

For her doctoral dissertation "In Search of Lost Scents," art and scent historian Caro Verbeek (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Kunstmuseum, The Hague) collected olfactory neologisms or newly invented smell related words from (art) historical sources ranging from 1855 to 1975, which she categorised according to the themes poetry, mind, concepts, material and synaesthesia. Three never-before-published artistic illustrations by the author help establish a more embodied cognition of the meaning of some of these concepts, as including "smell images" is impossible. In addition, she has created a "synaesthetic odour wheel" based on literary sources (2021).

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# On the “Odoresque” and “Aero-Perfumes”: Smell Related Neologisms in Avant-garde and Contemporary Art and Scholarship

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## Introduction

There appears to be a dramatic mismatch between smell and language, at least in most Western vocabularies. Many people have a hard time describing scents or related phenomena. Exactly this lack of vocabulary inspired the Futurists and other avant-garde authors and artists to invent their own words to describe their innovative olfactory practices and modernist relation to smell. They tried to bridge the gap between the sensory world and the words that represented this by transforming words into sensory elements themselves. Synaesthesia – or the translation of one sensory realm into another (i.e., visual music or musical perfume) was one of the main tools to achieve this.

What follows is a list of neologisms (invented words) referring to olfactory phenomena as found in Futurist, Symbolist and other contemporary texts written between ca. 1850 and ca. 1950. They are categorised into the themes:

- B. Sound related words
- C. Poetry and writing
- D. Smell and mind
- E. Smell concepts
- F. Scented material
- G. Synaesthesia and cross-modality.

Furthermore, there is an additional group of contemporary words that several scholars invented to (further) develop the field of scent culture and olfactory history of art: Category A.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This list is a result of the author's PhD-project “In Search of Lost Scents – The Olfactory Dimension of Futurism (1909–

## A. Contemporary handy (and nosy) concepts

### nose witness report

The official legal term as opposed to an eyewitness. Smells of people or places can provide evidence for crimes, such as the use of certain drugs. The term can also be used for reports on smells during significant historical events or artworks of which the olfactory dimension was lost. Simone de Beauvoir wrote about the 1938 Surrealist Exhibition in Paris as smelling of Brazilian coffee. That scent was itself a work of art called *Odeurs du Brésil* and was diffused by the poet Benjamin Péret by burning coffee beans on an electric stove.

### odience/oditorium

A term used to oppose the acoustic term “audience”, indicating a group of people coming together with the intention to smell an olfactory theatrical piece. The room in which this takes place is called the “oditorium”. Coined by Caro Verbeek and Catherine Haley Epstein in 2020 in the *Odorbet*.

### olfactionism

This word contains the words “fact” and “action”. It is the type of olfactory art that encourages the audience to take action. Coined by olfactory artist Peter de Cupere in his “Olfactory Art Manifesto” in 2014.

### olfactory gaze

In Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the “gaze” is the anxious state of mind derived from the self-awareness that one can be seen and looked at to be subject to someone’s gaze. In the arts, the “gaze” refers to the act of seeing, but beyond the mere physiological, and from a particular culturally-induced perspective. The “olfactory gaze” means analysing images and texts with olfaction in mind. When Marinetti wrote his poem “Ritratto olfattivo di una donna” (Olfactory Portrait of a Woman), he described following a female scent trail with his “nostrils open and eyes closed”, encouraging his readers to see the world from an olfactory point of view or with an “olfactory gaze” – coined by the author in 2020. See also [www.odorbet.com](http://www.odorbet.com) and Figure 1.

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1942)” and the ever-growing online collection of smell related words called *Odorbet* by Catherine Haley Epstein and the author.



Figure 1. Caro Verbeek, illustration for Marinetti's "Olfactory Gaze", 2021.

## olfactocentrism

What "ocularcentrism" is to the eye, "olfacocentrism" is to the nose. It indicates a worldview in which assumptions are justly or unjustly based on the sense of smell. Coined by art historian and founder of olfactory art history Jim Drobnick in 2006.

