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**OLFACTIVE FRAMES OF REMEMBERING:
NOTES ON THE SMELLS OF MEMORIES**

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‘While sociological theories try to shed light on the workings of collective memory, this rapidly expanding field of research is assisted by the shift taking place in sociology from the study of social structures and normative systems to the study of ‘practice’, stimulated by the growing interest in culture as the constitutive symbolic dimension of all social processes’ (Miztal 2003: x).

Introduction

Oftentimes, the study of social memories divides its approach based on social groupings, such as working class memories (DeBouzy 1990), collective memories, gender memories, or on individual life histories/stories (Morrison 1998; Ochberg 1994), usually with a concern for traumatic memories such as the Holocaust (Buruma 1995), or the Second World War (Chang 1997). Instead of locating social memories through such groupings, or events-based trajectories, this paper ruminates on the role of smell in one’s recollection of the past, and how such recollections may have bearings on one’s experiences in the present. Hence, I add to the plethora of social memory and emotion scholarship by including the sensorial aspects linked with one’s remembrance of the past, which is often neglected in these studies. In this way, I argue, in tandem with Miztal (2003) that the study of remembering the past, needs to locate the embodiedness in which the past is being recollected. Miztal contends that embodiedness ‘alerts us to the ways in which our *feelings and bodily sensations*, generated in the past, help to interpret that past’ (2003: 77, my emphasis).

Here, I refer to olfactory sensations as employed by respondents¹ in recounting about their past, and how such sensations may have consequences in their present day experiences. Therefore, smells offer what I term olfactive frames of remembrance (see also Low 2003) for social actors, in their recounting of pleasant and less pleasant memories. By extension, I also probe into the ways by which memory is socially experienced. The paper thus aims to contribute

¹ This article is an extension of my research on sociocultural aspects of olfaction in everyday life experiences (Low 2004). Data presented in this work are derived from narrative interviews conducted through face-to-face and email interviews, depending on the preference of each respondent. A majority of the respondents are Singaporeans, except for anosmic individuals (who have lost their sense of smell through accidents or illnesses), as it was difficult to locate anosmic respondents in Singapore. This paper was presented at the XVI International Sociological Association World Congress of Sociology held in Durban, South Africa, 23-29 July 2006.

to and extend our understanding of various *lieux de mémoire*² or sites of memory (such as biographies, poetry, songs, monuments, films, memorabilia, photography and painting) to include the sense of smell as an intangible but one of many crucial vehicles and nodes in triggering the remembering of one's past. It may perhaps be plausible to argue that attention paid to olfaction may thus offer an insight into different episodes in olfactive-autobiographical memories (see Misztal 2003: 78). Smells are therefore conduits which are often associated with experiences, people and places. In short, one's memories are certainly richly sedimented with sensorial (or in this case, olfactive) experiences.

Apart from propositioning the role of smell in biographical recollection, the paper also hopes to highlight a need to bring in notions of sensorial-bodily experiences in qualitative inquiry, drawing inspiration from similar arguments put forward by such scholars as Gillies *et al.* (2004), Kleinman and Kleinman (1994), and Sandelowski (2002). Gillies *et al.*, for instance, locate the creation and use of memory work among themselves, as a way to explore embodied practices of sweating and pain. In this attempt, the focus is placed upon studying the 'socially constructed nature of bodily processes from an embodiment standpoint – where embodiment is viewed as always a total expression of both the discursive and non-discursive' (2004: 100). Consequently, the authors argue that 'embodied experience is both performed and constituted within a number of practices, events and activities in the social world' (*ibid.*). Attention paid to embodied discourses in memories of sweat and pain therefore, highlight the importance of addressing how bodily practices 'impinge upon subjectivity, self and identity' (2004: 101).

In similar vein, Sandelowski argues that qualitative inquiry, in its naïve reliance on the interview, as well as its tendency to neglect the material world, has led to qualitative research which is far from being as 'full-bodied' as it should be. She points out that there is thus a need to re-embody qualitative inquiry so as to move beyond Western cultural tendencies to separate body from mind, which unfortunately veils the potential of locating the body as a 'point of departure for any process of knowing' (2002: 104). A misnomer of the qualitative interview, according to Sandelowski, is that it does not entirely offer 'privileged access to authentic experience, private worlds and true selves' (2002: 105), despite being recognised as the 'gold standard' for data collection in qualitative research (see Silverman 2000: 291). Sandelowski maintains that qualitative researchers are 'in danger of taking what people say in interviews at face value as revealing *what is behind the face*, and thus are in danger of being taken in (2002: 106, italics in original). She substantiates this observation by providing an example of how a recently published study of a group of low-income persons suffering from psychiatric disorders pointed to

² See Nora (1996).

complaints from these patients about their health care providers. The researchers of the study took what these patients brought up as factual, without verifying the experiences on the side of the care providers. Sandelowski suggests that ‘feelings of mistreatment expressed in talk might be symptomatic of these [patients’] condition, that this talk might be a narrative strategy designed to present themselves in a certain way or to cope with their disorder’ (2002: 106). In this manner, the study, according to Sandelowski, was lacking in many aspects, such as failing to give voice to the health care providers, and failing to move beyond mere interview data to look at other avenues of social experiences including observing interactions between the patients and the care givers, or a review of patient records in order to ascertain what the care providers were saying about these patients.

