



THE SMELL TREK
by Cordula Weissköppel

Making Sense!

Entering the Field of Sensory Studies.



**Joint Module organized by
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Syllabus (14 weeks, autumn term at UB: October - January)

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Sub-Units of the Module

Smell Trek: PD Dr. Cordula Weißköppel, UB

Sound Trek: Dr. Javier Gago Holzscheiter, UB

Visual Trek: Dr. Martin Gruber, UB

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Follow your Nose!

Instructions for Students to get involved in the Trek of Smelling

By Cordula Weisskoeppel (9.9.21)

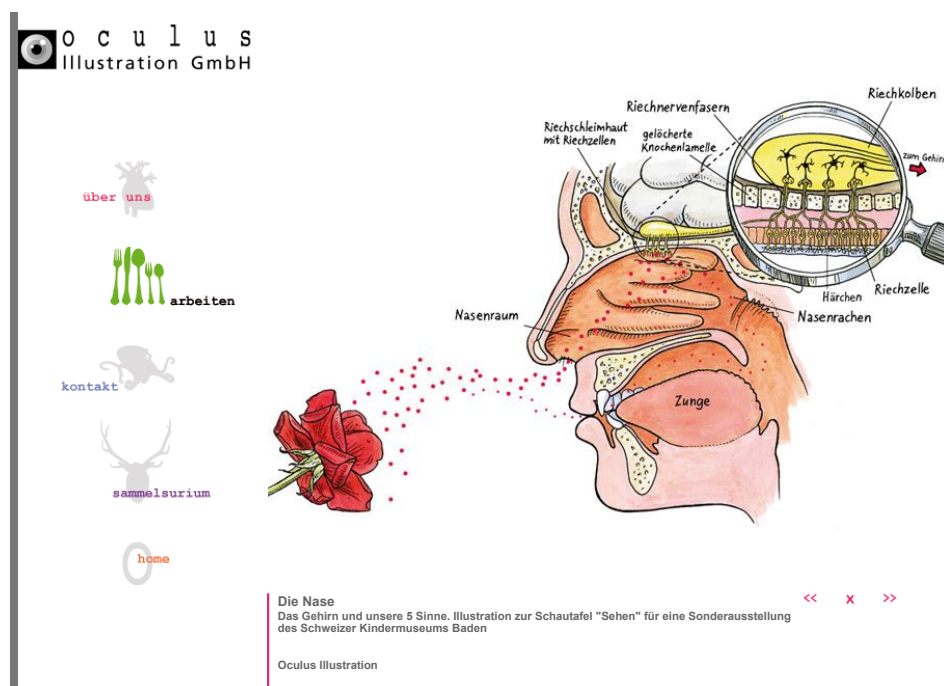
Welcome

The world of smell is fascinating and surprising, as smell is suddenly present. Think of the steam of coffee which spreads quite intensively through your kitchen when brewing it. After a few minutes the steam has disappeared completely, while your thoughts are still busy with the rising prices of your favorite coffee brand, or you feel reminded of a good friend you have met last week over a cup of cappuccino whereas at the moment you only need some caffeine in order to have a good start of the day.

Smells are embedded in our everyday life either at our home or in the public space of bakeries, markets and shopping malls. As smells are most often invisible, just in the air, they may circulate unintendedly or they can be arranged by intention. It is our nose with which we recognize the diverse smells and odours through a complex system of detection and codification via receptors, nerves and the olfactory part of the brain („amygdala“). Human beings are able to distinct between more than one billion (!) different smells, unbelievable. This might be one reason to start a trek into the world of smells: You are welcome!

1. **Station (synchrone, 1 SWS): What do you know about SMELL?** Please follow the questions in the **short quiz** – give your answers spontaneously – or do some quick research by *google* or other sources on the internet! Exchange your results with your tandem-partner or peer-group.

Perhaps you came across **anatomic pictures** which explicate the physical microsystem of your NOSE -? Compare these pictures with that one we have found:



Picture at: http://www.atelier-oculus.ch/11/source/kindermuseum_riechen_nase.html

2. **Station (a-synchrone, 1 SWS): HOW do we SMELL?**

Try to explain to your partner-s what you have understood from these anatomic pictures: e.g. How does the process of smelling function in or through your nose? How is the inner microsystem of your nose arranged? And how is the communication between molecule reception and denotation of certain smells in your brain organized? If you feel motivated to sketch your own picture, please do so!

As there are a number of experts in the natural sciences who have done research on these questions (e.g. in human biology and the neurosciences) please start reading the articles by Bettina Pause (2020) and Müller-Grünau (2018) to update your knowledge about the physiological processes of the human capacity to smell.

Questions on the texts for your independent Studies at home:

- What are the most important facts from your perspective?
- What have you learnt in these articles about the (physiologic) process of smelling?
- What do you think about the comparison between the human capacity of smelling and the olfactory skills of other animals and species?
- What kind of further questions arise? Please note them!

3. Station (synchron, 2 SWS): Domestic Smells and their connotations

As you have become well informed about the mechanism of your nose as the central sensory instrument of your body which is able to discover and to denote smells, we will now turn to a short excursion in your domestic sphere: in your office/ room and if possible, in your wider apartment.

Please listen to the voice (by the teacher or by the podcast) and follow the instructions, afterwards you need only a pen & paper for taking notes on your discoveries.

