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Olfactory design: strategies and applications

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The paper aims to look into contemporary practices that use smells in architecture, design and landscape design and to find out general patterns and effects of such practices. The following considerations are to be seen in the context of a current interdisciplinary research program which aims to work out the “smellscape” of the city of Vienna and, on this basis, to identify resources for the creative intervention of designers and architects¹. Its working hypothesis is that the use of smells may not only highly enrich the individual’s holistic experience, but also enhance the feeling of authenticity and of belonging, because of their capability to create “airs” or “atmospheres”, to address personal memories and to evoke emotional states.

The public debate on smells, between science and marketing

Olfaction has become a favorite topic for public discussion due to at least four influences: of the *Nouvelle histoire*, of the sensory turn in the anthropology, of the recent discoveries in the life sciences and of the multi-sensory marketing and branding. In the history of mentalities and everyday practices, Alain Corbin’s famous book on the olfactory revolution in France between 1750 and 1850² gave a decisive impulse to the research of the smells of the past. His approach left traces even in the perfumery: the recent “archeological” trend endeavors to compose scents with a historic touch, for example by reconstructing the “smellscape” of the French aristocracy in the 18th and 19th century or that of writers (George Sand, Jules Verne, Colette), on the basis of literary sources³. This rather unusual historical interest in the art of scents had previously led to the creation in 1990 of the Osmothèque in Versailles, as a museum or archive of scents, and it may generally indicate the emergence of a new *collective memory of the senses*: And which sense can entail a stronger power of evocation than the olfaction, which already Schopenhauer had defined in contrast to the other senses precisely as the “sense of remembrance”⁴?

The body of research on odors was enriched significantly in the 1990s by the study of sensotypes or sensory models of other cultures in the social and cultural anthropology. The new anthropology of the senses, which takes its inspiration partly from the ethnological field studies in the 1950s and 1960s, is epitomized by the collective investigations of the Sensory Research Group in Canada⁵. From the perspective of the sensory anthropology, sensation is irreducible to mere physiological reactions to stimuli, but it represents the most basic field of cultural expression and the medium for the

enactment of social practices. The work of senses consists in the constitution of sense, that is, – according to Howes and Classen – in ascribing meaning to what it sensed, in ‘sensing’ the universe and ‘making sense of the world’⁶. Put it in other words, the senses translate the perceptive impressions into ‘worldviews’ and provide interpretations of the lived world. This implies that there is no such thing as an alleged “natural” condition of the human sensibility; on the contrary, senses are from the beginning embedded in specific cultural, social and not last political structures and thus are subject of a *policy of the senses*.

However, the recent general public interest in smells was apparently kept alive mainly by the popularization of scientific discoveries in the life sciences, such as the debates on the animal and human pheromones (volatile substances released by species, that trigger innate behavioral responses in another member of the same species) and the discovery of the vomeronasal organ (Jacobson’s organ) in the human nose, as an auxiliary olfactory sense organ with still not clarified functions; moreover, the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine was awarded in 2004 to Richard Axel and Linda B. Buck for their research on the “odorant receptors and the organization of the olfactory system”. Besides, the physiological mechanism of olfaction is still a matter of controversy: whereas, it is generally accepted the molecular biological explanation, according to which each smell corresponds to a specific structure of the cells receptors, Luca Turin put forward the theory that the smell of substances is based upon the frequencies of vibration of their molecules⁷.

In spite of such and other scientific uncertainties, the resources of the smells have been largely mobilized in the past few decades by marketing. Fragrances are successfully used in shopping malls, tourism, design and event marketing in order to create a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere, to enhance subconsciously the customers’ well-being and, by that, to raise the profits, guided by the principle: “Mood sells.” This sensible trend led Martin Lindstrom to estimate in 2005 that the future belongs to the five-dimensional-design (5D-design) and to the *synaesthetic brands*⁸. Extended inquiries of focus groups in 13 countries in North and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia and supplementary online interviews with over 2.000 people in USA, Great Britain and Japan provided the empirical basis for Lindstrom’s interpretation. It ensued that smell is ranked the second after sight as importance for the sensory experience, yet that less than 3% of the enterprises seem to consider investing in the design of branded smells, with the Singapore Airlines on the top of the companies that already use multi-sensorial brands. Lindstrom argues that sensory (inclusively olfactory) stimuli are able not only to *stimulate* the consumer, but also to *enhance* the sensory attractiveness and identity of a product and, finally, to *bond* the consumer to the brand, by lending a distinct profile to the brand and by integrating it into a philosophy of life. To generate fidelity is the last aim of the branding philosophy. Even though Lindstrom’s theoretical underpinning of what he called The Holistic Branding Proposition, as key-word for the future design, is rather eclectic and although we do not share his audacious idea that the model for the 5D-design should be sought in the synaesthetic religious experience, his approach has the merit of having called the attention to the importance of economy as global player in the field of sensory design and commercial interest cannot be eluded by aesthetics either.

