

The represented objects of olfactory experience:

Everyday objects and bare olfactory objects

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### Abstract

This paper aims to identify the objectual contents of olfactory experiences, i.e., what it is that olfactory experiences represent as being “smelly”. I argue that there are two types of olfactory experiences: *attached smell experiences*, in which smells are experienced as qualifying particular everyday objects, like roses, garbage bins, and cakes baking in the oven, and *lone smell experiences*, in which smells seem to take on a life of their own, as when an experienced smell seems to linger in a room or waft out the window. I argue that the objectual contents of attached smell experiences are everyday objects, like roses, garbage bins, and cakes baking in ovens, while the objectual contents of lone smell experiences are “bare olfactory objects”, which are ad hoc objects that are only represented as having olfactory and spatial properties. I contrast this view of lone smell experiences with Batty’s (2011) view that olfactory experiences represent existentially quantified contents and the view that some olfactory experiences represent mere olfactory properties, which might be inspired by Mendelovici’s (2013a, 2013b) proprietorial view of the contents of moods.

## 1 Introduction

Much discussion of the content of olfactory experiences concerns their objectual contents, i.e., what it is that olfactory experiences represent as “smelly”, or what

experience takes olfactory properties, like citrusy-ness or pungency, to qualify. One view of the objectual contents of olfactory experiences is that they are everyday objects, like basil leaves, halved oranges, and cakes baking in the oven. Another view is that they are odors, which might be taken to be collections of airborne molecules (Richardson 2013, Cavedon-Taylor 2018). A third view, proposed by Batty (2010a), is that olfactory experiences predicate olfactory properties of *something* but not of anything in particular. Another option is that the objectual contents of olfactory experiences are the “stuffs” that everyday objects are composed or made of, rather than the everyday objects themselves (Mizrahi 2014). Combined views are also possible: Lycan (1996) maintains that every olfactory experience has two objectual contents, an odor and an everyday object, and Budek and Farkas (2014) claim that olfactory experiences represent odors, the everyday objects that are the sources of odors, or both.

In what follows, I will argue for a different combined view of the objectual contents of olfactory experiences on which some olfactory experiences represent everyday objects, while others represent what I will call “bare olfactory objects”, ad hoc objects of experience that are only represented as having olfactory and spatial properties.

I will proceed as follows: §2 provides some background and further precisifies the question I am concerned with, §3 argues that some olfactory experiences—which I will call “attached smell experiences”—represent everyday objects, and §4 argues that other olfactory experiences—which I will call “lone smell experiences”—represent bare olfactory objects. §5 suggests a way of understanding the representation of everyday objects that unifies the proposed accounts of attached smell experiences and lone smell experiences.

## 2 Background

Olfactory experiences are the experiences we have when we do what we commonly call “smelling”. For example, we have olfactory experiences when we smell a

halved orange, sniff a basil plant, or catch the whiff of a burning piece of toast. I will use the term “smell” in an everyday way, as, depending on context, picking out what might turn out to be acts, features of objects, or objects. For example, we can say that we smell a halved orange, that the halved orange smells citrusy or has a citrusy smell, or that we notice a citrusy smell in the room. “Smell”-talk is intended to be neutral on the theoretical views of the contents of the states described. For example, saying that a subject smells a halved orange does not prejudge the question of what contents she represents.

This paper concerns certain aspects of the contents of olfactory experiences. There are various ways of elucidating the notion of content at play. My favored way is through an ostensive definition of intentionality, on which intentionality is the feature of mental states that we introspectively notice in certain paradigm cases and that we are tempted to describe using representational terms like “present”, “represent”, “directed at”, “about”, and “of”. Paradigm cases include thoughts, such as a thought that grass is green, and perceptual experiences, such as a visual experience of a blue cup on a table. We are tempted to say that such mental states are “of”, “about”, or “directed at” something, such as grass being green or a blue cup on a table. *Intentionality* is this feature that we thus describe, and *contents* are what intentional states “say”, are “of” or “about”, or, more generally, *represent*.<sup>1</sup>

Many philosophers explicitly maintain that olfactory experiences have are intentional states (see Perkins 1983, Lycan 1996, 2000, Matthen 2005, Batty 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d, Richardson 2013, Budek and Farkas 2014, Mizrahi 2014, Roberts 2015, and Cavedon-Taylor 2018, , but see also Reid 1785 and Peacocke 1983 for opposing views). One central reason to think that olfactory experiences have contents comes from introspection. As many authors have noted, olfactory experiences seem to be “world-directed” in that they seem

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<sup>1</sup>Note that the fact that the paradigm cases of intentionality are introspectively accessible mental states does not mean that all intentional states are introspectively accessible or mental. There might be introspectively inaccessible or non-mental cases with the same very feature as paradigm cases.

