Epistemological Challenge of Cognitive Body Odour
exploring the underside of dialogue

Introduction

How to explain the distaste that those of one belief system or school of thought feel for another, however politely it is expressed? This is most evident in the relations between religions. It is only too clear in the relations between academic disciplines -- especially between the "hard" and the "soft" sciences. It can be regretted in the case of the dysfunctional dynamics between the many groups concerned with "peace" or "saving the planet". It can be detected in attitudes to contrasting aesthetic preferences, whether associated with the arts, music or language -- or even meditation.

This distaste may well be at the root of the "arms length", tepid, tokenistic relationships characteristic of interfaith dialogue, interdisciplinary initiatives, and multicultural encounters. It continues to be rationalized in support of "us and them" modes of social organization, as disguised forms of apartheid -- and even in support of violence against the other.

The phenomenon is most perplexing in the case of initiatives that explicitly set out to be integrative and comprehensive in scope, or even profoundly spiritual. In practice each seemingly fails to address the significance of other initiatives that perceive themselves to be of similar or more profound significance. Furthermore their insight may be transformed into intellectual property of some kind for the special benefit of the originator.

This creates a challenge for the uninitiated -- how to distinguish between the various integrative claims, and the peculiarly unsophisticated dynamics between the claimants. In a period of violent confrontation between cultures -- epitomized by "crusades" and "jihads" -- this is the challenge that the Parliament of the World's Religions totally fails to address. In fact such bodies could not exist if they were to be acknowledged and addressed therein. And yet many of the religions that meet there implicitly (if with unctuous regret) endorse the actions of their adherents in cutting each others' throats.

The concern here is that, albeit unknowingly, all of us with integrative aspirations suffer from various forms of "CBO" -- cognitive body odour -- meaning that we may "smell good" to others of our tribe, but we may well "stink" most offensively to those of some other tribes. How should this challenge be addressed?

Cognitive body odour

As a metaphor, body odour offers a widely understandable template through which to explore this pattern.

Body odour, according to Wikipedia, is the smell of bacteria growing on the body -- estimated to number some 10^{12}. These bacteria multiply considerably in the presence of sweat, although sweat itself is almost totally odourless. Body odour is associated with the hair, feet, crotch (upper medial thigh), anus, skin in general, breasts, armpits, genitals, pubic hair, and mouth. Body odor is specific to the individual, and can be used to identify people, though this is more often done by dogs than by humans. An individual's bodily odor is also influenced by diet, gender, genetics, health, medication, occupation, and mood. Various scales have been developed to distinguish inoffensive from highly offensive body odour.

Given the personal familiarity most have with these phenomena, how might "cognitive body odour" then be understood?
What might be the "bacteria" growing on a "body of knowledge", or a "body of faith", with which we personally identify? In the case of our physical body these bacteria are totally invisible to us and the existence of millions of them on the skin is readily denied -- if not a cause for horror and obsessive hygiene. How might a body of knowledge or belief system be similarly populated? By what exactly? The question acquires a different sense in the context of explorations of bacterial intelligence (cf the work of Eshel Ben-Jacob, 2004 and 2006).

Do the exertions of that body, perhaps in response to challenge, engender a form of "sweat" that favours their growth? How would the description of a discipline or faith as being currently "in a sweat" be understood? In the case of the physical body, body odour is notably engendered at the joints and orifices. In the case of belief systems and schools of thought, what are these "joints" and orifices?  

- "Joints": these are most evident as the points of articulation between the parts of a discipline -- at the points of junction between sub-disciplines and the central corpus. They are similarly evident within any religious belief system. More interesting are situations where there is a real tension, perhaps to be described as pre-schismatic, between "factions" or schools of thought within a belief system. Also interesting are the areas of discontinuity, inconsistency and "contradiction". The fact that sweat is notably produced in areas where there is more profuse growth of bodily hair, in contrast to "hairless" skin (typically more acceptable), points to the possibility that "cognitive sweat" may be more closely associated with the "untamed" (questionable?) frontiers of a body of knowledge.