To sum up the previous overview on the research of odors, the cultural history brought evidence for the extent to which the identity of a place and its memory are indebted to odors. The social and cultural anthropology raised the suspicion that the lack of olfactory

sensibility in the Western world and its ideal of shaping odorless environments are by no means inherent to an alleged universal human nature and that this sense can be educated, which opens the way for a *policy of the senses*. Last not least, marketing investigations emphasized not only the existence of a need of smells in our society, but also the power exerted by odors, in interaction with other stimuli. Given the absence of an adequate education of olfaction, this power over our moods might be used independent or even against the subject's will. *Identity, sensory policy, mood and synaesthetic (holistic) experience* will serve as leading threads in the text(ure) of the following considerations on the olfactory design.

The way to an odorless architecture

On other occasions we analyzed the aesthetics of odors in the field of perfumery⁹; therefore, we will focus here on design and architecture. The most elementary reflection about the lived experience indicates that spaces in general, the architectonic spaces in particular, are lived *with all senses*. Yet the theory of architecture tends to neglect smells; verbal descriptions of architectonic works and their presentations in the language of new media (photographs, films) gives the rather distorted impression that buildings and sites are mainly, if not exclusively images and combinations of shapes, materials and colors. This visual reductionism has been already targeted several times by critics.

The curious anosmia, or loss of ability to smell, in the contemporary theory of architecture is rooted to a large extent in the assumption that space is a void form, which has to be filled, and not a lived environment (in Marc Crunelle's words: "un milieu de la vie")¹⁰. Moreover, the belief is widespread not only among aestheticians that the concept of form is mainly visual or musical, but that it cannot be applied to smells. This implicit rejection of any intentional configuration of odors on aesthetic purposes is endorsed by the difficulty, if not impossibility, to represent odors, as long as representation is conceived as a sort of mental image. Consequently, we find ourselves in the situation to be surrounded by smells and exposed to their pleasant or unpleasant effects, yet without being able to describe them properly, not even to name them or to grasp them into a formula. Aesthetic treatises hardly mention any examples of odors and it has been said that even writers seldom ventured to describe the smell of buildings, of cities and their outskirts (e.g. Marcel Proust, Heimito von Doderer). In exchange, the "aerial subjects" of the urban planning¹¹ prefer to draw maps with the distribution of the 'Green spaces' (*Grünräume, espaces verts*) and to estimate the quality of life by calculating the number of square meters of greens per capita of population and by measuring the intensity of the gas emissions. All this is undoubtedly useful for all kinds of assessments, yet it does not say much about the pedestrian's real experience, who lives *à plain pied*, immersed in the smellscape of the city – and this was mostly conceived as being offensive.

This is another reason for the oblivion of aesthetic smells in the architecture theory: Modern architecture as well as urban planning did carry out an olfactory policy, however less by seeking the citizens' holistic sensory fulfillment and rather by putting into practice the principle *divide et impera*: The space was zoned on all scales (city, district, house, flat) according to human activities, biological functions and social status. This segregation of odors (e.g. of the industrial areas from parks) allowed then to focus on the suppression of the repugnant smells. By that, architects supported the movement of desodorisation, as part of an encompassing social and politic program that covered the

past two centuries and that proposed to improve the health condition of the working class and the situation of the crowded urban suburbs. The same hygienic purposes were aimed at, since the beginning of the 19th century, by the new founded, modern public health-care institutions, as well as by opening the former aristocratic parks and hunting districts to all city residents, irrespective of their social origins. This movement spread from England on the continental Europe and thrust aside those pre-modern customs that used to place fragrant plants in the lodgings and to spread herbs on streets and in churches on the occasion of religious ceremonies (e.g. in the Mediterranean cultures); along with them, modern medicine let disappear the fumigations, a common practice, until the 19th century, used in hospitals and in private residences, in order to refresh the air and to drive away diseases and epidemics.

