

the nineteenth century and now curse of the lanes everywhere mild, and ground elder and bindweed – whilst we dreamt of colour and scent.

While gardening – making this garden and designing other gardens – my good fortune is to be the accomplice of the most observant, sensual, kind, comprehending, communicative, funny, original thinking co-conspirator that anyone could have the luck to encounter. Mr B, as he is styled in these notes, has taught me about observation, to take notice, and to relish. He is addicted to many things, gardening and scent among them. The business of smell is so deeply subjective that we have many differences. Mr B often did not agree, and the reader will often not agree, with my verbal interpretation of smells. Mr B comes at things from a different flight path to mine, never ceasing to astonish, even puzzle me. But we almost always end up in the same place. This garden has been a playground for our daydreams and a larder of smelly things. But gardens are full of contradictions too. Nothing is ever quite right, or if it is, it is because you never meant it so, it just happened. But the witchcraft of scent somehow acts as an emulsion, fusing all, it is tranquillising for the gardener. Despite its capriciousness it goes on giving a thousand things back. To appreciate it I try sometimes to be as aimless as a child, to be a trespasser on my own patch, as if I'd never been in this place before. It is the same when photographing: divining the moment when there is something I have never seen before in the viewfinder, my resolutely familiar world has dissolved.

The presumption tends to be, when I have mentioned this project over the past decade, that I am writing a book about 'perfume' – a word that implies much, loaded with a baggage train of implication stretching back along the Silk Road and into the ancient world. Marvellous to speak of, and very much part of what I wanted to explore, but not central. This is a book about what I smell in my garden, notes I have made about the smell of plants and, as I became more enmeshed, the business of smell in general – though this last would take another book to explore properly. Smell is all about instantaneous judgements deep in the ancient bit of our brains. Judgements about our connection with the outside world, with the dead meat smell of *Eucomis* and what dead meat means to us. Smells have a life force that speaks to us in an old language, and what I am interested in was expressed by Antonin Artaud: 'where there is the stink of shit there is a smell of being.'

Smell is our constant unacknowledged companion. Smell is everywhere yet unseen. We breathe, we smell; that which we breathe in is full of smell, and that which we breathe out is usually smell-less. It is a chemical and constant exchange. Perception of smell, however, is intermittent, somewhere on the edge, happening but not really registering. Smells tend to slip away, even when we focus on them. This is core to their elusive, ungraspable quality. But it is also core to our being able to deal with so much bizarre disordered information. Evolution has arranged things so that when we are stable and cognisant, we need to rationalise our perceptions and not be overwhelmed by them. Sight, sound and touch are physical senses but smell and taste are chemical; in the exchange in some extraordinary way what we smell becomes part of us. This makes smell such an intimate sense and such a vulnerable one too, because it is a direct molecular combination with bits of the outside world, the substance of our *Umwelt* – the world as it is experienced by any organism. All sensory perception is making sense of the world about us, but the olfactory membrane is the only place in the human body where the central nervous system comes into direct contact with the outside world.