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Art per Os

A Place for Taste in Art

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Can art be tasted? While this question has been discussed occasionally throughout the history of aesthetic thought there have been very few actual examples of tasted art work. This research explores the obstacles that have impeded the sense of taste as a medium for art and contends that, as the sciences of flavour, taste and food are in a time of renaissance we now have suitable tools and an artistic culture conducive to the creation of tasted art.

Introduction: Detaching flavour from food

It wasn't until humans learned how to imitate and symbolise nature that art became possible. In the visual arts, representative images created allegories of life while the utilisation of dyes and pigments permitted the powerful application of colour. In sonic art, the notes and sounds found in nature provided a model through which we created our own mimetic sounds and rhythms. It was from these basic sensory 'alphabets' that we learned to communicate in the language of art and to have meaningful dialogues about the ideas that these languages explore.

A codified language has not yet been created for the sense of taste - the alphabet is only now being established. Through gastronomy natural flavours can be skilfully and beautifully transformed into cuisine, however, scientists are only beginning to create mimetic flavours which can be utilised in ways other than the examples provided by nature. Despite the infancy of a codified language for taste, discourse surrounding the validity of the aesthetic value of flavours and taste's suitability in art has been on-going, with epistemological roots reaching back to ancient Greece. Within much of the concerned literature there is no distinction between flavours and their associated foods in the aesthetic evaluation of taste, an absence which has muddied the waters of aesthetic discourse; this linkage is understandable as, until quite recently, there were very few instances where flavours and the foods from which they are derived were separate entities. This paper and the on-going research which it represents is an effort to clarify these murky waters and to place the discussion surrounding taste into a contemporary understanding of both the senses and art.

It is important from the outset to disambiguate the scope of this research. Firstly, this investigation does examine how flavours can be utilised in works of art which convey meaningful and relevant concepts. This discussion does not pertain to artworks where food is utilised in the construct of visual art¹. This discussion is not concerned with the act of cooking, dining or eating as a function of pleasure or survival although the cultural dimension of how we eat may be suitably addressed as topics through such artworks. This study is not particularly concerned with the discrimination between that which is purely taste sensation and that which involves olfactory and tactile senses, it is well established that taste is a combination of all of these sensations yet it remains distinctly its own medium. Finally, the application of flavours in this paradigm of "tasted art"² does not require highly-trained taste acuity as it does not seek to convey the complexity of possible human discretion in taste but instead to communicate creative concepts by way of the mouth, accepting that there are differences in how individuals perceive with their senses.

In the last few decades sensory studies have been enjoying a welcomed revival. This surge of attention has not only focussed on the physiology of taste but has also explored the philosophy, anthropology, psychology, linguistics and food science underpinning how we perceive and manipulate taste, re-evaluating our complete understanding of the sense. It is as a direct result of this reawakening of the scholarly study of taste that I am able to assemble my arguments and I am indebted to the powerful minds who through their adept scholarship, have contributed to this resurgence. In particular, the philosophical work of Carolyn Korsmeyer, the anthropological studies of David Howes and Constance Classen, and the scientific investigations of Linda Bartoshuk must be

¹ Such as the 2004 work by Antony Gormley where a bed was made of bread.

² The authors own words used to describe artistic works that are communicated primarily through the medium of the human sense of taste.

mentioned, who, in the company of many others, have established a new starting place for the development of ideas pertaining to taste.

