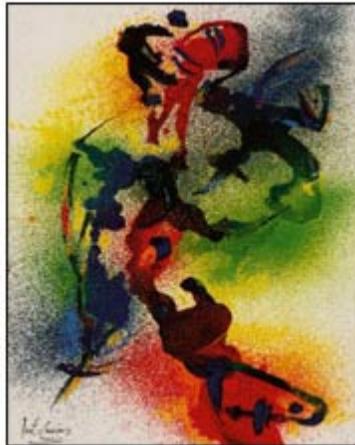


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Qualitative Methods



*A 'Polysensitive' method
for qualitative sociological research*

Ada Cattaneo

A 'POLYSENITIVE' METHOD FOR QUALITATIVE SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH.

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Abstract

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The paper presents a qualitative method used to find and analyze social, cultural, emotional, psychological factors in experiencing leather.

The proceeding phases are five. The first is aimed to portrait the typical characteristics of the interviewees using some appropriate deep questions.

Knowing the strong pre-judicial power of sight, before going on to the two successive phases, the subjects are asked to close their eyes. So, first, they have to recognize the smell of leather saying which images, reminds, emotions it evokes. Then they have to describe sensations, perceptions emotions, feelings, images by touching different samples of leather.

The fourth phase is dedicated to sight. Interviewees formulate their opinion about various kinds of leather they saw.

Collecting all these findings the 'polysensitive' technique offers the occasion of underlining the importance of perceptions and senses in every-day life as tools of socialization, communication and expression.

Key words: sensation, perception, emotion, feeling, sight, touch, smell, leather.

1. Introduction.

Both macrosociology and microsociology tend to concentrate on phenomenon, dynamics and processes like globalization (Mander & Goldsmith, 1998) and sustainable developing (Brundtland, 1987; UN, 1992), movements and institutions (Alberoni, 1989), flexibility (Cesareo, 1887; Gasparini, 1990, 1994; Storper, 1991) and systems (Luhmann, 1995), lifestyles (Morace, 1990) and alienation (Marx & Engels, 1967), multiple belonging (Garelli, 1984) and mosaic realization (Garelli, 1984), temporal perspective (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999) and disembedding (Giddens, 1990), immigration and race attitudes (Bogardus, 1928), *loisir* (Dumazedier, 1991; Sue, 1982) and everydayness-vacation antithesis (Dumazedier, 1978), solidarity (Durkheim, 1971) and intergenerational gap,...

This great deal of issues seems to depict a quite exhaustive frame of human life where experience appears as a synthesis of the concomitant action of personal and contextual factors (geographical or anthropical) (Ryan, 1998; Bordessa, 1993).

But, while the latter are highly considered and studied, the former are still largely under-estimated.

Moreover, feelings and emotions, besides being essential in interpersonal relationships, are often considered irrelevant or secondary and, in some cases, they're even derided or despised by enlightened, rationalist sociologists.

And an even less relevant role is reserved to senses, forgetting that they're the first step of the ladder which allows the meeting of the subjective sphere with the external reality.

In parallel and, sometimes, as a result of theoretical scientists' indifference, social methodologists use to neglect this field of research, too.

And, as they don't care of it, they also promote or boost neither introduction nor development of new techniques for exploring, analyzing and collecting dates and findings. In so doing, they refuse the opportunity to deepen their own reflection using such a precious source of information.

The opposite attitude is shown by many other disciplines, more or less scientific, including from psychology to chromatology, from psychoanalysis to aromatherapy, from biosciences to psychodynamic.

Then, a sociologist who would like to give a first contribution to such an approach like this, has to begin from the two components of the individual where interaction is realized double subject-object: personality and body which are the 'bridge' between inside- and external reality.

1.1 The reality

1.1.1 The inside reality.

The centripetal motion of sensory perceptions, communicated by organs, is the necessary condition, but not enough, in order to bait the emotion-cognitions chain (Battacchi, 1998; Cattarinussi, 2000, 2002; Frijeda, 1988) achieving attitudes, behaviours, dispositions to the action (Dantzer, 1992).

Therefore, the subjective components of experience are:

- a- senses that introduce an external world composed by colours, odours, tastes, sounds, tactile feelings often unpublished that, together with specific situations, are engraved in memories in an indelible way allowing a less indefinite consecutive recalling;
- b- emotionality and feelings which are among the principal factors interpersonal relationships and they also represent an important cause of changes in human life (Gazzeno, 1989).

