

Francesco Morace

For the New York Times, Jason Logan has created “Scents and the City,” a project that maps the constant, mixed, pleasant or unpleasant odors of Manhattan: how is the perception of smells changing in the global society?



The sociologist, writer and journalist

Francesco Morace has worked for 30 years in the field of social and market research. He is the president of Future Concept Lab.

A strategic consultant to companies and institutions on an international level, since 1981 he has conducted conferences, courses and seminars in 20 different countries. A teacher at Domus Academy and the Milan Polytechnic, he has written 20 essays, including “Consum-autori” (2008), “The meaning of Italy. Instructions for the third Italian Miracle” (2008), “The Talent of Business” (2010), “Paradigms of the Future. Trend Scenarios” (2011), “The Business of Talent” (2012) and “What is the Future” (2013). He writes columns on trends for magazines in different sectors, including Adv, Dove, Espansione, Interni, Mark Up, Style.

Precisely in the moment in which the life experience of everyone seems to be definitively shifting towards digital environs, when technology pervades our conception of existence, the very strong desire emerges to amplify our senses, not only with sight, as happened over the last 20 years through the society of the image and the media, but also and above all towards a polysensorial dimension that embraces and mixes the 5 senses, with a new centrality of knowledge based on the sixth sense, on the capacity for intuition and sensorial memory. We know that smell is the most powerful, the most ancient of the senses, the one that belongs to our deepest identity, reconnecting us with our animal nature. We can forget images and sounds, but odors have a way of putting down roots in our brains. So we can easily foresee a major rediscovery of smell as a forgotten sense, which after touch (forcefully addressed by the new touch-control technological interfaces) and taste (called back into play by the growing success of cooking and chefs) can redefine the sensorial map of our experience.

France’s Michèle Gay has invented “culinary fragrance” and the American Chandler Burr has invented “scent dinners”: two ways of combining perfumes and taste, thus doubling the perception of pleasure?

The worlds of nutrition and taste – and, with it, food design – have replaced the fashion system in the collective and media imaginary, by now, though in the past fashion was the main platform of production of trends and imagery. Chefs have taken the place of fashion designers on the pyramid of the most liked and recognized creative activities. So it is inevitable that taste is the driving force of this rising perception, along with smell which is an essential component of cuisine and, in many cases, its most refined area of expertise. It is not just a matter of doubling the perception of pleasure; it means grasping the most erudite, elite nuances in a more expert way. Through a new hierarchy of quality, in which aroma becomes the first filter of taste.

The New York Times, in October 2011, had an article about The Great Unwashed, a new American trend: there are some very civilized people who claim it is not necessary to bathe on a daily basis, that it is better to return to a more balanced natural condition of the skin. Does this imply that everyday hygiene and perfuming of the body are neither ecosustainable nor seductive?

As always, we need to find an intelligent balance between the various shadings of experience: for years the most advanced scientific research has shown that the use of soaps, repeated every day or more than once a day, causes excessive stress for the skin, running the risk of depriving it of its most natural qualities. Of course this rule applies only to certain parts of the body, and not to those most exposed, like the hands, the hair, the feet, the teeth. I'd say that in this case it is enough to get back to good common sense, and that in this area grandmothers can still be the real "authorities" for correct hygiene and proper seduction. There is little doubt, in any case, that the body and its natural moods have regained a central role in recent years, avoiding manipulation and excess. Even the most invasive practices of cosmetic surgery and being replaced by lighter forms of intervention, more oriented towards care and a gentle approach, keeping the unique character of every person intact.

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The dimension of sensory experiences and the five senses, then, will be one of the areas of development for the global market, helping to determine quality of life in the future. This indication already emerged in the three visionary days organized by Interni and Future Concept Lab – the institute I direct – for BE OPEN Foundation during the Milan Design Week 2012, where we approached the three key themes of the future: sustainability, happiness and uniqueness. We met and discussed with experts from all over the world, exploring the emerging values and aesthetics of the future. In this encounters one major truth emerged: in each of these areas (Sustainability, Happiness, Uniqueness) that by now have been transformed into the paradigms of the future, the sensorial aspect has taken on unexpected importance, leading to three new trends: emotional sustainability, relational happiness and sensorial uniqueness.