Sandelowski maintains that it is not her intention to discount the usefulness of interviews as a glimpse into social realities, but rather, to point towards more effective ways of utilising such a qualitative avenue, by seriously considering the kinds of discourses and constructs that emerge in the course of the interview, and how these varied accounts are to be analysed accordingly. Besides critiquing the interview, Sandelowski also discusses insufficiency or inadequacy of participant observation, which usually does not take into account the role of the senses of the researcher. She argues that we ‘tend to forget that observation is not confined to looking but, rather, encompasses all of a researcher’s senses’ (2002: 108). She continues: ‘Although qualitative researchers have become increasingly used to taking account of themselves in their research, these selves are rarely depicted as embodied selves’ (*ibid.*, italics in original). In tandem with Sandelowski’s call for more attention to be paid to the senses in order to locate embodiedness in research, I have carried out participant observation in racial enclaves of Singapore with respondents, in a bid to locate how they utilise the sense of smell in perceiving and locating notions of ‘race’ and ‘space’ via olfactive and other sensorial encounters (see Low 2005). Such a derivation of participant observation as method, is what I term as ‘smellscape walkabouts’ (*ibid.*). By using this method, it is recognised that the senses, as an avenue of embodied awareness, enhance participant observation in that both the bodies of the respondents and the researcher are accorded due attention, thus making qualitative research more ‘full-bodied’, robust, and richly textured. This is effectively articulated by Sandelowski (2002: 111-112):

Accordingly, there is as urgent a need to reembody qualitative research as there is to reembody theory in the social science and practice disciplines. We should spend as much time developing our visual, tactile, and other sensory skills, as we currently spend on developing our “reading” skills...Qualitative researchers must remember that lived experience is also embodied experience. [As] people relate to the world with and through their bodies, [this thus warrants for an incorporation of] the corporeal and the material, [so that] we qualitative researchers can ensure a robust and full-bodied research encounter.

In their study on exploring the trauma of political violence in Chinese society, Kleinman and Kleinman investigate the ways by which social memory recollection takes place through processes mediating and transforming the social and the corporal (1994: 708), and argue that research should be devoted to ‘*how* sociosomatic processes shape the experience of the body in its social contexts, [challenging] much of what passes for understanding in the interpretive sciences, which are more concerned with *what* the body’s cultural form means and *why* its representation differs in different epochs and among different groups’ (1994: 711, italics in original). In this respect, more attention should be given to studying the ‘processes that mediate and transform the bodily forms of social experience’ (ibid.).

In line with the attempt to reembody qualitative inquiry, and taking the lead from the works of authors discussed above, this paper thus places emphasis upon the ways in which social actors recollect their past experiences with smell as a conduit of memory recall. More pertinently, I argue that smells act as an elicitor of memory, whereby memory recollections become imbued with emotional qualities (Dorland 1993; Misztal 2003; Vroon 1994). Biographical narrations, drawn from narrative interviews framed within a phenomenological approach, form the basis of empirical data to be analysed herein. Olfactive frames of remembrance emerge in my analysis of narrative data, including such domains as childhood memories, familial relationships, relationships with partners, as well as memories of difficult times and hardship. Additionally, I locate within these frames different themes of memory recall, by looking at such issues as (1) olfactive and other sensorial outlets as triggers of memory; (2) olfactive memory which affects behaviour and attitude in the present-day context; (3) notions of nostalgia and food consumption; (4) emotional associations and attachment; and (5) olfactive-spatial links in memory recollection. Cumulatively, the analyses will show how actors project their sense of self, how they reformulate their experiences and relationships with others vis-à-vis smell as a point of reference for recalling the past, imbued with emotional discourses of joy, happiness, sadness, and nostalgia. In sum, processes of remembering and reconstruction would throw light upon how memories are both socially and physiologically experienced.

Analyses of embodied experiences through smell as a medium is undertaken by locating narrative accounts via language as a tool of description (where writing becomes the medium used in representing sensorial/embodied experiences). In this process, one may question how experience can be fully understood with mere recourse to linguistic description of such sensorial encounters as smells and memory recall. To address this critique, I draw inspiration from Csordas (1994) and Pink (2004). Csordas, for example, puts forward his argument concerning the relationship between ‘language’ and ‘experience’. He notes that instead of employing a

polarisation of language and experience where the latter is mediated by the former, (and hence, one cannot really study experience) ‘one can instead argue that language gives access to a world of experience in so far as experience comes to, or is brought to, language’ (1994: 11). By extension, then, ‘language not only represents or refers but “discloses” our being-in-the-world’ (ibid.). This viewpoint is also adopted by Pink (2004), who maintains that writing is not totally inappropriate in conveying or representing sensory experiences. Interestingly, other scholars such as Gillies *et al.* (2004) are of the opinion that linguistic representation cannot fully convey actual experiences of pain, and that written memories may thus not necessarily ‘provide an integrated view of our selves as embodied subjects’ (2004: 111). Apart from recourse to language in disseminating qualitative research on embodiment, the authors suggest a movement away from ‘discourse reductionism’, by employing other methods of expression such as drawing and painting. In short, then, I adhere to the stances of Csordas and Pink, by locating sensorial experiences within linguistic expression in this paper - where reliance on language to codify sensory inputs is necessary (Press & Minta 2000; see Classen 1993, chapter 3 for a discussion on the sensory connotations of select words; and also, Popova 2003) - and leave other means of communicating and analysing such experiences to future research.

The paper is organised in the following manner: I first provide a discussion concerning the links between smells and memory recollection, by referring to literature in both the ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ sciences, ranging from psychology and physiology, to sociology and anthropology. The discussion will serve to provide examples of how smells are effective cues in the recollection and construction of autobiographical memory. Next, I elucidate the various frames of remembrance iterated earlier, by discussing experiences of respondents who utilise smell as a social intermediary in discussions of their past experiences. The notion of smell as a medium for memory recall is also adopted by Howes, who suggests that one ought to consider ‘how sensory phenomena may function as social symbols apart from, or in association with specific individual or collective memories’ (2003: 44). The discussion will be supplemented by further deliberations on the ways in which smells trigger memories which are linked to emotional states of being (Ehrlickman & Bastone 1992), as exemplified by social actors’ narrations. I conclude by arguing for more attention to be devoted to the senses and the body, as fruitful points of departure in qualitative research, with a proposition that social reality and experience are, more often than not, influenced and acted upon, with the senses as guiding elements, apart from other factors. This paper thus is an attempt at offering a sensual-olfactive approach towards analysing biographical narration, as well as a call for reembodying qualitative inquiry.

