

Osmospheric Dwelling

Smell, Food, Gender and Atmospheres

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Understanding the tight connections between human dwelling and the sense of smell seems nowadays urgent. Since human being-in-the-world finds its very prerequisite in being-in-the-air, an inquiry on air design, today particularly intrusive, is a philosophical necessity. The aim of this contribution is to sketch an exploratory investigation on the aesthetic relationships between space, smell and gendered atmospheres through the case of food, specifically through its *osmosphere*: its flavour as its affective aura. Firstly, I discuss analogies between atmospheres and smells. Secondly, I proceed by presenting olfactory devices whose aim is conveying gendered food-related and emotional atmospheres, scrutinising the phenomenological intertwining between food, cooking, gender, 'sense of home' and the olfactory imaginary of the matter. Finally, I put forward some observations which weave together aerial dwelling and ecological thought. | *Keywords: Osmosphere, Smell, Food, Gender, Atmosphere, Air Design*

Every dwelling has its individual smell of home.
Juhani Pallasmaa

1. Osmospheric Dwelling: Smell, Atmosphere and Space

Understanding the tight connections between human dwelling and the sense of smell seems nowadays compelling. In fact, the period we are facing is characterized by aesthetic practices and perceptual dynamics which make extremely tangible in daily experience that the olfactory sphere constitutes “the very ground base of life” (Sacks, 1998, p. 159). On the one hand, we are persistently subjected to the conditioning of ‘scent marketing’, namely the staging of olfactory atmospheres as auratic adherences to places and commodities.¹ Since human being-in-the-world – Luce Irigaray (1999) suggests – finds its very prerequisite in “being-in-the-air”, as reworded by Sloterdijk (2002, p. 93), comprehending the influence of ‘air design’ becomes a philosophical necessity. On the other hand, although we are witnessing

¹ Cf. Anderson (2014, pp. 25–37).

a general renaissance of smell – in academics as well as in everyday perceptual awareness –, phenomenological inquiries on its shaping our dwelling are still disjointed.

After a general introduction, my aim is to sketch an exploratory investigation on the aesthetic relationships between smell and gendered atmospheres through the case of food, specifically through its flavour as its affective aura – its *osmosphere*, as I will delineate later –, since it appears irreducibly linked not only to the phenomenological experience of being ‘placed’, but also to gendered values. To do so, I firstly deem necessary to outline how smell moulds our engagement with the environment. In this sense, the COVID-19 pandemic is worthy of a brief remark, in that it is noticeably revealing the effects of olfactory malfunctioning.

As it is well known, the most common symptoms of such disease concern olfactory dysfunctions that usually recover in a few days. But approximately 10% of people who get infected suffer from post-COVID condition, which includes long-lasting anosmia (smell loss) or parosmia (smell distortion) (Borges Watson et al., 2021, p. 2). These sensory disruptions often coincide with a feeling of detachment from the world, which appears “very blank. Or if not blank, shades of decay” (Borges Watson et al., 2021, p. 10). The olfactory inability breaks off the vital links one has with people and the surroundings, triggering a spatial *qua* affective disorientation that, consequently, overshadows the ‘I’ as the core, the placed ‘here’, from which every experience unfolds. Some people precisely complaint a sense of alienation from themselves, together with a diffused sensation of loneliness. Besides causing paranoia and other psychological disorders, smell dullness can even make one feel claustrophobic in their own body.²

To cut a long story short, smell is paramount for our connections with ourselves and the world, as some philosophers have recognized.³ In his pioneering investigation on the psychical links between atmosphere and oral sense published in 1968, Hubertus Tellenbach compares the family aura in which the child is immersed to the “smell of the nest [that] clings to the baby-bird” (Tellenbach, 1981, p. 229), fathoming that vague but distinctive and all-encompassing ‘air’ that radiates the most intimate tonalities outwards, inwardly condensing a peculiar way of opening up to the world. The analogy with smell is not just metaphorical; rather, it pertains to the olfactory sphere to such an extent that a kind of commutability between the two has been differently hypothesised. Following Eugène Minkowski, the way in which odours *spread* reveals not only the atmosphere as a peculiar spatial dimension,⁴ but also its very aesthetic and moral quality (Minkowski, 1999, p. 115). But let’s take a step back, as it is worth giving a concise overview to retrace their phenomenological and conceptual affinity.

² I have found these observations in *AbScent Covid-19 Smell and Taste Loss*, a Facebook discussion group created for research purposes. Being private, I just provide the general website (*AbScent Covid-19 Smell and Taste Loss* | Facebook, no date).

