negative, it does not matter) of man [sic] with his environment, to the point that ‘there is no here and there.’”⁶⁶ The perception of smell is this intimate communication with an *expression*, not an object, a quality, or a location.

The similar phenomenal character of olfaction and atmosphere can be explained spatially, as philosopher Ivan Illich demonstrates with the concept of “aura.”⁶⁷ Illich does not mean aura in the mystical sense, nor in the sense of aesthetic authenticity. An aura is an atmosphere generated by a body; very generally put, it is the non-dimensional presence of a body-in-space. Illich writes, “This aura, when sensed by the nose, reveals the non-dimensional properties of a given space;

just as the eyes perceive height and depth and the feet measure distance, the nose perceives the quality of an interior.”⁶⁸ Illich, like Alain Corbin, considers the deodorization of homes, public places, and individuals to be concomitant with modernity. Deodorization restricts and fragments the mingling of auras, it represses the ability for “smelly people” to gather, that is, to form a common aura, which, “must be dissolved to make space for a new city through which clearly delineated individuals can circulate with unlimited freedom.”⁶⁹ The deodorization of public and private spaces gives way to a new organization of society, one that is suited to the lives of privatized individuals who may engage in transactions as such. Spaces become less fluid and less resourceful, now stratified by house numbers, street names, districts, etc. The new civic space, what Illich calls “space without quality,” encourages new forms of living (work, the family, “the neighborhood”). These activities, which only reify capitalistic, gendered, and nationalistic conventions, are predicated on a closing-off of certain lines of atmospheric charge. Thus, “Space had to be stripped of its aura once aura had been identified with stench.”⁷⁰ If the rise of modern Western society is in part a massive deodorization initiative – first of the dead, then of whole cities, then of the home and the person – then we define “stench” as the ability to self-organize, to intensify auras, and most importantly, to participate in atmospheres that threaten those orders of social life that only serve the preservation of profit or security.

We can also reasonably claim that the repression of a “common stench” is really just an overcoding of odors deemed intolerable. That is, the domestication of aura is predicated on a smell-based marginalization of others, those “stinky” people:

the poor, racial and ethnic minorities, women, immigrants. One could even say that Enlightenment-era deodorization practices, although they carry on to this day – reflected in practices related to hygiene, custom, and architecture – did not even really work! They only redirected the nose towards heavily codified “bad” odors.

In Griffero and Illich there is a linking of smell, atmosphere, and lived situations. These atmospheres are immersive: they are not primarily observed, but tuned to, fused with, and melted into. The enormous ontological significance granted to atmosphere calls upon smell, in the sense that olfaction makes clearer how atmospheric interactions happen both “operationally” (that is, as a model), but also actually (as a phenomenon). Atmospheres are not like clouds that float around a person, a space, or an event. They are fundamentally productive. Being grounded not in things or qualities, but quasi-things (expressions, relations, doings), they are always productive of an affective situation. But it might be necessary to caution against an overly-smooth concept of atmosphere, which Griffero verges on, using words like fusion, penetration, and pouring. Atmospheric events are often destructive, jagged, and lopsided. A overly-homogenizing picture of atmospheric perception cannot account for certain atmospheric instances. For example, recent protests led by Black students across American universities, which include concrete demands for resources and policies that address racism on college campuses, can in part be seen as a response to the proliferation of vapid institutional atmospheres of “diversity” and “inclusion.” That perceiving an atmosphere is an affective tuning means not only that atmospheres can be attuned with or misattuned with, but, especially with anthropogenic atmospheres (those constituted primarily by policies

and attitudes), the reality of an atmosphere can be coexistent with its emptiness, its fakeness, its failure, or its exclusiveness. Some atmospheres are even predicated on a marginalization of others from the atmosphere itself (elitism). But this means nothing other than the fact that atmospheres are produced and productive. To say that atmospheres, then, do not always involve an immersion means that atmospheres can be made, remade, destroyed, subverted, and played with. Griffero does hint at this, as we respond to an atmosphere “not necessarily with a behavior, but at times also with a distancing (which is, to an extent, always aesthetic).”⁷¹ Because atmospheres impinge on the felt-body and always produce affects in us, this distancing is not a disinterested judgment. Distancing here could be the taking up of a certain posture or attitude towards an atmosphere (but still preserving the incipient agency of atmospheres; they act without us). That one can respond to atmospheres with a distancing means that, by atmospheric means, new existential spaces, consistencies, and possibilities can always be inscribed. Distancings can intensify an emergent atmosphere, recombine old atmospheres, or cut against draining atmospheres.

We can finally define atmosphere as a couplet of: 1) an embodied situation of feeling affects and 2) an external consistency or grouping of materials, feelings, qualities, and processes. Atmospheres do not just affect us (Brennan), nor do they just constitute an openness to the world (*Stimmung*): this affecting is itself constitutive. As we proceed, it is my hope that atmosphere, olfaction, mood, the body, and lived experience are currently “in the air,” gently hanging together.

Notes

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- ¹ Michel de Montaigne, trans. Charles Cotton. *Essays*, "Chapter LV, 'Of Smells.'" Project Gutenberg. Web. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3600/3600-h/3600-h.htm>.
- ² Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Ed. Joan Stambaugh. Albany: SUNY 2010. Print. pp. 131.
- ³ As Dreyfus points out. See *Being In: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division 1*.
- ⁴ Heidegger, Martin. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Ed. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995. Print. pp. 67.
- ⁵ Ibid, 132.
- ⁶ Ibid, 133.
- ⁷ Ibid, 133.
- ⁸ Ibid, 133.
- ⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 134.
- ¹⁰ Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, pp 66.
- ¹¹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*. Stanford: SUP 2004. Print. 65
- ¹² It is my belief that an unwillingness to simply equate "Dasein" and "Human," nearly 90 years after the publication of *Being and Time*, is a useless theoretical point, unless one is tracing its origins from Eastern thought. Dasein is not an entity, but an activity or a condition, but postulating this as a specifically *human* activity is actually helpful if we are to engage with (push on) Heidegger today.
- ¹³ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, pp. 67.
- ¹⁴ What Alva Noë has called "actionism" might be a good trajectory to throw in. In trying to avoid "over-intellectualizing the intellect," Noë grounds experience in sensorimotor knowledges based on skill, movement, handling, and style. The body's sensorimotor access of the world is not merely a background; they are not "intermediaries" – but in fact are always constituting new ways of being-in the world. Those complex activities (i.e. cognitive, intentional, symbolic) are "hard-won." This is, in effect, to see intentionality as a capacity that manifests itself in different ways and is grounded in an embodied immersion in the world.
- ¹⁵ Stern, Daniel. *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*. Basic Books, 1985. Print. pp. 142.
- ¹⁶ Ibid, 54.
- ¹⁷ Stern uses this phrase; in more phenomenological terms we can say it is a form and position of experiencing.
- ¹⁸ Performance piece, 2015. Atlanta Science and Art Festival.
- ¹⁹ Laurie, Duncan. "Rock Music." Dragonline Studio. 2008. Web. http://www.duncanlaurie.com/writing/essays/rock_music
- ²⁰ See *Panzee*. <http://drawingvoices.com/panzee.html>
- ²¹ Levin, David Michael. "The Ontological Dimension of Embodiment: Heidegger's Thinking of Being." *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. ed. Donn Welton. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999. Print.

²² Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Ed. Donald Landes. New York: Routledge, 2014. pp. 10.

²³ Ibid, 219.

²⁴ Ibid, 223.

²⁵ Ibid, 224.

²⁶ Ibid, 222.

²⁷ Ibid, 219.

²⁸ Ibid, 221.

²⁹ Ibid, 260.

³⁰ Ibid, 238.

³¹ Ibid, 243.

³² One could, of course, in a very foundationalist move, link smell to the behavior of danger-recognition. Contesting this move has nothing to do with the smell of gas, but comes from the phenomenon of smell itself. In *Sensing Changes*, Joy Parr illustrates this with the case of the Bruce heavy water plant on the shore of Lake Huron in Canada. The chemical plant emitted hydrogen sulfide (with its famous “rotten eggs” odor). The story of the Bruce heavy water plant is one in which the risks and uncertainties of the plant played out on a level where materiality and culture were indistinguishable. Integral to the Bruce water plant situation is the phenomenological characteristics of olfaction. The situation involved the bodies of local humans, sheep, and vegetation, the changing wind patterns of the area, the Canadian nuclear industry, state-level incompetence and secrecy, and the qualities of the chemical compound itself. Hydrogen sulfide is invisible, corrosive, explosive, and poisonous. At low-level concentrations it has a foul smell, but at high-level concentrations it is odorless (those who work in oilfields know that a situation is dangerous when the smell of H₂S is no longer present). The difficulties of measuring H₂S and thus for the plant to be aware of a potential catastrophe, the relative uncertainty about the dangers of long term low-level exposure, the variability of the ability to pick up the scent, and the residents’ eventual habituation to the smell (both due to its normalcy and being a sign of economic opportunity) made the Lake Huron situation rife with uncertainty. Parr is tracing out the way this uncertainty arises in the interaction of institutions, local attitudes, chemical dispersions, and, primarily, individual sensing bodies. She writes, “Here evanescent olfactory measurement dilemmas and local cultural dispositions clouded assessments of risk, and the historically specific sensing body, as much as policy and technology, figures substantively in an unfolding environmental history.” (140) Parr’s insistence on the immediate sensitivity of bodies in the history of contact with environments, technologies, and everyday life will be important to an olfactory phenomenology. The uncertainty surrounding the operation of the heavy water plant was not strictly limited to institutional and political forces, but smell itself – as an experience that is ambiguous and vaporous: “a sense that generates uncertainty.” (137).

³³ Jay A. Gottfried, Wen Li, Isabel Moallem, Ken A. Paller. “Subliminal Smells Can Guide Social Preferences.” *Psychological Science*. 18.12 (2007): 1044-1049.

³⁴ Conducted at Toho University School of Medicine in 1994.

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- ³⁵ Marks, Laura. *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensuous Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. Print. pp. xx.
- ³⁶ Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004. Print. pp. 1.
- ³⁷ Ibid, 6.
- ³⁸ Ibid, 74: "My affect, if it comes across to you, alters your anatomical makeup for good or ill. This idea, perhaps more than any other, stands neo-Darwinism on its head."
- ³⁹ Guattari in Mony Elkaïm's, from *If You Love Me, Don't Love Me*: "The concept of an individual unity strikes me as misleading, To claim on the basis of such a unity to be able to center a system of interactions between behaviors arising in fact out of heterogeneous components that cannot unequivocally be located in one person appears to me to be an illusion." pp. 181.
- ⁴⁰ The "ethico-aesthetic" paradigm characterizes Guattari's approach to both psychiatry and the physical sciences, particularly complexity theory: "It will be less a question of taking stock of these practices in terms of their scientific veracity than according to their aesthetico-existential effectiveness. What do we find? What existential scenes establish themselves there?" Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*. New York: Continuum, 2000. Print. pp. 37.
- ⁴¹ A strategy in political theory in which social and political theorizing are accompanied by metaphysical claims about the world. However, such claims are acknowledged as speculative, not as "hard truths." Such a practice can be seen in Jane Bennett; she writes: "A weak ontology bestows upon choices and judgments a status that is more than subjective but less than objective: they are not as rhetorically thin as an individual preference or as dogmatically heavy as a generalizable truth – not too skinny and not too fat..." Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001. Print. pp. 161.
- ⁴² Brennan, 77.
- ⁴³ Ackerman, Diane. *A Natural History of the Senses*. New York: Random House, 1990. Print. pp. 26.
- ⁴⁴ Brennan, 9.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid, 154.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid, 141.
- ⁴⁷ Part of a larger collection that reflects on Brennan's life and work. *Living Attention: On Teresa Brennan*. Albany: SUNY, 2007. Print.
- ⁴⁸ Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014. Print. pp. 44.
- ⁴⁹ Willett, Cynthia. *Interspecies Ethics*. New York: Columbia UP, 2014. Print. pp. 73.
- ⁵⁰ Griffero, Tonino. *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2014. Print. pp. 148.
- ⁵¹ Ibid, 64.
- ⁵² Ibid, 143.
- ⁵³ Ibid, 139.
- ⁵⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 222.
- ⁵⁵ Griffero, 33.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 12.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 15.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 121.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 134.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 114.

⁶¹ Ibid, 117.

⁶² Ibid, 98.

⁶³ A Baradian term that refers to the tendency to understand the world in terms of things or entities prior to their relations. Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28:3 (2003): 801-831. Web.

⁶⁴ Griffero, 68.

⁶⁵ Barwich, A.S. "A Sense So Rare: Measuring Olfactory Experiences and Making a Case for A process Perspective on Sensory Perception." *Biology Theory* 9 (2014): 258-268. Web.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 67.

⁶⁷ Illich, Ivan. *H₂O and the Waters of Forgetfulness*. Dallas: The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1985. Print. pp. 51.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 52.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 53.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 54.

⁷¹ Griffero, 51.

Chapter 2: Propositions of an Olfactory Phenomenology

Geosmin (Airy-Groundedness)

A ground must be furnished for occularcentric phenomenologies to “take footing.” This is to say that the “eye” of occularcentrism is made possible by a certain relation to the ground. The ground is the basic region upon, within, and underneath which terrestrial animals move around. For terrestrial animals, humans included, the ground is not a limit, an image, or a geographical entity – it is that which is *lived on*. That terrestriality and home are inextricable has made the ground, whether implicitly or explicitly, constantly at stake in philosophy. This to say that the ground is also a concept and the condition for concepts. Certain genealogies of perspective, agency, thought, perception, and the body can in fact be linked to a theorizing of ground – specifically to its homogenization. The reduction of the ground to a dead shell upon which one stands has been an extremely productive move for philosophy; a necessary one for idealism and foundationalism, and indeed one that ushers in its own epistemology. The “ground” of knowledge was made explicit by Kant, who, in *Physical Geography*, considers it “the stage upon which the play of our skills proceeds and... on which our knowledge is acquired and applied.”¹ This ground is a flat plane that is pre-given and inert, merely a *stage* upon which things happen. The ground must be abstracted into an inert material surface, a support or a blank slate, in order for the human to arise as that which inhabits, marks, and produces upon it. The ground as such is grounded in the generation of the human, because it is the surface that allows the human not only to distance and exteriorize itself, but to dwell in the realm of ideas. Luce Irigaray recognizes this, writing,

“Metaphysics always supposes, in some manner, a solid crust from which to raise a construction.”² Uniform and infrastructural, the ground of philosophy justifies the trampling and clearing of everything beneath it (because it is assumed nothing is there in the first place).

