



Elena Mancioppi, PhD candidate in *Ecogastronomy, Education and Society*

# The olfactive Nourishment through smell



## ABSTRACT

Despite smell being traditionally considered as a minor, negligible and marginal sense, it has lately elicited growing attention among scholars and philosophers. It is no coincidence if such cultural shift has been happening along with the “affective turn” and the emergent academic interest on atmospheres.

Mostly denigrated by a long-lived and dividing epistemic model, olfactory perception can be interpreted as a peculiar way of knowing and sensing, i.e. smelling as an intuitive, sagacious, vague and immersive *pre-sagire* or *foretaste*. Closely connected to taste and food, smell is a crucial gateway, both in physical and metaphorical terms, through which both the “outer” and the “other” are metabolized, accepted or refused, ingested or rejected, where nourishment and affection are inextricably intertwined.

The thesis consists of three chapter. Firstly, through an overview of traditional philosophical problems ascribed to olfaction, smell is understood stressing its affective qualities. Secondly, philosophical potentialities of smell are deepened and discussed; the idea of the «olfactive» as a peculiar aesthetic modality is here developed. Thirdly, a socio-political aesthetics of smell is offered examining the role of food odors and aromas.

## METODOLOGY AND MAIN SOURCES

Inter-disciplinary studies through different fields: Philosophy; Psychology; Sociology; Sensory Anthropology; Sensory History

## PhD THESIS

### 1 Smell: Philosophical Issues

- 1.1 Epistemological Limits of Olfaction
- 1.2 Smell: The Aesthetics excluded
- 1.3 The Immorality of Odors

#### Olfactophobic Philosophies

In Western philosophical tradition, accusations against the sense of smell are countless; among them, unreliability, coerciveness, weakness, self-indulgency, materiality, immorality and subjectivity. However, distrust of smell seems to coincide with the epistemic value attributed to affectivity which, in the olfactory sphere, is multifaceted and ambivalent. As in food intake, the act of smelling causes the boundaries between subject and object, organism and environment to fade. It is a mutually performing process which entails a deep mingling: even aesthetic olfactory values are fleeting and situational.

### 2 The «olfactive»

- 2.1 Nose Sagacity
- 2.2 Olfactory Aesthetics
- 2.3 The Ethics of Smell

#### Olfactory Knowledge

In manifold idiomatic expressions, the act of smelling refers to the ability to perceive deeper and subtler truths than those graspable by other senses, hinting at intuitive sensitivity and cognition. A further correspondence is to be found in *sagacity*'s etymology: from the Latin *sagire*, «to smell, have a fine spirit»; it witnesses the link between the sharpness of smell and perspicacity. A kind of affective knowledge is here at stake, where an emotional and immersive atmosphere is always present and co-emergent. Smell and emotion are rooted in the relationship with the mother as life and food giver and, conversely, food assumes most of its psychological value through its aromatic profile.

### 3 Smell Politics

- 3.1 Smell as a socio-political sense
- 3.2 Odors and (il)legality
- 3.3 Olfaction and Atmospheric Foods

#### Smell as a socio-political sense

Smell prevents from ingesting toxic substances: olfactory suspicion of new odors is due to their potential risk; suspicion may lead to disgust. But smell also triggers pleasure and desire towards nutritional sources, inducing cravings and appreciation. The same occurs when considering interpersonal dynamics; even in this field, smell is Janus-faced: aggregating or separating. Freedom and constriction, manipulation and free will, deceit and authenticity are core issues when dealing with artificial flavoring and the use of odors for profit-making. At the same time, the social question plays a central role: aesthetic precepts are dictated by those who hold political and economic power.

## SOME CASE STUDIES:

The Role of Smell in Gluttony as a Sin

Odors and Identity; Gastro-Olfactory Racism

Scent Marketing: Emotional Economics

Edible vs Non-Edible: the Future of Food Scents



Truffle, Ecology and Politics of Smell

(Ol)Factory Iper-Aesthetization in Consumerism

Scented Meals: an Excursus

Smell and Prohibition

