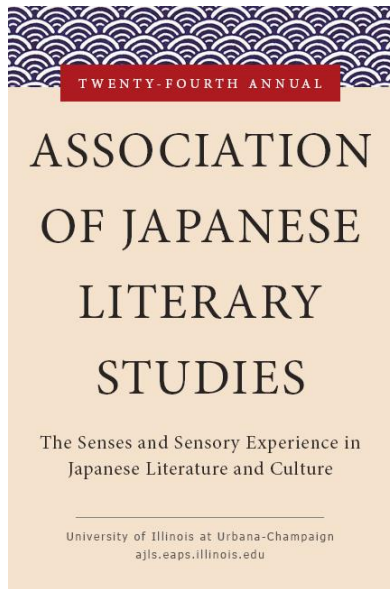


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Sensory Imagination in the Incense Ceremony”

Benedikt Vogel

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## SCENTING AS PERFORMANCE: AESTHETICS OF AROMA AND SENSORY IMAGINATION IN THE INCENSE CEREMONY

Benedikt Vogel  
Trier University

The sense of smell can be described as a biochemical process involving molecules and receptors. However, to retrace the sensual sensibilities within a society, rather than the biological reactions, it is the various cultural factors that form and embed the sensory experience.<sup>1</sup> For example, philosophy and religion present such factors. Christian and Buddhist traditions rank the senses, and the sense of smell is characterized by different religious notions.<sup>2</sup>

Aesthetic practices, too, create an order of their own. In Edo period Japan, a new type of aesthetic gathering flourished<sup>3</sup> – most famously represented by the practices of *sadō*, the tea ceremony, *kadō*, flower arrangement, and *kōdō*, the incense ceremony. Practitioners of these arts commonly used written treatises to teach and transmit practical knowledge about the art form. In attest to a strong focus on performance and bodily practice in the events. The treatises on the incense ceremony, too, show that not only a linguistic but also a performative treatment characterizes the gatherings and constitutes aesthetic appreciation. Beyond verbal articulations, gestures and other codified reactions illustrate the olfactory experience.

Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the performance in its significance for olfactory perception. The sense of smell is not isolated from other senses. Instead, the use of the other senses is strongly connected to and defines the olfactory. This sensory structure provides a means of highlighting the olfactory appreciation of the time. Only after the analysis of the performance and its sensory structure can the focus once again switch back to linguistic fictionalization to see how sensory experience is connected to cognitive processes and fictional imagination. But first, it is helpful to take a quick look at the history of incense in Japan and the characteristics of the incense ceremony.

While the handling of incense eventually developed into a sophisticated game and art, its beginnings are grounded in religious rituals. Buddhist monks imported

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<sup>1</sup> Even if it is possible to reconstruct the physical composition of the stimulus, the different social and environmental conditions would not lead to the same experience. See Mark M. Smith, “Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History,” *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 4 (2007): 841–58, 846–7.

<sup>2</sup> See for example McHugh, James McHugh, *Sandalwood and Carrion: Smell in Indian Religion and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> A phenomenon that appears under various names, such as *shitsunai geidō*, *yūgei*, and *za-arts*. See Murai Yasuhiko, “Cha hana kō no keifū,” in *Cha hana kō: yoriai no geinō*, edited by Geinōshi kenkyūkai, 5:7–85, *Nihon no koten geinō* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1970); Kumakura Isao, ed., *Yūgei bunka to dentō* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2003); and Eiko Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

incense materials, tools, and practices from China along with the Buddhist faith in the sixth century. The courtly society quickly adopted it, releasing incense of its ritualistic utilization. Instead, it transferred into a realm of play, amusement, and pleasure. Aristocrats packed incense material into small pouches and carried it around, or enjoyed it by infusing garments with scent. Eventually, *awase* (juxtaposition) games provided a more complex way of appreciating incense. As in poetic *awase*, in incense *awase* competitors compared and judged the scent of two *takimono*, small incense balls made from various pulverized incense materials glued together with resin. The *Genji monogatari*'s "Umegae" chapter famously describes one such event and illustrates the high status of olfactory perception and association for social interaction as well as cultural imagination.

