

SELECTED WORKS

Lauryn Mannigel

2020

Bio

Lauryn Mannigel (*1983) is an artist-researcher living and working in Berlin (DE). She holds an M.A. in Contemporary Art and New Media from Université Paris 8 (2009). In her artistic work, Mannigel questions the Western cultural dominance of visual epistemology by exploring the perception of the sense of smell, hearing, touch and taste. Thematically, her work is driven by diverse manifestations of social and cultural inequalities. Currently, Mannigel creates experiential and discursive social spaces that explore the social olfactory perception and judgment of others body scents. In this line of work, she has developed and presented the performative experiments *Love Sweat Love* (2016), *Eat Me* (2018), *Smell Feel Match* (2019) and *I smell a rat* (2019) in Europe, Canada and India. Overall, her work is located at a crossroads between art practice, science, technology and social sciences.

A short video [3min35sec] of Mannigel presenting her current work is available [here](#).

List of selected works

1. The social perception of women's body scents (working title 2019-)
2. I smell a rat (2019-)
3. Smell Feel Match (2019-)
4. Eat Me (2018)
5. Love Sweat Love (2016)
6. Internal Earthquake (2014)
7. NAÏVE °2 (2007)

RECENT WORKS



Photo: Sabrina Meissner

The Aesthetic and Political Potential of Body Scents

This work series explores the social olfactory perception and judgment of people's smell and its relation to othering through olfactory performative experiments and discussions. It thus sets out to investigate the social stigmatization of body scents, and the repression of smell in aesthetics. It examines the following questions:

- (1) Which designs for olfactory experiences of people's body scents through my artistic practice will generate awareness about olfactory judgments and insights on the phenomenon of othering?
- 2) How can I challenge issues of objectivity and reductionism in scientific research methods and technologies that explore the

social olfactory perception through the idea of "situated knowledge" and what Donna Haraway terms "a feminist version of objectivity" (1988, 578)?

- (3) What methods of aesthetic evaluation and interpretation will allow me to make sense of people's olfactory judgments of the body scents of others, which I refer to as the aesthetic potential of body scents?

This series aims to contribute to diversifying, democratizing and decolonizing perception and knowledge production of the way we think about, embody and express, or communicate, our experience of other people's body scents.

Reference:

Haraway, D 1988, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 575-599.

Mannigel's terminology

The **Aesthetic Potential of Body Scents** entails people's olfactory perception and judgment of others' body scents. She uses her findings on the felt experience of others' body scents to contribute to framing the aesthetic potential of body scents and to highlight the sense of smell in aesthetics. By aesthetic, Mannigel refers to a socially-constructed cognitive process of assessing sensory experiences. Here she draws from anthropologist Sharman Russel's take on aesthetic perception as an open and cross-cultural approach that looks at personal associations that we attribute to any sensory experience.

Body Scents are the interplay of various smells that constitute a person's olfactory identity. Mannigel continues to develop the meaning of this term by critically drawing from the fields of psychology, neuroscience, and social psychology. She currently understands body scents to be shaped by diverse aspects relating to cultural practices, biology, and the atmosphere. Regarding cultural practices, she refers to the social interactions of humans and nonhumans, which include leisure and work activities we engage in, the food we eat, the fragrant products we apply or come in contact with through our social contacts, as well as the built environment and landscape that we inhabit or trespass. The biological aspects encompass genes, the microbiome, as well as our health condition. By atmosphere, Mannigel means weather-related conditions.

Othering is a form of social exclusion based on the premise that a person or group is perceived as "different". Therefore, individuals who have been othered are not considered as a part of one's own social group.

Political Potential of Body Scents signifies that the perception of body scents is political because it shapes and gets shaped by social behaviour and structures. Scents can nurture feelings of togetherness and belonging, as well as disunite and marginalize people (Reinarz 2014). Yet as philosopher Alva Noë argues, "[p]erception is not something that happens to us, or in us [but] is something we do" (Noë 2004, 1). Mannigel's work develops methods that implement this perceptual agency.

References

- Noë, A 2004, *Action in perception*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) & London (UK).
- Reinarz, J 2014, *Past Scents: Historical Perspectives on Smell*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Chicago & Springfield.
- Russell, S 1997, 'The Anthropology of Aesthetics: A cross-cultural approach', *JASO*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 177-192.