## smell museum

In the 1970s, pop artist Andy Warhol expressed his profound wish to establish a smell museum to enable him to travel to the past with his mind through a single inhalation. Preserving scent was a true obsession of his. He collected perfumes and smell related products and called them his *Permanent Smell Collection*. Scents should and could be preserved in archives and museums where they should be presented at nose level. Warhol (1975), *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol. From A to B and Back Again*. See Figure 2.

## B. Sound related words

### **accordi di fetori (stench chords)**

Literally “chords of stench”. The Futurists wanted to include the other side of the dichotomy “fragrant-foul” to heighten a sense of lyricism. The term “perfume chord” was already known, but traditional perfumers did not include malodours. Many scent terms such as “notes”, “chords”, and “compositions” are derived from music. Valentinelli (ca. 1916), *L'arte degli odori*.

### **arpeggio (of thyme and lavender, of rosemary, basil, myrtle, tarragon)**

Literally, a “broken chord” (of thyme and lavender, of rosemary, basil, myrtle, tarragon). An arpeggio consists of a succession of notes rather than a chord played at once. An olfactory arpeggio would consist of rapidly alternating olfactory notes, which – according to the scientist Avery Gilbert – human beings are not able to perceive (unlike mice). The term was used in connection to a scent concert as described by the author Aldous Huxley. Huxley (1932), *Brave New World*.

### **modulazioni olfattive (olfactory modulations)**

Literally “olfactory modulations”. A modulation is a rapid shift from one tone to the next and back again. According to scientist Avery Gilbert, the human sense of smell cannot detect such shifts. Sanzin (1942), *Fiori d'Italia*; Huxley (1932), *Brave New World*.

### **octave of smells**

The perfumer and chemist Septimus Piesse believed that every musical note corresponded to an odorant. Piesse (1857), *The Art of Perfumery*. See also “smound”.

### **profumatóio a tastiera (scent organ)**

Marinetti described a scent organ in a manifesto. It was supposed to answer to individual tastes and be handled by the audience (odience) at their own table. See also “scent organ”. Marinetti (1933), “Teatro totale per masse”; Battaglia (1961), *Dizionario Italiano*

## polifonia di profumi (polyphony of perfumes)

A *polifonia di odori* is a controlled synthesis of different perfumes. Sanzin (1942), *Fiori d'Italia*.

## scent organ

Aldous Huxley's scent organ was able to modulate and switch odours very rapidly. Marinetti probably based his invented word *profumatoio a tastiera* on Huxley's slightly earlier use of the term. Huxley (1932), *Brave New World*.

## semi-odors

Semi-odors are half-notes – like the black keys on a piano – and derived from the “octave of odours” by Septimus Piesse. Piesse (1857), *The Art of Perfumery*.

## smound

A contraction of sound and smell. Septimus Piesse believed that sounds triggered the olfactory nerve and vice versa. According to more recent scientific insights, he was right. Piesse (1857), *The Art of Perfumery*. See Figure 2.

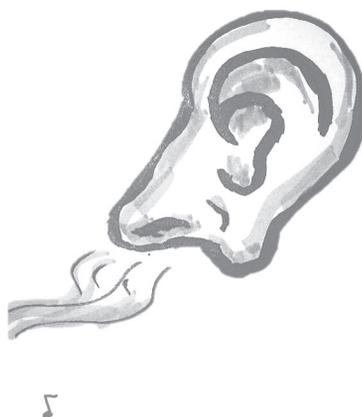


Figure 2. Caro Verbeek, illustration for Septimus Piesse's concept of “smound”, 2021.

## C. Poetry and writing

### idiome des fluids (perfume language)

Literally “grammar of fluids” or the language of perfumes. Huysmans (1884), *À rebours*.

### lirismo olfattorio (olfactory lyricism)

Literally “olfactory lyricism”. See also “stances aromatiques” by Piesse. Valentinelli (ca. 1916), “L’arte degli odori”.

### stances aromatiques (aromatic verse/poetry)

An aromatic wordless type of poetry. Huysmans (1884), *À rebours*.