As new cultural groups influenced the developments of Muromachi culture (1336-1573), essential shifts occurred in incense gatherings' contexts. As the materials changed from self-made mixtures to small pieces of incense wood, the moment of olfactory perception became a strictly controlled performance. Furthermore, the connection between incense and poetry became stronger and more sophisticated. For example, Muromachi incense gatherings focused mainly on the representation of incense through poetry, specifically, poetry addressing the question of finding a fitting name for a given scent.<sup>4</sup> Out of this endeavor, finally, *kōdō*, the incense ceremony, evolved.<sup>5</sup>

By the beginning of the Edo period, *kōdō* was mainly practiced in the form of *kumikō*, incense games. The game Ujijama-kō is one of the over two hundred games described in the collection *Kōdō ran no sono* (*Orchid garden of the Incense Ceremony*) of the year 1737.<sup>6</sup> Focusing on the recognition of scents, five different types of incense woods are used. Each of them is introduced by its name (a name specifically chosen for the purpose of the game) and burned so that every participant can try its scent. Following the sampling, the "actual" game begins. The woods are burned in random order, and after every participant has "listened" to the scents and written down his answer, the answer sheets are collected.<sup>7</sup> The recitation of a poem that supplies the names of the woods follows. Finally, the answer sheets are checked and the results presented in the form of a protocol. It is important to note that in the gatherings, no direct oral comment on the aromas themselves takes place.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Visible in the *Samidare nikki* (1478/9) and *Meikō awase* (1501); reprinted in the *Gunsho ruijū*. For a closer look on the *Samidare nikki* see Hamasaki Kanako, "Kōdō rengateki setsudan no bigaku: *Samidare nikki kō*," *Zeami* 2 (2003): 146–73.

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed look on the history of *kōdō* and its characteristics, see for example Isshiki Rikyō, *Kōdō no ayumi* (Tokyo: Ashi shobō, 1968); and Hata Masataka, *Kōsansai: kō to Nihonjin no monogatari* (Tokyo: Tokyo shoseki, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Reprinted in Ozaki Saeko, and Kuniyūsha, eds., *Kōdō ran no sono: zōho kaiteiban* (Kyoto: Tankōsha, 2013). In the following quoted as "KRNS". For further elaboration on *kumikō* games, see for example Kumasaka Kumiko, *Kōdō bungaku sanpo* (Yokohama: Ofisu K, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Following the Buddhist tradition, the verb to describe the moment of olfactory perception is not "to smell" but "to listen" (*kiku*).

<sup>8</sup> There are, of course, statements in the treatises on the quality of incense woods, depending, for example, on their place of origin, but they are more general comments than detailed analyses and are never part of the ceremony itself.

Because they evolved over several centuries, incense games come in a wide variety. But even in the case of rather simple games of discriminating and recognizing scents, a literary or poetic theme is always present. Participants might recite poems as a closing sequence of an incense gathering and/or name incense woods on the basis of poetic and literary figures or scenes. In more complex games, participants use the random sequence of woods to create poetry and stories, and there are variations in which fictional stories further materialize in board games. However, not only the poetic element but also the performance distinguishes the experience. One of the first comprehensive outlines of the performative aspects of the incense ceremony is compiled in the *Kōdō kihan* (*Guidelines for the Way of Incense*, end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century), which is one of the very first treatises on the incense ceremony.<sup>9</sup> Starting with this treatise, the description of the material and performative elements is a constitutive part of the *kōdō* tradition. In the diverse activities, a distinct set of reliably present elements exists. This includes, first of all, a formalized style of decoration and spatial arrangement. The treatises describe the exact design of shelves as well as their spatial position within the context of the ceremony. This is also the case for the utensils used in the process and the incense woods. Directly connected is a second characteristic, namely the performance and choreographies of the gatherings. Not only are the utensils and incense materials part of the decorative arrangement, but also their preparation and treatment is carefully staged. In addition, participants follow strict regulations prescribing their own bodily movements. Third, regardless of the surrounding activities or games, the olfactory perception itself is necessarily an important part of the experience. Be it at the beginning or at the end of a performative sequence and regardless of whether the olfactory experience becomes the focus of discussion or a part in the progress in a board game, without incense there is no incense ceremony.