³ From Friedrich Nietzsche to Gaston Bachelard and Michel Serres, just to mention a few prominent ones; cf. Le Guérer (1998, p. 151 f.), Jaquet (2010), Mancioffi (2022, pp. 85–151).

⁴ “An odor has, in the air, an infinity” (Bachelard, 1988, p. 136).

Atmosphere⁵ is the point of convergence between the geopsychic tradition of the *genius loci* and the phenomenological idea of *Leib* (Griffero, 2008, p. 76). Although atmospheres have to do with all the senses and reveal themselves synaesthetically (Böhme, 2017a), smells turn out to have a sort of ‘atmospheric primacy’ (Brennan, 2004; Diaconu, 2006; Böhme, 2019). This can be ascribed to manifold similarities; without claiming to be exhaustive, we can recall their hybrid ontology, the way they persist in memory despite being fleeting phenomena,⁶ and the peculiar dialectic between introversion and extroversion in the felt body they both hint at, given their affective nature as ‘spatialized feelings’ (cf. Griffero, 2022). In the wake of the so-called “affective turn” (Clough and Halley, 2007; Thompson and Hogget, 2012; Slaby and von Scheve, 2019), an “atmospheric” one has followed in the humanities (cf. Griffero, 2019); not surprisingly, philosophical studies on smell – the atmospheric and affective (as in Kantian system) sense *par excellence* – have been booming.⁷ Beyond the traditional prominence of visual aspects, also geography, urban design and architecture have not actually ignored atmospheric and olfactory environments.⁸ The notion of *smellscape*⁹ reveals the attempt to thematise such dimension.

Here, instead of resorting to the idea of *smellscape* – still vitiated, among other things, by an ocular, bi-dimensional and geometrical comprehension of space (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2021, pp. 97–98; Mancioffi, 2022, pp. 161–162) – I propose the notion of *osmosphere*. Composed of ancient Greek *ὄσμη* (smell, odour) and *σφαῖρα* (sphere, globe), *osmosphere* is my neologism whose purpose is to stress the immersive, unavoidable, ever-changing, affective and ‘round’ dimension of the olfactory space in which every entity dwells. An *osmosphere* is always perceived from within; therefore, it is relational, situated and self-reflexive, since every being is embraced by their own olfactory ‘bubble’.¹⁰ Osmospheric spaces, being bi-directional,¹¹ are in a continuous and mutual play of negotiation and adjustment, with substantial sociological implications (Simmel, 2009, pp. 577–579; Carnevali, 2020, pp. 154–

⁵ Of course, I employ this very ambiguous term in its philosophical sense; cf. Griffero (2018).

⁶ The “Proust Phenomenon” (Chu and Downes, 2000), that explains why “[e]veryone who clings to the past dreams of indestructible odors” (Bachelard, 1988, p. 137), or why “in fragrance and flavor the enduring element of the past, its atmosphere, is preserved” (Tellenbach, 1981, p. 224); for observations on Proustian olfactory poetics, Benjamin (1968, p. 214). Cf. also Kluck (2019).

⁷ In addition to the works cited throughout the text, cf. e.g. Keller (2016), Barwich (2020), Shiner (2020).

⁸ In antiquity, the aromatic profile of buildings was considered paramount (Tuan, 1995, pp. 64–65); nowadays, architects are much concerned with materials and spaces’ atmospheres (cf. Borch (2014), Bressani (2019), Alison (2020), De Matteis (2020)), as well as with ambient scent. The same applies to designers (Henshaw et al., 2018) and geographers (Porteous, 1996). Cultural studies and sensory history – both fields in great expansion, with much research on smell (cf. Kettler (2020), for a remarkable bibliography) – have shed light on odour control strategies in city planning throughout the ages (cf. Corbin (1986), Classen, Howes and Synnott (1994)).

⁹ Coined by J. Douglas Porteous (1985) and then adopted by different disciplines (cf. Henshaw, 2014).

¹⁰ Main reference is here Peter Sloterdijk’s trilogy on spheres (Sloterdijk, 2011; 2014; 2016).

¹¹ Linguistically but also phenomenologically, the transitive and the intransitive are interwoven in smelling – ‘to detect’ and ‘to emit’ odours.