Moreover, the body (Sirost, 2000) acts in narrow synergy with personality (Allport, 1937) conceived as an 'inside agency' (Caprara & Barbaranelli, 2000) that selects and elaborates information. It also reacts with emotions and feelings. It has awareness, assures integration and continuity of experience and it addresses the behaviour, coherently with a system of meanings, purposes and personal standard.

Dynamic analysis that regulate the influence of situational context on physical and psychological dimension, can be carried out adopting some psychological models and techniques of inquiry (Caprara, 1995; Caprara & Barbaranelli, 2000) integrated by an ecological theory of perception (Gibson,

1979) and a conceptual organization based on communication systems (Neisser, 1975).

1.1.2 The external reality.

In the centrifuge informative dynamics, the subject (with his body and his personality) is a means of communication (Zani & Selleri, 1994) that works through:

- a- reactions of different type thoughtless, automatic, mechanic, instinctive- risen as answer an inner or external stimulus they tend to represent man as a passive entity, a biological organism that answers some solicitations independent from him (Palmonari, 1989) or from his wish (Cattarinussi, 2000);
- b- actions - the subject is active (Quadrio, 1996) turned to objectify precise rational intents or so made through special supporting 'derivations' (Pareto, 1916; Giannetta Alberoni, 1993);
- c- interactions - the individual, inserted into a precise context, is integral part of a tangled process of exchanges classified into oral-communication and non verbal communication (Zani, Selleri & David, 1994).

1.2 The senses.

Deepening the discussion about senses (Roberts, 2002; Barlow & Mollon, 1982; Adrian, 1928, Simmel, 1908) you find out that not all senses enjoy the same prestige.

1.2.1 Sight.

The intellectual elite of the 18th and the 19th centuries makes the so called 'revaluation of the senses' (Fox, 2002) which decrees sight the all-important and superior sense, while the others are deemed to be of a lower order.

Fundamental instrument for the Cartesian scientific method (Galli & Carlini, 1954), sight becomes symbol of reason and sign of civilization. Its

success, is shown by the fact that the actual 'era of seeing' is entitled to it (Cavallari, 1990), countersigned by the centrality of appearance, of physical aspect, of ostentation and from the fact that, not rarely it is not considered true, and existing only what it is broadcast on television (Colombo, 1990).

Therefore visual communication is most charged with emotion even when it's pure illusion, a mere significant meaningless (Boudirillard, 1970)

Among the organs of sense, the eye offers a unique sociological performance: "the connection and the mutual action among individuals, which consists of looking at each other" (Simmel, 1908). Looking at each other the individual is contemporarily subject and object, he looks and he is looked: "the eye reveals the other soul that tries to reveal him. As this evidently happens immediately looking at each other in the eyes, here it occurs the most perfect reciprocity in the whole field of human relationships." (Simmel, 1908) The biuniqueness of the process implicates the birth of another meaningful effect: "politics of the ostrich" or rather the fact that the man exists for the other not when he comes from he is looked from this one, but only when this one looks at him.

The eye, together with the individual element, contingent, empirical, perceives similarities and differences among the realities that it represents favouring the creation of concepts, ideas and social representations (Palmonari, 1989; Quadrio, 1996; Arcuri, 1988).

Particular is the case of the unity that people involved perceive in the phenomenons of aggregate as fashion, soccer or panic (Alberoni, 1989).

Besides depending on over-sensitive elements, it is tightly bound to the sight. The involved subjects tend, overall, 'to see themselves as part of a specific group of individuals. Their relationship with others is based neither on an oral knowledge nor on a physical contact or on the smelling of the mutual odour, therefore it creates an abstract conscience as evidence of the weak bond that intervenes among them (Simmel, 1908).

The cataloguing, classifying and labelling character of look leads to the birth of stereotypes (Arcuri & Cadinu, 1998) and prejudices (Allport, 1954; Brown, 1995).

Fundamental it is, therefore, its contribution to the rising and developing of varied sociological mechanisms as the racism (Balbo & Manconi, 1990; Pugliese, 1993), the ethnocentrism (Campbell, 1972; Massucco Costa, 1964), the stigma, the sense of affiliation (Mazzara, 1997), the recognition (Alberoni, 1989), the scapegoat, the social roles, the representation of the apparent-, real- or social-ego (Goffman, 1969, 1971), the falling in love and the betrayal (Alberoni, 1996), the envious imitation (Grirard, 1980) and the identification (Freud, 1977; Alberoni, 1989).