Given its complex constitution, the dynamics of the incense ceremony may be variously characterized as play, ritual, or even theater. Different types of performative sequences blend and create a unique atmosphere. The general framework of the incense ceremony can be considered that of a game. However, the handling of the incense woods as well as the interaction between the participants is highly ritualized, while stimulation of the imagination through incense names and the poem recitation creates further theatrical notions by alluding to literary motifs. Furthermore, these sequences are always embedded within the aforementioned material conditions. Despite the complexity of the activities, however, the *Kōdō kihan* is very explicit on what is most important. In a description on how to perform the actual sequence of presenting incense and handing it to the participants one can read the following: “When it comes to giving out incense, the scent [or: the incense wood] instantly becomes the center of attention.”<sup>10</sup>

Consisting of many elements, the event is performed around this “center of attention” – for the distinct purpose of the appreciation of scents. There is no linguistic guideline, no story or narrative, that guides the event. The diverse sensory

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<sup>9</sup> Reprinted in Geinōshi kenkyūkai, ed., *Suki: Nihon shomin bunka shiryō shūsei* 10 (Tokyo: San’ichi shobo, 1976); in the following quoted as “NSBSS”.

<sup>10</sup> NSBSS, 403.

stimuli, the utensils, the decoration, and the collective dynamics structure the gatherings and therefore illustrate as a whole the appreciation of incense and scents.

Performance is a wide-ranging field, as is Performance Studies and the different ways it develops in efforts to approach and analyze phenomena. By defining the constitutive parameters of performances and therefore the categories for analysis,<sup>11</sup> it is possible to evaluate the actions taking place on or surrounding the “stage.” Beyond that it seems necessary to contemplate the anthropological implication of performances. Therefore, my focus is not only the artistic or theatrical context, but staged or ritualized forms of gatherings as a whole. They generate some kind of transformation in the participants, create a collective experience of something happening, and stand in an alternating relationship with its cultural context.<sup>12</sup>

The most prominent of the sensory stimuli in the incense ceremony are without doubt the olfactory stimuli. When it comes to olfactory perception, there are two important factors to consider. First, scents influence emotions and evoke memories. While this is of course true, I find it important to consider that this kind of affective reaction grows weaker when a given stimulus is presented at a high frequency. Therefore, secondly, the external factors are highly relevant for the hedonistic reactions and of special relevance in the incense ceremony. The naming of scents, for example, is of special relevance because it lets a usually unconscious element become unnaturally present.<sup>13</sup> Recognizing, furthermore, that the connection between scent and name is utterly arbitrary,<sup>14</sup> it becomes obvious that the methods of olfactory description, which are both linguistic and performative, are very important. Olfactory experience is more than just an uncontrollable reaction to a stimulus. Experience of and hedonistic reactions to scents are for the most part learned and based on customs and training.<sup>15</sup> In this way, the sight of objects and the decorative arrangement of the room has to be considered as highly influential, too.<sup>16</sup>

What does this mean for the performance in the Incense Ceremony? Because of the constant concentration on scents in a strictly regulated context, the incense gatherings can be regarded as training in how to experience aromas. It is an acquisition of affective reactions towards olfactory stimuli. Because scents, however,

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Guiding the following remarks is the approach developed by Richard Schechner in Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); revised in Richard Schechner, *Performed Imaginaries* (London/New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Egon Peter Köster, “The Specific Characteristics of the Sense of Smell,,” in *Olfaction, Taste, and Cognition*, edited by Catherine Rouby, Benoist Schaal, Danièle Dubois, Rémi Gervais, and A. Holley, 27–43 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 36–7.

<sup>14</sup> Danièle Dubois and Catherine Rouby, “Names and Categories for Odors: The Veridical Label,” in *Olfaction, Taste, and Cognition*, edited by Catherine Rouby, Benoist Schaal, Danièle Dubois, Rémi Gervais, and A. Holley, 47–66 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 48.

<sup>15</sup> Donald A. Wilson and Richard J. Stevenson, *Learning to Smell: Olfactory Perception from Neurobiology to Behavior* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 156–7.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson and Stevenson, *Learning to Smell*, 172.

do not lose their potential to influence emotions etc., they initiate a further cycle of affective and trained reactions. Consequently, the concentration on olfactory perception establishes an altered state of consciousness and creates a state of transformation in the participants, at least in the trained participant. First-timers cannot expect to experience the event in the same way because odors indeed provoke emotional and affective effects, but the desired reactions are for a great part actively learned and not passively acquired.

