



Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell

By Constance Classen, David Howes, Anthony Synnott

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Smell is a social phenomenon, given particular meanings and values by different cultures. Odours form the building blocks of cosmologies, class hierarchies, and political odours. They can enforce social structures or transgress them, unite people or divide them, empower or disempower. The authors argue that the sociology of smell is repressed in the modern West, and its social history ignored. This book breaks the "olfactory silence" of modernity. It offers the first comprehensive exploration of the cultural role of odours in Western history - from antiquity to the present. It also covers a wide variety of non-Western societies. Its topics range from the medieval concept of the "odour of sanctity", to the aromatherapies of South America, and from olfactory stereotypes of gender and ethnicity in the modern West to the role of smell in postmodernity. Its subject matter will fascinate anyone who likes to nose around in the inner workings of culture.

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Editorial Review

Review

Warning: this book may bring on the desire to fill your home with bouquets of freesia, spread lavender under your sheets, take baths infused with verbena, and rub rosemary through your hands. For *Aroma*, through its examination of the role of odor in various cultures and at different periods, cannot help but make a reader painfully aware of the great olfactory void that characterizes Western civilization in the late 20th century.... Considering the omnipresent olfactory backdrop of automobile exhaust, a short growing season and limited access to the earth, that anyone is trying to 'take back odor' surely is cause for celebration, especially for such olfactory aficionados as these authors.

—The Montreal Gazette

Better than anything written on the subject thus far . . . Tremendously rich and attention-holding.

—Zygmunt Bauman

Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell is fascinating on how odours are not just biological and psychological but cultural, employed by societies as a way of defining and interacting with the world...it is quite a relief to open this deliciously rich stew of a book and smell nothing more than paper and ink.

—The Observer

Classen, Howes and Synnott have brought the day a little closer with their fascinating book.

—John Emsley, Imperial College, London

...a fine survey of the meanings of olfaction from the historical, anthropological and sociological viewpoint...their text will prove valuable to teachers and students alike.

—Journal of Social History

About the Author

Constance Classen is Reader, Centre for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto. **David Howes** is Associate Professor of Anthropology, Concordia University, Montreal. **Anthony Synnott** is Associate Professor of Sociology, Concordia University, Montreal.

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