1.2.2 Hearing.

The lack of the reciprocity that look establishes between eye and eye and contemporarily allows it to catch and to give, makes the hearing a “selfish” sense (Simmel, 1908). Being the ear only an organ able to receive the external stimuli, to create a feedback, preparing a communicative process, it needs mouth and language. This implicates the necessary birth of an alternation that is not found in look.

A second difference between sight and hearing is found in the greatest ability of “uniting” of the second. The sound involves the physical possibility that innumerable audiences perceive the same stimulus in parallel (Simmel, 1908). On the contrary, the visual image is more conditioned by the position of whom perceives it. Although the object is the same each one shows a particular perspective absolutely unique and original (Vanni Rovighi, 1950).

The impossibility for the ear to dissuade or to close in front of the perceptive stimulus contributes to confer it a connotation of passive organ, endowed with an inferior status in comparison to the eye.

Nevertheless the hearing is the fundamental sense in the cultures where traditions are orally handed down and in Jewish civilization (Cavallari, 1990).

This type of perception exalts the magic power of the sound, even the ontological one, both when it becomes word and when, from the juxtaposition of varied noises, it produces songs, harmonies, music.

The extraordinary characteristic of the sound and, consequently, also of the apparatus that perceives it, is to arouse emotions and feelings through a non semantic language, directed more to unconscious than rationality.

Therefore, music and songs represent in everybody's sub-conscious a moment in their life full of feelings and memories which will come to the surface when they hear it again (Imberty, 1986).

It doesn't surprise, therefore if, from one side, the mystery of life is really contained in the Verb of God (Tintori, 1945; Heidegger, 1982) and, from the other, the fathers of the communism consider so dangerous the listening of music to forbid it to the Russian people categorically.

Music is also the most emotive form of aural communication. It has a triplex denotative, connotative and evocative value (Anolli & Ciceri, 1992). Being able, contemporarily, to transmit a message, more or less implicit, and to arouse feelings, states of mind and memoirs, it is found again, although to different title, in varied contexts that, besides to affirm the metaphysical course and the ontological autonomy of the same music (Mathieu, 1996), they produce varied phenomenons of interest for sociology.

It appears similarly in the harmony of Plato (Plato, 1991) and of Pitagoricis (Real, 1989) not less that in the tamtam of the drums that the eastern people build with the skin of sacrificed animals and the ancient Inca with the killed enemies ones (Vasconi, 1999); in songs and in music danced during religious ceremonies or popular folk parties so as in the passages danced at the disco; in Gregorian songs and black Americans young's songs.

And, while Giovan Baptista Vico testifies the importance of the hymns or the songs of war to inflame the minds of the soldiers (Vico, 1988), the New Age the uses sounds of nature for the practices of relaxation (Steiner, 2002). And if the boys, at the stadium, identify and recognize each other, tuning up witticisms against adversaries, famous experts try to understand which are the most suitable melodies are to favour your shopping at the supermarkets or to make the atmosphere in public places more pleasant, to guarantee the maximum output of the employees of an office or to use as sonorous column in advertising countries (Breese, Barbet, Guichard, Lecoquière, Lehu, 2000).

1.2.3 Touch.

Touch involves the sensations produced by deformation of the skin. That is, to person's skin becomes slightly distorted when he touches an object or an object touches him (Maltin & Foley, 1997). Even if the active tactile perceptions seem to be more precise and useful than the passive ones (Apelle, 1987), both, however, have scientifically demonstrated influences in interpersonal relationships (Fischler, Ritting, Heslin, 1976).

The need of a physical contact with other people's body is essential to every age and for every individual, despite changes according to the specific culture, traditions, type of relationship and contingent situation.

Touch is central in the development of the infant-parent attachment, i.e. the first phase of primary socialization process (Jacob, 2002a; Brown, 1984) which largely takes place within the family and which stresses the basic knowledge and values of the society (Curry, Jiobu, Schwirian, 1999).

On the contrary, the role of touch seems to be reduced in secondary socialization which emphasizes synthesis, logic, advanced knowledge, emotional control, creativity, reality and practicality (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978).

Therefore, to the agents of secondary socialization recommendation is constantly renewed not to neglect the education of the senses, included the touch (Huisman, 1972).

So the well known "mens sana in corpore sano", passing through Montessori method (Montessori, 1952, 1962), to reach the recent applications of psychomotricity, always implies an appointment to develop and sharpen the touch.