Literature Background on Smells and Memories

In the fields of physiology and psychology, scholars have attempted to study the relation between smells and memories (for example, Aggleton & Waskett 1999; Cann & Ross 1989; Herz *et al.* 2004; Rubin *et al.* 1984). Most of them argue that smells form effective cues in one's memory recollection, and draw references to the Proustian phenomenon (Proust 1982), a famous episode whereby Proust's literary anecdote demonstrates his vivid recall of his childhood and his auntie, after having dipped a madeleine biscuit into his tea. Proust muses (1982: 48, 50):

[My mother], seeing that I was cold, offered me some tea, a thing I did not ordinarily take. I declined at first, and then, for no particular reason, changed my mind. She sent for one of those squat, plump little cakes called "petites madeleines", which look as though they had been moulded in the fluted valve of a scallop shell. And soon, mechanically, dispirited after a dreary day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin...And suddenly the memory revealed itself. The taste was that of the little piece of Madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray, when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my aunt Léonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of tea or tisane...

He goes on to explain the evocative power by which the merging of the smell and taste of the biscuit and tea brought forth such vivid recollection of the past (1982: 50-51):

But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.

Proust's anecdote does have biological bearings, as proposed by Winter (1976: 17-18):

Our olfactory ability is ten thousand times more sensitive than our sense of taste. Furthermore, olfaction, among all our various senses, is the one with the most direct connections to the basic drive areas of our brains. Unlike the signals of the other senses, which first go through the brain's relay system, the thalamus, smell messages go directly to the behaviour centres and are therefore least subject to rational self-control. Aromas, as a result, can bring back memories or move us to actions without our even realising it.

Winter elaborates upon the evocative power of smells in generating memories (1976: 22):

Odour memory is less influenced by the passage of time than auditory and visual memories. In one experiment, subjects were shown pictures and after a few seconds were asked to recall what they had seen. Recall was almost 100 percent. But after 120 days, it was only 50 percent. By contrast, in a similar experiment, odour recall was 70 percent immediately after exposure to scents and 70 percent 120 days later. Once remembered, smells are rarely if ever forgotten. Scientists believe this is because odours stir basic emotions. They may have no meaning themselves but they become associated with "feelings". Nothing can recall a memory as quickly and as surely as an odour.

The Proustian episode, coupled with Winter's explanation of smell as a powerful memory recall tool, point not only to the effectiveness of olfaction in evoking memories, but at the same time, illustrates the belief that odours evoke recollections that are usually more emotionally loaded (Cann & Ross 1989; Chu & Downes 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Ehrlichman & Bastone 1992). This is also suggested by Herz *et al.*, who argue that 'when a cue is presented in its olfactory form, memories are more emotional as indicated by self-report and physiological responses, such as heightened heart-rate, than memories evoked by the same cue presented in other sensory forms' (2004: 371).

Having discussed in brief the ways in which scholars of psychology and physiology have argued for highlighting the vividness with which memories are recollected through smell as a trigger, I now turn to other areas of debate concerning how smells and the other senses become embroiled in recollections of past events. I shall pay particular attention to the notion of embodied experiences, and how this reflects upon the need to re-evaluate the nature of conducting qualitative research. Such research, I argue, ought to encompass the senses as our ways of knowing and constructing social experiences and realities.

Sutton (2001) explores the relationship between food and memory in his research on the island of Kalymnos, Greece. In his work, he argues that food contains the ability to evoke memories, and deliberates upon the interrelationships between food, memory, embodiment, and culture. Sutton locates the receipt of food packages by Kalymnians across transnational borders, and proposes that the senses of smell and taste act as triggers of memories; specifically for people who were away from their homeland (i.e. Kalymnos). He cites the examples of how a woman living in Germany laughed and cried at the post office upon receiving a *pestelloma* (honey) from Kalymnos (2001: 81). Sutton contends that sensory provocation brought about by honey actually induced local knowledge, knowledge of home, a sense of 'returning to the whole' in contrast to her experience of (Kalymnian) sensory deprivation while working in Germany (2001: 82). The senses therefore, become messengers of one's past experience (in this case, of 'home'), evoking at the same time, 'emotional/embodied plenitude' (ibid.). As a corollary, Sutton suggests – through the example of a Greek couple fighting over the 'proper' way to make bean soup – that notions of 'home' become more intensified especially in the migrant context, stating that 'cooking is not simply an everyday practice, but an attempt to reconstruct and remember synesthetically, to return to that whole world of home, which is subjectively experienced both locally and nationally' (2001: 86).

Additionally, I follow Seremetakis' argument that memory 'cannot be confined to a purely mentalist or subjective sphere. [Instead, it] is a culturally mediated material practice that is activated by embodied acts and semantically dense objects'. Understood this way, memory 'is the horizon of sensory experiences, storing and restoring the experience of each sensory dimension in another, as well as dispersing and finding sensory records outside of the body in a surround of entangling objects and places' (1994: 9). The relation between memory and the senses, therefore, comprises a intermingling of 'involuntary experiences', pointing to their 'encompassment by a trans-individual social and somatic landscape' (ibid.). Through her fieldwork in rural and urban Greece, Seremetakis (1994: 28) came to realize that:

"Listen to see" is the colloquial Greek phrase to demand attention in conversation...The memory of one sense is stored in another: that of tactility in sound, of hearing in taste, of sight in sound. Sensory memory is a form of storage. Storage is always the embodiment and conservation of experiences, persons and matter in vessels of alterity. The awakening of the senses is awakening the capacity for memory, of tangible memory; to be awake is to remember, and one remembers through the senses.