- "Orifices": here there is an advantage in exploring the radical distinction made (notably by psychoanalysts since Freud) in the case of a physical body between:
  
  "mouth": many disciplines and belief systems have their "mouthpiece" or spokesperson, although this may take the form of a representative body -- empowered to dialogue with another such body. Such a person functions both as gatekeeper for input to the belief system as well as articulating the insights of the discipline in question to the wider world. In the physical case, there is a huge industry providing corrective products for halitosis, however euphemistically these are described in terms of "freshening" or "cleaning". In the case of belief systems the challenge is not understood as a form of "halitosis" but remedies are expensively provided in the form of corrective public relations campaigns -- with speech writers perhaps to be understood as a form of cognitive prosthetic for the "freshness-challenged"
  
  "anus": just as the anus is a necessary orifice for discharge of foodstuffs after vital nutrients have been extracted from them, one may ask what form the "anus" of a body of knowledge or discipline might take. Clearly such entities do ingest nutrients, whether or not some might consider themselves to have no such mundane dependencies. Given the manner in which defecation and flatulence is framed as a private activity surrounded by taboos, prudery and even shame, it is to be expected that the waste output of a discipline might be similarly concealed from the public eye. It is however notable that terms such as "shit" and "flatulence" are extremely widely used as metaphorical descriptions of the output of some systems of thought through their most esteemed exponents -- who may themselves be described in terms of the appropriate orifice for such output (cf Backside to the Future: coherence and conflation of dominant strategic metaphors, 2000).
  
  "genitalia": the organs whereby the body reproduces itself are, like the anus, similarly subject to a vast range of taboos and pose well-recognized challenges to limit diffusion of offensive odours. By what means are disciplines and belief systems to be understood as "reproducing" themselves? This is most obvious in their educational processes, with the associated publications and media products, through which that body is renewed and its future engendered (cf Future Generation through Global Conversation, 1997). Certain "cognitive body odours", as attractants, may be vital to the dynamics of this process. The dysfunctionalities are evident in the criticism that some of these processes "stink" -- most notably in the dubious dynamics of the peer review process, reinforcing the patterns described as "incestuous" (eg mutual citation acts, corporate subversion of research, etc) or "anally retentive" with respect to the dissemination of knowledge.

Another locus of body odour is that associated with constraining clothing, notably footwear, which requires periodic cleansing. Again it could be asked what parallels might apply in the case of schools of thought and belief systems. Some sensitivity to this might be seen in occasional recognition of the need for a form of "renewal" or "spring cleaning", typically framed as the need for "new blood" and "rejuvenation". It may be more apparent in the perceived need for design changes in the organs through which the belief is expressed (journal, website, etc). The challenge here, as with the need for changes of clothing, is how frequently do they need to be made in order to limit the accumulation of disagreeable "cognitive body odours"?

**Specificity of body odour**

As noted above, body odour is typically specific to the individual, and can be used to identify people, most often by animals. The specificity may be linked to patterns of diet. For northern Europeans, the extensive use of garlic by those of the Mediterranean region may render them distinctive. Of greater interest to the exploration of this metaphor is the distinctive odour associated with Europeans in general to the sensitivities of many in Asian countries with different dietary preferences. This offers a means of highlighting the sense in which "western" modes of thought may have a potentially unpleasant 'cognitive body odour' to those of "eastern" schools of thought.

It is interesting that in the case of schools of thought or belief systems, their subtly distinctive character may be described by an observer in terms of odour. This may take an uncritical form ("the group has a particular smell") or, as noted above, as a strong criticism ("the belief stinks").

By contrast the medieval notion of the "odour of sanctity" was associated with that of saintly people at their death or when exhumed -- still held to be evidence of sainthood [more]. It is now used more commonly in a negative sense -- "being in bad odour". This could
indeed be said of particular schools of thought or hypotheses.