Individualism (Simmel, 1908), frenzy, formalism that imbue and mould the actual society, reduce sensitively the use of touch as mean of communication (Zani, Selleri & David, 1994).

It tends to be relegated in sphere tightly personal, private, intimate of friendly and parental and above all erotic bonds. The hedonistic component

prevails in comparison to the instrumental one or to the ostentatious, that is introduced in the varied forms of the

- “self-contacts” - trichofilia, to weave the fingers, to rub the hands,
- “professional” contacts – with physicians, hairdressers, beauticians,
- “social” contacts – in dances, sports, ceremonies.

Therefore, the common denominator to all the tactile experiences is the fact that the effect of even to subtle touch can be substantial (Maltin & Foley 1997; Brown, 1984)

Nevertheless, ‘given the imbalance in stimulus information, it is not surprising that (also in this case) people are more inclined to trust their visual input.’ (Klatzky, Lederman, Reed, 1987). It means that their tactile perception is recalibrated so that it matches what they see.

To make up for this distortion the psychomotricity that strives for valorizing *the stereogonic sense* busy in the recognition of the only touch, intervenes again, as it is the habit of blinds.

1.2.4 Taste.

The sense of the taste puts in relationship with the tasty bodies through the feeling that they produce in the organ destined to appreciate them. Excited by the appetite, hunger and thirst, it has a priority role in the growth, in the maintenance of the individual, as well as in mending the losses produced by the vital dispersions of it.

The three principal facets of the taste are revealed:

- 1 - in physical man, where it acts as apparatus through which tastes are appreciated;
- 2 - in moral man, where it gives the feeling that excites the organ impressed by the tasty body;
- 3 - in its material cause, as ownership of a body to produce a feeling (Brillat-Savarin, 1996).

Unlike hearing or sight, it acts in a simple way being unable to be contemporarily impressed by more tastes. Nevertheless, in the same action of tasting “you can find a second and also a third feeling that get weakened and that are designated with the words taste, perfume, fragrance.” (Brillat-Savarin, 1996)

It, arouses therefore three different types of feelings,:

- 1 - the direct one - born from the work of the organs of mouth while the eaten body is found on the anterior part of the language;
- 2 - the complete one - formed by the union of the first impression with that sort in the back mouth that hits the whole organ with taste and odour;
- 3 - the reflected one - represented by the judgment of soul on the perception. (Brillat-Savarin, 1996)

Opposite to the common convictions, some recent studies come to affirm that ‘the sense of smell and the taste form only a sense of which the mouth [...] makes the tactile bodies taste and the nose makes the gases savours (Brillat-Savarin, 1996) and, therefore, “the taste, only doesn't exist” (Fox, 2002).

In fact even if taste perception begins from the tongue, the human nose is the main organ of taste as well as smell: the taste-buds on tongue can only distinguish sweet, sour, bitter and salt, all other ‘tastes are detected by the olfactory receptors high up in nasal passages (Fox, 2002).

Therefore, ‘the taste system - Pritchard of the University of the Pennsylvania explains - gains all merit but it has indeed alone little of it. It reacts to the chemical substances, limiting to distinguish them it needs the assistance of the olfactory, visual and auditory system. The synthesis of all that passes with the name of taste and gives the taste system the possibility to take the full responsibility of this complicated process.

And the conclusion confirms, again, the hegemony of sight: everything wheel turns round the edge of eye, as if this sensory storm had the necessity of an aesthetical guide to recognize tastes and to be able to appreciate them fully as well.

Suspending the judgment on the specific physiological processes that regulate taste, its sociological value is however broadly shown (Bourdieu, 1979; Mennel, Murcott, Von Otterloo, 1992).

From the totemic meal of Australian tribes to the Eucharistic Christian agapè (Freud, 1973), from the banquet of Trimalchione (Petronius, 1914) to the frugal meals in Middle Ages, from the wedding banquet to the habit of going out eating pizza with friends (Finkelstein, 1989), in every case lunch becomes a rite full of symbolic and metaphoric meanings (Ferniot & Her Goff, 1986).

The collective consummation and food sharing, besides the pleasure of tasting determined dishes, testify the existence of a depth bond among the guests (Alberoni, 1989).

The taste, becomes therefore the way of evoking unity, brotherhood, friendship, of fortifying the sense of affiliation, but also of affirming the cultural identity expressed by gastronomic traditions (Flandrin, 1986; Raise-Strauss, 1968; Brillat-Savarin, 1996; Van Estrik, 1982).