159; Hsu, 2020). Many would agree that “[s]cents capture the aesthetic-emotional quality of place” (Tuan, 1995, p. 69; cf. Griffero, 2014, pp. 63–69); hence, smell encourages a phenomenological comprehension of the environment: not in the measurable meaning of space, but in the surfaceless dimension of presence on which felt-bodily experience is incardinated (Schmitz, 2019a; 2019b).¹²

If we take seriously the idea that perception is ecological – as supported by the most updated theses stemming from J.J. Gibson’s theory –, every sense has to be understood not as a separate and passive channel; rather, as an active and cross-sensory perceptual system. To put it differently, we can suggest the ‘olfactive’ as a peculiar modality to ‘pick up information’ which has not so much to do with stable objects,¹³ but with processes, affections, imagination and a *poetics of space*. Further to this point, a “whiff of perfume or even the slightest odor”, Gaston Bachelard maintains, “can create an entire environment in the world of the imagination” (Bachelard, 2014, p. 191). There seems to be an ‘olfactive’ as opposed to an ‘optic’ way of perceiving space.¹⁴ We are in the olfactive mode when recollecting our relations with it: “[t]he most persistent memory of any space is often smell” (Pallasmaa, 2012, p. 58) or, as a variation on the theme, “[w]hen memory breathes, all odors are good” (Bachelard, 1969, p. 136). This is why, according to the French philosopher, odours are “the first evidence of our fusion with the world” (*Ibid.*). Moreover:

These memories of odors from the past are recovered by closing our eyes. Long ago we closed our eyes to savor them fully. We closed our eyes and then, right away, we dreamed a little. [...] In the past as in the present, a beloved odor is the center of an intimacy. [...] Poets are going to give us testimony on those odors of childhood, on those odors which impregnate the seasons of childhood. (*Ibid.*)

In fact, osmospheric space is always intertwined with felt time as ‘climate’, i.e., seasonal weather; odours, to use Lefebvre’s words, are “traces that mark out rhythms” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 21).¹⁵ At this point, we can enter two further conceptual knots that are to be tackled in the following pages: food and

¹² This point raises central issues which explain the traditional marginalisation of smells in philosophy and aesthetics due to their materiality, the lack of ‘objectuality’, structure, universality, neutrality in perception, etc.; in this sense, borrowing Juhani Pallasmaa’s words, “[a]mbience is like an invisible fragrance or smell that fuses and heightens the sensory experience” (Pallasmaa, 2014, p. 24). For an analysis on ‘olfactory world’, cf. Nogué (1936).

¹³ Merleau-Ponty proposes the idea that “each sense organ interrogates the object in its own way, and that it is the agent of a certain type of synthesis” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 232) quoting Marius von Senden, whose patients recovered from blindness “see colours much as we smell an odour [...] which enfolds and intrudes upon us, but without occupying any specific form of extension in a more exactly definable way” (von Senden, 1960, p. 129).

¹⁴ I take inspiration from Nicola Perullo’s concept of *haptic perception* versus optic one; cf. Perullo (2022).

¹⁵ In this sense, Michel Serres describes smell as the sense of *singularity*: “Forms reappear, invariant or recurrent, harmonies are transformed, stable across variations, specificity is countersigned by aroma. With our eyes closed, our ears stopped, feet and hands bound, lips sealed, we can still identify, years later and from a thousand other smells, the undergrowth of such and such a place in a particular season at sunset, just before a rain storm, or the room where feed corn was kept, or cooked prunes in September, or a woman” (Serres, 2008, pp. 169–170).

gender. Food flavours emblematically dot and provide space and time with a characterizing atmospheric tone which transforms occupied space into inhabited one: migrant literature insists on the healing power of food osmospheres for homesickness (cf. Law, 2001). In the opening of her queer phenomenology about orientation as ‘feeling at home’, Sara Ahmed offers interesting observations about relocating; through smell, the contours between space and time become blurred and, thanks to it, a ‘house’ can turn into ‘home’:¹⁶

Then I arrive, an empty house. It looks like a shell. [...] The familiar smell of spices fills the air. [...] I feel flung back somewhere else. I am never sure where the smell of spices takes me, as it has followed me everywhere. Each smell that gathers returns me somewhere; I am not always sure where that somewhere is. [...] Such memories can involve a recognition of how one’s body already feels, coming after the event. [...] So we ask the question, later, and it often seems too late: what is it that has led me away from the present, to another place and another time? (Ahmed, 2006, p. 10).