What is this ground that philosophy stands on – or better yet, what has it made possible? Paleoanthropologist André Leroi-Gourman provides us with one example from a strong genealogy of the erect human (along with Darwin and Freud). The moment of bipedalism, I argue, is a kind of ur-narrative for occularcentrism. Leroi-Gourman considers the evolution of humans and the evolution of tool use to be concurrent; the 1959 discovery of the early hominid *Zinjanthropus* led him to claim that technicity is what initiates and drives the human itself. The human thus begins with the feet; the ability to stand upright on the ground “liberates” other appendages: front limbs are no longer used for walking, but for grasping, while the mouth is no longer used for grasping, but speaking.³ In Leroi-Gourman’s theory, changes in posture and physiology drives evolution, not, as generally held by paleontologists, the brain. The feet here become a kind of first brain, and their placement on the ground produces the hands, the face, and the cortex itself. But one may ask what is happening *to* the ground, not just on it – precisely because its position grounds anthropogenesis. We find that Leroi-Gourman, like Kant, makes a topographical mistake by abstracting groundedness. Whether it is a geographical-anthropological assertion or a situating of the human thinker firmly to a basis of knowledge, the ground operates as fundamental to

ocularcentrism, as it is what the human stands upon (over) in order to distance itself, act, or think.

Flattening the ground subsequently renders the air a transparent medium, as that which is moved and looked through with ease. This elemental neglect forgets that, just as we are fundamentally “on the ground,” we are “in the air.” To take air as a condition of thought: we reawaken it, or let it *be* as it approaches (envelops) us. Irigaray names air the absolute unthought of Being, always forgotten because it is always already there, the site of all escaping and presence.⁴ Air never “appears” as a phenomenon. Yet it is the grouping-together of all habitation and happening, the condition for all thinking and doing. Air is unclearable yet is itself a clearing; it is that which we are *in*, the open place of meeting.

Air is also the home of olfaction, where smells are carried along and encountered. How are we to conceive air as an event-space? Air is not simply a more primordial ground, and we cannot supplant air where the ground once was (air itself reconfigures the ground; it weathers, erodes, and moves it). The air is neither pre-given nor without its weight. We consider the air not only the condition of encounter but an encountering itself, rather than an empty, “cleared” space of perception. We are taking the air as constitutive to experience in the way the ground is, *with* the ground. Our investigation into air will begin with the phenomenon of non-appearing, a receiving, which is the olfactory phenomenon.

The air and ground are not isolated spheres. The olfactory phenomenon takes place in an airy-groundedness that we identify as geosmin. Geosmin is the smell of rain – it is an organic compound whose name derives from the Greek words

for “earth” and “smell.” Both famous and difficult to notice, it is the freshness of the air after rain hits dry soil. Microorganisms called *Streptomyces* produce geosmin when soil is disturbed and especially rained on. A single protein (geosmin synthase) is central to this process. Geosmin synthase is a bifunctional enzyme, composed of two different poles: the first half of the reaction produces a chemical that drifts over to the other end of the protein, which produces geosmin, to which the human olfactory system is extremely sensitive and can pick up at 0.7 parts per billion.⁵ Geosmin finds a perceiver when it rains, the rain being both an imperishable guarantee (a meteorological fact) and an unexpected occurrence (a specific event), mocking the calcification of everyday rhythms – walking, driving, remaining “presentable,” and actuating a home for wonder, sleep, transition, and so on.

We can say the processes of raindrop-soil, *Streptomyces*-enzyme, geosmin-smell generally mean that the air and ground are intimately linked in the olfactory phenomenon. There is no ground as abstract surface here; the “ground” of perception is composed of interlocking processes and materials, that is, it is impinged upon by climactic affects (which are not reifications of an object, but suspensions, submersions, and intricacies). Geosmin (earth-smell) is thus both already there and a surprise. The perception of geosmin happens as the affective body encounters a shift, giving rise to an emotional-affordance that cannot be said to arise in the perceiver or the outside. This smell has a charge, one in which what we go on to do is dipped, whether or not it is consciously picked up. We call this a climactic affect because it does not originate in the perceiving subject, but is an absorption. The famous rainy-day smell is not just a particular odor; it constitutes

the smeller as one who is always already taken by a mood, a mood that does not belong to a consciousness nor a personal feeling, but is the situation of being a rainy day.

Ontological geosmin is the foundation that is always falling into or away towards something else. The olfactory phenomenon is “grounded” in a kind of straying; there is no ground without air. To smell is to already find oneself drifting over into some mood, both being impinged by it and also immersing oneself in it at the same time. Because moods are always a wafting or drifting, they are fragile.⁶ But this fragility – the ability to be broken up, transformed, distorted – is the very constitutive power of moods: that is, moods are nothing other than their changing. By saying moods are fragile, we do not revoke their constitutive power, which is a power of the diffusion between body and atmosphere.

In *Slow Fast Mountains (earth aroma)* (2014), artists David Haines and Joyce Hinterding developed synthetic geosmin and soaked pieces of coal in the fragrance. Haines and Hinterding use their own fragrance laboratory to compose odor compounds and resingularize them as jolts of those wave forces that are right under our noses (electricity, ozone, memory). The artists are interested in approaching aroma as a kind of music-making, composing odors “like pieces of music,”⁷ because both music and smell happen as molecular vibrations. The coal debris are channels of manifestation – themselves odorless, dipped in geosmin they become strange bodies for the smell. Wet earthiness wafts in the gallery, yet is also concentrated in the infinite and timeless black of the smooth stones. “Viewers” approach the coal like an unrecoverable return; there are instructions to “SMELL BUT NOT TOUCH,” as

if the coals have been clothed in a resounding dilemma, that of two “earths”: the synthesized geosmin, a simulation of earthiness that is injected into the coal, another earth, which has today become a symbol of its own mining and resultant ecological devastation. Hence the tragic overlap of two speeds (geological formation and extraction) and two earths (geosmin and coal; synthetic and ancient; wet and explosive), and the confusion/infusion between the two.

Our affirmation of a highly specific chemical, geosmin, as the fundamental “space” of perception is really an pronouncement of earth and place as constitutive of perception itself. With geosmin, the location of perception is not an isolatable domain in which the human sets itself off and apart from.

Threshold

Luca Turin walks across the parking lot of an industrial perfume factory and is struck by an incredible oddness, one that shatters the reality of his present experience.⁸ It was only later that Turin understood why this happened – he had smelled a giant orangeness (“To justify its presence, there should have been a pile of ripe fruit one hundred meters high, but there was nothing, only a light breeze coming from a nondescript building.”⁹) Turin recognizes in the smell phenomenon an undoing of cause and effect; it is a sensation that comes from nowhere and has the character of a hallucinatory experience. It is why he describes scent as “a hologram of an object with an attendant mood, at once familiar and impossible to name.”¹⁰ The smell experience impinges upon us without evidence or cause; its

immediacy is affective and without a stable object. For this reason we characterize the phenomenon itself as liminal, always happening as a transition.