For ostensive definitions of intentionality, see Kriegel 2011.

to tell us about how things are in the world (e.g., Budek and Farkas 2014). For example, a sniff in the kitchen might tell us that certain smells are present or that certain things smell a certain way. Another reason, suggested by Batty (2011), comes from consideration of species with more advanced olfactory systems than our own, such as the hammerhead shark, whose olfactory experiences plausibly represent the location of putative smell sources. Since our olfactory experiences arguably differ mainly in degree, and not in kind, from those of other animals, this suggests that our olfactory experiences are intentional, too. A third reason to take olfactory experiences to have contents is that they cause and justify related beliefs. An olfactory experience of a citrusy smell might lead one to justifiably believe that there is a citrus fruit nearby. One very good explanation, arguably the best explanation, of how olfactory experiences cause and justify such beliefs is that they have related contents that, perhaps with additional assumptions, support the contents of the beliefs.

As the above discussion suggests, the contents that olfactory experiences represent are often propositional in that they represent that something is the case.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, they seem to represent particular objects, which we might call *olfactory objects*, as having particular represented properties, which we might call *olfactory properties*. My concern in this paper is with the objectual rather than the proprietarial contents of olfactory experiences—the objects, not the properties, they represent.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to be clear on what is meant by an objectual content and a proprietarial content, since there are multiple ways of understanding the notions. For my purposes, I take a *proprietarial content* to be a content that can qualify other contents, and an *objectual content* to be a content that can be qualified by other contents but that cannot itself qualify other contents. For example, a visual experience of a blue cup involves an objectual content, <the cup>, and various proprietarial contents, such as <blue> and <cup-shaped>, which qualify <cup>.

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<sup>2</sup>See Montague 2007, Grzankowski 2012, 2013, and Mendelovici 2018.

<sup>3</sup>See Batty 2010b and [ removed for blind review ] for discussion of olfactory properties.

Importantly, objectual contents and proprietal contents need not be identified with or even correspond to existing objects and properties. Hallucinations can have objectual contents, and a visual experience of a blue cup can represent <blue> even if color properties are not instantiated or do not exist. The notions of objectual and proprietal contents characterize contents at a “superficial” level of description based on the roles they play rather than at a “deep” level based on their metaphysical natures.<sup>4,5</sup>

In what follows, I will argue that olfactory experiences exhibit two importantly different kinds of phenomenological profiles and can be divided into two kinds on this basis. Some olfactory experiences, which I will call “attached smell experiences”, seem to present smells as attaching to particular everyday objects, such as basil leaves, halved oranges, and baking cakes. Other olfactory experiences, which I will call “lone smell experiences”, seem to present smells that do not attach to particular everyday objects, such as a smell of a wet dog that lingers in the foyer long after the dog is gone. I will consider each kind of olfactory experience in turn and argue that the objectual contents of attached smell experiences are everyday objects like basil leaves, halved oranges, and baking cakes, while the objectual contents of lone smell experiences are what I will call “bare olfactory objects”.

### 3 Attached smell experiences

*Attached smell experiences* are olfactory experiences that present smells as attaching to particular everyday objects. For example, when you sniff a basil leaf, you experience a basil-y smell, and this smell seems to attach to the leaf

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<sup>4</sup>This is Mendelovici’s (2018) distinction between the superficial characters and the deep natures of contents.

<sup>5</sup>As should also be clear, the notion of a represented object is not that of the referent of an intentional state—an intentional state can have a represented object without referring to anything. It also differs from Crane’s (2001) notion of the “object” of experience, which seems to straddle the space between being a referent and being an objectual content. In contrast to Crane’s way of carving up intentional states in terms of their objects and contents, my way of carving things up takes objectual and proprietal contents to be on par, each answering to the notion of “content”, and each bearing relations (in some cases) to potentially distinct referents.

itself. It seems to qualify or characterize the basil leaf, presenting as a property of the leaf, a way that the leaf is. Similarly, an olfactory experience of a piece of chocolate presents us with a chocolatey smell that seems to qualify the piece of chocolate itself. Taken at face value, these everyday observations suggest that these olfactory experiences, and other attached smell experiences, represent particular everyday objects, such as basil leaves and pieces of chocolate, as having particular olfactory properties.