Space and time assume an atmospheric timbre also according to the seasonality of ingredients, recipes, traditions and cooking methods: “smells have seasons and each season smells” (Seremetakis, 2019, p. 30), first of all thanks to gastronomy.¹⁷ In their turn, food and gastronomy are strongly gendered domains (Bordo, 1993); *eo ipso*, as I will try to show, the perception of food osmospheres is always intertwined with gender imaginary,¹⁸ claiming a specific phenomenological investigation that is still lacking. What follows is a first attempt to open new lines of research.

2. Food, Gender and Olfactory Imaginary

The emotional influence of food is a key subject in the psychology and philosophy of taste (e.g. Shepherd and Raats, 2006; Kaplan, 2012). Without going into detail of such a broad topic, suffice it to say that smell plays a fundamental role in it (cf. Drobnick, 2006). As a confirmation, we can resume COVID-induced olfactory complications, where eating becomes extremely problematic. Food is commonly perceived as bland or awful; for that reason – together with eating disorders or unhealthy dietary behaviours – nostalgia, depression, sadness, unsociability and melancholy take over (Burgess Watson et al., 2021, p. 10).

¹⁶ Dealing with the philosophical complexity of such a notion (from Husserl to Bollnow and Lévinas) would keep me from getting to the point of my contribution. Here, I use ‘home’ when stressing the affective property of intimacy with space, regardless geographical position; ‘house’ when referring to material buildings, even if the distinction sometimes fades.

¹⁷ Think of the geographical and sociological notion of *foodscapes*, meaning environments shaped by food systems (cf. Sobal and Wansink (2007)); Pallasmaa evokes an olfactory foodscape when writing: “sales counters on the streets are appetising exhibitions of smells: creatures of the ocean that smell of seaweed, vegetables carrying the odour of fertile earth, and fruits that exude the sweet fragrance of sun and moist summer air. The menus displayed outside restaurants make us fantasise the complete course of a dinner; letters read by the eyes turn into oral sensations” (Pallasmaa, 2012, p. 59).

¹⁸ By necessity, I overlook the large debate on male/female olfactory oppositions in relation to bodily secretions, perceptual sensitivity and cosmetics. I just note that today, consistently with the rejection of binary genders, unisex fragrance is the new frontier in industrial perfumery (Graham (2006); Fetto (2020)), a strongly (hetero)sexualized market until recently (Kjellmer (2021, pp. 150–151), Grand-Clément and Ribeyrol (2022, p. 11); for perfume in erotic arts, cf. Shusterman (2021)). For its part, artistic perfumery is fighting gendered categories since decades; cf. e.g. Ellena (2013).

Food affective impact can be traced down considering the relationships children establish with their mother. Since the primordial stages of new-borns' life (and even before, in intrauterine environment), maternal scent coincides with her emotional atmosphere which, in the same breath, "is condensed into taste" (Tellenbach, 1981, p. 226), so much so that moods, flavours and nourishment, being concurrent and permeated with the sense of love, trust and protection, acquire an interchangeable atmospheric value. Certainly, such aesthetic link between female identity and food is not limited to biological or psychological instances; cultural paradigms largely contribute to settling and reinforcing it. I will recall the heart of the matter in broad outline. In many societies including the Western one, women have been expected for a long time to look after kids, to cook and to do the house cleaning;¹⁹ men to hunt and, in general, to run their activities outside the household. According to such a picture, while the feminine is placed in the intimate sphere of the house,²⁰ the masculine occupies the public space (Tuan, 2013, p. 23).²¹ As Carolyn Korsmeyer and other scholars have extensively argued, the long-lived marginalisation within the academic discourse of food, the domestic and the 'lower senses' (specifically taste and smell) can be reasonably attributed to their connection to female activities.²²

If, in general, food has a privileged relationship with women, nonetheless some edible items and cooking methods are perceived as more feminine than others. Despite political and social changes directed at dismantling such rigid demarcation in areas of responsibility or in binary gendered values, such sexualization of food, preparations and flavours seems to be still in force today. 'Air design' largely leans on these categorisations; in fact, we are witnessing a massive, often gendered, *osmospheric foodification*, with far from negligible consequences for the phenomenological experience of aesthetic dwelling. By presenting some symptomatic olfactory devices which are clearly aimed at conveying gendered food-related atmospheres, I will comment such imaginary around food, cooking, gender and 'sense of home'; this inspection will be then instrumental in hypothesising how osmospheres deal with the felt body as deeply affected by the imaginative power of matters.²³ For this, I will largely refer to Bachelard's works on the imagination of matter. Aware of the risk of

¹⁹ For the aesthetics of laundry, where smell is crucial in appreciating it, cf. Saito (2017, pp. 115–138).