Taste in Greek thought, theology and the Enlightenment

In *circa* 360 BCE Plato and Aristotle proposed a 'hierarchy of the senses' where the determinate feature was the contribution that each of the senses made to the development of the rational mind (Placeholder8). In Plato's *Timaeus*, the soul, embodied as the rational mind, is explained as being eternal while the body is temporal; using this measure, the role of taste exists as appetite to remind the body to eat, ensuring the health of the temporal human animal. This disparagement of the sense of taste was arrived upon for several reasons, all of which are founded upon taste's lack of rational worth. These reasons are that 1) taste offers pleasures which provoke overindulgence, which is to the detriment of the body and a distraction for the mind; 2) the information provided by the sense of taste is subjective, as the sense draws attention to itself and does not compare in value to the 'objective' information offered by the higher senses of sight and sound; 3) the immediate proximity of the object of perception (i.e. food) and the organ of perception (tongue) does not facilitate the pursuit of knowledge (where the distance of the body from the object permitted by vision allows for a more pure contribution to intellect); and 4) the ephemeral nature of the experience of taste (the object is consumed during the act of perception) is counterproductive in the pursuit of the eternal. From this metaphysical rationalisation of the senses, a philosophical framework for taste was established which has persisted in essence until the present.

In the 13th century, the codification of theological principles discriminating against the sense of taste became radically dogmatic. Gluttony and cannibalism would eventually become commonly depicted in religious art as warnings of the dangers of the sins of the flesh and the punishments of the damned³. Among others, St Thomas Aquinas qualified the terms of gluttony in the Middle Ages describing five ways to participate in the sin of gluttony; these were snacking, the pursuit of delicacies, saucing and seasoning, eating in excess, and eating with too much enthusiasm (Aquinas, 1892). This codification of gluttony imprinted a moral association upon the sense of taste which, if indulged, could lead to the irrevocable damnation of the eternal soul⁴. The dangers inherent in the necessary routine of eating seems to eclipse the possible divinity of the sense of taste described in the biblical examples, "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (KJV, 1858, p. Psalms 34:8) or through consumption of the sacrament, which is believed to be the literal act of communion with god through food and drink (KJV, 1858, pp. Luke 22:19-20).

By the 18th century, the concept of beauty was in jeopardy due to its subjective nature; as such, the preservation of the ideal of beauty became a primary concern for Enlightenment aesthetic thinkers. The analysis of beauty had become contextualised within the metaphor of "taste" where the comparison of aesthetic "taste" and gustatory taste ultimately offered a solution for the preservation of the concept of beauty. Kant's notion of "disinterested pleasure" (Kant, 2007),

³ One notable example is the work of Hieronymus Bosch, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (circa 1500 CE)

⁴ The seven deadly sins are derived from the writings of the 4th Century monk, Evagrius Ponticus, who listed eight evil thoughts (Ponticus, 2003, pp. 73-75). This work was later popularised in Christian theology through the writings of John Cassian, Pope Gregory I and in Dante Alighieri's, the *Divine Comedy*.

making reference to a rational, and therefore objective aesthetic contrasted against the relative and interested (functional) pleasure of gustatory taste, sentenced the later to artistic exile⁵.

The aesthetic metaphor of “taste” received notable attention throughout the Enlightenment period. In, *Of the Standard of Taste* (Hume, 1757), Hume proposed that value judgements regarding “taste” could be arrived upon by consensus of gifted apologists of the arts and left the door open for the inclusion of actual taste in art. Kant offered a particularly damning verdict against the possibility that gustatory taste holds value as an aesthetic sense due to taste’s attachment to practical desires. Kant concluded that physiological taste draws attention to the body rather than the object of contemplation, unlike the “pure beauty” permitted by the distant sense of sight (Kant, 2007).

Hegel expanded the discourse by placing culture and the artistic concept as the objects of consideration, more so than the stimulation of the senses, where the sensuous presentation of the “Absolute”⁶ is the source of beauty (Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 1975). Once again, Hegel’s theory excluded gustatory taste from art as it could not be imagined how taste could express the “Absolute Spirit” as taste only satisfied the immediate. Hegel’s idea for the concept as the object of beauty and the autonomous (non-functional) nature of art remain staples of contemporary art.

Bourdieu critiqued the notion of a uniform standard of taste labelling it as “class hegemony” and proceeded to deflate the carefully constructed distinctions surrounding taste within aesthetic theory. Bourdieu did this by placing the value of aesthetic “taste” back onto equal footing with that of gustatory taste, arguing that the oral pleasure of taste underpins the logic of aesthetic taste and therefor the two have equal worth (Bourdieu, 1984).