The case of attached smell experiences that are parts of multimodal experiences also supports the view that attached smell experiences represent everyday objects. For example, when we pick up a halved orange and take a whiff, we enjoy a multimodal experience that might involve visual, tactile, and olfactory experiences. These experiences represent the orange as being certain ways, as being various shades of orange, having a round and flat face, having a certain texture, being a certain temperature, being juicy, and having an orangey citrusy smell. The key observation here is that it seems to be the very same represented object that has all these properties. In the case of the visual and tactile experiences, the relevant objectual content is quite clearly the halved orange, so the halved orange is arguably also the objectual content represented by the olfactory experience.<sup>6</sup>

One objection that has been made to the view that olfactory experiences represent particular everyday objects is that we cannot discriminate between different possible causes of our olfactory experiences, so we do not represent particular objects as having olfactory properties. For example, upon entering the kitchen, you might experience a foul smell but not be able to tell from your olfactory experience alone whether it is the garbage bin or the sink that smells. Along such lines, Batty (2010d, 2011) argues from olfaction's limited discriminatory abilities to the claim that olfactory experiences do not represent particular everyday objects or particular spatial locations. Here is a simplified version of Batty's central example: You spray lemony air freshener all over your

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<sup>6</sup>See O'Callaghan 2012, 2015, and Bourget 2017 for discussion of multimodal experiences.

kitchen. In the first scenario, which she calls *Full Cover*, you successfully spray your entire kitchen. In the second scenario, which she calls *Miss-a-Spot*, you successfully spray the entire kitchen except for one spot over the sink, which you miss. In both scenarios, you have the same olfactory experience upon entering the kitchen, which shows that your olfactory experiences cannot discriminate between the two scenarios. Batty concludes from this that olfactory experience does not represent olfactory properties as being instantiated by distinct represented objects or at distinct locations.<sup>7</sup>

I agree that our olfactory experiences are not always able to discriminate between the different possible causes of an olfactory experience. Perhaps there is a systematic failure in discrimination here in that for any olfactory experience, there will always be more than one source that might have caused that experience. However, the fact that we cannot reliably discriminate between different scenarios concerning the distribution of experienced olfactory properties does not mean that we do not (at least sometimes) *represent* the experienced olfactory properties as attaching to one represented object rather than another. Compare: The stimuli reaching the visual system are massively ambiguous in that there are multiple visual scenes that can cause them (see Marr 1982). But the visual system does not simply fail to see in cases where it cannot discriminate between different possibilities. Instead, it makes various “assumptions” about what the visible world is like and uses them to resolve the ambiguity. This shows that, in general, not being able to discriminate between a set of possibilities does not prevent us from representing one of them. At most, the fact that we fail to discriminate between a set of cases suggests that, all else being equal, we should represent alike in all of them. In the case of olfactory experience, then, even though we might not be able to discriminate between the different possibilities regarding the sources or locations of various smells, such as the lemony smell in Batty’s

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<sup>7</sup>Richardson (2013) similarly argues that olfactory experiences do not represent everyday objects because “olfactory experience is too insensitive to their comings and goings to count as perceiving them.” (pp. 403–4) In contrast, Richardson argues, olfactory experiences are causally sensitive to odors, so odors should be taken to be their represented objects.

example, this does not prevent us from representing one of these possibilities, e.g., the entire kitchen being filled with the lemony smell.<sup>8</sup>

Another objection to the view that olfactory experiences represent everyday objects is based on an observation made by Matthen (2005) that we cannot experience two instances of the same smell at the same time. If olfactory experience represents everyday objects as having olfactory properties, then, presumably, it should be able to represent two distinct everyday objects as having the same olfactory property in much the same way that visual experience can represent two distinct represented objects as having the same color: by attributing the same olfactory property to two different represented objects. But we cannot experience two instances of the same olfactory property at the same time, which suggests that we do not experience olfactory properties as attaching to represented objects after all.<sup>9</sup>