²⁰ According to a perspective that today appears extremely reactionary, localisation also concerns respectability: "Wife in the kitchen. Whore in the street" (Agrest, 2000, p. 368).

²¹ For domestic spaces, duties and gender, cf. also Locke (2007, p. 55).

²² "[I]f the business of preparing meals is the job of women, servants, slaves (and of course women are in all those categories), then food, the sense of taste, and gustatory appetites reside in the wrong social place to merit much notice" (Korsmeyer, 1999, p. 36; cf. also Korsmeyer (2004, pp. 83–104)). It is not by chance that these topics have begun to gain philosophical interest in conjunction with the challenging of gendered hierarchies and stereotypes, or with an interest towards marginality as such. Curtin and Heldke (1992), Telfer (1996), Perullo (2016), Boisvert and Heldke (2016) are some leading-edge works.

²³ Being smell the 'essence' of the matter from which it exhales: "Thus, the odour of water mint calls forth in me a sort of ontological correspondence which makes me believe that life is simply an aroma, that it emanates from a being as an odour emanates from a substance, that a plant growing in a stream must express the soul of water" (Bachelard, 1983, p. 7).

presenting, instead of a rigorous analysis, an evocative impressionism, I believe that facing these topics through Bachelardian intuitions deserves further and meticulous development.

Food-themed motifs implying gendered orientations can be found in different scented commodities.²⁴ Here, I am particularly interested in room sprays and scented candles, since their explicit purpose is to endow space with an emotional atmosphere. “Grandma’s Kitchen” candles can be considered as iconic examples of interior environmental fragrancing through feminine food. As a case, we can consider *Homesick*²⁵ branded candle – designed to recall warm apple pie with ice cream and fresh-baked snickerdoodles –, which is the olfactory transposition of the idiom “sugar and spice and everything nice”,²⁶ from a 19th-century nurse rhyme to typify girls’ character. Even if variations are manifold,²⁷ perceptual, emotional *and* spatial leitmotifs are evident. Olfactory sphere revolves around baked goods, often sweet – pies, biscuits, etc. – together with spicy and fruity notes (such as vanilla, cinnamon, apple), while the end is to trigger cosiness and warmth: a hugging osmosphere which folds the space inwards. Before delving into this point, which arises interesting phenomenological concerns, I want to set forth a diametrically opposite case. *Homesick* designed also “Bud Light Tailgate” candle, which embodies a typical masculine food-related event.²⁸ The olfactory nuances are, among others, smoked charcoal, lawn chairs, grass, old pigskin and hops,²⁹ evoking an open-air barbecue and traditionally male sports. The virile is therefore expressed through woody and musky tones (similarly *Budweiser Backyard BBQ Candle*, no date). In this case, the osmosphere is extroverted and exposed: the space unfolds outwards, assuming an *outgoing* character in every possible way.³⁰ Broadly speaking, the same applies to cookout-themed fragrancing devices that, among the various ‘home fragrances’, have a more eccentric than hedonistic function, epitomizing a sort of inherent inconsistency with the domestic

²⁴ In the toy market, for instance, many food-scented toys are female-targeted. As Varney (1996) argues, fruity and sweet smells (strawberry, vanilla, raspberry, marshmallow, etc.) would symbolise the female olfactory code, at the same time exemplifying the features a woman should have according to sexist stereotypes, i.e., to be attractive and pleasing. However, toys have increasingly become unisex; think of the kitchen sets, cf. Delfin (2021).

²⁵ (*Homesick*, no date) is famous for its candles reproducing the ‘olfactory *genius loci*’ of American states and cities. As the company’s name suggests, scents are designed to soothe nostalgia and ‘sense of place’; on the same line *Govalis* (*Govalis*, no date), Spain-based and themed.

²⁶ A recurring description reads: “No one can bake like Grandma. Her love of making people happy fills each recipe and her entire home with a comforting, warm scent that feels like a hug. It’s a spicy, sweet happiness” (*Grandma’s Kitchen Candle*, no date a).

²⁷ Just to mention few brands with “Grandma’s Kitchen” candle in the catalogue: *Rustic Creation USA* (*Grandma’s Kitchen Candle*, no date b), *Country Home Candle* (*Grandma’s Kitchen*, no date), and *Govalis* (*Vela Aromática Cocina de la Abuela*, no date).