In the case of the physical body, huge expense may be devoted to giving it a distinctive smell through application of perfumes and lotions. In the case of a school of thought or a belief system, getting it to "smell right" is typically a matter for public relations and "communicators" -- however much the need for their activity may be viewed with dismay by those within the discipline.

For a school of thought with its base in a particular physical environment, typically a building complex, traditionally incense has been used to enhance the sense of identity and specificity. New developments in the perfume industry are however being applied to allow institutions to enhance their distinctiveness through additives to air conditioning. These could be understood as physical parallels to preventive or supportive public relations.

**Cognitive hygiene**

Various forms of hygiene are seen as the primary means of reducing or eliminating disagreeable or offensive body odour -- especially when it is felt to be an embarrassment. Typically this may involve bathing frequently with soap, using a bidet, oral hygiene, and wearing clean clothes, particularly fresh socks and underwear. Use of antiperspirants, deodorants and oral hygiene products may be understood to be part of this process. Some cultures and belief systems may emphasize the need for this. Others may see it as unnecessary, as with Europeans in past centuries, who bathed very rarely -- notably at the time of the Renaissance when various bodies of knowledge emerged.

Historically one of the reasons for discouraging bathing in Europe was the concern of religious authorities at the moral consequences of public nudity in communal bathing facilities. Ironically it remains the case that disciplines and belief systems expect to be allowed to "wash their dirty linen" in the privacy of their own institutions rather than in public.

Should disciplines, schools of thought and belief systems explore the need for a greater level of "cognitive hygiene"? Is this not precisely the objective of the "scientific method" if not of "discipline" itself (notably as more broadly defined by Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: outline of an anarchistic theory of knowledge*, 1975)? It might be argued that this is what is more strongly advocated under the term "critical thinking".

It might be assumed that the "bacteria" at the basis of the "cognitive body odour" in this metaphor are meaningless connotations. The approach to "conceptual hygiene" offered by Torkild Thellefsen (*Semiotics of Terminology: a semiotic knowledge profile*) endeavours "to show how we may sharpen scientific terminology based on the pragmatic semiotics of Peirce and how to conduct conceptual 'hygiene' upon concepts to erase meaningless connotations". A number of other references to "conceptual hygiene" exist in the literature.

Unfortunately metaphor itself, as used here, is often considered as offering "meaningless connotations" that it is desirable to eliminate.

Put more crudely, who is to determine which disciplines or belief systems "need to take a bath" -- or to "bathe more frequently"? Is it perhaps also appropriate to envisage rare chronic forms of cognitive body odour, unremedied by "bathing", as suggested by metabolic disorders such as fish-odour syndrome? Or perhaps rare forms of a degree of "metabolic order" and "wholeness" engendering what may be recognized as an "odour of sanctity"?

In this respect, it is interesting to compare the cognitive implications of the requirement on Muslims of washing in preparation for prayer -- five times a day -- with the presumably more lax attitude to cognitive hygiene of other belief systems. In preparation for such prayer, Muslims are enjoined to wash the hands, the face, the mouth, the nose, the arms and elbows, wiping over the head, and washing the feet and ankles [more]. Cognitively this might be contrasted, in the case of worshippers of some other faiths, with the application of deodorants as a substitute for washing.

Where conscious use is made of public relations as a form of hygiene, the question to be asked is also whether this is to be understood as the application of deodorants and perfumes to disguise the "stink" -- the modern equivalent of a pomander.

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<tr>
<th>Dialogue Ping-Pong</th>
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<tr>
<td>For everyone, dialogue may involve the reconciliation</td>
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<td>of the clear &quot;ping&quot; of one's own insight</td>
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<tr>
<td>with the sharp and musty &quot;pong&quot; of the other's</td>
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**Epistemological implications of the odour metaphor**

The role of metaphor in relation to cognition has been extensively studied, notably by George Lakoff. (*Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 1987) and Mark Johnson, whether separately or in collaboration [summary]. Some of their studies have focused specifically on the body as a metaphor (Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: the bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*, 1987; George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy In The Flesh: the embodied mind and its challenge to western thought*, 1999).

