**This Place Stinks**

Continuing with the theme of things that assault the senses (music, TV) we are now going to look at how the world stinks.

Imagine 5000 years ago and walking into the Yosemite Valley. Imagine how that might have smelled. You’ll have to imagine it as there is no way in hell you’ll ever get a real sense of it now. The world is one giant chemical stench of industrial chemicals in the form of things like gasoline and road tar and in the form of things like fragrance and beauty products, and it is all-bad.

When my dog rushes up to another dog to greet him/her they engage in an exchange of sniffing. That first action usually causes gasps from the owners but that first 15 seconds tells the dogs so much each other. The smells they pick up tell each other about diet, stress, living conditions, where they have been and mood. In those few seconds their olfactory systems tell them vastly more then the human fist bump, half-hug and secret handshake. And we Human’s used to do the same thing without our noses.

We humans used to be able to smell fear, smell health, smell impending death and even marital status through another’s scent and now all we can smell is toxic waste. In some misguided effort to rid the world of its natural smells we have given everything a scent. Everything needs a scent. Everything needs a signature fragrance. And we just soak ourselves in it simply because marketer’s tell is we have to in order to be human.

When you meet someone now instead of getting know all about them via their unique scent you smell; body wash, shampoo, hair care products, deodorant, chemically created fragrance, chemical scented gum/mint/mouthwash, cigarette smoke, chemicals used to created clothing as well as the chemicals used to create one’s shoes. Yes, when you meet someone you smell that cacophony of vile factory creations and countless other ambient smells depending on where you meet them. And believe it or not it confuses the hell out of you. You can no longer rely on one of your key senses to help you understand the reality around you.

I myself have learned to hate the smell of anything that can be recreated in a factory. The smell of roses in the garden is nice, but the smell of rose scented anything in a can, bottle, cream or candle sends me into a homicidal frenzy. It doesn’t soothe me like the label often says it pisses me off. And that goes for all the rest of the packaged scents designed to make me feel something special.

What confounds me is this: if I sniff glue for fun the cops will arrest me and charge me with a crime. If I load myself up with the standard morning cologne bath and all the rest of the scented beauty products I get the same high! And it’s legal! If I walk into the Bed Bath and Beyond to purchase a frying pan I am stoned out of my gourd 15 seconds after entering into the store, as the chemical smell from the potpourri, candles, soap and all the rest turns my brains into mush. By the time I get to the frying pan section the music has taken what’s left of my will to live.

Try taking a bit of your preferred cologne or perfume and spray a bit on a rag and “huff it” and see how you feel? Take a dryer sheet, hold it up to your face and “huff it” and see how you feel. Does one think that because one isn’t actively huffing the effect of an all day waft is any different?

Every time I leave the house I run the danger of picking up a mass produced scent. A 20-minute chiropractic adjustment can lead to a change of clothes after lying down in someone else’s scent while on the table. I now refuse to enter the Bed Bath and Beyond simply because anything I buy needs to be washed and my clothes do as well. I touched a gas pump handle last week, which led to me touching my face and my steering wheel, which led to me enjoying the benefits of “Polo, by Ralph Lauren,” in my life for the next five hours. One prolific hugger planted a new brand of perfume on me that lead to me having to toss the shirt because I couldn’t get the smell out on my own (there is no dry cleaner in town that provides a scent free cleaning – none). Sure it all sounds a bit prissy of me, until you understand how all of this scenting of the planet affects your consciousness expression.

This need to scent everything is a crime against humanity and it is turning people into zombies. Scents have a huge effect on the ability to express our consciousness. When I was in college I would take a scent and use a hint of it to associate it to the information I was studying. Then come test time all I needed to do was put a dab under my nose and could remember what I needed to. Even to this day, if I smell the now chemical version of Aramis Cologne I think of my parents going out for a night out. If I smell the smell of brandy on someone’s breath I think of my father being an ass… well you get the idea there. A hint of garden mint reminds me of my grandmother and her yard. Ms. Fields was made famous by gently blowing the scent of the cookies into the mall, enticing customers. Our sense of smell is no joke and marketers know that.