In sum, the literature on smells (and the other senses) and memories exemplifies the fruitfulness of locating embodied ways of remembering. Hence, it is pertinent to draw out and analyse the ways by which memory and the senses point towards our embodied ways of being, both in the past and the present-day context. This approach follows Misztal's argument that attention should be placed on the body as 'its habitual and emotional experiences [become] a reservoir of memories and a mechanism of generating them' (2003: 79).

Olfactive Frames of Remembering

This section offers empirical portrayal of olfactive frames of remembering, which are: (1) childhood memories; (2) familial relationships; (3) relationships with partners; and (4) memories of difficult times and hardship. These four areas will then be discussed vis-à-vis different themes of memory narration in the next section, where I show how memories evoked by smell are, more often than not, linked to different emotional states of being, and also, intertwined with the other senses apart from smell.

The first two frames of childhood memories and familial relationships often surfaced in the narrative interviews. Themes involving nostalgia, comfort and freedom emerge in one's recollection of olfactive childhood memories. These are exemplified in the following accounts:

Judith: Like for example, my grandmother is a *Teochew*, and now that she is not around anymore, whenever I walk past a person's house who happens to be cooking some *Teochew* dishes, it reminds me of her...I'll know someone is cooking *Teochew* dishes when I walk past their house along the corridor. It is just simple dishes like steamed fish

and braised duck especially. In the past, my granny used to stay in Bedok where we will gather every week. At that point of time, all the cousins are young and we had lots of fun playing together at the old house. Ever since my granny moved house to Pasir Ris, and we cousins started growing older, we hardly have so much fun. So when I smell *Teochew* dishes it just reminds me of times in Bedok.

Keith: Last but not least, the smell can leave a memorable experiences a person had. It relive the memory a person had associated previously, pleasant or unpleasant experiences. Example of my experience with smell is that of the bathing soap. The soap can make me recall the different stage of my life. Such as a green soap that is very difficult to find in the market now. Once I came across a shop carry these soaps in Malaysia, it immediately rekindled the memory I had with this soap in my younger days...The green soap was very popular in the early '70s and '80s. It is more popular with the lower income group where I belong to. It is cheap and easily available. In its heydays, every household in my *kampong* would boast of owning it. Thus it reminds me of my childhood memories in the *kampong*. I used to walk barefoot and had a crew-cut hair. I had a few childhood friends and we used to play marbles and catch fish in the drain. The *kampong* had been demolished to make way for redevelopment. I stayed, with my parents and 2 siblings, in a zinc roof, wooden houses. I was then, aged 6 and stayed 3 years before we moved out to a flat. Now, there are terrace houses and condominiums occupying the place where I once reside. The soap has a unique smell unlike the perfume soap. It gives off a 'chemical' fragrance. Its smell is very close to anti-septic lotion. The current generation dislike the smell. I asked my children aged 9 and 7 to smell and they all feedback that it is smelly compared to *Lux* soap.

Maxine: For example, heavy chlorine takes me back to one year when my family lived at Lake Lanier and we went swimming a lot, and a certain smell I can't describe evokes the house of one of my late grandmothers, where I spent a few summers.

Ostensibly, the above three accounts illustrate the evocative powers of smell to elicit narrations of their childhood, as well as hints of nostalgia, with regard to missing a dear family member, or recounting experiences of the good old days. Such reminiscences are filled with positive and pleasant events, as described by Leigh:

I do remember smells that have stuck in my mind from when I was young which used to bring back memories of really positive times such as my granny's homemade soup. Thinking of that made me think of the times I went to visit her in Aberdeen...My granny's soup probably smelt salty. It was fresh vegetable soup probably made with meat stock. I probably wouldn't even like the smell of it now but as a child I rarely had fresh food. Cooking was not my mum's strong point so we mostly ate frozen goods such as burgers and fish fingers. So I associated the smell of my granny's soup just with visiting her which was on rare occasions. I think the smell becomes a positive association for me because my home life was very chaotic. I lived in a tiny council house with my parents who didn't have a lot of money and didn't particularly get on. Then there was my three older brothers and little sister. We are all very different. So I rarely had space or time to myself or to get away from the tensions. When I was old enough I began to visit my granny in Aberdeen alone...I also had many other relatives in Aberdeen including cousins so the thought of her soup definitely stimulated memories that were happy. If I were to smell it now, and once a few years ago I caught a whiff of a similar smell, it would conjure lots of feelings and memories.

In Leigh's case, it is interesting to note that the smell of her grandmother's soup characterised not only her recollection of her childhood days, but acted as an outlet of solace and comfort, given her 'chaotic' life back home with her parents and siblings. Such a smell is also effective in drawing forth accounts of Leigh's relationships with her immediate family, as compared to her grandmother and her cousins. Smell, in this case, allows Leigh to re-experience her life in different familial settings, displaying an obvious case of positive/negative associations with paying her grandmother a visit, and living with her immediate family respectively. In sum, 'smells can be memory releasers for the reconstruction of one's childhood' (Porteous 1990: 22).

Where the frames of childhood memories and familial relationships show up issues of freedom, nostalgia and pleasant/unpleasant experiences, the third frame of smells eliciting experiences with one's former partners/relationships also elucidate upon similar emotions, although in some cases, may also provoke less positive encounters and attitudes. Through the narrative interviews collected, it seems as if perfumes are powerful triggers for reminding one of their ex-partners, and that different scents characterise different relationships. Take for instance the case of Kate. She recounts:

When I smell *Calvin Klein Eternity* for men, I have an emotional attachment to it, because that was what my ex-boyfriend used to wear. And when I smell erm...*Escada* for men, that triggers off another chain of memory, because that was what some other guy I used to go out with used to wear...You know now I'm going out with a guy right, he smells really nice...I [used] to like [to], you know whenever I smell something like him right, I would straightaway think of him. And then like, I [used] to like [to] stand really close to him, and not to take advantage of him or flirting with him, but I just like the way he smells. And...it's very...I find it very...erm...how do I say ah? I feel very secure when I'm with him, and there's that smell around him. If I don't smell, I'd go like, how come you are not wearing it today?