1. The Social Perception of Women's Body Scents (working title, 2019-)

This project started during the *bangaloREsidency* in Bangalore, India in 2019, which was funded by the Goethe Institut Max Mueller Bhavan. It explores the social perception of women's body scents in India. Mannigel held interviews with five women in Bangalore to learn about their experiences related to how other people perceived their body scents and how they perceived their own smell. These exchanges were audio recorded. From these interviews, Mannigel identified a women's neck as the most suitable and respectful body part to focus on for the scope of this project. This was due in part because it can be both partially exposed to the world, as well as covered up by clothes. Although the neck is considered an intimate space, the scents of this area do not seem to be as stigmatized as the other intimate areas of the body in India, such as the scent from a women's underarm.

In 2021, Mannigel plans to follow up with the interviewees by asking them to collect the body scents from their necks. She will use these samples to chemically reproduce the aromatic compounds in a synthesized liquid formula. For the chemical reproduction process, she is collaborating with chemical ecologist Prof. Shannon Olsson and her naturalist-inspired chemical ecology (NICE) lab at the National Center for Biological Sciences (NCBS) in Bangalore (IN).

For the final version of this art piece, Mannigel envisions to present her insights through designing an experiential space that can be explored through smelling, reflection, listening and learning. This work will eventually be exhibited in Bangalore.

For more details on the project's development check out Mannigel's residency [notes](#).



Photo: Santosh Rajus

Developing a protocol for the collection of women's body scents

In preparation of Test 2, Mannigel was wearing a DIY cotton string necklace and a bracelet with medical silicon pieces for one week.

Test 2, December 24th 2019:

Prof. Shannon Olsson analysed a body scent sample of Mannigel's neck and wrist at NICE lab. This method for collecting body scents works well and will thus become the protocol for collecting the body scents from the five women in Bangalore.



Photo: Lauryn Mannigel

2. I Smell a Rat (2019-)

I smell a rat is a workshop which challenges the fact that female body scents have a history of particularly negative associations. Participants critically engage with gender-related perceptions about body scents through presentations, discussions, and hands-on experiments. With special attention given to the social and cultural norms of female body scents, the work sets out to explore the following two questions:

- (1) How do we react towards women's body scents?
- (2) Can we overcome potential prejudice, or even disgust towards body scents, by cultivating curiosity?

I smell a rat has been commissioned by and presented at [Ada X](#) (2019) in Montreal (CA), as well as the [Goethe Institut Max Mueller Bhavan](#) (2019) in Bangalore (IN).



Photo: Magali Couffon de Trevros

@ Goethe Institut Max Mueller Bhavan, Bangalore (IN), 2019



@ Ada X, Montreal (CA), 2019



Photos: Gabriel Beck

3. Smell Feel Match (2019-)

Smell Feel Match has been commissioned for *Experiment Zukunft* (2019), a joint project of University Rostock and Kunsthalle Rostock (DE), curated by Susanne Jaschko. Moreover, it has been presented at the experimental performance festival *VIVA! Art Action* (2019) in Montreal (CA) upon invitation by feminist artist-run center Ada X.

Smell Feel Match is a performative experiment that investigates the perceptual olfactory judgments of friendships. It offers the opportunity to make new friends based on shared feelings and body scent preferences about the ways that others smell. Participants explore their perception of others' smell by examining their feelings as well as their own preferences about others' body scents. Through a paper and online questionnaire, the work catalogues these responses for further documentation and assessment. Based on participants' online responses, they are then immediately matched and are sent a friendship potential prediction via SMS.

Smell Feel Match spurs participants to ask themselves the following questions:

- (1) How do I feel when perceiving someone's smell?
- (2) What does a body scent experience disclose about my perception of others?
- (3) What role do body scents play in including and excluding people from my social circles?

For more details visit Mannigel's [website](#).



Photo: Lauryn Mannigel

@ Experiment Zukunft, Kunsthalle Rostock (DE), 2019



Photos: Fritz Beise/ Kunsthalle Rostock

@ VIVA! Art Action, Montreal (CA), 2019



4. Eat Me (2018)

Eat Me has been developed and presented at the *Creative Innovation Art meets Science* residency (2018) at Wageningen University (NL). It is a performative experiment that explores how people's body scents make us feel about others, if we were to eat their body scents.

Eat Me asks participants to imagine a world in which experiencing others by tasting and smelling (retronasal smell) them would be the norm. Mannigel conducted interviews at Wageningen University, asking people if they could imagine eating others' body scents, and in which edible forms. Based on people's replies, she designed four snacks and one beverage, which were served at the project's presentation.

The *Eat Me* experiment's project presentation unfolded in three stages. While Mannigel presented the research behind her project, participants were invited to collect samples of their own underarm body scents. They were then solicited to smell five of the body scent samples that were anonymously presented in glass jars. Finally, participants were served four snacks and one beverage which alluded to people's body scents. The food design was based on Mannigel's interviews. When smelling and tasting, participants were asked to record their experience in a paper questionnaire.