Scent is important and our ability to smell the world around us is important. The world now is some Disneyland of synthetic chemicals, which absolutely changes our ability to perceive. They affect our mood, they cloud our judgment and they do everything but make us feel better. I suggested once to a client that breathing in dryer sheet smell all day was causing some mental confusion and the response was that people loved the way she smelled, as they often described her as smelling as “fresh and clean.” What in the name of everything ever created as led people to think the smell of dryer sheet is “fresh” let alone “clean?” While working with clients many would come to home and leave their mass produced fragrance in my house, leaving my unique home smelling like one of millions. Even worse, quite often the scent was so overwhelming that it made my work so much harder as I needed to battle they effects of the chemicals on my brain.

Some corporate fairy has run around the planet spreading scent all over the world in an effort to rid the world of that oh so offensive, “absence of fragrance.” While in Yosemite I enjoyed the smell of pine coupled with the smell of dryer sheet, the smell of water with the smell of Eternity by CK, the smell of diesel fuel with the smell of millions year old granite. In my mind I was simply overwhelmed by the conflict these scents were having on me and it wasn’t fun.

Soaps of every sort need a scent. Why does dish soap need a scent? Every room needs a scent? Every store needs a scent? Every car needs a scent car that gives the car that new car scent? Every holiday needs a scent? Every shampoo needs a scent? Every human needs a chemical scent on them at all times? Every candle needs a scent, which, when burned, creates some other horrifying chemically scented toxic fume? Next time you are out go into any drug store, any Bed Bath and Beyond even a Super Market and stop what you are doing and smell, breath it all in.

On of the most depressing parts of this is that once some folks did create things with real, genuine artistic fragrance. Many years ago I had a friend that made custom fragrances. She came over and smelled me, yes my skin - me, and put together something that didn’t cover me up and was a true artistic creation. Now some marketing guy contacts a globochem company and says, “gimme a scent to sell this damn candle” and one is rushed to them without regard to the end users consciousness expression. This kind of effort diminishes the true artistry of those who can craft something with soul. This ubiquitous scent thing has me disliking almost anything with smell at all at this point, as even those with some “spiritual” method seem to be just adding to the pile.

The worst part of all of this is we have lost the ability to smell others. Will a baby coated in baby wipe smell, diaper smell, dryer sheet smell and baby soap smell be able to smell his mom? Will a mother be able to smell when her child is sick? If your mom was in a line up with other moms could you pick her out by smell? Could you pick out your mate by smell or is your makes smell one of the CK signature perfumes? I know I have been so conditioned that the smell of another, without perfume, can annoy me. My mother is remembered by me for Este Lauder’s “White Linen” and not her personal scent.

Be aware how scent can alter the way you perceive your reality. Hours of breathing cigarette smoke is an obvious mind altering experience but so is breathing hours of perfume, or gasoline, or candle, or dryer sheet or anything else that is designed to stimulate the brain.

**Tastes like chemicals**

Continuing with our theme of sensory assault we will now examine the sense of taste. This key sense has not been spared from the sensory chaos and it too has a monumental effect on the way in which one’s consciousness expresses itself through the body.

Recently I saw documentary called *Somms*, about a group of men seeking to be certified as a wine Sommelier through a grueling test that only a few will pass. One of the key parts of the test is the blind taste test where the aspiring Somm must taste several wines and name the region, brand and year. This seems insane to you and I but they train themselves to do this by using both the sense of smell and taste (sight too). They can smell dozens of “scents” in a wine and dozens of distinct flavors in any vintage. They could smell orange, mildew as well as taste earth and of course the grapes but curiously they never said, “I get a hint of aspartame” for some reason. Wine for them is as complex as anything it gets.

Now I am the first to admit my palate isn’t very sophisticated. The palate finishes its development by about 10 or so and my culinary experience to that point was uninspired to say the least. This means getting to know new tastes is rough going in one’s old age. Several years back I investigated the primal diet, which meant eating everything, including all meats, raw. At first the process was very difficult, as I just couldn’t get into the taste of things. I also had a hard time with my firmly held, preprogrammed belief, that raw meat was dangerous – it isn’t. Eventually I muddled through the process and managed to learn to love sushi, steak tartar and even raw chicken. What I learned most out of this process was that food, as a consciousness expression is primarily fuel, not entertainment. If is also so much more, but for the body it is fuel first and foremost.