The transitional phenomenon points to no before or after, no cause or finished state, and no dialectical resolution. Philosophy's inattention to smell perhaps stems from an inability to think the body as processually opening and permeable. Olfaction throws the body into a moment of being elsewhere, an elsewhere arising both in the world and individual sensory life. In "Magic, Perfume, Dream..." social anthropologist Alfred Gell writes, "The sense of smell comes into play most when the other senses are in suspense, at moments, one could say, of materialization *and* dematerialization."¹¹ Olfaction shakes the kind of sensory experiencing guaranteed by a project, rendering it ultimately fragile and changeable. In olfaction, experience and the thresholded body are brought together so vividly and so inimitably because Turin should have seen thousands of fruits in front of him on that day.

Even in an everyday sense, smell signals a transition, it marks a passage. The preparation, arrival, consumption, and ending of a meal are all punctuated by a particular smell, each having its own weight and tonality. The smell of a meal being prepared is slow, warm, and inviting, while afterwards the lingering smell is in a stasis and almost stale. Smell is *fundamentally* a transition, in the way it manifests as a phenomenon. David Howes' essay "Olfaction and Transition" is thus correct in imparting this character to smell in general: it is "the liminal sense *par excellence*, constitutive of and at the same time operative across all of the boundaries we draw between different realms and categories of experience."¹² Smells not only bring

attention to a threshold; they also prompt its crossing. Thresholds (social, culinary, emotional, etc.) are thus not merely announced by olfaction; they are not some external line or boundary. Rather, olfaction constitutes the entire body as being-in a threshold, as always already thresholded. That the body is the bearer of experience means that a uniformity of experience, presupposed by occularcentrism, must be bracketed (much like the way Merleau-Ponty takes “space” outside a geometric primacy or pre-givenness and weighs it down with existential tonalities and densities). Experience is populated by so many thresholds, interruptions, and crossings, evinced clearly in the smell phenomenon. Like the single protein that brings geosmin into being, smells are gentle catalysts that reveal an attunement to modulations of experience, or even existential fulcrums that destabilize the singular body and the givenness of the world.

The title of Howes’ essay plays on an earlier text in social anthropology, “Percussion and Transition,”¹³ and Howes makes an evocative parallel between olfaction and percussion. The rhythms, bursts, and tempos of percussive beats stimulate the limbic region of the brain and the autonomic nervous system, and can therefore trigger powerful emotional and physiological responses, impeding logical reasoning and verbal communication. The suspension of self-assurance and reason is not a deadlock, because percussive stimulation “entrains *activity* rather than thought,”¹⁴ and for this reason is a powerful agent of category change. Percussion initiates a passage between social and ontological categories maintained by reason, discourse, and social conventions because it mobilizes rhythms that operate below, alongside, and between these categories and their separation. Howes argues that

the same, and even a stronger case, can be made for olfaction. I find an attractive analogue in the way both olfaction and percussion seem to share a similar dual-structure, in that the disclosure and *motivation* of a passage is like a Mobius strip. Olfaction and percussion are an immersion in an affective situation in which a threshold is both posed and made porous in the same moment. Olfaction is energetic in this way; it does not only disclose the world, but reorders it.

Fade in/out

Smell presents itself to experience as a threshold, which leads us to say that its style of manifestation, both spatially and temporally, is a fade in and fade out. This is not to claim that odors are wholly formless; they have a tonality and a pull, but their manifestation is wholly indeterminate, and perception does not fashion itself a stable object. The fade in/out connects perceiver and perceived in a manner that is nonhierarchical and noncausal.

Space

The olfactory event fades in and out of perceptual activity. Spatially this means that a smell is always escaping, both its object and its perceiver. A smell does not present itself to experience in its representability, visibility, or practicality, but in its diffusiveness. The ambiguity of both source and reception is basic to the olfactory experience itself, which seems to lie outside any final spatial determination. The spatiality of an olfactory event is a continual inhalation and exhalation of itself, as smell is equiprimordially an escape from a source, a curling or wafting elsewhere, and a “walking into something,” in the interruptive sense.

Space and Communion

One walks into a smell; this encounter is not with a referential object, but rather with an event, an escape or diffusion. The question of causality – whether by the exteriorization from a source or an intense meeting and fusion – is unsuitable; the collapse of this question is a collapse of the interior/exterior distinction that informs it. We call this collapse communion. Communion is not a power naturally given to perception, and humans are not communion-machines. Perception-as-communion, while it certainly “needs” a body and a consciousness, does not ultimately find its power here. Olfactory perception is a communion because, in it, a perceiver encounters an expressiveness that is always exceeding perception, yet the perceiver still fuses with this excess. The union of perceiver and perceived is never total, in the sense that it never secures its material. Perception is the power to fuse with the inexhaustible, and for this reason communion is a quasi-miraculous event. The “com” (with, together) is emphasized, over and above union. One cannot say who finds who in the olfactory phenomenon – the smell or the smeller. Doing so would proceed from delineations of space (here/there, in/out, close/far), but these are all lost. They are given over to communing.

Time

The temporality of olfaction is likewise a fade in and fade out. The phenomenon is not structured as an episode, but presents itself as a materialization and dematerialization. The beginning and end of olfaction are middles; neither is resolved into a clean temporal boundary, and perceiver and smell waft into one another as a fragility that is never overcome, but tuned to and with.

A smell will materialize out of nowhere. An odor lingers, on an article of clothing perhaps, and will awaken a plurality of times (“I know what you were doing earlier, I can smell it on you now”). The temporality of smell does not culminate in a “now” or a moment when a perceptual object is steadied by a temporal synthesis. Temporality is central to the perceptual subject, as it is how perception, a sense-making activity, “makes sense” of the world. For Merleau-Ponty, in perception temporality *is* subjectivity.¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty explains this as a “focusing” act (an occularcentric metaphor). If perception is a connection of terms (body and world), then focusing is the connecting act. It is the creation of time by the body, the tying together of past, present, and future through perception. This is what makes perception subjective. The sensory world does not attack and overwhelm us because we have the capacity to focus, to “send something that was touching me back to its place in the world.”¹⁶ This is accomplished as a temporal orientation, asserting a past and a future, a history and potentiality, to an immediate sensation. The subject of perception is this temporal synthesis, which, Merleau-Ponty will clarify, is finite. The temporality of perception is never absolute and is always being made and remade by experience – that is, it is an activity. This scheme, however, fails to account for olfaction because its temporality is entirely a subjective power (“There are no connected objects without an act of connecting and without a subject”¹⁷). It is for this reason that we shift from the language of focusing to that of fatigue.

Time and Fatigue

Olfaction will collapse at any given moment. The phenomenon does not collapse into nothingness – it does not “end,” but is deepened. This is what is called “olfactory fatigue,” an instance of the psychosensorial concept of “adaptation.” Sensory adaptation, in terms of olfaction, is simply the phenomenon of getting used to a smell. Certain odors become undetectable once they are smelled long enough and fade into the environment. But this does not mean that a smell has gone away (a smell is “revived” when one walks out and back into a room). Smells disappear *from perception*, though they do not disappear. The diffusion of a smell into the environment is only a further plunging into it, precisely because we have never defined olfaction as access or conscious awareness, but instead as an attunement or synchronization. As perceptual subjects, smells are terrifying because they affect us in ways that lie outside the reach of evidentiary perception, and their fading away is only a fading-in (hence the nagging worry that once a smell is gone it has actually just gotten on or inside us). This recessive quality of smell is actually productive, and as a smell withdraws we are actually most intensely smelling.