PODCAST 1: Domestic Smells

For Homework: Please write a detailed protocol about the excursion on domestic smells and upload it in your portfolio on StudIP:

- What were your main discoveries during your trip at home?
- Which smells were convenient, nice to have, and quite usual in your daily routines?
- Which smells did you freshly discover, which ones were unpleasant or ugly, which ones were pleasant, or even inspiring?
- What other insights did you have during your trip?

In addition please read the text by Herz (2006): „I smell what I like“. Prepare the text with an excerpt by answering at least these 3 questions:

- After reading, what is the author's encompassing message?
- How do humans know to differentiate between diverse smells, e.g. healthy ones and risky/dangerous ones?
- And what is meant by the conceptual differentiation between „denotation“ and „connotation“ of smells?

4. Station: Research on Smell by Cultural Sciences (Input by CW, synchron 4 SWS or as combination: a-synchron, 2+2 SWS)

I. What is specific of SMELL?

- A. In-visible presence
- B. Volatility – persistence
- C. Embeddedness in human-nonhuman encounters or interaction: smell production
- D. Evocative dimension: Imaginary and memorial potential

- Relational (no absolute/objective) meaning and knowledge about smell-s
- Contextual and situational analysis
- Exercise on individual, intersubjective and collective CONNOTATIONS (see **list of smells!**) -
- Established cultural meaning- and status system of different smells (in relation to taste)
- Cultural construction of meaning- and status systems through smell & taste

II. How can we analyse these different meaning-systems of smell?

- A. By historical research (reconstruction) how the meaning system has developed and changed during centuries; e.g. Alain Corbin (1984, 1982): *Pesthauch und Blütenduft*, read chapter 1+2!
- B. By comparison of different meaning-systems in different societies/ cultures/ milieus
 - The concept of „Smellscape“ (Porteous 2006) and ethnographic case studies (Obligatory to present shortly one of the case studies!)
- C. By own exploration of smellscape in our culture/ society... and how they relate to each other

5. **Station** (*asynchr*, 4 SWS =180 min): **Smells in a shopping mall:**

Please prepare yourself for an exploratory trip on different smellscape in a shopping mall: ¹ (duration ca. 4 hours incl. breaks) Choose a tandem-partner; download **the map of the shopping mall*** and the podcast 2/smell, parts 0-4 on your mobile phone; charge your mobile phone sufficiently before the trip; take a digital notebook/pad with you for your fieldnotes, as well as some drinks and snacks for your breaks - and don't forget a good mood, as you will meet your fellow students and other human beings!

(*If you don't live in Bremen, please choose a shopping mall/center which offers at least a supermarket, a drugstore, a shoe shop, or a bookstore)

Conduct the exploratory trip in the shopping mall with your tandem-partner: Choose at least 3 different shops/ smellscape, visit them one after each other. Take some time directly afterwards to write down your fieldnotes. Meet your tutor/teacher in the breaks in between and exchange about your first impressions orally.

For homework/ independent studies: Please write a full protocol on your trip: describe as detailed as possible what you have experienced and what kind of smells you have discovered. How did it smell in the shops, and how can you characterize these different variants or types of smells with words? To which event or person does the smell reminds you? And from a comparative perspective: How did the individual atmospheres or smellscape in the shops differ from each other? ...

6.A **Station** (*synchrone*, 2 SWS): **Take a break!** Have exchange about your first results in your peer group and in plenary: Bring your written notes, protocols and sketches you have created.... Share them with us, your partner or peer group for peer-reading and feedback.

¹ Alternatively: if you are more interested in historical approaches, read the book by A. Corbin (1984,1982), and prepare a presentation on section I, or II or III of this book!

After that decide on which shop/ smellscape (or other track of interest) you want to focus on during a second visit in the shopping mall. Write down your main questions or main concern for this second exploration.

6.B Station (*asynchrone, workload 2 SWS*): **Choose a Focus!** Conduct this second visit for max. 90 minutes, either independently or with your partner. Document your further experiences on smells in your chosen space by a series of pictures (5-10), and include them in your written protocol as a strategy of illustration (upload it in your portfolio).

7.Station: Present your discoveries: Let`s meet again on ZOOM (*synchrone, 4 SWS*), and let us have a look in your „basket“ or „backpacker“ (*individual presentations either in BOS or in plenary, depending on the number of participants*):

- What have you found? What are your main discoveries?
- How have you documented it – by words, by pictures, - by another strategy?
- What kind of challenges have you come across during this process of documentation and illustration?

Homework/ Independent Studies (*asynchrone*)

- Experiment with further strategies and styles of visualization in order to transform your written impressions on smell! Use our additional **TOOLBOX**, e.g. the **video on photoshooting** with your smartphones, or **HOW to use SCRIBUS**, an app which supports you to include pictures in your written text (see: Visual Trek!)
- Please read one of the mentioned texts (Margolie 2001; Turin 2006, Aftel 2006) and reflect about the author`s strategy HOW to document smell experiences! What do you like in the author`s approaches, what do you miss?

8. Station (*synchrone, 2 SWS*): **Final consultancy** about rework of YOUR visualized stories (in plenary or BOS) after submitting a short exposé on the following questions:

- Do you have already a title for your story?
- What is your main idea/ plot / insight?
- How do you want to structure your narration and how do you want to visualize it?
- What kind of references to authors read in the course or to other sources and references do you want to make?

9. Station (*asynchrone, independent Study*): **Create your story** on your main smell-experiences during the excursion-s. Upload it in your portfolio! (=part of the graded exam)

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