The difficult comeback of smell

The battle against offensive smells has been essential for the emergence of the modern architecture and modern urban planning; now the time might have come to take into consideration also the positive effects of smells. Let us ask therefore which purposes can serve the olfactory design? First of all, it goes without saying that pleasant smells contribute to the spontaneous acceptance of a place and to its *habitability*; consequently, it should be possible to raise the quality of life of an environment through a deliberate use of natural and artificial fragrances. As it was already mentioned, in the 1980s it was discovered that the diffusion of certain smells (e.g. of fresh-baked bread in supermarkets) can help raise sell figures in general; this led to the development of the olfactory design of buildings as a method for a successful marketing. Furthermore, used in proper amounts, smells are not only able to delight, to relax and to open the souls for social interactions, but also to create specific “*atmospheres*”, entailing what Marc Crunelle has dubbed generally “poetical and affective dimensions”¹².

By enforcing the (positive) olfactory quality of a place, smells may contribute to enhance the residents’ *identification with a site* and to develop a deep sense of belonging; such a need is obvious in the case of the migrants, of the clients of geriatric centers and of the stationary patients of hospitals and rehabilitation centers but might be presumed also in general. For that purpose there could be identified first specific smells which are either desired (by residents, municipality, etc.) or associated traditionally in a positive manner with a place. To take one example, asked how their city smells like, the population of Vienna use to evoke spontaneously the smell of lilac, of horses (due to the horse cab tours for tourists in the inner city), of *Würstl* (sausages) and water. As a matter of fact, the parks and streets of Vienna, not to mention the forests of the so-called “green belt”, that surround the city, host plenty of other fragrant plants, such as lime trees, acacias, honeysuckle, etc., however, for the Viennese, their city smells mainly of lilac, followed by roses. The fact that the subjects we interviewed¹³ had mentioned the odors even before they could localize them in the urban space confirms our hypothesis that the olfactory profile of a city represents an imaginary construction, which nourishes itself both from phenomenological data (lived experience) and from learned cultural clichés (e.g. in our case study, the German film *When white lilac blooms again*¹⁴). However, what it counts here is not so much the correct answer to the question how does a city really smell like (which can be measured and analyzed with chemical methods), but rather the very existence of mental representations about the olfactory identity of a place; the perceptions

are subjected to a subjective selection during which it is decided what is characteristic for the city and what not. The designers' and architects' interventions in public spaces interact necessarily with these representations, be it by enforcing a supposed already existing identity, be it by modifying it, correcting it, enriching or even contradicting it.

Smells can indeed make us feel well or "at home" in a place, but under special conditions they can fulfill also other tasks. Just to confine the discussion to the landscape architecture, the Gardens for the blind are deliberately designed with pedagogic purposes, in order to facilitate to visually impaired children a hands-on learning about plants. Also the evocative power of smells proved its utility in the case of aged people, particularly for those who suffer of Alzheimer and dementia. The horticultural therapy owes its efficacy to the patients' active involvement in gardening (Germ. *Ergotherapie*). Furthermore, the work in the garden, with its specific rhythms according to seasons, structures the patients' daily and even annual program and gives a purpose and a perspective to their life, whereas the natural odors of plants and of the earth bind them to the past and recall the gardens they had previously. In other words, the odors of the gardens serve as an element of continuity for confused patients. Nevertheless, both the pedagogic and the therapeutic dimension of odors transgress the field of olfactory design as an aesthetic activity and are addressed to specific groups. Therefore we will focus in the following on the hedonic and identity functions of the olfactory design.

But before that, one should not overlook that in spite of the real potential of the olfactory design, due to its psychological effects and the available techniques at present, it has also its drawbacks. Most obvious is a technical disadvantage: the diffusion of smell cannot be steered and controlled as precisely as for other sensory stimuli, e.g. like a projector. This difficulty to turn on and off at will or to regulate the intensity of odors, as it is possible with light and sound, is well-known in the theatre and in the event marketing; from the same reason, Harold Osborne manifested skepticism that odors can be used for aesthetic purposes¹⁵. Also the caution not to annoy allergic consumers (even though allergies have rather "tactile" than olfactory causes) inspired the recommendation to employ smells moderately („subtly, not massively"¹⁶) when staging events; we leave here open the question how far this aesthetic rule might be indebted to the Western codes of sensibility.