1.2.5 Smell.

As smell is the first and most primordial sense of all living organisms and it's rather an emotive (Miltner & al., 1994) than a cognitive sense, it's very ambiguously and ambivalently considered.

While in Western Countries it's no more than 'a primitive, brutish ability associated with savagery and even madness' (Fox, 2001), in other cultures it's highly esteemed. The cause of such an opposite evaluation is the different way of estimating the emotional potency of smell.

It has the ability to affect physiological and psychological state via two mechanisms: 1- the intrinsic (pharmacological) properties of the odour molecule itself and 2- contextual association and memory (Wang, Walker, Sardi, Fraser & Jacob, 2002b).

Then, the perception of smell consists not only of sensation of the odours themselves but of the experiences, emotions, memories associated with these sensations, that is known as 'Proust Effect' (Chu & Downes, 2000).

So, while smells can evoke strong emotional reactions, many olfactory likes and dislikes are based purely on emotional associations (Fox, 2001).

On the whole, literature shows that smell can influence:

- ✓ moods: pleasant odours give rise to pleasant mood states while unpleasant odours give rise to unpleasant moods (Jacob, 2002a),
- ✓ memory: as smells use to have concrete referents and emotively connoted, they produce more primordial memories, often linked autobiographical episodes, and generally very difficult to translate in words (Rubin, Groth, Goldsmith, 1984). In general, people tend to prefer scents they can identify correctly rather these unknown (Fox, 2001).
- ✓ emotions- being an emotive sense (Miltner & al., 1994), the main function of smell is to react to odours and not to give them names for cognitive finalities. It rather adds an emotive connotation to perceptions than a detailed information, as vision does (Cattarinussi, 2000). That's why sometimes it's so difficult to give a name also to the most common odours.
- ✓ interpersonal relationships- The positive emotional effects of pleasant fragrances also affect our perceptions of the other people. In experiments subjects exposed to pleasant fragrances tend to give higher 'attractiveness ratings' to people in photograph (Fox, 2001).
- ✓ mate choice- the attractive power of pheromones have often been exaggerated leading some men to believe that the odour of their natural sweat is highly attractive to women (Marchisio, 2002). But, their expectations have to be deluded as androstenone, produced by non fresh male sweat is highly unpleasant by females. On the other side, also women who believe that the use of 'sexy' perfumes will attract men, however, may be misguided. In fact women's sensitivity to

musk, an ingredient commonly used in perfumes, is 1000 times greater than men's. (Fox, 2001)

✓ the immune system and endocrine system (Jacob, 2002a/b).

As a consequence, the sense of smell is said to be at the mind-body interface.(Jacob, 2002a/b; Hari, Wang & Jacob, 2001).

Besides being a biological and psychological experience, perceiving smell is also a social and cultural phenomenon. In human mind, a pleasant smell is associated with all good things even if physical, mental or moral.

Moreover, as smell is a great means of communication for emotion, others' emotion may be experienced and communicated by smell.

Another reflection about sociological consequences of smell is suggested by seeing it as a sort of mirror of the times. It can be considered the objectivation of a particular historical context an period with its peculiar values, social dynamics, ethics, believes.

Alain Corbin correlates the decline in 'olfactory tolerance' to the rise of bourgeois mentality in the late 18th century. Following puritan principles, the ascending elite condemned the ephemeral nature of perfumes (symbols of waste and extravagance) which indicated a decadent taste for pleasure antithetical to the work ethic and which had no useful, pragmatic function and were therefore immoral (Fox, 2001).

On the other side, many noted the "appropriateness of vanilla scents for the 'softer, more caring' zeitgeist of the 1990s- as opposed to the thrusting, bullish 80s, when the fashion was for perfumes" extremely overpowering (Fox, 2001).

1.3 Concluding.

The man's destiny as sensitive and social creature is marked from the way he perceives and reacts to external reality through varied types of perceptions that hit his body. Particularly:

- with sight, he embraces the space and it becomes aware, through light, of form and colours of the bodies that surround him,
- with hearing he receives, through the air, the vibrations produced by noisy or sonorous bodies,
- with touch he realizes the consistence of the bodies with which he comes in contact,
- with taste he appreciates what it is tasty and edible,
- with the sense of smell he feels the odour of the bodies that are gifted of it.

Classifying the 5 senses according to a continuum between rationality and irrationality, at the opposite poles are put the sight and the sense of smell.