²⁸ Tailgating is an American way of partying where people – not exclusively but mostly males – drink alcohol, grill and share food (mainly meat-based); it usually takes place in parking lots, before or after sporting events or music concerts. Vehicles’ tailgates are used just like a stove or a table, hence the name.

²⁹ Cooked meat and fermented drink can be interpreted as “the principle of the banquet, that is to say the principle of primitive society” (Bachelard, 1964, p. 105).

³⁰ The advice is to “add crispy boys” when burning it, so as to having a full experience of tailgating also in its social and light-hearted dimension.

sphere as such, not only with regards to its spatial dimension, but also to its 'mood'. This justifies and concurrently explains why my investigation is unbalanced towards the feminine pole: in olfactory terms, 'home' seems to coincide with feminine osmospheres.

Philosophy could be reproached of overlooking gender issues when accounting for atmospheres, a subject which is inversely much explored by consumer science for its effectiveness in 'emotional marketing'.³¹ Certainly, thinking of 'feminine' and 'masculine' in term of deep unconscious principles of the subject would betray and misrepresent a theory whose main purpose is to de-psychologise emotional life proposing an anti-introjectionist conception of atmospheres (Schmitz, 2019a). 'Externalising' sexualized principles into the realm of matters' affordances (or in the relationships between dweller and material environment) allows to test the opportunity to integrate theories on olfactory atmospheres with intuitions on genders as spatial tendencies.

What has been considered so far would confirm the conclusion many scholars have come to: meat and other animal products are 'masculine', while plant-based foods are 'feminine' (Kaplan, 2020, pp. 47–48; Bentley, 2005, pp. 190–193);³² and cooking methods are not gender-free (Montanari, 2006, p. 49). Specifically, roasting and baking embed opposite gendered osmospheres. Implying different bodily engagements, timing, occasions, settings, instruments and matters, they are dense with sexualized symbolism. This could be narrowly ascribed to the contexts the activities of roasting and baking normally take place in: the former outdoors, the latter indoors.³³ Otherwise, the former is masculine because requires mainly fire, high heat and, as a rule, little time; the latter is instead feminine as gentler and slower (Shapiro, 2001). Working the dough is a complex process of elemental generation (cf. De Beauvoir, 1956, pp. 439–442) – “a feminine labor”, Bachelard parenthetically notices (Bachelard, 2002, p. 34) – which implies the creation of a new 'ecosystem'. Actually, cooking itself involves varied levels of cooperation among the elements, together with diverse thermic dynamics.³⁴ But earth, air, water and fire, 'gynandromorph' if considered as static ideas, undergo sexual differentiation according to their performative actuality.

³¹ The so-called 'retail atmospheric'; cf. e.g. Spangenberg, Grohmann and Sprott (2005), Borges, Babin and Spielmann (2013).

³² On this point, ethno-anthropological investigations highlight strong similarities among societies (e.g. Pollock, 1998). The contraposition is implicitly present in some linguistic expressions. In Italian, the term *finocchio* (verbatim 'fennel') – an offensive epithet for effeminate man – seems to originate from the practice of using this vegetable as an olfactory camouflage during persecution: once thrown into the fire of the stakes in which witches and homosexuals were burned in the Renaissance period, its scent would have concealed the stink of human burning flesh (Federici, 2004, p. 197).

³³ Indeed, domestic kitchen as a female domain is a *topos* which ranges from paleoanthropological insights to the most worn-out male chauvinist rhetoric. Cooking per se is not exclusively a female prerogative; rather, in professional kitchens and public restaurants, the male majority is evident; cf. Rendell (2000, p. 101); Perullo (2017, pp. 38–40). This point opens to further reflections, which I cannot develop here.

³⁴ “From the calorific point of view, the sexual distinction is quite clearly complementary. The feminine principle of things is a principle pertaining to surface and outer covering, a lap, a refuge, a gentle warmth. The masculine principle is a principle of the center, a principle of power, active and sudden as the spark and the power of will. The feminine heat attacks things from without. The masculine heat attacks them from within, as the very heart of the essential being” (Bachelard, 1964, p. 53).