What else can speak against the shaping of the olfactory form of a place? For example, the olfactory interventions in the indoor space have to deal with the fact that any smellscape hardly consists in a single note, but in variable mixtures of smells. The materials of construction, the pieces of furniture, the people's body smells and artificial scents, not to mention their activities (cooking, etc.) merge into each other and melt with the odors coming from outside, which at their turn vary with the weather conditions. Some of these factors escape a deliberate design. An architect can choose the materials to be used, but the space as a milieu of life, be it a garden, be it an enclosed space, develops also after the architect has handed it over to the client. In the long run, time leaves traces and reveals itself as an aesthetic agent. The atmospheres emerge slowly and infinitesimally, like through a secret alchemy, in a never ending process; they can be felt in old houses, old staircases, traditional cafés and in vintage shops, whose smells have mysteriously preserved the "essence" of their past inhabitants' life.

Another difficulty of the olfactory design is emphasized by the marketing experts. The tourism marketing has focused so far on optical stimuli and logos; now the creative directors of international hotel chains call for developing branded smells and sounds

which enable the customer to recognize spontaneously the hotel after the smell of the lobby or the sound of the shower¹⁷. Like all other trademarks, they can be used as vehicles in the advertisement (for example by inserting fragrant stripes in travel magazines). In exchange, the producers require a *legal protection of the smell brands* against unfair competition. But can be smells branded?

Generally can be registered as trademarks words, images, drawings and graphics, letters, figures and their combinations, colors, original three-dimensional forms (e.g. of Lego), as well as sensory signs (sound, smell, taste and touch), as long as they are “capable of graphical representation”¹⁸. Even so, the trademark legislation in Germany included the three-dimensional signs, the olfactory, tactile and culinary signs on the list of potential trademarks only after the reform in 1995¹⁹ and requires to reproduce at least the chemical formula of the smell²⁰. On the contrary, Great Britain posed no restriction about the mode of graphical representation; what counts is that the sign is enough clear and distinct to allow its identification just by reading the register. In spite of such differences between the legislation in the European Union, Great Britain and the United States, the “clear drawing of the mark”²¹ represents an indispensable condition in all these countries, which allows the recording on the register.

As a matter of fact, the Office for Harmonisation of the Internal Market (OHIM) branded in the European Community few odor marks, such as the smell of freshly cut grass for tennis balls (in the Benelux), the fragrance of roses for tires and the odor of bitter beer, applied to flights for darts (both in the UK), not to mention perfumes²². Other applications were rejected; one of them was represented before the German Trade and Patent Office by the European Patent Attorney and doctor in organic chemistry Ralf Sieckmann (Düsseldorf) in 2002; in his appeal to the European Court of Justice, Sieckmann asked whether the requirement of representation might be fulfilled also by providing chemical formulas and descriptions of the olfactory “sign” or by submitting a deposit of an odor sample. In its answer, the European Court of Justice confirmed the possibility to register non-visual marks under the condition of their distinct character, yet it rejected all the above mentioned alternative modes of representation; this regulation is thought of to have made it “well-nigh impossible to register smell marks for Europe in the future”²³.

Strategies of olfactory design

Admitting now that positive smells may be deliberately used by architects and designers what strategies can be applied in order to enhance already existing odors, to cover negative smells or, finally, to experiment with new odors? We suggest the existence of mainly three elementary strategies: a ‘cosmetic’ one, a ‘natural’ and a ‘technological’ strategy.

1. The first procedure covers the basic odor of an object or place by adding artificial fragrances, like in a sort of make-up; therefore we dubbed it the *cosmetic strategy*. This was occasionally used in the production of perfumed objects such as newspapers, postcards and envelopes, toys, designer furniture and watches, and it became generally accepted in the branch of toilet requisites and household supplies.