#1 Burnt popcorn: This snack is based on an interviewee who could imagine body scent to taste like burnt popcorn.

2 Sweet elderberry flower vegan jelly: This snack is based on an interviewee who imagines body scent to have a delicate sweet taste like a flower's smell.



#1



#2



A spicy home-brewed beer: This drink is based on an interviewee who could imagine home-brewed beer to taste like body scent. The interviewee imagines the taste of fragrant products, such as, vanilla, cinnamon, amber, black pepper, sandal-wood, and palo santo.



Front left. Sticky red brown lavender caramel: This snack is based on an interviewee who can't imagine eating natural body odor, but instead fragrant and artificial scents (e.g. shampoo, deodorant). He envisions a sweet gummy candy like taste with lavender. It could be red or purple, and have a chewy quality.

Rightmost. Beige/white vegan jelly with miso paste: This snack is based on an interviewee who could imagine eating body odor with added fragrant products. She pictures it to have little taste, not a lot of texture, nor structure, similar to a jelly. Tastewise it would be salty, definitely not sweet, and beige in terms of color.

5. Love Sweat Love (2016)

Love Sweat Love has been commissioned and co-produced by [Mediamatic](#). It was presented at the *Long Night of Museums* (2016) in Amsterdam (NL).

Love Sweat Love is a performative olfactory dating experiment that explores physical attraction in connection to people's body scents. Conceptually, it challenges smell's historically pejorative relationship to animalism and sexuality, which fuelled the neglect and moral repression of the sense of smell in aesthetics and modern psychoanalysis.

During the experiment, performers appeared as scientists in traditional white lab coats inviting visitors to collect and donate a sample of their own underarm body scent. Each participant was assigned a number which anonymously displayed their collected sample in a glass jar. While sampling their own scent, participants could smell their way through the collection of body scent samples of the other participants. The smelling experience was guided by a short paper questionnaire which invited participants to reflect upon the associations, feelings, and odor identifications they related with the body scent samples of up to three body scent samples they felt most attracted to. The "scientists" informed participants via short message service (SMS) or email when someone liked their scent. These messages would for instance read: "Number 63 likes our scent". With this information at hand, participants could seek out to smell the body scent samples in jars from the number(s) that liked them. When two participants both fancied each other's smell, the "scientists" offered to connect the pair and provide them with a free drink at Mediamatic's bar.

A short video [45sec] of how *Love Sweat Love* worked is available [here](#). For more details visit Mannigel's [website](#).



Photo: Anisa Xhomaqi & Mediamatic

@ Long Night of Museums, Mediamatic (NL), 2016



Photo: Anisa Xhomaqi & Mediamatic

OLDER WORKS

6. Internal Earthquake (2014)

Internal Earthquake was part of the one-day exhibition, *The Ability to Fail in Public* at Kreuzberg Pavillon on April 21st 2014, which explored the role of failures in artistic practices. The exhibition's conceptual framework demanded that the testing and development of the work happened on the day of presentation.

Internal Earthquake is a sound installation that challenges the cultural dominance of sight by exploring how architecture and the body can be experienced through vibrations created by sound. During the show, Mannigel investigated the exhibition space by experimenting with its aural, spatial, and vibrational qualities. After a series of tests, she decided to use a pre-existing 2-channel sound piece composed of low frequency sounds. The set-up for *Internal Earthquake* consisted of two speakers, which were placed on the wooden floor in the center of a completely dark room at approx. 3 meters distance apart and facing each other. Two neon blue light sticks marked the front-bottom part of the speakers and thus served as minimal guiding light sources to prevent potential accidents. In addition, a felt blanket situated between them created a listening space. *Internal Earthquake* accommodated one visitor at a time. The low frequency sounds generated a vibrationally dense experience of space, which evoked feelings that oscillated between comfort and discomfort. Since *Internal Earthquake* questioned human reliance on the sense of sight, Mannigel documented it by highlighting the installation's absence of visual content.

The sound piece [3min58sec] is available on Mannigel's [website](#), and it is recommended that listeners use of headphones or low frequency speakers.