In the West, the hegemony of the first one depends on its natural link with reason, objectivity, cold scientific procedures, that allow to bring it back to the Freud's Super-ego. In antithesis, the instinctive, irrational sense of smell is outlined which, acting on the unconscious, becomes a great deal powerful, but also fleeing and hardly controllable.

A remarkable fact for the social culture, but still broadly neglected, is the double process of transformation in action in the senses:

- 1 - "becoming civilization more and more refined, the real acuteness of perception of all senses clearly decreases, while the accentuation of the sense of pleasure and sorrow increases" (Simmel, 1908);
- 2 - the tendency to the individualism involves a refolding of the subject on himself, a closing in the personal sphere that seems to reduce the action field of the senses and, at the same time intensify the perceptive ability to brief distance (Simmel, 1908).

Finally the intrinsic communicative vocation of the senses, a conclusive element makes them in interpersonal relationships, therefore it justifies the interest of it for sociological studies.

2. Polysensitive method.

The complexity and the atypicalness of a similar matter demand the adoption of a particular method that is not limited to draw the consolidated repertoire of sociological techniques, but it also enjoy some experiences matured by other disciplines.

2.1 The research.

By way of example hereby is described the approach adopted in a study born from some demands of market (a research commissioned by Italian Leather Association UNIC) in which a concrete testimony is offered to see how a polysensitive and polysensorial method can be useful to analyze a social reality.

2.1.1 The purpose.

The purposes that the study intends to reach the study are:

1 - to identify respectively

a - perceptions,

b - emotions and feelings,

c - memoirs,

d - values

that hide provokes in subjects consequently to the sensorial solicitation;

2 - to understand the individual meaning of the experience about hide;

3 - to analyze the aspects and the symbolic-social meaning that it has.

2.1.2 Premises.

- the nature of the investigated material imposes that the senses involved in the search are:

o sight

o touch

- sense of smell
- according to the analysis of literature, it is essential to remember the strong power of the sight able to influence the other sensorial perceptions.
- It's easier to describe, to express and deal with cognitive senses (sight) than with emotive senses (smell and, partly, touch).
- some findings suggest reduction in perceiving functions either with ageing or in consequence of individualism.
- conventional techniques used in quantitative research aren't appropriate to such a study like this. Therefore it's necessary to choose a qualitative method and to develop some particular techniques to explore it.

2.1.3 Participants.

Analyzed subjects' requirements are four.

- 1- They have to be free from any kind of pathology and disease in perceiving senses such as cough, blindness,...
- 2- In order to reduce the natural difficulties of verbalization previously examined, they must have:
 - a- a quite high instruction level;
 - b- a good capacity of expressing itself.
- 3- Some questions deal with personal experiences (erotic attraction, biographical memories, inner feelings and emotions), then to make participants feel more at ease, it has been stated that:
 - a- they have not to know the interviewer who has to facilitate the instauration of quite familiar and relaxed atmosphere;
 - b- interviews are settled into the sample's houses.

4- Analyzed subjects are vaguely told to take part to a survey about emotions, avoiding any reference both to the specific method applied and to leather. Thus in order to:

- a- reduce the undesired influences of bias and pre-judgements on perception,
- b- have the most genuine and spontaneous feedback as possible.

The investigation is carried out on 30 Italian people living in Lombardy and Veneto, fairly divided into gender and belonging to a middle/high social-cultural level.

They're fairly distributed into 3 age ranges: young ranging from 20 to 30 years, adults ranging from 40 to 60 years and over-60.

2.1.4 Proceedings.

The whole study is divided into 4 successive stages each articulated in some phases.

I- the **preliminary** stage. It's a bibliographic research carried out both in libraries and on Internet. It's aimed to find books, documents and literature dealing with:

- 1- personality,
- 2- senses,
- 3- emotions,
- 4- values, social representations, bias in experiencing leather

II- the instructive moment. Starting from the bibliographical analysis:

- 1- the field of study is outlined
- 2- some hypotheses are expressed
- 3- the instruments to measure individualized variables are prepared.

III- the **extensive** stage. It's made of 5 phases which give an empirical dimension to the hypotheses.

1- The first phase draws a synthetic portrait of interviewee's ***personal characteristics*** grouped in:

a- *Ideal/real*: respondent is shown two lists of stereotypes, the former about men the latter about women. The subject has to choose the images which best represent:

- what he'd like to be,
- what he is,
- how his ideal partner is,
- how his real partner is.