Carolyn Korsmeyer summarises the philosophical verdict against gustatory taste as, “taste is a subjective sense that directs attention to one’s bodily state rather than to the world around, that provides information only about the perceiver, and the preferences for which are not cogently debatable” (Korsmeyer, 1999, p. 69). Korsmeyer, a champion of the sense of taste, also acknowledges the challenge that taste and food pose to aesthetics by stating that, “both inevitably come off distinctly second rate, trailing the distance senses and fine art. It is not necessarily that they are intrinsically of less interest or importance, but rather that their particular interests and importance are not directly illuminated by the traditional concerns of aesthetic appreciation.” (Korsmeyer, 1999, p. 66)

Symbolists, Futurists and the Present

The Symbolist movement of the late 19th century reacted to the materialism and rigid science of the time; rather than engaging the empirical it chose to embrace the immeasurable, rather than exploring outwards Symbolists looked inwards. Within this symbolist world the senses became sacred - a soft metaphysical womb to become lost within, which contrasted against the hard realities of the ever-increasing momentum of the industrialised world. Where Enlightenment philosophies had created a border between the ‘rational’ senses and the ‘bodily’ senses the symbolists sought to heal this artificial rift through multisensory art. (McGrath, 1986, pp. 164-83) The Symbolists reacted against the century’s scientific bent though they also harnessed scientific discovery in their embrace

⁵ While Kant draws credit for this idea the idea of disinterested pleasure had been developed in earlier writings by authors as Lord Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson.

⁶ The summation of human consciousness become actualised (Hegel, 1967).

of synaesthesia, the blending of sensory perceptions⁷. Artists and writers such as Charles Baudelaire⁸, Jean Moréas⁹, J.K Huysmans¹⁰ and Alexander Scriabin¹¹ (as well as many others) all extolled the virtue of engaging all of the senses; however, while present in discourse, the sense of taste seemed not to venture from the pages of witty thought or from symbols on canvas into the actual domain of art.

Where the Symbolists sought to exclude the science and materialism provoking change the Futurists, spearheaded by F.T Marinetti (Joll, 1960, pp. 179-84)¹², embraced the hardness and chaos of modernity. Futurists viewed science as a “vivifying current” of modern art (Boccioni, Carra, Russolo, Balla, & Severini, 1910) and explored the sensual stimulation of mechanised culture. Yet, it wasn't the science itself that Futurists embraced but instead the sensual stimulation that technology created. The most notable instance of the employment of taste in Futurist art was Marinetti's 1930 *Manifesto of Futurist Cookery* (Marinetti F. T., 1989) which, when published in Turin's daily *Gazetta del Popolo* (28 December 1930) and later in Paris's *Comoedia*, caused a public outcry. Marinetti struck a nerve in Italian culture with his condemnation of pasta which provoked the sort of scandalous reaction that he had been grasping for, prompting him to exploit the social role of food in his subsequent work. An example of a Futurist banquet is one prepared by chef Bulgheroni of Milan for 300 guests at the Hotel Negrino, Chiavari (18 December 1931). The meal employed the use of satire, surrealism and surprise through the use of odd recipes such as calf's head on a bed of pineapple stuffed with anchovies, tongue-in-cheek titles in the menu which made reference to Italy's cultural icons, and stage propping, yet the overall effect was one of popular provocation. Beyond rattling the cage of traditional foodways through sensationalism it did not communicate its message through taste as much as through food presentation.

Where Symbolism was anti-science, and Futurists explored the sensations that science and technology produced, our present art culture would seem to be embracing science in a very different way; that is, as a facilitator of art rather than a subject of it. Science-art collaborations are becoming increasingly common and are blurring the lines between the two disciplines as creative

⁷ Synaesthesia is a neurological condition where the stimulation of one sense is involuntarily experienced in another. While there are variations between subjects, synaesthesia manifests itself through symptoms such as appearance of colours with letters/numbers, or through the experience of specific tastes with the articulation of words. Synaesthesia is relevant to the classical hierarchy of the senses as it challenges the common belief in separation between the senses.