Similar sentiments emerge in Daphne's case:

I think most of the time, or maybe all the time, smelling a particular scent will trigger my memories. For example, when I smell a particular perfume scent in the air, one which was used regularly by someone who used to be close to me, it will bring back memories of the times I've spent with that person, that is, my ex-boyfriend. There was an incident a few years back, where I smelled the perfume my ex-boyfriend used to use; it felt as if he was somewhere around the vicinity. But of course I had to convince myself that he wasn't around. Haha.

The ways in which specific scents stir up memories of one's former partner, is also relevant for male respondents, as seen in the following accounts:

Horace: Smells also remind me of my first love. Whenever I catch a whiff of white musk, I remember her instantly! Same goes for another girl I had a crush on in University...if I smell *Clairol* shampoo on someone, I remember her.

Jerome: A third smell that comes to my mind is from a perfume. *Davidoff Cool Water* for women to be exact. Everytime I smell this smell it will remind me of my past relationship

as this girl used to put this particular perfume. As for the perfume smell, whenever I smell that particular scent, it always reminds me of my ex girlfriend's face. No particular events come to my mind, but just her face.

The experiences of both Horace and Jerome, similar to Kate and Daphne, show that memory of smells – in this case, specific fragrances – denote and bring forth recollections of their individual experiences with different individuals. Furthermore, in the case of Jerome, he shares that the perfume would not only conjure up memories of his ex girlfriend, but also, an image of her face. This hints at the workings of both the olfactive and the visual senses, an issue to which I return in the later section on multi-sensoriality and memory recollection.

As indicated above, different fragrances would lead one to recall memories of experiences with different individuals whom one was close to. Beyond that, another respondent, Hazel, stressed that she would not want future partners to put on the same scents as her ex-partners, emphasising the need for an olfactory-memory demarcation:

Certain fragrances remind me of people too, like ex-boyfriends. Why does the association stick? I can't say why, really. I guess it's in the subconscious? Ok, I remember one of my ex-boyfriends using a certain *Hugo Boss* perfume, and another, *Davidoff's Cool Water*. So every time I catch a whiff of these fragrances, I'd be reminded of them at once. I'm quite neutral to the perfumes my ex-boyfriends wore actually. Neither pleasant nor unpleasant. But I wouldn't want future boyfriends to wear the same scents because of the association. I don't fancy the idea of reminders of ex-boyfriends when in a new relationship, so...yeah.

Hazel's emphasis on the need to have boyfriends wear different scents point towards the ways in which particular memories with particular individuals are characterised by particular smells, and hence, the olfactory-memory demarcation is necessary in order to not be reminded of one's past relationships while being with someone in the present moment. For her, there should preferably be no intermingling, or rather replication, of scents associated with her partners in her life. This indicates that smells become distinctive and become signifiers for social actors' different phases in their life trajectories. As one of them puts it, 'Yes you're right. Significant phases of my life...It's like, you said like emotional attachment every different phases of my life, ya you're right. I used to think it was just...like music, different phases of my life, different music...you know, attached to it. But smell also as well'. It is clear from these examples that olfaction is employed as an organising element in one's social experiences, and hence, smells, along with the other senses, should be studied not only in physiological terms, but also, in the varied sociosomatic ways in which they influence social actors' everyday life experiences (see also Press & Minta 2000).

The fourth frame concerning memories of difficult times and hardship is apparent in past experiences of both Reichen and Horace. In Reichen's case, he shares his memory of being at the hospital where his grandmother was, which evoked a strong emotional response. In Horace's case, the smell and taste of *Oreo* cookies brought him back to days of his army training, which to say the least, was fraught with immense unpleasantness. Reichen shares:

Perhaps the smells from the hospitals would remind me of the time when my grandmother was in hospital...perhaps smell, along with sight would go hand in hand in triggering one's memories about a certain place...by hospital smells, I am thinking of the smells of medicine, a very disinfecting smell cos maybe to kill the germs and bacteria? But it has a distinctive smell that one can instantly recognise...the smell reminds me of the time when my grandmother was in the hospital, such that I would instantly associate hospital smells to the time when my grandmother was in hospital...it did not be even in the same hospital where my grandmother was hospitalised...and certainly the feeling was not pleasant...the hospital smells give me the greatest impression because it was directly related to my dearest family member, that's why I have such a strong feeling about this.

Horace recalls:

Oreo cookies smell remind me of extreme tiredness, loneliness and no freedom, because I always ate *Oreo* before doing the Standard Obstacle Course (SOC) in National Service. Somehow the association got established with SOC and all the associated unpleasantness. I have never eaten *Oreo* cookies since [army days]. The one time when I tried it again – *Oreo* ice-cream – I couldn't finish it and felt like throwing up. Hmmm...since that the unpleasant association caused something physical too...Same for that orange can *Off* mosquito repellent. I so hate that smell now because I always used in National Service training and field camp, so I remember being very tired, sad, no freedom, discomfort and stuff. I never use any repellent produced by *Off* now.

Where Reichen points out that the sense of sight, alongside smell, is also involved in evoking one's memories of place and/or event, Horace narrates his bodily state which was provoked by the smell of *Oreo* cookies, and more pertinently, his aversion to the cookies, as a result of them being associated with his army days, is carried forward into the present day context, where repulsion by similar foods elicits not merely mental and emotional discomfort, but also, physical rejection. In both cases, it is apparent that the sense of smell works alongside sight, and taste respectively, in one's reconstruction of past experiences. This goes to show the multi-sensorial nature of memory recall, where synesthetic processes become involved in one's narration and re-experience of the past. I take this up in the next section, when I deliberate upon these four frames in relation to different dimensions of memory recollection.