To the avant-garde of this kind of design belongs also the automobile industry, which Lindstrom qualified as one of the pioneers of the Sensory Design, together with the pharmaceutical industry. Enquiries ensued that “a huge 86 percent of the consumers in the United States find the smell of a new car appealing, whereas only 69 percent of Europeans feel the same way”²⁴. Moreover, many drivers appreciate the new-car smell as one of the highest rewards when they purchase a new automobile. In response, the manufacturers use to add this smell to the undersides of the car’s seats shortly before it leaves the factory. According to estimations, the new-car smell lasts about six weeks. This technique is not exempt of an artistic touch when it comes to reconstruct the smell of old cars, such as that of the 1965 Silver Cloud Rolls-Royce. An analysis of the smell of a real Silver Cloud identified about 800 individual odors that compounded the mixture, including mahogany, leather, oil and petrol. Also Cadillac, Ford and Chrysler designed specific branded aromas. Citroën 4 was even offering as standard in 2005 a scent-diffuser in the ventilation system with a range of nine different scents, grouped into three classes: vitality, travel and well-being. The innovation was meant to solve the paradox that car producers usually aim to prevent any odors coming through the interior, whereas sales of car air fresheners are booming. As a matter of fact, this presumed “paradox” confirms the assumption that a change of attitude toward odors has already taken place and that the traditional (modern) suspicion against odors competes nowadays with the wish to experiment odors.

Essential for this strategy is that artificial fragrances (most of which imitate natural odors) are integrated in pieces of furniture or diffused via air-condition. This is the most common technique of the olfactory design and marketing used in Austria and Germany. Empirical tests carried out in shopping centers brought evidence about its positive psychological effects: the fragrant “atmosphere” creates a sensation of well-being, intensifies the agreeable perception of a place and makes the place hard to forget. Also the customer tends to underestimate the time she spent in the building. However, not all fragrances relax, some of them are used in offices to support the power of concentration.

2. The *natural* (or should we call it *ecological*?) *strategy* opens the indoor space to the green odors outside the building. Like the “cosmetic” odorous practices, also this strategy is as old as architecture, just think of the medieval abbeys and the Moorish palaces in Spain, whose patios permeate the rooms with fragrances. A contemporary example is the “Finnhaus” designed by the French architect Dominique Groz²⁵. The house, which has been advertised with the key words: “Heat, climate, smell and aesthetics”, seems to turn the back to the world and to face the garden; this orientation is achieved by placing all the representative rooms, with their large windows and balcony, on the side of the garden, whereas the functional space is concentrated on the side of the street. Dwelling, says its advertisement, becomes here a cocooning.

3. Finally, the *technological strategy* neither adds alien smells, nor lends them from the outdoors, but lets them evolve from within; in other words, it resorts to materials of construction that smell pleasantly. The entire wood architecture (including the Finnhaus) falls under this category. At the same time, new materials may be developed with specific olfactory qualities. Good examples in that sense provides the textile design: the “Futurotextiles” Lille 3000 (opened between October 2006 and January 2007) presented ‘intelligent’ fabrics and fibers which emit different scents according to the subject’s emotional state or that allow to eliminate body smells in camouflage clothing, due to their

antimicrobial properties. This third strategy appears to be the most innovative and promising.

Scented gardens

Landscape architecture is a suited example to conclude with, even though it seems to blur the above mentioned distinction between the three strategies of olfactory design: Vegetal odors “dress up” a place and refresh the air indoors; its “materials” are natural per definition; last not least, new species of plants are bred with regard not only to their colors, forms and texture, but also to their specific fragrances. Given the synaesthetic experience of the green spaces, practically each garden should be considered *ipso facto* a fragrant one; however, upon a closer examination this general supposition appears to be untenable. Discussions we had with landscape designers seem to indicate that there are different approaches also corresponding to their academic background (architecture or botany). For example, the landscape *architects* tend to handle green spaces as open spaces, without paying particular attention at the diversity of the vegetal repertoire. Also it is hard to resist the temptation (and the client’s requirement) to present a green space as a completed picture, without predicting its further development, due to the growth of plants, to the ageing of materials and eventually to yet unknown future uses of the place.

Another proof that not all parks stimulate nor satisfy to the same extent the need of smells is the inventory of the public gardens and parks of the health-care institutions in Vienna, which aimed to identify needs of intervention from landscape designers²⁶. The author, a Vienna-based architecture office, mentioned in full detail the size of the garden and how it looked like, if it was quiet or affected by the sound of the traffic; they registered the number of visitors and their activities, as well as described the affective atmosphere evoked by the garden – yet they never mentioned smells, neither in a positive way, nor in order to complain about them. Was this blatant absence a lapse of the authors? An answer to this question can be found in the conclusion of their field research, where it says: “Further possibilities of occupation, gardening, sensory experience of the outdoors space (smell, feel, touch), contact to plants or animals or deliberate integration of the environment is intended almost nowhere in the hospitals and in very few nursing homes and senior residences.”²⁷ Since then, horticultural therapy made progresses in Vienna and is practiced in the Geriatric Centre Am Wienerwald and in the Otto Wagner Hospital, also in co-operation with educational institutions (the Agro-pedagogical Academy, the University of Agronomy). Nevertheless, this therapy is mainly a form of *Ergotherapie* and thus places into the foreground the patients’ physical activities. As for smells, even though common herbs are cultivated in these gardens and the therapists are aware of the positive effect of their scents on patients, we could not identify so far examples for a specific focus on smells in Vienna. Nevertheless, specialists recommend to hospitals and sanatoriums to set up gardens with medicinal plants and therapy gardens with meditative areas, fragrant lawns, “places for smell” and areas with aromatic herbs²⁸.