Fatigue (to tire out, but also related to breaking down) is central to the olfactory experience. Fatigue is not a stagnation, but an immersion, an undoing of self-possession, a being carried away. Olfactory perception is an openness to the world, and as a smell recedes into the atmosphere, the porosity of this openness is dilated; the lines that connect this synchronization are only made more distinct. If we are to say, following Merleau-Ponty, that the subject of perception is temporality, then this temporality is not focus, but fatigue. The subject of perception is fatigued.

Fatigue in this context is not a state of being wasted or weary, but is a productive immersion.

Fatigue is not only characteristic of the olfactory phenomenon, but to all perception, which highlights the importance of an olfactory consideration in any phenomenology interested in embodiment. Fatigued perception is perception that happens as a middle. Touch provides an analogue. A touching is structured by a beginning and end; one may reach out to touch another, one may move away – there is always an initiator and a retractor. But when a touch is sustained, there arises an ambiguity between toucher and touched. Neither can distinguish who is touching who anymore; the boundaries of both bodies fold into one another, and distinctions of self and other evaporate into the touch itself, no matter how small the touched-area (even a finger resting on a forearm). This tendency is precisely what constitutes the tenderness of touch itself, and, as I am arguing with the concept of fatigue, it is in the *losing oneself* of being touched that one is most intensely touching.¹⁸

This happens absolutely in the olfactory phenomenon because its spatiality and temporality is a dematerialization of boundaries. By describing olfaction as fading in and out, we are, on the one hand, pointing out its transience and nonexhaustability. But fade in/out more importantly elucidates the perceptual *immersion* in a transience and nonexhaustability. Perception itself is an encounter with an unfinished openness, which is the entanglement of subject and world.

Pheromone

Subtending olfaction and subjectivity is the figure of the pheromone. Such an approach has its obvious dangers and limits, and the pheromone is nothing more than a philosophical tool – we take lead from scientific literature with carefulness and modesty, but also with the intention of initiating new lines of thought and new ways to approach a question (Guattari would call this an ethico-aesthetic approach). Pheromones are considered species specific and predominantly a mechanism of fitness (with most literature centering on their sexual function). These perspectives will be sidelined in order to tease out a philosophical opening. “Our” pheromone, as an exchange between scientific and philosophical thought, will not be a clean, uniform, or even accurate transposition, but instead a site of contestation and even fabrication. The hope is that this fabricating will be both useful and tenable; that we are not engaging in a careless extraction, and that imprecisions will be offset by a philosophical productiveness.¹⁹

Etymologically, pheromones refer to a carrier of that which sets something in motion. They are whatever drives a change, or impels an activity that does not originate from the individual being impelled. The pheromone, as a theoretical device, gives a materiality and discernibility to flows of affect and energy. They tell us that there is no endogenous locus of subjectivity, and that subjective practices are constantly invested by atmospheric forces and formations. This affective opening and openness to the world is *actually happening* in pheromonal interactions. We are not claiming that pheromones are anything more than they are, but a phenomenological perspective on their existence would consider the onto-existential consequences of these interactions.²⁰ This is not to say that the world is

one giant pheromone; pheromones are singular to a certain body, a situation, and a space. They do not – by definition, they never – belong to any particular entity, as they are themselves an *exchange*.

Pheromonal interactions are constitutive of subjectivity. By this we mean two things: the existence of pheromones has a significance that reaches beyond pheromonal mechanisms themselves, and that pheromonal mechanisms do not happen to a pre-given subject as a side effect. The pheromone is a folding of the subjective, social, and chemical world into a situation. Similarly, Guattari considered subjectivity to be transversal and heterogeneous, invested by social, nonhuman, and unconscious forces. In his later works, *The Three Ecologies* and *Chaosmosis*, he reposes the question of the subject as a question of subjectivation, and pheromones can be framed by what Guattari calls “vectors of subjectivation.” The Subject (promised by occularcentrism) is a reified, stagnant, and ultimately conservative fantasy which has, since Descartes, absorbed the actual processes that comprise subjectivity itself. The subject is really a process (subjectivity), or a processual channel through which existential materials pass through, are held together, and are resingularized. Existential materials are ensembles of sensations, everyday rhythms, nonhuman intensities, memories, and semiotics of the a-signifying and signifying orders. The relation between existence and existential materials is machinic, or processual. This relation, in phenomenological terms, is called intentionality, which in this case would not set the subject off or against the world in the dominant and foundational sense. Intentionality is instead posed as a hooking on to existential materials. From this, anything resembling “identity,” indeed, subjective interiority

itself, is always processual – by which Guattari means anything in affinity with alteration and alterity. This moves subjective grounding away from Being, agency, or self-sameness, and instead towards process, focal points, catalysts, attractors, and rhythms and counter-rhythms. Pheromones touch what Guattari means by subjectivity, because they posit a subject opening onto multilayered rhythms of life; this opening is the subjective itself. Pheromones are central to subjectivity because they hint at both the expressions of the world and their reception by a subject, simultaneously – that is, as a mutable practice.

Entrainment

We have defined the pheromone as a fold or mangle of existential materials, as a being-in-the-world that is neither enacted by the human gaze nor finalized in any kind of existential configuration. Entrainment is the process of a pheromonal reception, which is a subjectivation. Similar to pheromones, entrainment will be pushed past its psychoneuroendocrinological context.

We mean to contrast entrainment with experience. We define experience as a relationship or contact with the world that necessitates an experiencing subject. It is multilayered and at times multidirectional, though it seems to culminate in a project, in an unreflective but *particular* way of setting oneself in the world. Experiences can be bought, sold, and traded; they no longer emerge but are acquired in accordance to a certain “lifestyle.” We define entrainment as the active receptivity that is constitutive of subjective processes but not subsumed by them – a kind of subjective wafting or drift. Entrainment locks into existential rhythms

without flattening them under a project. There are not even “subjects” of entrainment. There are only atmospheres and atmospheric-subjects: both terms are the same thing and refer to a consistency of subjective and non-subjective materials. Entrainment is an entanglement but also the movement of being-impinged by an otherness, a newness, or a shift. It takes the “form” of a surprise that is unpunctuated, because it is always already rhythmic – that is, one has already tuned to a surprise.

It is tempting to ditch experience as hopelessly vague, and even claim, quite dazzlingly, that we are only *sometimes and occasionally* having experiences, and at other times something else is happening, and that we thus need a better concept to describe subjective contact with the world. Instead, we use entrainment to decenter the uniformity of experience, which has been falsely promised by the subjective point of view. Alva Noë’s “enactive approach” is the closest thing to such a denaturalization of experience, in which experience does not happen to us, but is always acted out; “it is something we *do*.”²¹ But in the enactive approach, experience still culminates in the individual, and is thus tied to the unity of a project and the availability and visibility of the perceived, which hopefully by now have been revealed as tenets of occularcentric phenomenologies. What is needed is an account of experience that is embodied but also plural, processual, and anti-humanist. We thus shift from experience and the individual to entrainment and atmosphere.