However, it is not clear that the putative phenomenological observation that we cannot experience two instances of the same smell at the same time holds. If you place two blobs of the same toothpaste on either side of your nose, it does seem that you represent the same olfactory property as instantiated by two distinct objects at the same time. One might expect the phenomenology to be clearer for animals that have superior abilities to localize smells. Batty (2011) discusses the case of hammerhead sharks, who have nostrils on either side of their wide heads, allowing them to accurately localize smells (e.g., the

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<sup>8</sup>[ removed for blind review ] objects that the fact that we cannot discriminate between the two cases in Batty's example suggests that there are no analogous "assumptions" in the olfactory case that determine our olfactory objects in cases of failure of discrimination. But this objection misses the point of the analogy, which is that a failure of discrimination is not a good reason to deny that some object or other is represented. Which "assumptions" the olfactory system makes that enable us to represent one or the other option is, of course, a further question, as is that of how literally we should understand the "assumption" story in the first place (hence the scare-quotes).

[ removed for blind review ] also objects that my response here does not provide a positive reason to think that a particular everyday object—the kitchen as a whole, say—is represented in Batty's example. I agree that my response to the objection to the claim that some olfactory objectual contents are everyday objects does not give a positive reason to endorse the claim, but this is not dialectically inappropriate—my aim is only to show that the objection is mistaken. The positive reasons for accepting the claim are the considerations from the phenomenology of attached smell experiences and the case of multimodal experiences, which were mentioned earlier.

<sup>9</sup>See also Clark 2000, p. 79.



smell of blood) in much the same way that we use binaural disparity to localize sounds. It is not implausible that the olfactory world of a hammerhead shark can include two instances of the same olfactory property in different locations. If our olfactory experiences are similar in kind to those of hammerhead sharks (as Batty 2011, I think plausibly, suggests—see above), we might expect that even if we do not or cannot normally represent the same olfactory properties as being instantiated by distinct objects or at distinct locations, it is due to contingent limitations of our olfactory systems rather than general features of the contents of olfactory experiences themselves.

In sum, the phenomenology of attached smell experiences and the case of multimodal experiences support the view that the objectual contents of attached smell experiences are everyday objects, such as basil leaves and pieces of chocolate. Two important objections to the view are unconvincing. If all this is right, there is good reason to accept that attached smell experiences represent everyday objects.

## 4 Lone smell experiences

Let us now turn to *lone smell experiences*, which are olfactory experiences that do not present smells as attaching to particular everyday objects. I will first consider views on which lone smell experiences represent particular objects, arguing that the best view of this sort takes olfactory experiences to represent bare olfactory objects (§4.1). Then I will consider and reject two alternative views that reject the assumption that lone smell experiences represent particular objects, one based on Batty's (2011) view that olfactory experiences represent existentially quantified contents (§4.2) and one that takes lone smell experiences to have proprietorial contents (§4.3).

## 4.1 Bare olfactory objects

The smells we experience in lone smell experiences appear to take on a life of their own, leaving their sources far behind, as when the smell of a baking cake seems to travel through the house and out the window. Lone smell experiences present smells as existing distinctly in their own right, independently of their sources, which may or may not be known. This is clearest in cases where the source of a lone smell is unknown, as in Budek and Farkas' (2014) example of entering a room and being greeted by an unexpected smell. One experiences the smell as existing distinctly and in its own right, not as qualifying any particular everyday object. (Budek and Farkas use this example to argue that some olfactory experiences represent odors without representing their sources, but my proposal will be slightly different.)

Lone smell experiences do not seem to represent everyday objects like basil leaves and halved oranges. Instead, they seem to represent some other, special, kind of object or no object at all. In the remainder of this subsection, I will consider some views on which lone smell experiences represent particular olfactory objects, ending with my preferred view. In the next two subsections, I will consider views on which lone smell experiences do not represent particular objects at all, and argue that my proposed view is preferable.