Somewhat ironically, a metaphor may itself be described as the use of a "body of knowledge" about one concept to understand or comment on a second concept [more]. Given the metaphorical use of "body of knowledge" or "body of faith", the question is what such studies of the cognitive place of the human body might imply -- notably given the problematic significance potentially attached to odour.

Fiona Borthwick. (*Olfaction and Taste: invasive odours and disappearing objects - critical essay, Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 2000) provides a very fruitful examination of the sociality of olfaction and taste in everyday life. She argues:

> The metaphorisation of sight and hearing, the objective senses, dominate the founding ideas, or philosophemes, of Western philosophy. The senses of taste and smell are of little relevance in the formation of conceptual knowledge or in classificatory systems; they are, by virtue of their dissolving objects, incapable of giving objective knowledge in Western metaphysics.... Of all
the senses, that of smell—which is attracted without objectifying—bears clearest witness to the urge to lose oneself in and become the ‘other’. Retaining the framework and premises of the classificatory schemas that maintain five separate senses, how different are the possibilities for subject/object relationships in the metaphorisations of taste and smell compared to those of sight and hearing?

Borthwick develops Jacques Derrida’s argument (1982, 1986) that smell and taste -- the subjective senses -- are not used as a basis for the philosophemes of Western thought:

Smell is simply ignored, of no relevance to conceptualising the object, formulating the idea, giving objective knowledge. Taste is slightly more complicated since it has been metaphorised into the sense of judgement, which, arguably, gives it the characteristics of and philosophemes that support sight. In taste, as the sense of judgement, what is left behind after the Aufhebung is taste’s sensuousness and the implications this has for objectivity. In Western thought the division of the senses into categories of subjectivity and objectivity allowed a dialectical process to lift and preserve the objective aspects of the senses to found conceptual knowledge and to devalue what is cancelled, since an immersion in subjectivity cannot found categories or conceptual knowledge. This is especially relevant to taste and smell.

Nathalie Wourn (The Smell of God: scent trails from Ficino to Baudelaire, 2003) documents the history of the understanding of spiritual scent, of how a sense of smell can bring people to a deeper knowledge of God. This is one aspect of a theory which runs through much of European history from the Renaissance onwards, with fluctuating intensity and with fundamental variations. It has been referred to, principally, as the theory of signatures, the theory of universal analogy, and the theory of correspondences, and is originally derived from Plato’s philosophy of Ideas. As she notes:

The most common thread of the doctrine is that there are correspondences between the material and the spiritual worlds and that the material world can therefore be read like a book, revealing the secrets of the spiritual world. Another common thread of the doctrine is that the senses, which diffusely allow us to experience the material world, can be united as one, enabling our complete grasp of spiritual harmony, of the ideal world. The senses have usually figured highly in the doctrine of correspondences in general, as enabling this leap from the material to the spiritual. But individual senses have enjoyed varying degrees of attention throughout time. Smell has not been the most popular of them, but it is markedly emphasised by two users of the doctrine, the eighteenth-century Swedish scientist, theologian and mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg, and the French Symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire.

So much of the organization of knowledge and the institutionalized implementation of responses to social challenges is based on metaphors associated with sight and vision (Metaphor and the Language of Futures, Futures, 1993). Although the cognitive implications of odour would seem to be ignored, they are clearly evident in the very high concern with personal body odour and, for disciplines and belief systems as articulated by their institutions, of being “in good odour”. But the odour metaphor has quite fundamental implications for conventional modes of organizing knowledge. As Borthwick helpfully points out:

Odour and olfaction disrupt the metaphysical premises that use sight and hearing as their support; the metaphorisation of sight in philosophy supports the whole subject/object dichotomy and all that flows from it. Odour does not fit easily into the subject/object split. Its status as an object is questionable: its composition cannot be clearly defined… it cannot be classified, it cannot be mapped onto a geometric model… and, unless examined microscopically, it cannot be seen at all. It simply has potent effects within the body through the part of the brain linked with emotions, the limbic system. An odour could be understood as an object in relation to the subject, but only as long as the subject does not smell it; once an odour becomes part of olfaction its status as object is completely lost in the subject’s body, in the experience of olfaction. Just as a classificatory system based on geometric models does not work for odours, neither does the sight-based split between subject and object. In the experience of taste and olfaction, with the dissolution of the object, there is only an effect. The chemical senses provide the possibility of a metaphors that disrupts that of traditional metaphysics. The dissolvability, the lack of a form and the difficulty in classifying odours gives olfaction an entirely different basis to the certitude of form, the separability of object from subject, and the distancing, of the objective senses. This different basis is what Derrida draws on to develop different philosophemes.

Such a clarification reinforces the legitimacy of arguments recognizing the diversity of modes of thought that, within this metaphor, would sense each other to be fundamentally offensive in some way (cf Systems of Categories Distinguishing Cultural Biases, 1993). These are the modes of cognition variously identified and clustered by:

- Kagoroh Maruyama (Mindscape, social patterns and future development of scientific theory types. Cybernetica, 1980, 23, 1, pp. 5-25)
- Geert Hofstede (Culture’s Consequences: international differences in work-related values. Sage, 1984)
- Kinhide Mushakoji (Scientific revolution and interparadigmatic dialogue. Tokyo, United Nations University, GPID project, 1978)
- W T Jones (The Romantic Syndrome: toward a new method in cultural anthropology and the history of ideas. Martinus Nijhoff,
The clusters distinguished within each of the above frameworks are those which would tend to be alienated by each others' CBO -- especially when their preferred respective windows on reality ensure them a particular kind of "information diet" (for example, compare the "facts" with which physicists, economists, psychologists and musicians deal). This is after all the nature of distinction within the odour metaphor. Ironically however, between the above frameworks, there would be relatively little sympathy on the part of the advocates of any one such framework for any other.

The manner in which such radically distinct ways of knowing are engendered is clarified by Antonio T de Nicolas (Habits of Mind: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, Paragon, 1989, and Habits of Mind: An Introduction to Clinical Philosophy, New Edition. Authors Choice Press, 2000). He distinguishes the five main and invariant habits of mind in terms of the neurobiology of humans' multiple brains, or intelligence centers: the reptilian, limbic (including the heart,), right and left hemispheres of the neocortex, and Michael Gazzaniga's "interpreter module". These correspond philosophically to Plato's five divisions of knowledge. Mind as "thinking" excludes the processes of imagining, decision making, and experience, in other words the fourth and fifth in Plato, with which de Nicolas considers the cognitive processes of olfaction to be associated. The importance of this understanding is that it points to the manner in which, through the operational complementarity of these intelligence centers, the roles of seemingly disparate ways of knowing acquire the collective coherence without which humans would not be who they are.

Epistemological relationship between human values and olfaction

Borthwick's arguments raise the interesting question of whether the relation to odour is in fact more consonant with the epistemological relation to the subtlety of human values. How distinctions are made between "good" or "bad" odours in the cognitive sense explored here has fruitful similarities to the manner in which "good" and "bad" values are distinguished.

It might be argued that it is how the set of values is sensed by an individual or group in relation to a discipline or belief system that is best understood in terms of how they "smell" -- consistent with the traditional sense that sanctity smells "good" and evils smells "bad". The traditional process of "smelling out" evil doers and sorcerers continues to be practiced in some societies. Odours (notably pheromones), like values, may perhaps be explored as "strange attractors" (cf HUMAN VALUES AS STRANGE ATTRACTIONS: COEVOLUTION OF CLASSES OF GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES, 1993). Associated with love as one of the core values, research has shown that body odour is particularly critical for women in selecting a mate because it is a sign of immunological health. Ironically in contrast, it is by sight -- looks -- that men prefer to select their partners. This points to a subtle complementarity. It also offers a new explanation of the dominance of the "vision" metaphor in policy making.