Like atmospheres, also staged osmospheres seem characterized by what Hermann Schmitz calls suggestions of motion and felt-bodily stirrings, which are, following new phenomenological insights, articulated between the two poles of contraction and expansion. I suggest distinguishing between *unfolding* and *folding* food osmospheres. The former are characterized by various levels of expansion, therefore vastness; they are ‘masculine’ in the sense that their orientation is centrifugal, promoting a sense of spatial extroversion. The latter, instead, suggest contraction, hence narrowness; they are ‘feminine’ as they are centripetal, affording the intimacy of inhabiting an introverted, ‘uterine’ space. ‘Feminine’ and ‘masculine’ osmospheres are therefore to be understood as motosensory tensions through which an olfactory affection is perceived. They do not coincide with the gender of the perceiver, but their opposition has to do with different oriented intimacies. As a psychoanalytic acquisition, both sexual instances (and even more than two) coexist in the same personality.

Baked foods find their osmospheric counterpart in a feeling of closeness which rarely has virile traits. We can draw a parallel between such folding orientation and food considering the symbolism of the *placenta*, which is related to baking in many respects (the mammalian organ takes its name from a cake with honey and cheese from ancient Greece and Rome). A key aspect is discussed by Peter Sloterdijk in the rich pages devoted to it:

According to earlier traditions of midwifery, however, the dough baking in the maternal oven was not so much the child itself as that mysterious placental cake on which the child evidently fed *in utero* [...]. Thus the pregnant womb was always imagined by mothers and midwives in earlier times as a twofold workshop: a placenta bakery and an intimate child kitchen. While the child itself is prepared in the uterine cauldron, the mother’s second work, the flat cake, ensures the appropriate nutrition during the longest night (Sloterdijk, 2011, p. 377).

We can fully grasp the essence of the feminine as enveloping shelter – like a mother’s womb, or that protective smell of the nest as depicted by Tellenbach – when we read this Bachelardian recollection, even if without any gastronomic specification: “The house clung close to me, [...] and at times, I could smell her odor penetrating maternally to my very heart. That night she was really my mother” (Bachelard, 2014, p. 66). Indeed, an olfactory topoanalysis of the domestic would likely reveal that we are primitively ‘housed’ while sniffing baking aromas. Elsewhere, the philosopher suggests something similar:

an odor of warm bread invaded a house of my youth. The custard (*flan*) and round loaf returned to my table. Festive occasions are associated with this domestic bread. The world was in joy for the celebration of the warm bread. [...] In days of happiness, the world is edible (Bachelard, 1969, p. 141).

3. Final Observations on Osmospheric Foodification

When Elsa Morante writes: “The tepid air, especially in the sun, smelled of bread” (Morante, 1979, p. 417), she is rendering the vital and welcoming

quality of the air through the flavour that incarnates the idea of ‘home’.³⁵ As ‘beings-in-the-air’, we deeply – albeit mostly subconsciously – rely on odours as aesthetic indicators of our “domosphere” (Griffero, 2014, p. 96): the unbreathable air, whether in chemical or moral terms, is inherently bad-smelling (Minkowski, 1999, p. 117).³⁶ Nowadays, we dwell in spaces which are massively, synthetically and indiscriminately food-scented.³⁷ Naively, one could explain such osmospheric foodification as a counterbalance aesthetic strategy, given the decreased time we devote to cooking.³⁸ I suspect the reasons are deeper.

Since odours are *qualia* that let us “sense through our disposition (*Befinden*) where we are” (Böhme, 2017b, p. 125), emotional *qua* spatial disorientation which follows olfactory disorders becomes even more clear: “I feel discombobulated – like I don’t exist. I can’t smell my house and feel at home” (Burgess Watson et al., 2021, p. 11). In a way, the course of events showed that Italo Calvino was not too far off the mark when prophesizing, already in the 70s of the 20th century, that the man of the future would be noseless.³⁹ But smell loss or malfunctioning is not exclusively a medical condition, it is also a daily reaction as a result of olfactory fatigue. The more the osmosphere is saturated, the higher the possibility of anosmia becoming chronic, even ontological (cf. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2021).

That said, we must not forget that the germ of the consumer society was born in the 19th-century arcades, where it “learned to breathe the intoxicating scent of an enclosed, interior-world full of commodities” (Sloterdijk, 2002, pp. 95–96).⁴⁰ But late capitalism is taking such embryonic osmospheric aestheticization to extremes (cf. e.g. Lipovetsky and Serroy, 2013).⁴¹ Designed

³⁵ Curiously, a trick to easily sell a house would consist in baking some bread before potential buyers visit it (Pollan, 2013, p. 208).

³⁶ This is particularly evident in the dismissed but long-lived miasma theory, according to which air is a vehicle of disease precisely when fetid.