Framing Olfactive Memories – Emotions, Affect and Habitus

The four frames of olfactive remembrance above indicate not merely different episodic memories (Vroon 1994: 95) as narrated and reconstructed by social actors, but are certainly intertwined with other notions of emotional association, multi-sensoriality, and nostalgia. As mentioned earlier,

smells are powerful elicitors of memories which are filled with emotional weight. Odours are said to ‘influence mood, evoke powerful experiences of pleasure or displeasure, produce alertness or relaxation, and evoke long-forgotten emotional memories’ (Ehrlichman & Bastone 1992: 411). This view is substantiated by one of the respondents who opines: ‘Smell always evoke[s] some emotions’. Another respondent ventures: ‘It’s actually amazing how smell is so connected with our lives’. Ostensibly, the relation between smells and emotion makes it profitable to include them in a study of affective experience. Following this, I wish to offer a brief definition of affect, in order to better frame the discussion in this section, relating olfactory memories, affect, and emotion.

Affect, according to McKay, is understood as a ‘deep-seated physiological change written involuntarily on the face as emotion’ (2005: 77). By extension, the ‘senses are generators of affect, whether it arises through interactions with the environment or other people, as a necessary precursor to emotion’ (ibid.). In this sense, affect is first experienced as a bodily encounter, and later named and re-experienced through social relations and culture (Leavitt 1996). In order to bridge a connection between emotions, smells and memories, it is therefore necessary to locate how physiological experiences of affect are situated within everyday life encounters, which elicits emotional responses. To address this, I borrow McKay’s discussion concerning emotion and Bourdieu’s habitus. She explains (2005: 78):

Habitus works as a practical sense of moving through place, producing the embodied, sensual rituals of everyday life. The visibly embodied aspect of habitus is called hexis. Together, habitus and hexis make up our habitual patterns of understanding and inhabiting the world, creating the places we inhabit and acting as the ground for subjectivity. Habitus – as this practical sense of place and subjectivity – maps emotion onto experiences of affect.

Through this, McKay proposes a model where ‘stimulus produces bodily responses (affect) that are then filtered through habitus into emotions (as self-perceived) and emotional performances’ (ibid.).

I find McKay’s model useful, as it relates poignantly to what respondents have shared with me based on their olfactory recall of experiences of places. This pertains particularly to respondents’ characterisation of memories of place, using olfaction as a medium of recognition and placement. Such examples include:

Russell: Er...to me you know er when I smell something it would remind me of a certain experience, or it will remind me of...a certain place...certain kind of smell...er...would remind me of my past. Like for example I would relate...a certain smell to being in England. Or...the London underground...when I was in U.K., you can actually tell...I mean most U.K. houses smell of bacon anyway. You know, er, because the carpeting, the upholstery...the kind of fabric that they use in the living room, it absorbs all the bacon...the fine bacon smell. Ya.

Horace: Lavender essential oils remind me of my New Zealand trips because that was when I used it. It's interesting because once that association is formed, the memories get mixed up with all my previous 2 New Zealand trips taken 12 years and 5 years ago. There's the same association with my *Nivea* men's face wash. I used it everyday in New Zealand, and now, whenever I feel like I wanna remember, I use that face wash to trigger and indulge.

Sybil: When I was in Paris last year, I bought a little bottle of perfume from *Zara*. When I wear it back here, memories of shopping at the wonderful *Galleries Lafayette* would spring to mind. Not mention how badly I want to jet back to Paris for more shopping and glorious cheese!

It is clear from these three accounts that smell acts as a conduit by which it characterises one's experience in a particular place, at a particular time. Smells offer a demarcation of specific experience in an olfactively pinpointed locale, and hence, olfactive 'trips' down memory lane would throw light upon the ways by which one's memories and experiences are demarcated by olfactive-spatial associations, and in these three cases, mainly overseas encounters.

The notion of relating smells to space is not a new phenomenon. Porteous coins the term 'smellscapes' to suggest that

like visual impressions, smells may be spatially ordered or place-related...Smellscape, moreover, cannot be considered apart from the other senses. Many smells provide little information about the location of their source in space. Yet it is common experience that smells are not randomly distributed, but are located with reference to source, air currents, and direction and distance from source. In combination with vision and tactility, smell and the other apparently 'non-spatial' senses provide considerable enrichment of our sense of space and the character of place (1985: 359-360).

Additionally, Urry points out that the 'power of smell can be analysed in terms of the diverse "smellscapes" that organise and mobilise people's feelings about particular places' (2000: 96-97). Where Porteous and Urry talk about smells that are situated within specific locations as real and experienced, my examples from respondents differ in the sense that instead of picking up smells they described, from the actual locales, their experience with these places is brought about by the smells which they use/encounter while at these places. Hence, this difference can be explicated by referring back to McKay's model of habitus, affect and emotions.

McKay's take on habitus relates to the experience of place, intertwined with affect and emotions. The notion of embodied rituals of everyday life (such as olfactive encounters) in different habitus-locales (in this case, London, New Zealand and Paris), end up producing olfactive-affect bodily knowledge mapped through emotional associations. In Horace's case, his account of New Zealand clearly shows the association of positive emotions of enjoyment in his experience of the country. As he puts it, 'whenever I feel like I wanna remember, I use that face wash to *trigger and indulge*'. For him, he links his experience in New Zealand with the particular

scent of *Nivea* face wash, and shares that using the same brand of facial wash, allows him to walk down the memory lane of his experience overseas, which is clearly an exercise of indulgence for him. Interestingly, he opines:

I think the association and resulting recollection is automatic, not a conscious 'remembering'. It's like a knee jerk reaction. I can't control the initial flood of memories or feelings, but after the initial flash, then it's a choice – do I choose to go on indulging and thinking of the past, or just choose to think of something else.