### syntax/ grammar of perfume

Like language, perfumes are subject to syntax, meaning the notes are interconnected within an olfactory composition, like words and strophes are in a poem. Piesse (1857), *The Art of Perfumery*.

## D. Smell and mind

### narines excédées (extraordinary nostrils/sense of smell)

Literally “extraordinary nostrils”, or a keen sense of smell. Huysmans (1884), *À rebours*.

### odorant souvenir (olfactory memory)

Sensory memory or “Proustian memory” was actually not first described by Proust, but by the “Professor of Beauty”. It refers to a lively, usually early memory evoked by a scent. Montesquiou (1900), *Pays des aromates*.

### odorat, hallucinations de l' (olfactory hallucinations)

The fictional character Des Esseintes smelled things that were not there, so in his mind. Huysmans (1884), *À rebours*.

### **forces odorales (odorous forces)**

Literally “olfactory forces”. The concept was used in in the scented Gesamtkunstwerk *Cantique des cantiques* by Paul-Napoléon Roinard. Roinard (1891), *Les miroirs*.

### **homeopathie nasale (nasal therapy)**

Olfactory therapy, based on the healing power of scent memories. Huysmans (1884), *À rebours*.

### **olfatto-immaginazione (olfactory imagination/olfactorisation)**

There is no word for “olfactory imagination” in Italian (nor in other languages). Marinetti used it in the context of the scent of female skin and how it aroused him (as opposed to perfume). The English translation could be “olfactorisation” (as opposed to “imagination”). Marinetti (1920), *Il lusso femminile*. “Olfactorisation” was coined by the Dutch scientist E.P. Köster.

## **E. Smell concepts**

### **fetori, storia dei (history of stench)**

Literally “history of stench”. Valentinelli wanted to include stench in the re-narrating of the history of smell since usually only perfumes are described. Stench would heighten a sense of lyricism because of the intriguing contrast it would render. Valentinelli (ca. 1916), “L’arte degli odori”.

### **litanie odorante (fragrant prayer)**

Fragrant prayers or burnt offerings were a means to communicate to the gods. Montesquiou (1900), *Pays des aromats*.

### **mise en senteur (scent composition)**

Literally, a “scented composition” derived from “mise-en-scène”; a concept taken from the realm of theatre. It was first used for the scented Gesamtkunstwerk *Cantique des cantiques* by Paul-Napoléon Roinard. Roinard (1908), *Les miroirs*.

## odoresque

Odoresque (adjective) is a fin-de-siècle term opposed to the visually oriented *pitturesque*. It refers to a “scentscape” that stirs the olfactory imagination. First used at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the artist Sadakichi Hartmann, who tried to convey “A Trip to Japan in 16 Minutes” by means of scent in a theatre setting.

## odori, monotonia di (monotony of odours)

Literally “monotony of odours”. The Futurist artist Ennio Valentinelli wanted to replace existing smells attached to buildings with more appropriate ones in line with the activities and functions of public places. Valentinelli (ca. 1916), “L’arte degli odori”.

## ondate olezzatrici / ondes odorantes (fragrant waves)

*Ondata* means “wave”, and *olezzatrice* means “giving of scent”. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, smells were thought to travel through the ether as a vibrating electromagnetic phenomenon. Valentinelli (ca. 1916), “L’arte degli odori”; Huysmans (1884), *À rebours*.

## paesaggio di odori (scentscape)

Marinetti was the first to use the now popularised term “scentscape” for the spatial and temporal organisation of scents. Marinetti (1912), “Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista”; Marinetti (1932), “Paesaggio di odori del mio cane-lupo”.

## ritratto olfattivo (olfactory portrait)

Marinetti was the first to use the now popularised term “olfactory portrait”. He described the dynamic scent trail and exhalations of a woman he found attractive and whom he traced by following his nose. Marinetti (1932), “Ritratto olfattivo di una donna”. See Figure 3.

## uniodorità (monodority)

Contraction of *unione* of *unità* (unity) and *odore* (scent). Valentinelli wanted to break

down the dreaded monotony of odours in certain places and argued for a scented narrative in line with the function of a building or environment. Valentinelli (ca. 1916), “L’arte degli odori”.