Entrainment is a tuning – one that does not spring from a doer, or arise from a principal “cause,” but instead emerges as an event, which is to say that multiple “parties” (relations, entities, phenomena, forces) are implicated and entangled.

In dynamic systems theory, entrainment refers to when “pushes or pulls” of a system form a self-organizing process. This happens when wave or wave-like systems “lock” in either phase or frequency. An example, given by philosopher Chuck Dyke, is a father and a daughter on a swingset: eventually, the pair will synchronize the rhythm of their swinging, with one going forward while the other falls back (a frequency-lock), or both following the exact same pathway (phase-lock). In the same anthology, *How Nature Speaks*, Lasse Peltonen applies entrainment to the wave-like emergence of social movements. Peltonen examines how and why many Finnish activists grew dissatisfied with leftist student organizations and strayed toward the emerging Green Party in the late 1970s. Peltonen notes that the move from the left to the Greens was an entrainment, and thus does not besit an explanation that favors choice, calculation, or a driving structure or force. He writes, “the act of joining is not a clear-cut decision, but more akin to drifting toward interesting people, places, and ideas. Instead of perfectly informed choice, the phenomenon here implies *resonance*: identifying with something, being drawn to something interesting and pushed away from something alien.”²² The push/pull away from the left and towards the Greens is not unequivocal, and the activists Peltonen spoke with recalled a multiplicity of factors affecting them (dissatisfaction with outdated discourses, personal crises, curiosity, etc.)²³. The shift in involvement is thus a phenomenon that is relational more than it is intentional, and Peltonen, undercutting assumptions of agency and rationality, analogues the entrainment of fluid mechanics to social currents; we are similarly analoguing the entrainment of psychoneuroendocrinology to perceptual life.

Entrainment attunes to a threshold. It is therefore not the means by which a state of being is consummated, but always a vibratory or rhythmic beckoning and response. The self is entrained to the world and is thus constituted as receptive, without assuming from this openness the guarantee of assimilation, certainty, or fixity, but in fact just the opposite. This is to deny overshadowing this openness as the foundation from which “real” or “subjective” perception takes place. The synchronizations of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (attunement and sensation) seem to fall into this trap and are, in the final say, pushed into projective or pragmatic schemes. Entrainment does not grow into a transcendental perception; it already flowers with vitality, sense, and subjective import.

We are not entrained to experience because entrainment is not a type of experience; the very hegemony of experience is made possible only by affording it innumerable categories and layers (doing, remembering, feeling; “real experience,” “virtual experience,” “spiritual experience”). Entrainment is a special (though nonetheless unremitting) kind of encounter, which at times works indissolubly as or in experience, but at other times occurs alongside, below, or perpendicular to experiential lines. This is not to say that entrainment is a more primordial experiencing, although it is the subjective wealth that one experiences *from*. We are only rejecting a growth of entrainment into experience (there is no order of the two; no entrainment before experience, no entrainment as experience). This is to say that entrainment and experience are coterminous but not modalities of each other. We occupy this tenuous space where the two are related but not entirely, where they are different but not separate and dance together as a situation. This relationship is

most clearly elucidated by olfaction, especially considering the way olfaction and experience sometimes intertwine and other times clash, comprise an emergence, or impel a change. The body becomes the common denominator to which we can hold entrainment and experience in an unfixed affinity. The lived body is the gathering of experience and entrainment; to address the lived body – in its intelligence, skillfulness, habits, endeavors, and also its dynamism, heterogeneity, and receptivity – phenomenology must take “situations” (which by definition do not center around the human subject), not just experience, as its site of study.

Bonus Features

1. Mood: The subjective dimension of affect is mood, and its emergence is not becoming “in control” of affect. Moods retain their volatility, borderlessness, and transience – even and especially when they are felt. Olfactory perception can be elucidated through the couplets atmosphere-entrainment and mood-olfaction. The general formulation is that we are entrained to atmospheres through olfaction, and this manifests itself subjectively as a mood. Moods are not interior and they are not directable emotions; they arise in, but more importantly, *as* a subject that is already immersed in the world and taken by it: existence is mooded. Mood describes a particular kind of immersion, one that disrupts a unidirectional being-towards an in-order-to. The body is our vehicle for having a world, as the body is the locus of perception, but mood unhinges the grounding of perception in the existential visibility of an object (its accessibility, instrumentality, usability). Perception is never complete,

not in a sensory or pragmatic way, and is always desiring an elsewhere. This is because perception is and has a feeling – a feeling that always exceeds the perceptual act.

2. Alarm: Being frightened is a well known example of smell's ambient power. The pheromonal transmission of fear occurs in mammals, birds, insects, and plants. Birds are thought to have a generally terrible sense of smell, and express alarm primarily through visual or sonic signals (much like humans) by adopting a certain pose or screeching. However, new research on the social dynamics of Eurasian roller birds challenges this claim. When frightened or in danger, roller nestlings throw up a bright orange fluid that smells first of orange juice and then insects. Publishing their findings in *Biology Letters*, researchers determined that the fluid was an olfactory signal, which adult rollers could detect and respond to.²⁴ This was not a groundbreaking discovery if one considers how common scent cues are used to signal danger: minnows secrete schreckstoff ("shock matter") when injured; lima beans, when being attacked by spider mites, will emit a chemical signal that attracts predators of the mite; honeybee workers release a banana-smelling pheromone after stinging another animal in order to attract nearby bees and incite defensive behavior. The "smell of fear" is reputable in human culture as well, and has been exhibited multiple times in a laboratory setting.²⁵ In one study, participants watched either a documentary or the horror film "The Exorcist," after which sweat samples were collected from their underarms.²⁶ When another group of

participants smelled the samples, the majority found the horror sweat to be stronger and more distinct, and those who smelled it even performed better on various cognitive tests. A hyper-ontic approach to this data does not consider these pheromonal interactions as an after or side effect of being frightened. The chemical expression of fear is not separate from its “internal” manifestation, that is, its being felt by a scared subject. The materiality of this experience traverses the borders of interiority and renders the possession of experience as always part of an atmosphere that it does not contain. What can be called “biological” and “social” or “internal” and “external” instantiations of fear are never isolated, as the existence of one implicates the other. It is worth pointing out that Heidegger discusses fear specifically as an attunement. The attunement of fear is the approaching of something threatening to Dasein. Dasein can be fearful because it is concerned about its own being; fear is possible on the basis that Dasein is attuned being-in-the-world. Fear is only one factual mode of attunement, it is one kind of disclosing of the world and being-in, which, at the time, happens to be of a threatening character. Dasein’s fear is always its own because fear is always a fearing for its own being; Heidegger will even consider the co-attunement of fearing-for-another as being ultimately privative. This allows fear to eventually be given over to the fundamental attunement (*Grundstimmung*) of anxiety, which is a non-directed kind of fear that reveals Dasein as itself authentically, as being-toward-death. But Heidegger’s closing of fear within the individual experiencer arises only because he has excluded materiality,

and quite frankly, the body from his consideration. We instead take the materiality of fear (a pheromonal interaction) as a phenomenological entry point – fear is always a fearing-with, a threading of experiences that never involves a single experiencer. As Noela Davis points out, research in the field of epigenetics, the study of gene expression as it is inherited or affected by the environment, poses a fundamental challenge to such isolations and particularly in the interaction of social marginalization and hormones, what is called “minority stress.” Epigenetics not only considers the biological and social as co-constitutive, but points to the way this relation is *inside* the person and thus constitutes the individual as “always already environmental.”²⁷ The consequences of psychoneuroendocrinological research are similar, as the case with fear reveals. A hyper-ontic analysis does not issue fear over to a more fundamental existential mode, anxiety. This refusal itself has its ontological consequences, because it discloses attunement as expressive, transversal, unbounded, and socially productive. Attunements in general share this trait.