Man	Woman
Companion	Companion
Hero	Divine
Winning	Competitive
Macho	Enchantress
Anti-hero	Vamp
Prince	Princess
Pigmalion	Initiatress
Disturbing	Magic

Analyzing the gap between ideal and real dimension it's possible to understand:

- how satisfied/dissatisfied interviewees are of their life,
- which are their dreams, their referring figures, their model of interpersonal relationships,
- which values or principles they believe in.

b- *personality*. In some open questions subjects are invited to present their-own personality because it's scientifically demonstrated to be central in perceiving, processing, reacting and memorizing sensations, emotions, feelings.

c- *emotiveness*. Participants are asked to say

- if they're either emotive, sensible, passionate or cold, cool, rational people;
- which are their strongest, best, worst, most common emotions;
- how do these influence their private, public and social life.

d- *senses*. Thinking to his personal experience, the sample has to put into a decreasing order of importance the 5 senses and to say, for each:

- sensations mostly appreciated and disliked,
- particular memories linked to specific perceptions,
- the role of senses in interpersonal relationships.

e- *socio-cultural background*. It's deduced both from the description and from the value the sample attribute to his house and to his home.

f- participants' *personal picture* is completed using a 5 point Likert scale (from 1= 'I agreed very much' to 5= 'I didn't absolutely agree'). Interviewees are asked to express their agreement/disagreement on a series of 12 items which sum up previous themes on the basis of sociological and psychological literature. The items are:

	1	2	3	4	5
1 -I like showing interest towards traditions					
2 - I like proving physically strong					
3 - My house has to be a nest for me and my family					
4 - I like proving nonconformist					
5 - I like feeling powerful					
6 - I like being considered transgressive					
7 - I like being differentiate me from others with my shopping and ownership					
8 - I like classical things the objects of the past					
9 - I like being admired					
10 - My house must always be ready to receive people					

11 - My house has to be my mirror					
12 -I like enjoying social prestige and to be one that counts					

The qualitative difference in the degree of consciousness/unconsciousness and of spontaneity/rationality between these findings and the answers to open questions add some more hints especially about sampled subjects' psychological, cultural, social characteristics.

Knowing the strong pre-judgement and prejudicial power of sight, before starting the new phases, the sample is asked to close his eyes and not to open them till when they would be told to do it.

2-In the second phase each interviewed has to use his **smell** to perceive an odour.

a- A researcher puts under his nose a tester of leather with its typical intense scent.

b- After having smelt it, the subject should:

- identify what it is the odour of,
- list the first sensations proved perceiving it, and explain them,
- describe emotions evoked by smelling this odour,
- illustrate images, memories, events which come into his mind by perceiving the leather slice smell.

3-The third phase is dedicated to **touch**.

a- Still keeping his eyes closed, interviewed is successively given 5 testers of different kinds of leather (1-nappa, 2-cuir, 3-fish, 4-reptile, 5-chamois-leather). The criterion researchers have used to choose them is double:

- it's functional to the best known and easiest recognizable typologies of leather,

- it's lead to the aim of arousing the more various perceptions and emotions as possible.

b- Then the interviewed has to describe sensations, emotions, feelings, images by touching each sample of leather.

c- Finally, he is asked

- to comment the previous tactile perceptions comparing each-other,
- to discern the pleasant ones from the unpleasant,

4-The fourth phase deals with **sight**. Allowed to open his eyes the subject has in front of him more or less 30 tester of leather that differ in their esthetical features according to their colours, their forms and their surfaces. As usual, he is invited:

a- to give his esthetical opinion about what he sees,

b- to choose the most liked testers and to say what they could be used for.

Concluding the sensitive-empirical part of the research, the sample is invited to estimate the five kinds of leather (presented during the third phase) using a semantic differential. The 12 couples of adjectives (1-warm/cold, 2-smooth/rough, 3-soft/hard, 4-scented/evil-smelling, 5-caste/erotic, 6-attractive/repugnant, 7-fashionable/unfashionable, 8-precious/unprecious, 9-expensive/cheap, 10-for young people/for old people, 11-natural/artificial, 12-handcrafted industrial) proposed to define the 5 testers, are accurately selected from literature in order to explore both the physical, perceptive features of leather and its emotive and moral connotations.