Another prominent feature of *kōdō*, and other *yūgei* (leisure pursuits) as well, is its ritualistic character. Participants move utensils as well as their own bodies in a very limited, controlled, and highly stylized manner, creating distinct choreographies as a group. For example, in the treatise *Kōdō kihan* the following passage on passing on the incense burner among the participants is included:

When listening to incense woods (*kō*), one only bows to the next person, takes the incense burner, turns the front-foot (*mae ashi*) in the opposite direction, and listens. One should take a breath with one's head looking to the side and listen for about two breaths. In the case of young boys, etc., it [the incense burner] is under no circumstances passed on by hand. This is especially bad. When handing over the incense burner the front foot is to be turned towards the front; it has to be placed on the left hand and held steady with the right hand. It is passed on, the next person receives the incense burner, and like this it continues on.<sup>17</sup>

The most common approach towards understanding ritual is the search for signs and symbols that represent an underlying meaning and allow a deeper understanding, but the theoretical reflections are not necessarily what provides meaning to ritual. Rather, the movements and interactions themselves generate meaning. Because sensory experience does not happen passively but rather is actively generated, movements become essential tools for sense-making, especially in the coordinated movements of social interaction.<sup>18</sup> Ritual is therefore not – or not only – a manifestation of philosophical thoughts, but a kind of sensory communication.<sup>19</sup> This significance of the sensuality of the events unfolds in two ways. Firstly, the experience of the tense body underlines the importance of the event. The all-embracing and strict regulations make the gravity of the event perceptible on a sensory level. Secondly, it is important that many elements appear in other activities as well. The tea ceremony, for example, which developed alongside the incense ceremony, similarly consists of a distinct, fundamental choreography and etiquette. Therefore, these elements function

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<sup>17</sup> NSBSS, 398.

<sup>18</sup> Hanne De Jaegher and Ezequiel Di Paolo, "Participatory Sense-Making. An Enactive Approach to Social Cognition," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 6 (2007): 485–507, 497.

<sup>19</sup> Bernhard Leistle, "Ritual as Sensory Communication: A Theoretical and Analytical Perspective," in *Ritual and Identity: Performative Practices as Effective Transformations of Social Reality*, edited by Klaus-Peter Köpping, Bernhard Leistle, and Michael Rudolph, 33–73. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006, 49.

as pointers towards other activities with similar structures. An incense ceremony achieves not a reference to some abstract meaning, but the creation of a particular sphere of experience that stretches across various aesthetic activities.

In this way, the concentration on movements and the strict specification of choreographies establishes an increased experience of the senses and emphasizes the performance of the incense ceremony as part of a larger aesthetic sphere.

Visual stimuli are of course a vital part of the gatherings, too. The human reactions to visual stimuli are again twofold: Some objects activate affective reactions, and if these objects constitute signs or symbols and require some sort of decryption, they activate cognitive processes. But since the next section handles the latter, I will now focus on the performative type of significance.

In the treatises on the incense ceremony, there are clear regulations regarding the focal point in the gatherings, such as when to look at the decorative ashes, when to look at the incense burner, and when to focus on the performance.<sup>20</sup> This has practical implications, for example, to make sure that every participant has the chance to experience the aroma before the scent is gone, or that the incense wood does not fall in the ashes when the incense burner is turned around. But more importantly, a specific rhythm of appreciation occurs by distinguishing between performances surrounding incense and other parts of the gatherings, such as the spatial decoration. Shifting the focus between the participants as actors and the decoration of the “stage” produces a distinct gathering structure. This control over the visual elements is of further importance considering what is actually staged. Even though olfactory experience is a highly individual matter, in the treatises there is never an attempt to develop it as a personal pursuit. It is always something performed in a group. Because describing the olfactory stimuli universally is impossible, the regulations on how to perform – or better yet, how to present – the olfactory experience to others is essential.

While the decoration provides the essential atmosphere to the gatherings, the regulations regarding the visibility ensure the focus on the staged olfactory perception. To achieve that, the participants must constantly change between the roles of audience and performer.

While most performances consist of different parts and elements, academic studies often ignore the way these parts and elements comprise a complete performance as a sequence. In the case of theatrical performance, actors of course train before the show and also consider the part afterward as part of a “ritual”.<sup>21</sup> The same can be said about the incense ceremony and perhaps to a greater degree because descriptions of preparations and activities after the olfactory perception are a fundamental part of the treatises.

While there are rather simple instructions like “not to wear scented clothing” or not to appear at a gathering with “unwashed hands,” they nevertheless underline the

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<sup>20</sup> NSBSS, 399. Also paragraph 13 in the *Kōdō hidensho* (*Secret Transmissions for the Way of Incense*, 1669), reprinted in Horiguchi Satoru, ed., *Kōdō Hidensho no sekai* (Tokyo: Kasama shoin, 2009); in the following quoted as “KHS”.