Ostensibly, Horace's emotional attachment to New Zealand shows up with smell as an elicitor of memory and place, and in this respect, the triadic relationship between habitus, affect and emotions stands, contributing towards a clearer understanding of spatial perception and emotions, to which I add the role and influence of olfactive memories on affect and emotions. In these, notions of nostalgia, familiarity and comfort also emerge when one recollects the past. This is seen in the following cases:

Hannah: I suppose many people associate smell of food with memories of homecooked food. Obviously if you smell something and it smells like food, you will associate it with something you're familiar with.

Gretchen: Hmmm, perhaps smells of food which reminds and translates into my grandmother's cooking. I think one of my friends mentioned about her grandmother's cooking also sometime not long ago. Her grandmother is not around anymore though. If I remembered correctly, we were in some shopping mall and happened to smell a whiff of something. Then she started telling me about her grandmother's culinary skills, how nice her food was, and how none of her family members could make that kind of food anymore.

Abby: Years ago I used to carry around a little square of paper with a squirt of X's aftershave on it, and smell it to remind me of him. Particularly if we were distanced from each other for any period of time. As soon as I sniffed it I felt happy, as I thought about him. It sounds incredibly corny, but my heart would do a little flutter! Smell was a power memory tool that took me back and inserted me into a different time or event. I miss the feeling of smelling him and having that happy feeling come back from the familiarity of his smell and of the memories associated with it. Does that make sense?

Zachary: I do remember loving the smell of my high school girlfriend's clothes, and the odours always reminded me of adventures we'd have together, both in public and private. I suppose that's the undiscovered country, the reminders of love experienced then lost. I can still remember thinking of her many, many years later after realising the same odour around me; too bad it was in the laundry detergent isle at the local market. I did have quite an infatuation for her, and that may have had a lot to do with it...Other experiences would include the smell of chickens that reminded me of my childhood; burning leaves we've covered, dirt from childhood play, exhaust and burning rubber from races, smoke from fireworks, the odour in the air just after rain has started falling, autumn leaves, spring flowers, horse barns...

In these four accounts, a common theme of the good old days and notions of comfort and delight emerge as respondents recount their pasts, with smell as an intermediary of memory reconstruction. More interestingly, in Zachary's case, he hints at the workings of the other senses,

such as tactility, sight and sound, which also contribute towards his re-enactment of nostalgia and familiarity. I discuss below the intersection of sensorial keenness with the production and recollection of one's biography.

As a corollary of the link between olfactive memories and emotions, I now locate the influence of such memories on one's present-day encounters, arguing for a sense of affective continuity based on olfactory identification of experience, and how such identification influences one's attitude in similar olfactory encounters. Kate's encounter with alcohol from her father has influenced her association of alcohol with men, thereby indicating her repulsion:

Erm...clubs, you know. In clubs, like...the smell of erm...the smell of liquor triggers off a lot of memories for me. A lot lah. Because erm, you know my parents are divorced right? Ok erm...because my father used to...used to beat up my mum ok, so when I was really young, not really young, when I was in secondary school, he drinks ok. So I remember like every single Sunday right, he will go drinking and then he will come back and then he will...you know how Muslims can't drink right? He will reek of...erm...alcohol. And then, he will get all pukey and puke on the floor, and then he will start beating my mum up and all. So like the other day I went to a wedding dinner. So, because I usually try not to get into contact with alcohol, very much so lah. You know like in clubs when people drink, I...because inside it's overwhelmed by the smoke, so I don't really smell alcohol, but the other day I went to a...my friend's wedding dinner, and then one of my friend who was Malay, ordered red wine, and then I was like...I'm like ok, she's modern, so they had red wine all over. And then the smell came out you know? And then straightaway like, I got very depressed after that. I got very upset, then I was grumpy, and then like...you know I was dressed so nicely and I was so excited for the wedding dinner, but then the minute the smell came out, because there was eight of us at the table, and then everyone except for me and another girl didn't have liquor. The whole experience was negative, like...I felt crappy, and then like I thought of what happened, you know...it's a bit far-fetched but it was really bad. People notice lah, what's wrong? Because I'm usually so...loud and lively and vibrant but that day I was like grumpy, and keeping to myself. Ya. So the smell of liquor is a bad thing. I don't like it, ya.

She goes on to explain how the association of alcohol and men would turn her off based on her experience with her father:

That's why like when I go to clubs right, I go with friends who don't drink. And when my friends drink right, I don't...I don't get close to them. And if the guys who come to me drink, I don't even bother talking to them, because I don't like the smell of alcohol. But like I said usually the clubs will be smoky that the smell of smoke will still overpower the smell of alcohol. And I'm usually on the dance floor and you can't drink on the dance floor, so it's not too bad. But the minute like, someone speaks to me and he's got alcohol breath, I'm like, ok, ok, turn-off, take note. So every single guy I go out with cannot drink. The minute they drink, I say that's it.... The last time there was this guy he was drinking lah, and then...basically he reasserted my point that all guys who drink are bastards. Because he was drinking obviously, but it wasn't so strong yet, so he was dancing with me, and then what he did was...straightaway when he got close to me, he put his hand up my skirt you know. And the minute he did that, because he was so close to me, his whole breath stank of alcohol. So I'm like, huh, bastard. I'm right again. You know that sort of thing? Ya. So alcohol is a big no no... More often than not, I'm right lah. I think guys who drink...no I'm not saying like a little bit, I'm talking about

like drinking, drinking. Heavy drinking. Ya I think they are all shit. Ya. And I'm right. And my father was the best example.