One view is that the represented objects of lone smell experiences are *odors*, which are collections of airborne molecules. This view is attractive because odors are what in fact emanate from smelly objects and cause our olfactory experiences. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem that olfactory experiences normally represent odors. For one, there is little phenomenological reason to take olfactory experiences to represent collections of airborne molecules. On the contrary, phenomenological considerations tell against the view, since such contents simply do not show up in the phenomenology of olfactory experience. Further, taking lone smell experiences to represent collections of airborne molecules does not make sense of their roles in causing and justifying our beliefs about the smells

of represented objects. For example, from the olfactory experience I have upon sniffing the kitchen, I am not led to believe or justified in believing that there is a collection of molecules in my kitchen (at least not without additional substantive assumptions, such as that the causes of olfactory experiences are airborne molecules). These considerations provide at least *prima facie* reasons to think that olfactory experiences do not represent odors, and, so, that the objectual contents of lone smell experiences are not odors.<sup>10</sup>

Another option is that the objectual contents of lone smell experiences are locations in space. This view might gain some plausibility from the fact that lone smells, despite not being experienced as attaching to any everyday objects, nonetheless seem to have at least rough spatial locations. For instance, a wet dog smell might seem to be in the foyer, while a baking cake smell might seem to be in the kitchen. However, the view that the objectual contents of lone smell experiences are spatial locations also does not accord with the phenomenology: it does not seem that spatial locations themselves smell good, bad, citrusy or minty. Smells seem to be *located* in space, without *qualifying* spatial locations themselves. Likewise, traveling smells seem to move *through* space, not qualify new regions of space over time.

A more promising option is that the represented objects of lone smell experiences are portions of air. Since portions of air occupy space, they can accommodate the spatial phenomenology of lone smell experiences without requiring that smells qualify spatial locations. But this proposal is also phenomenologically inaccurate: as far as olfactory experiences are concerned, it

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<sup>10</sup>The general form of argument employed here is one that I and others have employed elsewhere to argue that certain experiences do not represent certain contents—see [ author's works ] for an elaboration and defense. One important objection is that introspective considerations and considerations pertaining to justification do not tell against the view that olfactory experiences represent odors because odors are represented in a particular way that obscures such contents from phenomenological considerations and considerations concerning the justified inferences they allow us to make. Such proposals deserve careful attention (see [ author's work ]). But, for now, it suffices to say that the proposal that there is a kind of content of experience that is shielded from being tested phenomenologically or through the justified inferences it allows us to make is a dubious one. While experiences might track or carry information about objects and properties that we are unaware of and unable to use as a basis for belief, it is highly implausible that things seem to us in experience to be a certain way that is phenomenologically inaccessible and occluded from belief-forming mechanisms.

seems that lone smells can move through the air without the air itself moving. In order for lone smells to move through the air without the air itself moving, they would have to qualify different portions of air at different times, so different portions of air would be the represented objects of an olfactory experience at different times. But this seems phenomenologically inaccurate: as far as olfactory experience is concerned, lone smells themselves move through the air rather than transferring their olfactory properties from one portion of air to another.

I want to propose, instead, that the objects of lone smell experiences are *bare olfactory objects*, objects that are represented as having no properties other than olfactory properties and locations.<sup>11</sup> For example, when we experience a wet dog smell in the foyer, we represent a bare olfactory object as occupying roughly the space of the foyer and having wet-doggy olfactory properties. What distinguishes bare olfactory objects from everyday objects is that we do not represent bare olfactory objects as having any other properties apart from olfactory or spatial properties. For instance, we do not represent them as having colors, textures, or temperatures.

Whereas attached smell experiences are often, or perhaps always, components of multimodal experiences, in that they represent olfactory properties as qualifying represented objects many of whose properties are represented in other perceptual modalities, lone smell experiences are generally not components of multimodal experiences involving the same represented objects. In lone smell experiences, olfactory properties do not attach to objects that we also represent in other modalities, but instead to ad hoc objects represented by olfactory experience for the sole purpose of being the bearers of the experienced olfactory and spatial properties. These bare olfactory objects are what we commonly call “smells”, as when we say that there is a smell in the room.