More promising as fragrance gardens are the *Gardens for the blind* and the visually impaired. The first one was grounded in 1936 in Exeter; other gardens followed in Boston, Vienna (1959), Bremen, Hamburg, St. Gallen, Graz, etc. Due to their visitors’ peculiarities, the structure of the place has to be simple and clear, in order to permit an easy orientation; this goal can be attained also by laying paths made of different materials. High beds enable the tactile exploration of plants and pots with fragrant plants

are placed alongside garden seating. Scented hedgerows serve as road marks or separate the garden from the neighbored areas. Some gardens house occasionally touch walls with various surfaces and acoustic installations, as well as special trails, called “beaten tracks” (*Trampelpfade*), for those herbs that release odors only when they are rubbed, crushed or when we walk on them.

The olfaction is a topic also in the somewhat fashionable concept of the *Gardens for the senses* or Sensory gardens, which are widespread from India to Germany. These are divided into distinct areas, dedicated to each of the five traditional senses. Most of these gardens for the senses are generation gardens and address either infants, toddlers and young pupils or seniors and impaired elder people²⁹. For example, the „kindergarten-gardens“ (such as in Freiburg in Breisgau or on the “Flower Island” Mainau in Lake Constance) aim to back up and stimulate the psycho-physical development of the children by offering them a wide range of stimuli to perceive, grasp, smell, feel, combine or to experiment by hands-on learning. Beside this holistic sensory experience, gardens are important places for social interactions and exchange; as such, smell is, like all the other sensory stimuli, integrated in a complex experience.

If not all gardens, at least all kitchen gardens (*Kräutergarten*) and rose gardens (*Rosarium*) with Old Garden Roses are fragrance gardens. Essential forerunners of the scented gardens were in Europe the medieval gardens. Later on, in the 18th century, the multi-modal sensory experience of the baroque gardens appears to have been seriously impoverished, since the art of the garden was at that time conceived in analogy with the fine (visual) arts, as a subcategory of the landscape painting (Kant) or as a combination of architectonic and pictorial elements (Hegel)³⁰. On the background of the aforementioned hygienic and political priorities of the urban planning in the 19th century, public parks were meant as oases of clean, fresh air in the middle of the industrialized cities – but nothing more. In the 20th century, vast parks were set up on the occasion of the international horticultural shows, which contained fragrant areas (such as the rose garden in the Donaupark in Vienna, opened in 1964). Temporary horticultural shows are dedicated to specific fragrance plants (rose, pelargonium, etc.), and perfume manufactures (e.g. Fragonard in Grasse/Provence) do not miss to advertise their exquisite scented gardens which are open to the public.

More common are nowadays in public and private gardens of all sizes the herb spirals, which present the advantage to accommodate plants of two microclimates: low Mediterranean herbs, in the upper half, and growing herbs that can tolerate shade and water runoff in the lower areas. This motif was occasionally taken up also by landscape architects³¹. Some projects of landscape design allude to scents only verbally, but do not imply any olfactory experience; for example, the “French scented bush” consisted of trimmed hedges in form of perfume flacons. Other ideas suggest indirectly an olfactory experience, such as “The Fountain of Youth”³², a large area covered with flowers, in the middle of which one could descend like in the homonymous fountain, before reaching – rejuvenated – the surface again. A well-known example is the Scent Tunnel (*Dufittunnel*) created by Olafur Eliasson in Wolfsburg (Germany): the tunnel of steel is suspended over the water and contains about 2.000 potted plants, disposed in rows. The inspiration for this walk-through living greenhouse came to the Danish artist from the medieval kitchen gardens. No matter how spectacular the idea and its marketing, too, might be (the artist announced his intentions to provide an architectonic, spatial stage, i.e. an artistic platform for the sense of olfaction³³), from a botanic perspective the project is less convincing:

Most plants were selected by the artist among the usual garden flowers of the region (wallflower, tufted violet, vanilla, calamint, lavender, sage, etc.) and the highly praised seasonal changes of the scent tunnel are no novelty for any gardener either. In sum, such artistic projects cannot compete with the diversity and the rarities of the botanic gardens, which, at their turn, – in spite of the delectation they produce to the visitors – make hardly the object of aesthetic reflections.

