

Smell and the Past

Noses, Archives, Narratives

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Figures

Olfactory Figures

At various points in this book you will be asked to sniff common materials that evoke the scent of the past because of the shared molecules and compounds that give both past and contemporary materials their particular odour. Below you can find a list of these Olfactory Figures, with a few suggested materials for each example. This book can be read without these figures, but the argument of the book depends on encouraging the reader to engage their nose and so they are essential to the full experience of engaging with this text.

OF 0.1	Breathe in your surroundings. Give your immediate environment a good sniff – both the ambient atmosphere and the objects around you. Does the space where you are reading this have a particular smell? How has this impacted your reading of this text so far?	11
OF 1.1	Sniff the ammonia in stale urine (human, cat) or smelling salts	24
OF 1.2	Sniff truffles or, more likely, truffle oil	30
OF 1.3	Light a safety match, blow it out and sniff the smoke	32
OF 2.1	This book and any other number of books you have around you (try, if you can, to sniff of varying vintages and materials)	67
OF 2.2	Root beer and some – especially in the UK – rubs and sprays for muscle pain from high street chemists	71
OF 2.3	Saffron threads – the sort you might find in a supermarket	73
OF 3.1	As you read this chapter, you could, if you so choose, burn a stick of incense	75
OF 3.2	Bleaching powder or liquid bleach (the active ingredient of which is chloride of lime). Just a quick sniff ...	85
OF 3.3	Dried or fresh rosemary, rubbing it between your fingers to help release the scent	95
OF 3.4	Benzoin resin, incense or gum	108