For most people they eat a combination of chemical concoctions which are designed to convince them what they are eating is good. MSG, not the Asian version, is a ubiquitous chemical agent added to nearly all processed food that tells the brain the urine covered cardboard they are munching on is the best food ever. This chemical helps mask the taste of the other chemicals used to create a shelf-stable food products. Labs work overtime to simulate flavors that occur naturally in order to trick the brain. Think about that, labs work to synthesize what already exists and is readily available. For example Aspartame is a replacement for sugar, only that chemical wasn’t designed as food at all. That chemical is a failed “ulcer medication” that happens to taste like a synthetic sweetener. While most humans won’t willingly take ulcer meds with their food, they will if they are told the sweet taste means thy won’t get fat – go figure. But this chemical has a unique quality, besides being a highly unstable neuro-toxin; it happens to work well at convincing the brain that it’s awful taste is not only good but rewarding.

Rewarding. Here is where things have gone horribly wrong with the all important sense of taste. Sugar, aspartame, trans-fats, chemical additives and pre-packaged foods have turned food into an instant gratification source. If one eats an avocado for lunch one will store the fat and use it for fuel later. This isn’t actually noticed by the person consuming the avocado, so the food seems superfluous in some ways. If a person drinks a diet coke, they will get a buzz within minutes. I have watched people’s energy field alter right in front of me after consumption of an aspartame laden drink – their nervous system shakes, their eyes change focus and their language shifts in seconds. If one eats a sugar cookie instant gratification happens there too. How about a bag of French fries?

The chemical world of taste has turned many into instant gratification junkies. Folks no longer store fuel for later, they consume something that stimulates the nervous system within seconds of consumption. The popularity of energy drinks is one simple example, as these are marketed to not only stimulate your nervous system keep you going when you might need to sleep. A friend of mine worked with a famous spokesperson for one of the well-known energy drinks. Said spokesperson didn’t drink the stuff because he noticed the free cans he received leaked in his garage and ate into the concrete. Oddly enough a fresh squeezed grapefruit doesn’t seem to do that. Instant gratification has people evaluating their food choices in terms of nervous system buzz and not value to their expression while here on Earth.

While I know it is a commonly held doctrine that “calories” equal fat, and this unbreakable foundation has led to the belief that any and all chemicals created to reduce calories are not only good but safe, but this is all wrong. Fat is for energy, and that means unaltered non-self-stable fat. Protein is for muscle repair and many other bodily functions. Carbs, those dreaded carbs are for fat storage. Calories do not factor into this process – see Gary Taubs work for more. This long time calorie truism has been turned upside down by the chemical industry and it is has distorted our ability to express ourselves. In order to avoid something that is nothing but a PR created boogey man we have rewired our brains. Instead of craving food that helps us evolve, we now crave things Madison Avenue tells us is good for us, even if in another circumstance the product would be considered toxic. Aspartame is a good and wholesome choice, even if you do not have an ulcer – for which this medicine is useless.

Did you know aspartame requires the EPA to monitor it’s handling? Did you know it is unstable at room temperature? Did you know a certain energy drink can eat through the garage floor? Probably not. Did you know cellulose, wood pulp, is a common additive to foodstuffs to extend what little food is there? Food is an energy source that is a combination of Earth energy, the living thing’s energy, and Sun energy. These three components coalesce to create something that sustains our expression and it is our palate that is supposed to be our discernment system on what to eat and when.

Let us not forget that involved in this taste bud land grab is the eyes and the nose. Apples used to be coated in some hideous chemical because people desired really red shiny apples. I read that the hardly-food product Kraft Mac&Cheese has a useless and unhealthy chemical in it to make it orange simply because people will not buy a neutral colored product! Smell that great cinabon smell from a bakery and try to resist that immediate gratification. The eyes, the nose the nervous system have superseded the palate as our guide.

Even more absurd, in America anyway, the consumption of food has become a political statement! This is beyond insane to me that folks make taste-sense food choices based on wholly made up political points of view. While have the world starves, lower middle class white kids argue the sustainability merits of various beer processes, as it if matters. Vegans vow to hate, or terrorize, the horrifying meat eaters. Governments ban salt, big sodas, trans fats in some kind of effort to establish political regulation over our palates – therefore our Soul Expression.

