

## SENSES—SMELL

**Smell: The Secret Seducer.** By Piet Vroon with Anton van Amerongen and Hans de Vries, translated from the Dutch by Paul Vincent. 1997. Farrar, Straus & Giroux (19 Union Square West, New York, NY 10003). 226 pp. Hardback \$23 (U.S.), \$32.50 (Canada).

When I received *Smell-The Secret Seducer* to review, I thought, you have got to be kidding me. Someone has written a book on smell. But then as a teacher of biology I realized that this is one sense not covered very well in our texts, and in fact I know very little about it and therefore do not teach about it. Upon examination of the copy I received I noticed that the cover has a centrally located photo of a nose and the back cover boasts some strange facts about smell. Did you know, "There are about 400,000 odors in the world today. A child's first sensations are smells of the 'life fluid' in the womb. There is good reason not to talk with one's mouth full: when you do, you lose precious aromas that are making their way to your nose." The book is full of interesting facts that have escaped us until now.

The book opens with a fascinating chapter on the history of smell, beginning with its importance in culture and in the animal kingdom and ending with the importance of the olfactory organ. Chapters 2 and 3 cover the sense of smell as an important part of the nervous system and therefore deal with morphology and physiology.

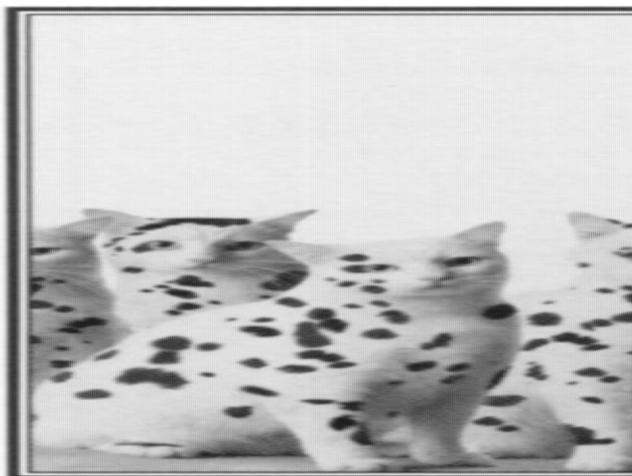
The central part of the book emphasizes the effect of smell on memory and behavior. Smell can influence social factors, synchronize menstrual cycles, and be part of the sexual attractants in insects, mammals and especially human beings. A wonderful exposé on perfumes and the marketing strategies employed by the perfume houses closes out Chapter 7.

The book concludes with some statements dealing with olfactory disorders covering topics such as innate defects, acquired disorders, causes and treatments, smell and disease, hormonal disorders, dementia, and aroma-therapy.

Smell is "a compendium of odd facts and a kind of tribute to the sense of smell, which, of the five senses, is the one we most commonly take for granted." The reading is compelling, humorous and factual. *Smell* answers questions that you might have pondered but sensed that no one had the answer. Now we have the answers in this specialized encyclopedia. Enjoy!

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