5-The last phase analyzes **social dimension**. The interviewed is told

a- to explain which are collective representations, stereotypes, bias, values, social significance correlated to

- leather, in general and
- in particular, to the following objects leather made:

- i a cloth,
- ii a sofa,
- iii car seats,
- iv the boss' armchair

b- to look for among the tester and to find out the most appropriate leather to make each of the 4 previous objects, giving a motivation of his selection.

IV- the **analytical** stage is made of:

- 1- a qualitative study on findings coming from open questions,
- 2- some statistical analysis of answers given to both the 12 item scale and the 5 groups of semantic differentials. Data collected are processed using the statistics program "SPSS 10.0 per Windows".

V- the **conclusive** stage. After having commented the results, it is drafted the research report and its presentation using the pc program "Power Piont".

2.2 Discussion.

Examining the main results of the research according to the adopted method and keeping in mind the inside difficulties due to the particular theme of the leather, some reflections can be taken on the polysensitive method.

2.2.1 The limits.

a - the greatest difficulty depends on the scarce familiarity of people to express orally their own emotions and even the great incapability to describe their own feelings. Even the less inhibited and timid subjects, that describe themselves not only self-confident but they act like that in conventional situations, put in front of themselves and having to speak about feelings and tried emotions, show evident signs of uneasiness:

they speak in a higher tone, they make gestures of self-manipulation, they manifest some tics...

- b - In the second and in the third phase, while the interviewed are asked to keep their eyes closed, their more frequent demand it is to be allowed to look at the testers, too. The prohibition, in the first minutes, is lived as incomprehensible, not justified.
- c - A further obstacle is to think about interpersonal social relationships in terms of sensorial experiences. To satisfy this condition the subjects are forced to complete a revolution in the usual way of judging and considering the others. Particularly they have to put between parenthesis the traditional one, uncontested dominion of the rationality, of Super-ego. This is a problem that, within the analyzed sample, it seems more prominent for men. They show a certain tendency to associate, if not even to identify, the polysensitive experiences sometimes with the hedonistic ones and often with the erotic ones.
- d - As all the qualitative methods, the validity of the results is not measured in terms of numerical quantity and doesn't have any exhaustive pretension, but it is necessary only to give some reflection hints on reality and on the world of life.

2.2.2 The positive aspects.

- a - once overcome the initial distrust, the subjects, letting themselves drive from their own senses, from emotions and memoirs, they offer an unusual perspective on reality that appears much richer and vanished than it is generally described.
- b - After having discovered and appreciated the pleasure of exploring the world that surrounds them even without using sight, many interviewed, while are concentrated in telling memoirs connected to the leather, they take instinctively the testers again, they handle them, sniff them, and often ask close their eyes in order to be able to give a better answer.

- c - Despite the scarce consideration recognized them by traditional sociology, the complex interlacement of sensorial experiences and their consequences on the states of mind, before, and on the relationships with the others, later, the carrying axle of interpersonal and personal experiences are revealed.
- d - Following the polysensitive formulation, the analyzed people interpret the interaction with the others according to how much it has modified their organs of sense and, consequently how much it is engraved in their memory. In this way interviewed allow also to examine the process of transformation that are crossing the senses: with the progressive restriction of their field of action to which it corresponds a greater perceptive ability soon after and a more and more marked hedonistic function. The leather, for his intrinsic, physics and symbolic-metaphoric qualities, is particularly suited to illustrate such changes showing the validity of the adopted techniques as well.
- e - This method is also a means to confirm the importance of non-verbal communication in social phenomena. Being the senses nearer unconscious, irrational, instinctive dimension than conscience and rationality, when they are adopted as key of reading of the processes of socialization, they end up enjoying the same power of non-verbal communication as in turn it is firmly rooted in the ground of sensitive perceptions and corresponding emotions.

2.2.3 The potentialities.

- a - The more and more diffused and confirmed success of disciplines, practices, doctrines, philosophies, generally of oriental ancestors, that affirm and underline the priority of senses, of inner emotions in human life, having consistent repercussions in the dynamics of relationships among men, demands an evolution in the field of sociological studies. In parallel, it is essential even the experimentation and the introduction of special methodologies and techniques directed to notice, then to analyze the importance of sensorial and emotional dimension.

- b - The application of a polysensitive method to subjects from different cultures can help to explain the reason of many differences in the way of conceiving and to manage interpersonal relationships. Besides it would allow to make a list of meaning, role, centrality, value that every sense assumes inside the varied cultures.
- c - This procedure can serve to refuse prejudices, stereotypes, biases and to see some common places again that, commonly prevent the direct disenchanting approach to certain realities.

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