Here is something you may not have considered. Nearly everything we eat is made with water, from soups to pasta, from beer to tomato sauce. The water in this county has some substantially palate-altering chemicals in it. Water contains fluoride, chloramines and who knows what else the medics of government add, and in some areas the water contains the chemicals humans eliminate through waste like Prozac, aspartame and antibiotics. Palate nullification seems to be what’s going on here.

Did you know much of your food choices are based on how stock market gambling bets are going at any given time? If bets are going badly, a press release will say something like, “chocolate may be disappearing” and folks will then panic-buy, raising prices, which then alter your food choices. The point here is very little of your food choice system is based on what helps you evolve, and it is your taste buds that are the battleground for the effort – *your* taste buds. We no longer eat to live, we live to eat. In less then 100 years the entire population, of America at least, are now Entertainment Food Eaters.

Food is an amazing thing on so many levels. The creative efforts, McDonald’s and the like excluded here, are amazing in their complexity. What people, especially poor people, have done to make cheap edible elements fantastic is remarkable. Street food of all sorts is a miracle. I ate a street pizza in Naples that I can still taste – cheap food there is shockingly good due to Naples being a put-upon region of the poor. Street tacos I’ve had in Tijuana are better then anything anyone can eat anywhere. A few weeks ago I ate a Date freshly picked from the tree above and it was fantastic in its natural state. The Plant Kingdom has created some awesome eats, the Animal Kingdom has created some awesome eats and industrial food companies have done their best to ruin things. The tragic world of chemically created shelf-stable foods has ripped on of the foundational elements from our Earth expression.

Listen to your palate. If I could do things differently in my life I would have taken the time many years ago to taste it all. I would have spent time really tasting a basil leaf: fresh, chopped, pounded and dried. I would have been a Somm of the tastes of food.

**The Flat Screen TV Is Our Undoing**

Television “programming.” One “programs” computers, one “programs” robots, and one “programs” the human mind, so why are the shows on television called “programming?” But I already digress. On with the rant.

Don’t get me wrong, I love a good visual yarn, be it TV, Film, Play, or even a YouTube video. I don’t even dislike the reality TV creates so much as pity those who immerse themselves in it in any meaningful way. Marshall Mcluhan spoke, early, and often about the perils of Teevee so I’ll not wax poetic about the sociological factors here. And most know that the flickering light of the TV itself, yes even that flat screen, puts one in a hypnotic state moments after watching it turning most into mindless zombies. You can read more about the connections TV and celebrity have on my article here. My gripe here is the ubiquitous nature of this beast due to the introduction of flat screen television.

Prior to the invention of the flat screen TV, the idiot box was a bulky unruly thing. The first were x-ray cannons that required space, power and commitment to see a program all the way through. Then in the 80’s they got better, but not much smaller as they eliminated tubes for the world of solid-state components and sleeker designs. This physical limitation meant the TV was pretty much relegated to home and a few other locations.

Then the flat screen nightmare began. Cheap LED components meant a TV cost no more then a pack of cigarettes to buy and could be put anywhere. Anywhere, no I take that back, everywhere. I can’t get away from the damn things. In some Orwellian nightmare somewhere there are fewer TV’s attacking the sensibilities of the population. The gym – every cardio machine has it’s own, plus dozens more, the bus, every waiting area on the planet, every bar, every restraint, a whole lot of cars, CARS! Some have them in every room of their home, they are in offices, stadiums, urinals (god damn urinals!) – screw this they are everywhere, period. Everywhere.

The constant flickering lights of images hitting me at every turn is just awful. In a great majority of cases no one is watching! It seems some sort of law was passed while I was sleeping that simply mandated if you have people near you, ever, you have to have a TV on. “If you have a bar, you have to have at least one TV (dozens are best),” “If someone comes to you for something you must have a TV,” must be the entire text of the law.

Dystopian is the word to describe this assault. There is not down time, there is no personal time in the world at large, there is only time where the TV isn’t right in front of you as much. On and on the droning of meaningless nothingness. A hellish brand of visual attack and symbols designed to make one feel worthless, pointless and useless except when it comes time to buy things.