In a personal communication Mahdi Elmandjra (Valeur des Valeurs, 2006, Humiliation à l'ère du néga-impérialisme, 2003) points out that human beings have lost about 75% of their sense of smell with time -- no longer needing to defend themselves as animals do. However in a period defined by a "clash of civilizations" (Mahdi Elmandjra, First Civilizational War, 1992), hopefully to have been mitigated by enhanced intercultural communication, the epistemological implications of this loss may be inhibiting the capacity to sense the values of others through the kinds of cognition required by this faculty. Hence the difficulty of ordering intercultural relationships in any meaningful way. Odour, by the very nature of its diffusion, could of course provide an interesting model of how values are shared, notably in relation to fairness (cf Frank Peterman, The Precautionary Principle: building a better society through our shared values).

The intimate relation between values and a sense of identity is also reflected in the manner in which perfumes are used to enhance a particular sense of identity -- commodified through the marketing of perfumes. This is evident in the bonding of people in relationships -- starting with the relation of infants to their mother. It is is of course essential to the relation of certain animals to each other and to humans. For some animals it may be assumed to define identity -- including that of the humans with which they are associated. Ironically identification techniques using body odour have been evaluated by government security services (Jason Burke and Peter Warren, Smelling out wrongdoers will put the law ahead by a nose, The Observer, 28 December 2003) -- a modern variant of the "smelling out" of witches. The military are also investigating the use of the discriminatory power of the tongue to enhance their soldiers in the future (Scientists probe the use of the tongue, AP, 24 April 2006).

In the expectation of any contact with extraterrestrials, such subtlety contrary to conventional logics could be usefully borne in mind (cf Communicating with Aliens: the Psychological Dimension of Dialogue, 2000)

Policy implications of cognitive body odour -- for collective "bodies"

Collective bodies: Given the fundamental cognitive implications of the body metaphor, notably as explored by Lakoff and Johnson, there is a strong case for recognizing the degree to which this metaphor has been extended into collective social organization. Given the challenge of CBO for any "body", what are the implications in the case of:

- body of parliament, parliament(ary) body, congressional body, legislative body, government body
- legal body, regulatory body, representative body, plenary body
- body politic, body social, body of law, body of regulations
- international body, national body, regional body, local body
- academic body, educational body, cultural body, body corporate, civil society body, religious body, community body
- body of knowledge, body of research, body of resources, body of experience, body of insight, body of excellence, body of faith, body of belief

Stinking policies: Although the above exploration has focused on the "cognitive body odour" by which the relations between disciplines and schools of thought are challenged, it clearly has implications for the manner in which the policy proposals and initiatives of a variety

- Emanuel Todd (La Troisième Planète: structures familiales et systèmes idéologiques. Paris, 1983)
of bodies are perceived. Critical comment on a proposal may typically use the metaphorical expression "it stinks" (Google lists: 822 items containing "policy stinks", 549 for "policy smells", 1220 for "stinking policy", 98 for "stinking strategy", 494 for "strategy stinks").

The verdict on Saddam is just. Yet everything stinks about the process by which it has been reached. (Max Hastings, Bush and Blair have forfeited the moral authority to hang Saddam. Guardian, 6 November 2006)

Nadia McLaren (In the Global Village: options for moving beyond Binge, Whinge, Cringe or Stinge in local green accounting, 1999), in developing a study by Peter Harper (Centre for Alternative Technology), effectively points to the challenge of the degrees of "cognitive offensiveness" of the more challenging strategies that may prove appropriate to sustainable development -- now faced with global warming (see also Navigating Alternative Conceptual Realities, 2002). As demonstrated by the selectively attractive role of pheromones, "cognitive body odour" may well be fundamental to what makes a collective initiative attractive to those who adhere to it. Does this suggest a more appropriate way of understanding the popular rejection of the European Constitution?