## F. Scented material

### aeroprofumi (aeroperfumes)

A contraction of *aero* (a prefix invented by the Futurists to indicate speed and modernity) and *profumi* (perfumes). *Aeroprofumi* were typically Italian and modern smells such as lavender from Liguria and bread cooked on car tires. Sanzin (1942), *Fiori d’Italia*.

### conprofumo (harmonic perfume)

A contraction of *con* (with) and *profumo* (perfume). A term used to indicate the affinity of a given perfume with the taste of a certain type of food, such as mashed potatoes and roses. Marinetti and Fillia (1932), *La cucina futurista*.

### disprofumo (dis-perfume, contrasting perfume)

A contraction of *dis* (counter/opposite) and *profumo* (perfume). A term used to indicate the complementary character of a given perfume with the taste of a certain type of food, such as raw meat and jasmine. Marinetti and Fillia (1932), *La cucina futurista*.

### permanent smell collection

In 1975, Andy Warhol imagined a smell museum so certain scents would not go lost forever. He started a “permanent smell collection”, consisting of perfumes, cleaning products and penny slot machines. He only used scented products for three months so that every smell could take him back to a designated time. Warhol (1975), *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol. From A to B and Back Again*.



Figure 3. Caro Verbeek, illustration for Andy Warhol's *Permanent Smell Collection*, which can be seen as a scentscape or even an olfactory portrait of his life, 2021.

### **polibibita (multisensory cocktail)**

The contraction of *poli* (plural/several) and *bibita* (drink). The polibibita is the Italian equivalent for “cocktail”. A polibibita could even consist of sounds. Marinetti and Fillia (1932), *La cucina futurista*.

### **vapofumo (vapodour)**

The contraction of *vapore* (vapour) and *profumo* (perfume) to emphasise the volatility and dynamism of an odorant. Giacomo Balla (1928), *Vapofumo*.

## G. Synaesthesia and cross-modality

### *Colour*

**odore azzuro/azure/opaline, giallo, rosso, verde/vert, turchino, violetto**

blue, yellow, red, green, turquoise, purple odours. Baudelaire (1857), "Correspondences"; Azari (1920), "Milano-Montecarlo in direttissimo Pullman"; Carrà (1913), "La pittura dei suoni, rumori, odori"; Montesquiou (1900), *Pays des aromates*.

**verdeazzurrodorato (greenish-blueish-scent)**

Contraction of *verde* (green), *azure* (blue) and *odorato* (scented). Sanzin (1942), *Fiori d'Italia*.

### *Shape*

**odore concavo, conico, convesso, elissoidale, oblungo, sferico, spirallico, tondo, triangolare**

Concave odour. Carrà (1913), "La pittura dei suoni, rumori, odori"; Marinetti (1933), "Teatro totale per masse"; Marinetti (1932), "Ritratto olfattivo di una donna"; Marinetti (1932), "Paesaggio di odori del mio cane-lupo".

### *Touch*

**odore velutato**

Velvety odour. Marinetti (1932), "Ritratto olfattivo di una donna".

### *Taste*

**aerovivanda (aero-food)**

A contraction of *aero* (a prefix invented by the Futurists to indicate speed and modernity) and *vivanda* (food). A typical aerovivanda contained scents, tastes, sounds and tactile elements. Marinetti and Fillia (1932), *La cucina futurista*.

**caldagrodolce (warmbittersweet)**

A contraction of *caldo* (warm), *agro* (sharp/bitter) and *dolce* (sweet). The Futurists invented many of these types of synaesthetic and multi-sensory words. Marinetti (1932), “Ritratto olfattivo di una donna”.

**sapore-colore-odore (taste-colour-odour/flavour)**

There is no word for “flavour” in Italian, so the Futurists contracted taste, colour and smell to emphasise the synthesis of these sensory stimuli during culinary activities. Marinetti and Fillia (1932), *La cucina futurista*.

**sinottico-singustativo (synoptic-together/syn-gustatory)**

When diverse tastes come together to become a new whole. Marinetti and Fillia (1932), *La cucina futurista*.