People talking on and on and on and on about nothing – seriously nothing. There are dozens of sports channels covering a handful of sports, showing people talking on and on about what? What are these people talking about, does any of it matter? Would anyone listen if they weren’t on this damn thing?

No person on TV actually says anything true for fear of being called on it, so they talk in circles about nothing, except they say it with force to imply it is meaningful. Talking heads going on and on and all in glorious High Def. High Def is another disaster. At least prior to Flat Screen/High Def combo the folks on the programming box seemed unlike us, marginally perfect in some way we we’re not. Now I can see every pimple, bag and wrinkle and the plastic surgery horrors clearly visible now serve as a public service announcement of what not to do to your face.

When does it end? I would rather they just tattoo one on my forehead and get rid of all rest as it would be less of a visual issue. But instead the new OLED’s are coming, which will make it possible to not only put one on my forehead, but on everything that doesn’t have one now. There is nothing to look forward too.

This can only end badly. I fear if the TV’s go dark the addicts will revolt. Yet if the TV’s do not go dark soon the addicts will be lost forever. I wonder, when you see random acts of vandalism, why do you never see a TV being bashed to pieces? People will bash or graffiti anything and everything but the god box.

**How I Learned To Hate Music**

Music is something I love, or loved. I was one of those kids who was drawn to music right from the get go. While my family was not a great music family in that my parents didn’t buy albums or wax poetic about the classic phrasing of James Taylor’s lyrics, it was still a part of our lives. In Los Angeles there was no shortage of radio stations on the AM or FM dial and the radio was always on in our cars and quite often in the house.

Over time I began to see music as something more meaningful, more intimate and something worth exploring. By 13 music was as integral to my life as my family was. I was fortunate to live in Los Angeles where finding music was easy. There was half a dozen record stores that specialized in used rock music, jazz music, world music and the all-important “cut-out” albums. Cut-out’s were promotional albums that had a hole punched in them which meant they were used for promotional purposes only and most of the industry companies dumped those albums at these stores and getting these albums was seen as a score. I picked through stacks, bought, listened and traded-in often.

As I grew older my taste expanded with each year. I found Bach to be a favorite as well as classic Country music. I found electronic music to be quite interesting as well as the New Age genre. I loved discovering Count Basie’s work as well as Leonard Cohen. While in New Orleans, possibly the music capital of the world, I found all manner of music to interest me, as the radio stations there was very eclectic indeed. In my head I figure there are some one hundred thousand songs and compositions rattling around. From Bill Haley’s “Rock Around the Clock” to Bach’s Brandenburg Concertos. From “Frere Jacques” to “Happy Birthday.” From Led Zeppelin’s “Kashmir” to “How Deep Is Your Love” by the Bee Gees. I can’t play any of them myself, but my head is like some neuro-wired jukebox. As a quick aside, a local musician named Jon Brion does a performance were he mashes up several songs shouted to him from the audience and plays them together, by himself – one can hear “Kashmir” with “How Deep Is Your Love” with “Happy Birthday” and it is remarkable.

Recordings from vinyl to MP3 to live music in clubs to stadiums, I have listened in all the ways possible. I have had my life soundtracked by the music from the s the Gregorian chants to the theme from the Godfather. And it was all great until 2010, as that’s when it died for me.

Music was something special and then something happened in the world. Music became a syringe designed to open a revenue stream from my soul. Music, and the same damn songs, was being played at the gym, in the convenience store, at the hardware store, at the doctor’s office, on telephone hold music and even on websites - everywhere. In early days of my life you made a choice to listen to music or you heard Muzak – the non-threatening, non-confrontational versions of songs piped into elevators. Muzak was there simply to make waiting a wee bit more tolerable but not to rip open your soul to sell you crap you don’t need. Other then Muzak there was only radio and folks new that blasting radio during surgery wasn’t cool.

