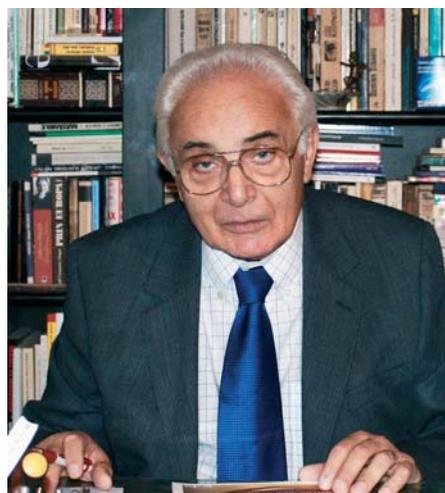


EDITORIAL

About taste, smell and perfumes - some considerations



Why talking about taste and smell since modern society is dominated at a sensory level by **audio-visual**? After millennia of bipedal stature, smell and taste have regressed in human species - the audiovisual tends nowadays to be all-embracing. Yet... let's remember that these two senses, taste and smell, initially fundamental, still control nowadays nutrition and reproduction, ensuring continuity of species, because they are deeply involved in social, affective and sexual activities - defining elements of human communication, therefore indispensable to modern civilization.

What **emotion** represents for art, smell and taste represent for appetite. The five senses are undoubtedly involved, but in different proportions, in the normal social life, from where gastronomy descends too.

Smell confirms sensorial impression. It allows us to discern flavours. In tasting, smell is indispensable. Therefore, with the help of our nose we perceive and improve **taste**. In the cortex, the two olfacto-gustatory centres are connected by multiple connections. Consequently, reduction or loss of smell has a great influence on taste. The two senses, anatomically and functionally interconnected, interfere together in food acceptance or rejection. Their pathology has important implications for the general pathology, effects (implications) sometimes neglected by ignorance or minimization.

Smell is the primary factor in the "search for food" because the nose is an organ with an extraordinary sensitivity. No scientific instrument or apparatus can compensate or equal the sensorial performances of the nose. The sense of smell cannot be replaced by a prosthesis.

By means of smell we are alerted in case of danger. The smell, doubled by intelligence and education, may provide us vibrant - delicate - intense and unforgettable

sensory emotions such as: fruit flavour, drinks, some types of food, human effluvia "odoro di femina", etc. Codification and storage in the cortex of different odours in the olfactory memory made Marcel Proust define this type of memory as "a huge edifice of memories".

In fine, refined and of high quality cuisine, dedicated to the connoisseurs, food value is expressed and memorized not through gestures and words, but through the flavours it gives off. The art of achieving this creation can be called "invisible kitchen". This metaphor defines the art of whetting the appetite with smells and flavours which are fixed in a sovereign way in the olfactory memory.

When going nowadays into "Capsa" or "Caru cu bere", those who have read the interwar literature can still perceive or recall, from the atmosphere and memories, the refined culinary smells specific to those times.

There are no standards in matters of taste. Taste is personal and can be educated or brutalized depending on environmental circumstances: colour, atmosphere, entourage, and on the state of our own mood.

Therefore, "de gustibus et coloribus non disputandum".

Smell - as a means of perceiving the surrounding world, has been since ancient times a motive for philosophical reflections, scientific debates, all having as fundamental concern the significance of sensation and its relationship with reality.

Over time, the aesthetic dimension of smell has been increasingly invoked in the process of social communication.

Through their ubiquity - smell and taste - are inevitable presences in our philosophical thinking adventure, providing us with physical or mental satisfactions or disappointments. The olfactory ego exists and it is in-

involved in shaping our personality, in the complex cognitive process and that of social communication.

In their desire of communication and intense social life, people have tried over the ages, among the many means of achieving this, to look for stimuli for the sense of smell too. Thus one got to perfumes.

The history of perfumes is as interesting as it is dynamic and sometimes exciting.

Perfume is for smell what music is for hearing and painting for the eye. Creating a perfume can be considered, when it is not part of an industrial process, a work of art with philosophical and aesthetic implications. Nowadays, smell and flavours, effluvia, are for civilized societies a way of life, a social and economic matter.

Memories about nice smells date from time immemorial and come from the East in the Indus valley.

In those distant ages, aromatic herbs were being used for religious rituals and for the pharaohs' funerals. They were however used in a simple, profane way. Later, women began to anoint their body with flavoured palm oil. Thyme began to be used for perfuming the pharynx and the neck, mint was used for perfuming the arms, the origani for eyebrows and hair, while the bedding was perfumed with myrtle, aloe and cinnamon.

Egyptians and people from Hebron invented combinations with sacred flavours and oils, with an essential role in the development of Hebrew liturgies.

It seems that the Greeks would be the first in history to discover and use the floral oils and essences, confirming the historical fate of modern perfumes. Hippocrates is the discoverer and first user of aromatherapy. In Greek mythology, the nice, dazzling smell represents the proof of the gods' supernatural origin, while the scented offerings were meant to attract their goodwill.

In ancient Rome, perfumes were used, less eclectically however, in all life aspects: baths, parties, orgies, religious ceremonies, funerals.

In the next centuries, the trade with odoriferous substances incredibly develops. It is initiated and developed by the Phoenicians in Byblos along the eastern coasts. Real "smell routes" are developed: sandal wood and cinnamon begin to arrive from India, myrtle from Arabia, nard and musk from Asia, camphor from China.

In Middle Ages, the Arab chemists invent the alembic and the coil, establishing the principle and the technique of aromatic plants **distillation**. It is believed that the process has been discovered by Avicenna, Arab alchemist and physician from the XIth century. The second stage of perfume history begins, the so-called "age of distilled essences".