Although I think it is plausible that our lone smell experiences do not

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<sup>11</sup>Bare olfactory objects might also be represented as having temporal properties, depending on one’s views of whether and how temporal properties are represented in experience. For example, if perceptual experiences generally represent not only the instantiation of properties but also the instantiation of properties *now*, then so too, presumably, will lone smell experiences. I set this complication aside.

represent bare olfactory objects as having any properties other than olfactory and spatial properties, it is far less clear that they represent them as positively *lacking* such additional properties. This means that a lone smell experience can be veridical even if there do not exist objects having only olfactory and spatial properties. A lone smell experience is veridical just in case there exists some object that has the specified spatial and olfactory properties, whether or not it has additional properties. Such an object might turn out to be an odor or a portion of air.<sup>12</sup> Of course, a lone smell experience could also be verified by an object that has only olfactory and spatial properties—a real live “lone smell”—if there were such a thing.<sup>13</sup>

## 4.2 Existentially quantified propositions?

I have argued that the best view of lone smell experiences on which they represent particular objects takes these represented objects to be bare olfactory objects. Let us now consider an alternative view that rejects the assumption that lone smell experiences represent particular objects: Batty’s (2011) view that olfactory experiences represent existentially quantified propositions to the effect that there exists something with such-and-such olfactory properties “here”, where I am located. Although Batty proposes this view as a view of all olfactory experiences, we have already considered whether attached smell experiences represent everyday objects, so here I will only consider whether Batty’s view provides an adequate account of lone smell experiences.

Like my proposal, Batty’s proposal denies that lone smell experiences represent objects that are also represented in other perceptual modalities. Also like my proposal, Batty’s proposal takes lone smell experiences to represent their objects as having only olfactory and spatial properties. But the proposals disagree on

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<sup>12</sup>In this case, the represented object of an olfactory experience would be a bare olfactory object but the *referent* of the experience would be an odor or portion of air.

<sup>13</sup>As is clear, taking lone smell experiences to represent bare olfactory objects does not lead to an error theory of lone smell experiences. However, an error theory of lone smell experiences, or olfactory experiences more generally, might nonetheless be true if the olfactory properties that olfactory experiences represent are never instantiated. See [ author work ] for discussion.

two key points: the first concerns which spatial properties are represented by olfactory experiences, while the second concerns the logical form of olfactory experiences. I will now consider these disagreements and explain why I prefer my own proposal.<sup>14</sup>

The first disagreement concerns which spatial properties are represented by lone smell experiences. Batty, like Matthen (2005), takes lone smell experiences (as well as other olfactory experiences) to represent olfactory properties as being instantiated “here”, where the subject of the experience is located, whereas my proposal allows lone smell experiences to represent olfactory objects and their properties as being located anywhere (though, presumably, like vision and audition, olfactory experiences will tend to locate their represented objects at perceptually accessible locations near the subject). The main reason Batty offers for taking the locations olfactory experiences represent to be simply “here” is that we cannot discriminate between cases where odors are located in one location versus another, as her example of the lemony air freshener mentioned in §3 is meant to illustrate. However, as we saw above, failure of discrimination does not imply failure of representation, so the example fails to show that we do not represent olfactory properties at spatial locations other than “here”.

My reasons for allowing lone smell experiences to locate their represented objects at locations away from subjects is phenomenological: In lone smell experiences, we seem to pick up on smells whose locations extend beyond our own. When we enter the foyer, we do not experience the wet dog smell as being limited to the confines of our nose or body but as filling the entire room. When the passerby catches a whiff of the smell of the baking cake wafting out the window, she does not experience the smell as coincidentally being just where

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<sup>14</sup>Another disagreement between my view and Batty’s concerns how many smells of a given sort we can smell at a time. Like Matthen (2005), Batty maintains that we cannot smell more than one instance of the same olfactory property at a time. (This is a further claim of Batty’s that does not follow from the view that lone smell experiences represent existential contents, since an existential view can accommodate the representation of multiple instances of the same olfactory property by taking us to have multiple existentially quantified olfactory experiences or olfactory experiences with multiple quantifiers.) I’ve discussed my reasons for thinking that we can represent more than one instance of the same olfactory property at a time in §3.

she is but instead experiences herself as chancing on a smell spanning from the window to her location and perhaps beyond. These olfactory experiences clearly differ from experiences in which a smell does appear to be “here”, just where we are, as when you smell something unpleasant and the smell seems to remain in your nose for some time afterwards. Of course, the precise spatial boundaries lone smell experiences attribute to bare olfactory objects might be vague or indeterminate and they might always include the subject’s current location, but this does not prevent them from including locations apart from the subject’s.