Smelling right: But why does it tend to be assumed that the most appropriate strategies will necessarily have an agreeable CBO? Should not the richly problematic smell of decay, valuable to the processes in a compost heap, raise questions about the necessary CBO of appropriate policy? In what way might CBO be fundamental to recycling processes vital to sustainability? (It is appropriate to note that a biological metaphor, using "body" and "orifice", has been used in exploring urban planning for sustainability in India [more] -- but omitting the challenge of "odour").

How is it that prepared to take high risks in an initiative (entrepreneurs, inventors, editors, media programme producers, etc) are renowned for relying ultimately on whether the project "smells right"? (Google offers 38,400 items for "smell right"+policy, 15,500 for "smell right"+strategy, 500 for "smelling right"+policy ). The same phrase is used by many with respect to certain life choices (employment offers, etc). Management may recognize and value a capacity for "smelling out" problems and opportunities. Investigative bodies may recognize the subtle skill of "smelling out" the truth.

With respect to policy-making, there is a marked contrast between the narrowly explicit nature of collective "vision" and the subtlety of emerging possibilities (like spring), that are sensed to be "in the air" -- a metaphorical reminder of former dependence on olfactory cognition in the complexity of the wild. The expression 'it is in the air' is considered by Nathan Rotenstreich to be latently related to the idea of Zeitgeist (The Dictionary of the History of Ideas, 2003). Suggesting an alternative understanding of an emergent future, there are increasing numbers references to "tasting the future" (beyond that of physical foodstuffs and decor) as well as to "smelling the future".

Systemic self-regulation: Is it possible that the epistemological pointers offered by Borthwick are an indicator that in relatively complex cognitive situations the organization of knowledge associated with olfaction may constitute the key to system regulation and integrity? Is there a necessary complementarity to the pattern of "odours" in a well-regulated system -- rather than an unnatural degree of "odourlessness" resulting from simplistic understandings of "conceptual hygiene"? How is "odourlessness" to be understood in relation to the "soullessness" by which some believe Europe to be challenged? (cf Animating the Representation of Europe, 2005). After all it is to a large degree through odour -- rather than "vision" -- that the self-regulation of complex ecosystems is ensured. If such is the case, why the total reliance on the "vision" metaphor in more formal policy-making?

Daniel Press and Steven C. Minta (The Smell of Nature: olfaction, knowledge and the environment, Ethics, Place and Environment, 2000) point out that, despite the dominance of visual modes of perception in western cultures, some contemporary societies still make use of olfaction for organizing themselves in space and time. They suggest suggest that it offers promise for advancing inquiry into the human-nature relationship that are so important to many environmental philosophers, scientists and activists.

But how to distinguish the offensive smell of recycling processes to "civilized sensibilities" from that which people are being called upon to accept in the dubious policy responses to terrorism in defence of "civilization" -- as exemplified by legitimization of torture, cluster bombing, withholding of assistance, etc?

Stench of corruption: Beyond the possible offensiveness of CBO, perhaps most striking is the use of the odour metaphor with respect to the detection of corruption associated with various "bodies" and their initiatives (Google lists some 7,000 items with "stink(s) of corruption", 12,000 with "smell(s) of corruption", 30,800 with "stench of corruption"). The question to be asked, in the light of Borthwick's analysis, is why it is the odour metaphor that provides the explanatory modality considered most appropriate to the detection and indication of corruption of collective bodies in general -- and of the body politic in particular.

Unmentionables: Curiously both "cognitive body odour", and any "smell of corruption", both benefit from being unmentionable in many settings. The impact of corruption on development processes was, for example, long denied by the World Bank despite its own association with the phenomenon [more]. Whilst the possibility of corruption is increasingly of explicit concern, notably in the light of investigations at the highest levels of government, the challenge of CBO remains to be openly discussed. Failure to do so will continue to undermine initiatives towards a more viable society (cf Global Strategic Implications of the Unsaid: from myth-making towards a wisdom society, 2003).

You know you like puns too much when you write something about how everything stinks and you call it "New World Odor." Disinfotainment Today #122

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