In Western Europe, aromatic essences are brought by famous seafarers. Venice becomes the turntable of

the commerce with perfumes and aromatic essences. In the beginning, these were used only for certain religious rituals imposed by the Catholic Church. Gradually, they will be adopted by the Royal Courts and by nobles as a symbol of luxury and refinement. During the Renaissance and then, during the Great French century, marshal Richelieu decides that body and ambient perfumes are obligatory for his entourage and for those bearing titles of nobility.

It is the age of "strong", remnant fragrances with a musky smell, of flavoured face powder and wigs. In those times one believed that hygiene and especially washing with soap and water were harmful to health and were severely contraindicated.

In the XVIIIth century the Italian chemist Gian Maria Farina discovers "aqua admirabilis", an aromatic extract dissolved in alcohol. The combination contained lemon, bitter oranges and bergamot pears. The success of the product is huge, and when Farina moves and continues to produce it in Köln (Cologne), the product gets the French name of the town and will be forever known as "eau de Cologne" (cologne).

A few decades later, the cologne is improved by Armand Roger and Charles Gallet who laid the foundations of the industrial perfume production. In the mid-XVIIIth century, the "Perfumery Corporation" is opened in Grasse. Then, in Paris it is founded the "Houbigant Perfumery", followed by Piver and Guerlain.

At the end of the XIXth century, the third age in the perfume industry begins - the age of industrial production of modern perfumes. One by one, appear the famous perfumes "Origan and Chypre" of the Coty house; "Rose Rouge" and "Partir" of the Roger and Gallet house; "Mon parfum" and "Soir de Paris" of the Bourjois house, then "Pour Homme" from Caron, "Jiky", "Mitsuko" and "Shalimar" from Guerlain.

In the era, the "Haute Couture" fashion develops in particular. Elegant clothes and luxurious underwear had to emanate fashionable effluvia and flavours. New perfumes appear, such as: Coco Chanel's "Nr. 5", followed by "Arpège" by Lanvin, Caron's "Vitiver", Jean Patou's "Patou"; then Marcel Rochas' "Femme", Christian Dior's "Eau Sauvage", Nina Ricci's "Air du temps", etc.

The definition and meaning of perfume is being improved in our time. Perfume represents a mixture of odours and diluted flavours, mixed in adequate proportions, creating an original, harmonious and specific olfactory combination. A perfume creator can only be the person who possesses the odours **intuition** and their memory. Without these two fundamental traits, perfume creation is impossible. These innate traits of the perfume creator make him compare with and re-

semble the art creator. Just as a painter adds a new touch of colour on the canvas, and then withdraws a step back in order to critically analyze if it is welcome or incomplete, the perfume creator makes various attempts to obtain the desired product. Therefore, creating a quality perfume finally becomes a spiritual creation, impossible to be industrially reproduced, mass production achieving only a copy, an imitation of the original formula.

The quality of a perfume is appreciated by: duration (persistence), volatility, volume, sillage and, of course, the manner of presentation.

The duration represents the persistence in time without altering its smell after application.

The volume and volatility represent the perfume's ability to emanate pleasant effluvia in the surrounding atmosphere, while the sillage is the odour trail that a perfumed person leaves behind.

These qualities of perfume led to famous love stories and literary works of similar value. Perfume, such as wine, is of quality when it triggers a sensory-olfactory dynamics producing an exuberant, provocative psychological and emotional state.

Qualifying a perfume by taking into consideration the modern criteria must comply with two aspects: the "top note" formed by the emanation of fugitive odours and flavours, which create the first impression and a "base note" characterized by the remanence of smell.

The smell persistence is achieved by characteristic fixers: especially musk and vanilla.

In common language, the quality of perfumes is appreciated by means of the phrase: fresh, warm, light, strong, dry, rich, fugitive, clinging, sour, unctuous, etc. These secular phrases translate in a subtle form the sensorial magic that perfume produces on an individual.

Unfortunately, perfume lovers are often fooled nowadays by imitated products - counterfeit ones, which are sold in the large commercial centres. Analytical means of chromatography, spectrometry and magnetic resonance allow violation of the original formulas and initiate real counterfeiting industries.

The modern perfumery thus becomes industrial, and the manufacturers' commercial approaches are aggressive and pragmatic.

The concept of perfume creator is more and more replaced by that of **producer**, since it better responds to the arid requirements of the market. Together with the producer disappears unfortunately **the magic of perfume creation**.

The market annually requires new odours and flavours. They are required not only for body use, but more and more for perfuming enclosed spaces - commercial spaces, means of transport, social groups - homes, offices, etc. Therefore, collective preferences and standards appeared for odours and flavours. One prefers: lime flavour for linen and washable products; pine, lavender or rose flavour for deodorizing toilets, tobacco or pine flavour for the interior of cars, fresh flavours for detergents, etc.

In terms of body fragrances, the average trend is nowadays for strong, unisex flavours and effluvia, oriental scents (amber), sports odours. Floral, dazzling, diaphanous effluvia remained nevertheless the preferences of educated and refined connoisseurs.

In Europe, the perfume industry annually grows by 15%. The place of individual creators has been taken by large multinational industrial groups able to invest in research. They monopolized advertising and means of promoting. Some of them subtly penetrate the consumer's consciousness. Sophisticated psychological and psychoanalytic methods are widely and persuasively used. The nose lately gained a marketing role, being subjected, by the mentioned means, to sensory manipulations that oscillate between illusion and pleasure. These illusions are also achieved and enhanced with the aid of the ambient decor in the department stores - colour, furniture, presentation, etc.

Essentially - the art of cultivating the sensory is philosophy and, as Da Vinci stated, "Scienza mentale". It is part of the great creation work, not for imitating or repeating the nature, but for making the imaginary concrete and life more attractive and more full of charm.

Dorin Sarafoleanu