³⁷ From the 50s of the 20th century, as chemical industry started creating and improving artificial flavours, food itself is food-scented. This is due, among many other reasons, to the aromatic impoverishment resulting from intensive production, and to the industry’s need to make ultra-processed foods more appealing. It is also interesting to note, in this sense, the renovated trend of meal replacements. However, far from being universal and stable, aesthetic values attributed to kitchen odours has remarkably changed throughout history; the collocation of the kitchen within the house has been modified accordingly (cf. Potter, 2015; Rybczynski, 1986, especially pp. 132–133). In general, spaces undergo gendered differentiations according to each room’s function; smells are both causes and consequences. Over the centuries, architectural arrangement and spatial organisation have also followed olfactory sensitivity. In modern times, for instance, the smoking room, a male territory, “was distanced from the rest of the house [...] because of the smell of cigars” (Spain, 1992, p. 114).

³⁸ Relying on take away or delivery services, there is also the eventuality of removing the kitchen from apartments. As Federici argues, this is in line with the disaccumulation of capital in the home and of the services provided by households (Federici, 2012), a focal point in gender studies and Marxist feminism.

³⁹ The reference is *The Name, The Nose* – drafted between 1971 and 1972 –, and collected in the posthumous *Under the Jaguar Sun* (1986).

⁴⁰ Cf. Borch (2011).

⁴¹ The link between late capitalism and postmodernism is interesting in olfactory terms, since the latter, as some have noticed (Classen, Howes and Synnott, 1994; Graham, 2014, p. 55), finds its allegorical sense in smell, also because of the dismissal of normativities (including gender ones) in favour of *fluidity*, a characterising aspect of odours in many respects.

scents no longer linger exclusively in shopping malls, urban streets, etc., but they invade, with our consent, private houses, making them ‘home’. This is the furthest frontier in scent marketing, and fast-food chains, with their flavoured merchandising, are representative promoters (Mancioppi, 2021). The evolution of the “aroma-technical modification of the atmosphere” (Sloterdijk, 2002, p. 92), besides revealing an obstinate addiction to market seduction, seems to be infected by the ecological thought, as Timothy Morton (2010) would put it. Let me clarify: gaseous atmosphere is today brimming with the ghosts of ecological crisis, climate change, pollution and, above all, viruses. Air – we are having global and first-hand experience – is *the* space of co-existence; co-existence is not necessarily harmonious and safeguarding. It has to do with an unavoidable familiarity with the unfamiliar, potentially dangerous, deeply sinister and uncanny. It implies the full, ecological awareness that we share our very *Heim* with *das Unheimliche*. Apparently, as ‘(aerobe)beings-in-the-air’, we still carry the memory of when, in Paleoproterozoic era, great part of the life on Earth underwent its first mass extinction for the so-called ‘Oxygen Catastrophe’. We started proliferating at the expense of other species; the fear is that something similar could happen again, but this time to our detriment. More than the ground under our feet, we are basically losing our breathing space, that imperceptible milieu “within which all beings, all things, and any other come alongside one another” (Irigaray, 1999, p. 161), for long given for granted also in theoretical terms. Hence, osmospheric foodification could be seen as an aesthetic strategy of making air familiar, folding, illusory controllable, maternal, ‘uterine’ and substantially life-sustaining again.⁴² Ultimately, an attempt to tame it through *domestication*. Thanks to olfactory technology, the domosphere is designed, quite literally, like a *pregnant womb as a twofold bakery*.

To come full circle, if “[e]very dwelling has its individual smell of home” (Pallasmaa, 2012, p. 58), every osmosphere is the way we dwell homewards.

On a small scale, we leave [...] a smell of food that lingers in the kitchen after we cook. If we consider smell as a trace of existence, then we can maybe slowly try to understand lines of habitation, not that of occupation (Ngamcharoen, 2021, p. 36).

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⁴² But, actually, if “atmterrorist model” – inaugurated by German army during the War World I through the release of chlorine gas on Ypres (Belgium) – is based on rendering uninhabitable the enemy’s environment (Sloterdijk, 2002, pp. 9–46), a terrifying ‘osmterrorist’ strategy would consist in making toxic air undetectable or, even worse, reassuring through the olfactory qualities of food. Smell was, and is, paramount for soldiers and civilian population when dealing with chemical warfare; reports highlight the salvific role of olfactory training to detect deadly substances. However, the most used gases smell like food (garlic, horseradish, mustard, onion, etc.) or have particularly ‘atmospheric’ scents such as new-mown hay, which make them even more insidious; cf. Plunkett (2014).

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