Then something happened. Madison Avenue realized that music would sell anyone anything at anytime. So The Who went from the soundtrack of my youth to the Marketing Soundtrack Used To Selling Cars To Upscale Men Feeling a Midlife Crises. Suddenly some horrifying, poorly pieced together Rap song was lovingly broadcast to make my stay at the carwash more pleasant, “and I said, fuck you bitch take that uh huh” made my most recent fifteen minute carwash a pleasure. Suddenly the gym was blasting music, the massage spa was blasting music, and the damn gas station was blasting music! The gas station, when it wasn’t showing the TV, was blasting music to what end? And worst of all, the music being blasted at me for my pleasure is not music that is good, but music that is cheap!

Music isn’t free, so folks who work in the business of creating music to make your Home Depot shopping experience more profitable for Home Depot wants something that is cheap or free, *and* will help them tap into your pocket. So the same songs play over and over and over again in the Lowes, the Home Depot and every other store that subscribes to the idea that a shopper hearing “Paved Paradise To Put Up A Parking Lot” will buy five extra snickers bars at the check out counter (that song’s irony is priceless when played at the home improvement centers). It isn’t bad enough I am no longer allowed to think while getting gas or buying a toilet, I have to hear the same 500 royalty free songs everywhere I go! The once innocuous Muzak’s webpage logo is “multisensory branding,” which translated into English is, “how we destroy music one track at time.”

To make matters worse, the folks controlling the auditory hell are doing so without regard the music itself – such as music has become. The speakers used are almost always defective, the sound is always way too loud to be clear and in many cases that Celine Dion song I can’t stand (but is one of the 100k in my head) is being constantly interrupted by some in-store announcement. I went to a major league baseball game and the blown out speakers, brand new speakers I might add, produced so much distortion that the wrecked song was apparently a song used to open the game was a song I used to favor. Every stadium, every used car lot, every taco stand has music blasting. I was walking down the street and a tanning salon set speakers outside the salon and was blasting music at the 6-lane highway, at nothing in particular just the highway!

I went to a restaurant a few weeks ago, a very expensive restaurant I might add, and the music was so loud I simply stopped talking, as I just couldn’t shout loud enough for anyone to hear me. And the reason for this posh restraint blasting the music was???

I now hate music. Once music was done to express, to entertain, to record experiences and now it has become some vile auditory nightmare used to get me to buy more stuff. At some point a musician wanted to simply play. Times changed and a musician wanted to sell records. Times changed and a musician wanted to sell a lot of records and perform in front of a lot people. Times changed and musicians just wanted to be famous with or without the music. Times changed and now musicians want to be featured in an add selling tampons. Even more horrifying, folks will buy a song off iTunes because it was featured in a tampon add!

The most painful part of this insane alteration in the human expression of something beyond marvelous is the destruction of the personal boundary. Not only has the world of marketing decided I must have music blasting at me at all times, so has everyone else. While sitting at a signal I am forced to listen to that same horrifying rap base-line (nearly all rap songs have the same or similar underlying base-line) whether I want to or not. The guy in the car next to me with the blown-out speakers has them turned up to eleven for my listening pleasure so I can not only enjoy his pedestrian taste in music but his rattling doors too.

Worse yet, my home isn’t protected either. I kept track of how many times I heard music that wasn’t coming from my speakers for one week. Each week I listen to three minutes and thirty seconds of someone else’s music as they pass by, some folks are passing by two or three blocks away. Last weekend a grandmother who was throwing a birthday party for 6-year-old granddaughter needed a two thousand watt stereo blasting rap music for the child to fully enjoy the day. What is two thousand watts mean you say? It means in my neighborhood everyone in a 4 block radius got to hear the music whether they liked it or not – because otherwise the party would have not be worth having!

I hate to say I hate music but I cannot find another way around it. Should I decide to listen to the majesty of the Brandenburg Concertos, actually sit down like I did 30 years ago, I will be interrupted by some car passing by letting me know that the new JZ record is worth blasting at number 11. The Who’s “Won’t Get Fooled Again” the antiestablishment anthem for a generation now sells cars to me while I pump gas. AC/DC gets the fans rockin’ for a relief pitcher and Celine Dion, god bless her, sells more crap at Target then anyone else. Chopin makes people weep as the watch and add for a smartphone.

If you asked me 35 years ago if I thought music would ever die I would have punched you rather then answer.

(And this. It would seem the government has used certain music to torture, or maybe they do not call it torture, prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay.)

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