3. Perfume: The a-signifying distinctiveness of a smell, which bears immense existential significance without being tied to a cause, source, or origin. Perfume is the manifestation of “that smell.” The particularity of olfaction is its materiality, that it always calls forth a mysterious dimension of matter. Memory, for instance, is given a materiality in smell, because it emerges as the drifting of an odor. Take Proust’s madeleine, a potent illustration of how odors are existential materials (vectors of subjectivation), material catalysts

- (affects), and emotional affordances (remembrance). Here, memory bypasses a “personal history,” not arising from any willed mental activity or internal recollection: “An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory – this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it *was* me.”²⁸ The madeleine does not fill Proust, but constitutes him *as* a feeling of love – smell here is an immersion, an affective charge that stirs a jump and reconnection in time and space, which is a subjectivating event. This is what is meant by perfume: not the aroma compounds sold by the perfume industry, but as any event which is an untotalizable familiarity, a feeling that cannot “be placed,” that is, the mysterious relation to something that is both extremely close and yet of another place and time.
4. Atmosphere: An olfactory phenomenology is, in a sense, a theory of the atmospheric. Atmosphere is a confederation of material affects that gain consistency as “a situation.” Situations have an experiential indefiniteness, and in them, terms like self/environment, inside/outside, along with subject/object, active/passive, and presence/absence are interpenetrated by each other. The olfactory phenomenon, if we are to take it in its peculiarity, totally scrambles these terms, and does not reach any final synthesis or even bilaterality; everything is constantly “up in the air.” The nose connects us to the atmosphere in a fundamental way; when we smell (in the double sense of

the word) we mean to say that we are immersed in an atmosphere.

Phenomenality, the body, and subjectivity are atmospheric, and can be reposed as such. *Atmospheric-phenomenality*: it is not an appearing, or a becoming-manifest to a perceiver, as olfaction does not follow a logic of visibility. Phenomenality is an encounter; neither the phenomenon nor the experiencing person stand outside each other. Both emerge together, and phenomenality would be precisely the dematerialization/materialization of experiential structures and the messiness of lived perception. *Atmospheric-body*: it is not, as Merleau-Ponty would say, where it has something to do. The atmospheric-body is wherever its borders are being drawn and redrawn, wherever it is thresholded. Embodiment can no longer take an existential-pragmatic idealization of the human body as its referent. The atmospheric body is precisely that which has no secure boundaries: it cannot be reduced to a set of qualities or skills, its physiology cannot be bracketed, and it is not unified by a project. The body *emerges* along with and by way of material-affective and social-biological entanglements. The body does not exist beforehand, navigating its way through these entanglements. Nor does it belong to some kind of unmarked and undifferentiated monism. The body *is* embodied activity, but only if we refuse to define activity as skillful or intentional action, but instead as a practice – a practice being the way the body opens onto, hooks onto, and is traversed by social-biological-existential-affective entanglements, that is, how the body (re)constitutes and is (re)constituted by such entanglements. *Atmospheric-subjectivity*: the

subjective “sphere” suggests more vaporous ways of being. We privilege atmosphere because it touches both an affective climate but also the deep recesses of subjectivity. Olfaction is atmospheric because it connects an expressiveness of the world and a subjective interiority – this is a double-positing in the sense that both the world and subjectivity are equiprimordially steeped in the other. Questions of subjectivity would no longer refer to identity, a project, or the subject, but rather, to entangled/mooded practices of immersion, impingement, and drifting.

Notes

¹ Social anthropologist Tim Ingold points out that the ground in Kant's *Physical Geography* is nothing like the actual ground, but more like the floor of a room. Ingold also charges Marx and James Gibson with making a similar move. Ingold, Tim. *The Life of Lines*. New York: Routledge, 2015. Print.

² Irigaray, Luce. *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*. London: The Athlone Press, 1999. Print. pp. 2.

³ See Bernard Stiegler's thorough use of Leroi-Gourman's thought in *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998. Print. See in particular the subsection "Everything Begins with the Feet" on pp. 143-145.

⁴ Irigaray, 8.

⁵ "Geosmin." *Royal Society of Chemistry*. Royal Society of Chemistry. n.d. Web.

⁶ Alva Noë argues that presence is fragile when we are able to think it outside representation in *Varieties of Presence*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2012. Print.

⁷ Kahn, Douglas. "Haines & Hinterding as Understood through Lightning." *Energies: Haines & Hinterding*. Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2015. pp. 24.

⁸ Turin, *The Secret of Scent*. pp. 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹ Alfred Gell, "Magic, Perfume, Dream ..." *Symbols and Sentiments: Cross-Cultural Studies in Symbolism*. London: Academic Press, 1977. Web. pp. 26.

¹² Howes, David. "Olfaction and Transition." *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991. Print. pp. 131.

¹³ By Rodney Needham.

¹⁴ Howes, David. "Olfaction and Transition." pp. 132.

¹⁵ "Subjectivity, at the level of perception, is nothing other than temporality..." Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. pp. 248.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 249.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 250.

¹⁸ This would be to shift a "lived haptics" away from its more pragmatic meaning (arising out of a using and doing), to an affective dimension.

¹⁹ The limitations of this approach I openly acknowledge, particularly in relation to the well discussed matter in Science Studies and "New Materialist Feminist" thought, in which the orientations, gestures, and transactions with the natural sciences are a site of interest and discussion. Myra J. Hird, in "Feminist Engagements with Matter," references to three kinds of approaches to matter and science: critique (as a critique of scientific rationality and the production of scientific objects), extraction (the application of scientific ideas in social science, often as models and metaphors) and engagement (attempts to interact with and impact the sciences as they develop and change). Brennan's *Transmission of Affect* is an example of an engagement with the science of pheromones, as she is pointing out a dual problem in both philosophy and the sciences, whose reconsideration affects both fields. Our approach falls roughly under extraction, as we are not necessarily making any

scientific claims, and see in the pheromone a phenomenological figure – one which, nonetheless, finds a material reality in their empirical existence.

²⁰ Moreover, a specifically hyper-ontic phenomenology would not bracket this biological data into an existential scheme.

²¹ Noë, Alva, *Action in Perception*, pp. 1 (italics mine).

²² Peltonen, Lasse. “Fluids on the Move: An Analogical Account of Environmental Mobilization.” *How Nature Speaks: The Dynamics of the Human*. ed. Yrjö Haila and Chuck Dyke. Durham: Duke UP, 2006. Print. 160.

²³ *Ibid.*, 159.