Kate's account demonstrates the influence of her association of liquor and men, and how such encounters impact upon her judgement of men and liquor in the present day context. This demonstrates a sense of continuity of memories and olfactive links, whereby the process of re-remembering imposes meaning onto the encounter behind the smell of alcohol, translating into an aversion to this particular smell, associated with men in general. Her narration echoes Warin and Dennis' contention:

Remembering, forgetting and re-remembering can provide multiple ways of being engaged with the past, present and future. The memories with which these processes engage may be continually recycled to throw light on the present and may point to both continuities and discontinuities of memory (2005: 160).

This viewpoint is also adopted by Misztal, who opines: 'Emotional responses, as important affective states that screen out certain memories and allow for other memories to surface, are inscribed in the body. They invoke a particular personal history; within their expression in the present they bring memories of past experiences that contribute to the forming and experiencing of the present' (2003: 80-81). Kate's experience is similar to Horace's encounter with *Oreo* cookies in the sense that '[s]ensory signification is a continuing development, not a simple reliving of once-learned associations' (Howes 2003: 44).

In my discussion hitherto, smell has been foregrounded as *the* sense which brings about memory recollection. Here, I wish to point out the relevance of the other senses, such as sound and sight, which also act as triggers of memories, alongside the sense of smell. In this manner, the senses act in what Warin and Dennis term as a 'synaesthetic knot in which memory is embodied and reproduced' (2005: 159). Similar ideas are also put forward by Thomas, who points out that the sensory is always experienced as 'simultaneity – a multi-sensorial whole' (Thomas 2004, quoted in McKay 2005: 86). That the senses overlap and/or feature differently in one's recounting of memory is apparent in the following examples:

Claudine: My favourite male perfume, the...erm...*Polo Safari*. And if...the way it smells conjures images you see, so I think of *Polo Safari*, you know what I think of? Harrison Ford. It's that...Indiana Jones...smells conjure images in my head.

Zachary: I have witnessed people begin long tales of past events after smelling something that was a reminder odour. It's interesting how the mind associates things; past and present with smells, feelings, sights, and sounds...I'd say that sometimes, a smell is stored in memory where other senses are disregarded. A subconscious reminder perhaps? I believe that smell, like I said earlier, can replace other senses and get stored in memory.

Gretchen: In my opinion, I would guess that smells would not necessary trigger memories, but more of how significant and the extent of degree of importance the particular event (a.k.a. memory) is/has to that person. Additionally, smells may be an element which the

person attach to, to the event/memory, be it pleasant or unpleasant...Songs or perhaps even sounds [would jog my memory apart from smell]. I always remember the days when my family and I were holidaying in Australia on a free and easy trip. So we rented a car, and had this tape consisting oldies...[such as] *Casablanca*, *Right Here Waiting*, *Endless Love* etc.

Keith: The sound of the *Beatles* may bring back my childhood memories.

Reichen: The sight and smell of lotus would remind me of the place where I go for my jogging because there is a pond where there are lotus.

From these accounts of how smells, alongside the other senses, may or may not act as memory elicitors, such examples bring about two important points concerning the senses and memory processes. First, smell is an important conduit by which memories are recollected, and for some, it becomes a pertinent 'entry point' by which one's past experiences are re-membered and reproduced; where olfaction is 'phenomenologically more proximal than is vision or audition' (Ehrlichman and Bastone 1992: 413). Yet for others, the senses of sight and sound are in fact, more poignant and efficacious in eliciting memories of past events. Second, the senses work hand-in-hand in a 'synaesthetic knot' (Warin & Dennis 2005). This has implications towards rethinking the imposition of Western values of rationality and the mind upon the sensorium (see Press & Minta 2000). In a nutshell, 'olfaction has generally been considered by Western philosophers as useless, or even contrary to science' (Le Gu  rer 1990: 37). Additionally, smell is classified by Aristotle as the lowest sense, while Kant did not even pay much attention to the sense of smell in his aesthetics (Corbin 1986; Rindisbacher 1995; Stoller 1989; Synnott 1991).

Despite the supposed 'hierarchy' of the senses, Jenner argues correctly, the 'practices of everyday life do not typically observe a fixed hierarchy of the senses' (2000: 138). By extension, one certainly does not choose to shut out a particular sense or particular senses in order to utilise the other senses; instead, the senses may work alongside one another in interpreting social encounters. Cumulatively, this thus demonstrates the heterogeneous complexes by which the senses are acted upon, influencing social actors in varying ways. Thus, the senses, instead of being hierarchised, should be studied in terms of the ways in which they become media for organising and interpreting social realities for actors in their everyday life experiences. Specifically, '...those senses that remain relatively unprivileged in Western philosophies, such as sound, smell, touch and taste, can be primary in the process of remembering' (Warin & Dennis 2005: 163).

Concluding Remarks

The ways by which we remember as social actors, and as communities, are certainly not limited to varied notions and representations of the past, through such avenues as museums, school textbooks, historical reproduction and dissemination, and memorabilia, amongst others. Instead, this paper has put forward the approach of analysing how the senses, in particular olfaction, act as media of memory recollection. This may influence one's biographical construction vis-à-vis various frames of remembrance or themes, some of which have been discussed here. The association of smells with particular past experiences may also have bearings upon one's social encounters in the present-day context. In this manner, such an experiential approach would generally avoid Cartesian dualisms of mind and body, thus enabling us to 'see the interrelation of cognition and bodily experiences' (Sutton 2001: 13). More importantly, the paper identifies a need to reembody qualitative inquiry, as sensuous ways of knowing can translate into social ways of knowing (Howes 2003; Stoller 1997). Warin and Dennis sum it up articulately: "...the experience of remembering is an embodied experience, which involves multisensual engagement with those places, objects, persons and experiences that are imbued with meaning and affect' (2005: 163). Further research on embodied reconstructions of the past through biographical narrations would therefore throw light on the need to frame memory recollection within multi-sensorial dimensions, thereby indicating a need to interpret, beyond olfactive associations, other sensuous ways of remembering.

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