The second point of disagreement between my view and Batty’s concerns the logical form of lone smell experiences. Batty takes their form (and the form of all olfactory experiences) to be that of an existentially quantified proposition, which states that some object has some olfactory property or properties and is located “here”:  $\exists x(x \text{ is } F \wedge x \text{ is located “here”})$ . In contrast, my proposal takes olfactory experiences to have a singular logical form:  $o \text{ is } F \wedge o \text{ is located at } l$ .

Before continuing, it is important to clarify the nature of the disagreement. The question of whether perceptual experiences have existentially quantified contents or singular contents is sometimes taken to simply be the question of whether particular external objects enter into the contents of experiences. If particular external objects, say, particular persons or cups, sometimes enter into the contents of experiences, then experiences are taken to at least sometimes have singular contents. If no external objects ever enter into our experiences, perhaps because external objects are simply not the kinds of things that can enter into the contents of experiences, then experiences are taken to have only existentially quantified contents. Understood in this way, the question of whether perceptual experiences represent existentially quantified contents or singular contents is a deep metaphysical question about the nature of perceptual contents.

But this is not the way I am understanding the question, and I suspect it is not the way Batty understands the question either, since the considerations she adduces for her proposal are phenomenological rather than metaphysical.

As specified in §2, there is a shallow way of understanding the notions of the represented objects and represented properties that characterizes them on a superficial level based on the roles that they play rather than their deep natures: A represented property is understood as a content that can qualify other contents, not as a content that is identical to an externally existing property, and a represented object is understood as a content that is generally qualified by other contents but cannot itself qualify other contents. Similarly, the notions of singular and existentially quantified contents at play here are notions concerning the logical form of contents, not notions concerning their deep natures: A *singular content* is a content that involves a *particular* represented object, whereas an *existentially quantified content* is a content to the effect that there is *some* object having certain properties.<sup>15</sup>

On my proposal, lone smell experiences (as well as other olfactory experiences) have singular contents, in the sense defined above, whereas on Batty's, they have existentially quantified contents. Batty's reasons for holding her view stem from her arguments from the case of the lemony air freshener: Olfactory experience does not allow us to discriminate between different possible sources of smells, so it does not represent particular represented objects. Again, rejecting the move from a failure of discrimination to a failure of representation blocks this argument.

My reason for taking lone smell experiences to have singular contents rather than existentially quantified contents is that lone smell experiences have what is sometimes called a "phenomenology of particularity" (see Montague 2011). From a phenomenological perspective, they seem to represent particular things in the same way that visual experiences seem to represent particular things. In the case of visual experience, these particular things are things like trees, cups, balls, and tables, whereas in the case of lone smell experiences, these things are what we commonly call "smells", that is, bare olfactory objects. Lone smell

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<sup>15</sup>See Mendelovici 2018 for this way of understanding the debate over singular and existentially quantified contents.



experiences in some sense reify instantiations of olfactory properties, taking them to be objects that can exist apart from their sources and travel from place to place. This is why we say things like “There is a smell in the room” rather than merely “There is something smelly.” This is also reflected in cartoon depictions of smells, where smells are depicted as objects with relatively precise spatial boundaries wafting through the air. Simply saying that olfactory experience represents that olfactory properties are instantiated by *something* fails to capture this phenomenology of particularity.

In sum, while there are many similarities between my proposed view of lone smell experiences and Batty’s view, the key arguments for Batty’s view do not succeed and there are positive reasons to prefer my view.

### 4.3 Proprietary contents?

The second view I will consider that rejects the assumption that lone smell experiences represent particular objects is the view that they do not do not represent objects at all but instead mere olfactory properties. Although this view has not been defended in print, to my knowledge, it might seem to be an attractive view of lone smell experiences since it denies that they qualify any particular objects at all.

A similar view of moods is developed in Mendelovici 2013a, 2013b. On this view, both moods and emotions represent affective properties, such as elation, sadness, and anxiousness but emotions represent these affective properties as qualifying, or binding to, objectual contents, while moods merely represent the affective properties “unbound”. For example, on this view, an emotional experience of being anxious about an upcoming event represents the upcoming event as having the affective property of anxiousness, while an anxious mood represents the very same affective property of anxiousness without representing it as binding to any represented object. While emotions represent propositional contents, contents stating that such-and-such is the case, moods represent mere

*proprietal* contents.