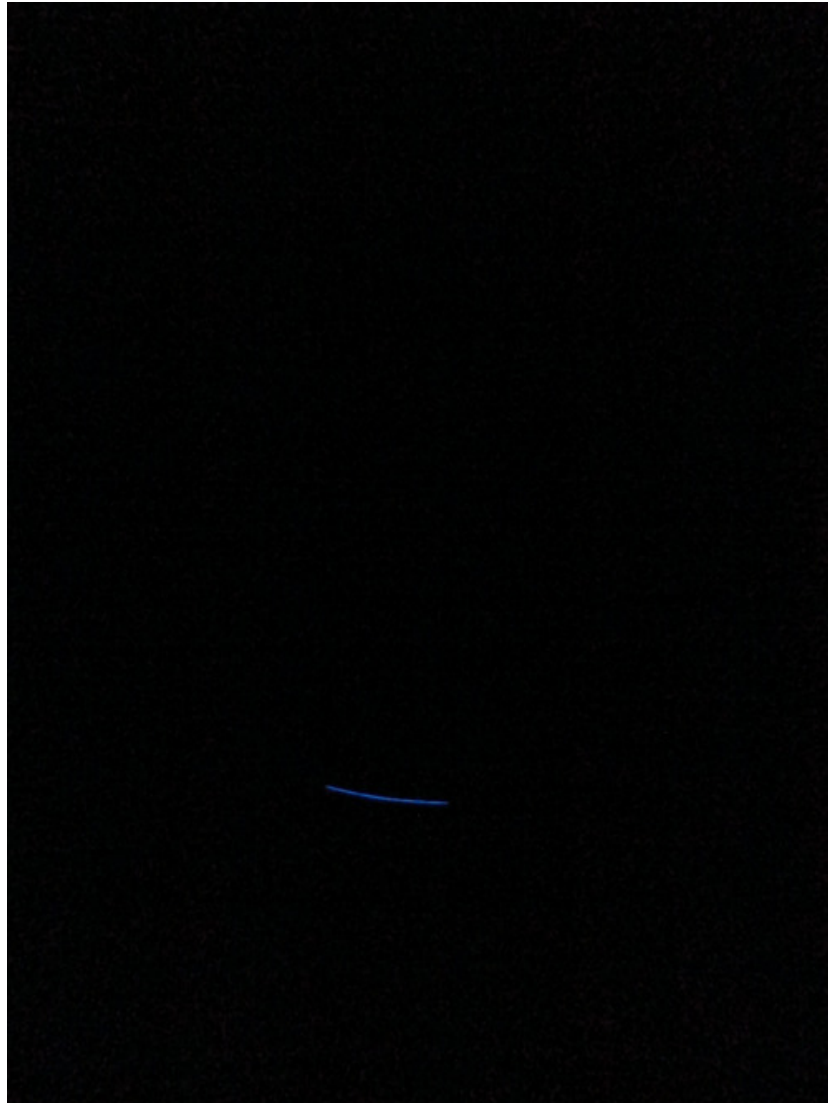


Photo: Heiko Pfreundt

7. NAÏVE °2 (2007)

NAÏVE °2 was presented as part of the course *Audible Topographies* (2007) at Concordia University, Montreal (CA) and at *Dorkbot Paris #7* at the festival *Les Mondes Hors Pistes* at Galerie Agnès B., Paris (FR).

NAÏVE °2 is a wearable and tactile audio installation that explores the impact of the physicality of sound on the body through processes of embodied listening. It is one of the artistic outcomes of an interdisciplinary practice-led research project entitled *NAÏVE*, which investigates the abstract concepts of displacement and integration as general themes in the context of the perpetual social and architectural transformations in urban spaces. In an attempt to challenge the limits of urban structures, *NAÏVE* creates fictional audio scenarios that immerse the aural urban fabric with the sounds of sea/ocean water.

NAÏVE °2 consists of a felt hat with integrated DC motors that plays a specially designed audio piece, which is composed of field recordings of the sea and low frequency sounds. The motors are connected to an amplifier and located in the hat's pocket, which touches the wearer's neck. Through bone conduction, the listener's body can become an organic resonator that allows for one to perceive sound as coming from within the body. Using the neck as an area sensitive to touch, *NAÏVE °2* investigates the threshold between the physical states of pleasure and pain. For the audio component, *NAÏVE °2* explores the coexistence of collected field recordings from the sea with computer generated pure low-frequency sine wave sounds. These low frequency soundwaves partially corresponded with Alpha (7 to 13Hz) and Beta (13 to 30Hz) brainwaves, which can be experienced as vibrations because they are below the lower limit of audibility (approx. 20 Hz). Due to the high vibrational quality of both types of sounds, the listener can be immersed in a powerful embodied listening experience.



Photo: Julien Dorra

A short video [29sec] of how *NAÏVE °2* worked is available [here](#).