Let us confine now the discussion to the ‘botanic’ stream in landscape design, where a higher competence, let alone interest, for the fragrance of plants are expected. This expectation is indeed met by the authors of gardening manuals – even though a minority –, who describe and classify the odors of plants according to various criteria. For example, the fragrance of the plants displays diverse manners of “behavior”: it may be persistent or transitory, it may be dull, hesitant, constant, reliable, withdrawn and tired or, on the contrary, vivid, sparkling and capricious³⁴; the scents can rest (*ruhende Düfte*) or wander (*Wanderdüfte, Umherdufter*)³⁵. The plants are also grouped into fragrance families (aromatic, fruity, sweet, putrid, rooty, smelling of citrus, pepper, wood, earth, resin, honey, etc.). Further criteria for the plant lists are the fragrant organ of the plant (leaves, roots, inflorescence, etc.) and the intensity of the scent (from “weak” to “extraordinarily intensive”). Significant for the selection of vegetation is also the time of the day when the plants release their fragrance into the air, either under the heat of the sun or at night; there are even few plants that smell differently during the day and at night.

Speaking about aesthetic appreciation, why should not imagine then the possibility to set up an orchestra-like garden, where each plant gives away its tone, in consonance or counterpoint, concomitantly or successively with the ‘voices’ of the others – and all that according to the fragrant score of the gardener-composer, who takes into consideration the natural calendar of blossoming and the usual weather conditions (e.g. the wind directions) of the site? The idea might seem audacious and it is also doubtful that all visitors may bring the required olfactory sensitivity to ‘hear’ the single notes and accords of the symphony of fragrances, but why not dream about, since both scents and gardens are renowned for their capacity to transpose the subject into a contemplative state? Monitoring the fragrance cycles of a garden is in any case an exemplary exercise of patience, as well as an olfactory training, not to mention its valuable lesson of slowing down the rhythm of life.

As for space, it is obvious that all these smells can be experienced only *in situ* and cannot be recorded and reproduced, as it is possible with the visual landscape and its sounds. Why are then gardens and parks so seldom included in city tours? On one hand, each garden is bound to a specific place and to its relief, soil and climate; as such, it embodies a *site* or place in the phenomenological meaning of the word³⁶ and has a unique local identity, which cannot be exported. On the other hand, the art of the garden is fundamentally international and its concepts (as “French garden”, “English garden” or “Japanese garden”) are applied worldwide.

Shaping a distinct identity of places is not the only goal that sensory policy pursues. Particularly the use of the public green spaces raises the question what functions do they play nowadays in general and what do we expect from the fragrance gardens in particular? In other words, which (historical) form may serve as model and source of inspiration? Is it the common vegetable garden or the garden with aromatic herbs? Is it

rather the *jardin de plaisir*, once a “privileged space of aristocratic sociability”³⁷, or the modern democratic public park, as a site of hygiene and education for the urban population? Parks appear at present as patchworks for diverse groups and activities; correspondingly, they are zoned in sport grounds, wood for walks, terraces for lecture, playing grounds, forum for discussions and botanical museum, etc. Where can be found the suitable place for a fragrance garden in this panorama? And not last, what does the olfactory design aim at: to instruct, to divert, to heal or simply to relax and delight?

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¹ The research program „Haptic and olfactory design. Resources for Vienna’s Creative Industries“ (www.univie.ac.at/tastduftwien) is a co-operation between the University of Vienna, the University of Applied Arts, the University of Agronomy and ZOOM-Kindermuseum (all in Vienna). The project is financed by the Wiener Wissenschafts-, Forschungs- und Technologiefonds (WWTF).

² Corbin, Alain, *Le Miasme et la Jonquille. L’odorat et l’imaginaire social XVIII^e–XIX^e siècle*, Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1982.

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