<sup>21</sup> Schechner, *Between Theater*, 16-21.

upcoming sensory experience.<sup>22</sup> Selecting the incense woods one has to bring to a gathering or wants to use in a certain game is a more sophisticated aspect of preparation. This hardly can be overlooked because pondering different choices requires a high grade of anticipation.

The same holds true for the activities after the incense is burned. Documenting what happens is an integral part of the gatherings. Hence, the treatises clearly state how protocols are to be written down. Besides the time and place of the event, the protocols provide information about the names of the participants, the results of the games, and the kinds of incense woods that have been burned. The treatises, however, not only designate the content of these documents. The process of writing them down becomes the focus of a ritualized appreciative performance in its own right.<sup>23</sup> Although not as prescribed as the actions surrounding the protocol, viewing and admiring the used utensils also can be considered part of the performance.

In this way, the sensory experience consists not only of the time bracket in which the olfactory experience happens, but of a broader set of sequences. While the arrangements before the ceremony prepare the participants for the sensory perception on a physical and mental level, it is important to note that the activities afterwards deal with the experience as well. Because the experience cannot be described for all participants in a satisfactory way, creating a material artifact of the event in the form of a protocol and appreciating the material objects used in the aesthetic experience provide reference points for communicating about the shared experience.

While it becomes clear that the treatises provide knowledge not only about the performance of the Incense Ceremony but also about modes of appreciation, especially olfactory appreciation, it is necessary to take a closer look at knowledge transmission. The transmission pattern via written treatises very much points to the structure of appreciation and the consciousness of sensory experience. Although it seems problematic to call incense gatherings “artworks,” that framework sheds some light on its processes.

As in the tea ceremony, for example, utensils become a fundamental part of the performance. Not only features such as material, form, or color, but the genealogy of the past utensils’ owners is most important to collectors.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the objects are appreciated as transmitted manifestations of ancient aesthetics and values from previous generations. Incense ceremony performances function in very similar ways: They are not appreciated as unchanging but ephemeral manifestations of ancient aesthetics and as re-enactments of cultural images. That is why the transmission of knowledge is mainly concerned with performance – and only to some degree with fragrances. In contrast to the gatherings, the treatises include descriptions of aromas mostly attributed to Shino Sōshin (1443-1523), a prominent figure in the history of the incense ceremony. Whether these aroma descriptions are authentic or not is highly

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<sup>22</sup> KRNS, 29.

<sup>23</sup> The *Kōdō kihan* includes the regulation that on the day following an incense ceremony the participants once again have to meet, gather around the specially arranged protocol, and approach it in a ritualized manner. NSBSS, 396.

<sup>24</sup> Tamamushi Satoko, “Dōgu to bijutsu no aida: cha no sekai ni okeru zōkeibutsu no kanshō ni tsuite,” *Kikan Nihon shisōshi* 23 (1984): 66–86, 80.



debatable,<sup>25</sup> but they have been copied in several treatises, first appearing in the 1669 *Kōdō hidensho* (*Secret Transmissions for the Way of Incense*). This is of utmost interest because the olfactory perception is once more not developed as an individual experience but established as a re-enactment of other peoples, more precisely Shino Sōshin's. In this way, the recreation of an experience becomes the artwork.

Consequently, there are no explicit evaluations of aromas in the gatherings either. Because the activity as a whole is a celebration of materials that have been appreciated and valued before, such comments are simply not necessary.

As outlined above, the multi-sensory sequences are fundamental elements in the incense ceremony. Although the gatherings have to be described mainly in their performative character, it is necessary to recognize the various images and imaginative processes as well because sensory stimulation can never completely be separated from cognitive processes. Although these elements require more detailed descriptions, I find it necessary to first establish the various associations and allusions. The images handled in the incense ceremony include material signs and symbols as well as imaginative associations deriving from poetry and literature. Both provoke cognitive reflection. At the same time, these signs and symbols need to be interpreted because they are useless otherwise.