²⁴ Almost humorously, the adult rollers did not, as one would assume, adopt a defensive role – they actually flew away and let the nestling fend for itself. Angier, Natalie. “The Smell of Fear (No Tweets Necessary).” *New York Times* 13 August 2012. Web. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/14/science/for-birds-whose-odor-conveys-fear-no-tweets-necessary.html?pagewanted=all&r=2>

²⁵ See Ackerl K, et. al. in *Neuroendocrinological Letters* 2002, 23(2): 79-84. Studies like this are somewhat common; see also <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2008/dec/04/smell-fear-research-pheromone>

²⁶ Study conducted at the Baylor College of Medicine and published in *Chemical Senses*, 2006, 31(5): 415-23.

²⁷ Davis, Noela. “Politics Materialized: Rethinking the Materiality of Feminist Political Action through Epigenetics.” *Women: A Cultural Review*. 2014: 25(1), 62-77. Web. pp. 70.

²⁸ Proust, Marcel. *Remembrance of Things Past, Vol. 1*. trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin. New York: Random House, 1981. Print. pp. 48.

Concluding Gestures

As noted, the nature of this project prevented any attempt to furnish a direction for itself. A phenomenological question was posed, though as already problematic, as it implied maneuvers, configurations, and strategies deemed occularcentric, and thus unsuitable for an olfactory phenomenology. We could therefore only follow this question by way of its own deflection, and if there remained a structure of inquiry, it was a type of drifting. This circumstance is what frames the layout of the second chapter. Each “proposition” floats around. They are not located within any kind of progression or system, but overlap and swirl together. The principles themselves are diffusive, and they come to interpenetrate and curl around each other. These relations are not conclusive and may emerge differently, taking on various consistencies and tones. That is, they can be combined to different effects.

This arises partly through mixing olfactory deflections with their basic concepts from existential phenomenology (experience, subjectivity, phenomena). An olfactory phenomenology could not dismiss or “move beyond” these concepts, and I acknowledge the crucial role they continued to play, although always as difficulties, as sites of decentering. I would hope my juxtaposition of an existential and olfactory phenomenology does not discharge, but enrich a future phenomenological practice. For example, experience/entrainment are not to be taken as a binary, in which the right term is now privileged – I introduce new models and vocabularies always in conversation with what has supposedly been shadowing them. Failing to do so would in fact contradict one of my basic points, which is that olfaction has never not

been constitutive of human experience, even in the so-called “deodorized West.” To assume the role, then, as one who is “here to fix a problem” becomes tenuous at best.

The most drastic intervention into the phenomenological method is what I am calling a hyper-ontic method. This approach does not demolish the ontic into the ontological. It can be understood as inverse bracketing, or unbracketing, or “bracketing the bracket.” The bracketing operation (the phenomenological reduction, parenthesizing, epoché) has a rich philosophical history, particularly in 20th century thought, and refers to the practice of suspending an immersive and uncritical acceptance of the world (the “natural attitude”) in order to examine how something presents itself purely as a phenomenon. It is an act of postponing, withholding, or displacing. The viability of a fundamental existential scheme is predicated on the ability to parenthesize certain data as prefatory, superfluous, prejudiced, or beside the point. If something has been “done” to olfaction by phenomenology, it is this – not necessarily being an omission or neglect, but a bracketing. The hyper-ontic approach basically explodes the bracketing move. One “unbrackets” when the bracketing move itself is located as a volatile site of phenomenological import. In such an approach, something like the material existence of pheromones can no longer be pushed aside as vulgar biological data. When molecular, biochemical, and hormonal processes are folded into subjectivity, the possibilities for different lines of phenomenological investigation only multiply, both in range and depth. Inverting the bracket means deeply immersing oneself in the world, even by way of a intentionally naïve attitude; doing so often means taking

eccentric and idiosyncratic phenomena, little themes, and scientific data seriously – that is, as having ontological weight. We are not “doing away” with existential projects, motility, understanding, or even the magic of vision – but allowing smell to cut across their primacy is of no small consequence. That smell has been bracketed means that its very withholding is what actualizes that which obscures it (the humanistic subject). This means that unfastening olfaction does not simply add another category of study – it fundamentally reconstitutes what it means to be an embodied subject in the world. Yet this (re)constituting is never final. That a hyper-ontic approach presupposes both an openness and an active interest towards the new, the different, the trivial, the confusing, and the messy means that it is a practice (not necessarily a posturing or a “style of thinking”) in the most extreme sense. Hyper-ontic phenomenology, by refusing to ever consider itself sufficient enough to capture phenomena, opens itself to an infinite becoming and going-elsewhere.

The attitude – a sensitivity – taken by Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter* has been an underlying support, and my own project would not be possible without the tenets of her “vital materialism”: that matter is energetic, affective, and beckoning; that materiality entangles human and nonhuman within protean and dynamic bodies, phenomena, and event-spaces. Yet this attitude is predicated on its own bracketing, which is the elision of human interiority. Bennett argues that questions of subjectivity will inevitably “lead down the anthropocentric garden path”¹ of trying to disentangle and hierarchize subjects from objects. An olfactory phenomenology, by asking such questions, indeed runs this risk, but it is also a deeply anti-humanist and nonhierarchical engagement with matter and materiality.

Many (perhaps most) who theorize smell have noted its preeminent materiality.² Pulling on a gesture characteristic to “new materialist” thought, we identify matter not as some external and brute reality, but as an active principle, as that which is entangled and entangling. Olfaction, as a material sense, is not only embroiled in social, cultural, historical, and political milieus – it also entangles the human itself; it renders human interiority and subjective practices as always falling outward, always touched by a materialization/dematerialization that is volatile and immersive. Subjectivity itself, explored through olfaction, is porous and rife with difference. In short, olfaction not only grants a constitutive vitality to chemical-matter; it altogether trashes the notion of the individual person. The subject given by olfaction is atmosphere.

Binarizations between subject/object, inside/outside, and passive/active obviously make no sense under olfaction, and wholly collapse. Yet a phenomenological perspective can further bring attention to, and also entangle, the more nuanced though no less insecure dichotomies of social/biological, human/nonhuman, ground/air. It becomes a question of what problems, transactions, and potentials are opened up by approaching the subject as constituted by atmosphere, constituted as atmospheric, and continuing a phenomenological practice without the individual perceiver.

In closing, I would like to make a remark on stagnation. If there is an ethics here, it concerns speed. A thought I constantly found myself having was: “No, ‘this or that thing’ is not idle, trifling, or dormant; it is thick and slow but immensely energetic.” My approach necessitated an attenuation to a productiveness that is not

necessarily manifested as vigor. Fatigue, atmosphere, breakdowns (not cessations), fragility, fading, hanging: these are slow-moving, quiet, and viscous concepts. But they are neither inert, nor infrastructural. Discerning their productive character arises when one approaches the speed of phenomena with gentleness, not asking too much of it, moving too quickly through it, or dwelling on where the “human” stands in it. We emphasize once more: olfaction does not only describe subjects who are in a mood and in an atmosphere – it *configures* them as such. That is, it produces atmospheres and atmospheric subjects, and is productive of their shifting, reconfiguration, and emergence – which is to say that the entanglement of atmosphere and atmospheric-subject are crisscrossed and constituted by a power of transformation itself.

Notes

¹ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 120

² To name just a few: Barwich, *A Sense So Rare* (266); Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (119); and Chiang, Connie Y. "The Nose Knows: The Sense of Smell in American History." *The Journal of American History* 95:2 (2008): 405-416. Web.