An analogous view in the case of olfactory experience would claim that olfactory properties can be experienced as bound to everyday objects, as in the case of attached smell experiences, but that they can also be experienced unbound, as in the case of lone smell experiences. On this view, attached smell experiences represent propositional contents to the effect that some represented object has some particular olfactory properties, whereas lone smell experiences represent mere olfactory properties, which are mere *proprietal* contents.

Unfortunately for this view, there is an important difference between the case of moods and the case of lone smell experiences that makes a *proprietal* view of the contents of lone smell experiences less plausible than a *proprietal* view of the contents of moods: moods, as Mendelovici notes, quite plausibly do not have propositional contents. They do not represent that something is the case, and they cannot be true or false. But the contents of lone smell experiences are quite plausibly propositional. Lone smell experiences do not merely present us with a way that things can smell but rather with the putative fact that there is something, a smell, that smells just that way. This suggests that they have propositional, rather than merely *proprietal*, contents. Further, if, when having a lone smell experience, we find out that there is no smell that smells just that way in the vicinity, we would conclude that our lone smell experience is non-veridical. Since only propositional contents can be true or false (only propositional contents say that something is the case), this suggests that lone smell experiences have propositional contents rather than mere *proprietal* contents.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, whatever the merits of a *proprietal* view of moods, there are key disanalogies between lone smell experiences and moods that make a similar treatment of lone smell experiences implausible. The best view of lone smell experiences takes them to have propositional contents, and the best version of

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<sup>16</sup>One might suggest a propositional variant of the *proprietal* view on which lone smell experiences represent *that* a particular olfactory property is instantiated (perhaps at a particular location). This brings us back to the view that lone smell experiences represent existentially quantified contents, which we considered and rejected in the previous subsection.

such a view takes them to represent bare olfactory objects as having olfactory properties.

## 5 A unified account

I have argued that there are two types of olfactory experiences: attached smell experiences, in which olfactory properties seem to attach to particular everyday objects, and lone smell experiences, in which smells take on a life of their own, seemingly existing without attaching to any particular everyday object. I have proposed a view on which attached smell experiences represent everyday objects, like roses, cakes, and garbage bins, while lone smell experiences represent bare olfactory objects, objects represented as having no more than olfactory and spatial properties.

Although this view deals with both types of cases differently, I want to suggest that it ends up giving them a relatively unified treatment. The apparently large phenomenological difference between attached smell experiences and lone smell experiences is accounted for by a relatively small intentional difference: the objectual contents of attached smell experiences, but not of lone smell experiences, are represented as having properties other than olfactory and spatial properties. Let me unpack this: the difference between representing an everyday object—a rose, cake, or garbage bin—and a bare olfactory object is that the everyday object is a multimodal experience involving visual, other perceptual, and perhaps even conceptual components. For example, an attached smell experience of a halved orange as citrusy might represent the halved orange visually, tactually, or conceptually (say, employing the concept `ORANGE`, `HALF`, or `CUTTING`), whereas a citrusy lone smell experience involves no modalities other than smell (except insofar as representing a location involves other modalities).

As is often lamented, much philosophizing about perception focuses on the case of vision, overlooking insights that might be gained from considering other sense modalities. One might wonder, then, whether my proposal, if correct, offers

some new insight into the nature and contents of perception that is not afforded through consideration of vision alone. I think it does, not because the case of olfaction differs from the case of vision but rather because the two cases are, at bottom, similar. I've briefly suggested that the difference between representing bare olfactory objects and everyday objects ultimately boils down to the difference between unimodal olfactory experiences and multimodal experiences. We can observe the same distinction in the case of vision: vision can represent "bare visual objects"—objects represented as having no more than visual features and locations (which might themselves be visually represented)—and everyday visual objects—objects that are represented in multiple modalities and that are also represented as having visual properties.

Why, one might wonder, do bare visual objects seem not nearly as bare as bare olfactory objects? The answer, I think, is that it is because we are visual creatures, devoting much greater representational resources to visual representation than to olfactory representation. A bare visual object can have a represented color, shape, texture, size, and location, making it not so bare at all, but a bare olfactory object only has an olfactory property and a location—very bare, indeed. But if what I have suggested here is correct, this difference between vision and olfaction is only a difference in degree, not in kind.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Thanks to [omitted for blind review].

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