In the incense ceremony, there are two types of symbolic imagery: One religious in its origin and one entirely aesthetic. For example, the ontological implications of the decorative ashes in the incense burners, which became a standardized and important feature of the elements in the incense ceremony, were first discussed at length in the early treatises. Five-element (*gogyō*) theory and divination (*hakke*) inform the patterns that were engraved in the ashes. Dependent upon the season and the form of the burner, ceremony hosts determine the patterns to individually represent one of the five elements, one cycle respectively, or one divination symbol.<sup>26</sup> Another religious theme can be found in the decoration of the triptych (*sangusoku*): This decoration consisting of an incense burner, flowers, and a candleholder is already established as a device for aesthetic arrangements in earlier treatises on interior design, namely the *Kundaikan sōchōki* (*Record of the Arrangements of the Shogunal Residence*, 1476/1511) and *Okazari sho* (*Notes on Decoration*, 1523).<sup>27</sup> Considering the fact, however, that the installment is also related to the question, whether picture scrolls with religious figures or seasonal themes should be deployed,<sup>28</sup> one can hardly say that the practitioners ignore their religious heritage and regard the decoration as solely aesthetic. The ceremony is neither an outspoken religious ceremony nor does the scent or the ritual have a divine purpose, but the arrangement of space and things creates an associative context for a special kind of experience.

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<sup>25</sup> From the perspective of modern research, it is doubtful that Shōshin even existed in the way he appears in the treatises. For more details see Honma Yōko, *Chūsei kōki no kōbunka: kōdō no reimei* (Kyoto: Shibunkaku shuppan, 2014), chapter 2.

<sup>26</sup> NSBSS, 390.

<sup>27</sup> Reprinted in the Naigai shoseki kabushiki kaisha, ed., *Gunsho ruijū. Shinkō* 15 (Tokyo: Naigai shoseki, 1929).

<sup>28</sup> KHS, §(?)94.

The same function can be seen in the deployment of poetry and literary images.<sup>29</sup> As mentioned, the *kōdō* games of the Edo period in particular exhibit a distinct use of this type of imagery. Poetry informs incense names and game structure, whereas literary images and themes provide the plot for the entertainment, but just as is the case with the religious signs, these linguistic elements are not part of an elaborated treatment in the gatherings either. As complex fictional products, they instead have the potential to become the objects of an ongoing discourse. However, instead of developing into a discourse, the linguistic exchanges remain rather vague statements and in this manner provide an associative basis for sensory amusement. Considering this, it seems appropriate to describe these various images and symbols as part of the performance and not as its purpose.

In the Incense Ceremony, it is not so much the olfactory stimulus that helps to clarify the sensory hierarchies but the surroundings in which this very stimulus is embedded. Because the treatises on the incense ceremony provide contextual information, they allow an excellent view on the sensory sensibilities of its time. By recreating the gatherings following the descriptions in the treatises, it becomes obvious that the events follow a clear sensory structure. Various senses are triggered with a distinct purpose and the sensory structure of the performance as a whole is focused on the olfactory experience. Of special significance for this experience is, furthermore, the constantly blurring and fluctuating boundary between spectators and performers. Every participant switches between these two roles, influencing with his performance and being influenced by others. Finally, the performance itself can be regarded as a formulation of appraisal. There are no comments on particular aromas because the strict regulation of their perception already states their quality.

The fact that a distinct sensory structure characterizes an aesthetic event is not unique to the Edo period but rather shared by many other cultural contexts and ages. But the way sensory experience unfolds is rather interesting. Although incense woods and their scents stand at the center of attention, it is equally obvious that a discussion of the scents' character or the individual olfactory experience is never a part of the gatherings. Instead, a complex performance surrounds the stimuli and defines their experience. Because the objects of appreciation – the scents – are extremely difficult to grasp due to their vagueness and ephemerality, efforts to find appropriate substitutes must become more sophisticated. What makes a collective experience, and ultimately the evaluation of the objects in question, possible is not the search for linguistic representation of the olfactory stimuli (like in incense gatherings of the Muromachi period), but the performance. The staged perception in an elusive performance becomes the momentary intersection of times now past and the individual aesthetic consciousness. The incense ceremony, therefore, illuminates facets of aesthetic appreciation in Edo period Japan.

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<sup>29</sup> Research on the Incense Ceremony shows a strong focus on the connection to literary sources in a way that suggests the ceremony sometimes seems like a mere tool for appreciating literature. For a more detailed description of the connection between literature and incense ceremony and as an example for such an approach, see Hayakawa Jinzō, *Bungaku to kōdō* (Nagoya: Arumu, 2007).