⁸ Baudelaire commented about his experiences in the famous *Club des Hashischins*, an activity utilised for the pursuit of synaesthesia experiences, “The senses of smell, sight, hearing and touch alike participate in this development . . . Sounds are clad in colors and colors contain a certain music.” (Classen, 1998, p. 110) from Baudelaire's, *Artificial Paradise* (Baudelaire, 1971, pp. 54-55).

⁹ Jean Moréas was the poet who penned the Symbolist Manifesto (Published in Le Figaro on 18 September 1886)

¹⁰ Huysmans' novel, *Against Nature [A rebours]* (Huysmans, 1930), remains a landmark for the exploration of multisensory aesthetic form and the possibilities for symbolist art.

¹¹ Scriabin's vision for an artistic multisensory experience is best embodied in his *Mysterium*, where he envisioned a symphonic performance to be played at the base of the Himalayas accompanied by dance, coloured lights, incense and taste experiences (along with other sensory imaginings). The concert would last for seven days before culminating in the end of the world. Sadly, Scriabin's work was never completed, however, the composer Alexander Nemtin devoted 28 years to composing a three-hour interpretation of the *Mysterium* based upon Scriabin's surviving notes.

¹² English translation of the *Futurist Manifesto*, 1909

scientists and science-minded artists meet in the middle¹³. As science plays an increasing role in the production of art the bodily senses have elicited greater interest, where new investigations into the mechanics and psychology of our senses has reconfigured our understanding of how the human body functions and perceives. Cultural historian Constance Classen illuminates one potential challenge to the ascendance of the bodily senses into mainstream art through her comparison between vision, being equated to modernised society, and the other senses signifying the developing world. Classen states, “In the scopic regime of postmodernity, vision is implicitly presented as the slick, powerful, First-World sense of the future, while the other senses are largely relegated to the background, poor Third-World relations, unsophisticated and underdeveloped. In this cultural climate the concept of multisensory art runs the risk of being dismissed as *passé*, a Nineteenth-century Symbolist fad or a McLuhanesque relic of the 1960s, before it has ever had the opportunity to be adequately developed.” (Classen, 1998, p. 159) This segregation of the senses along the lines of a digital divide is unsurprising, as it represents a contemporary interpretation to the evolution of Aristotle’s hierarchy of the senses, however, it must not be permitted to take root; instead, the bodily senses must be incorporated into our modern practice in the arts, dragging the analogue senses of the developing world into digital modernity, plucking the fruit of symbolism and its fellows from the page and the canvas and placing it into the actual.

Brush, Paints and Canvas: understanding the tools of tasted art

The flavour industry that we know today can trace its roots back to the Egyptian empire through the early utilization of fragrances as perfumes for ritual and beauty and the advent of essential oils. Although this precursor to our contemporary flavour industry offers pedigree, a record of experimentation and a toolbox of useful techniques (i.e. distillation and the extraction of essential oils) it was not until the middle of the 19th Century that the foundation of the modern flavour and fragrance industry was established. Despite this recent beginning, thousands of extracted and unique flavours have now emerged through chemical processes resulting in the creation of an ever-increasing mimetic palette for flavour; in much the same way that pigment offers possibility to painters these derived flavours present possibilities for *tasted art*. The flavour industry has since grown into a multi-billion dollar/annum industry¹⁴ which represents one of the largest growth sectors (3-4% per year on average to 2015) in the food system (Müller, Kishi, Bizzari, & Yang, 2011). As this library of flavours expands and new flavours find their way into consumer products people are increasingly confronted with the reality that the foods that they eat no longer find a counterpart in nature. As humans move away from the reference points of flavour found in nature we are alerted to the notion that taste is a sense that is increasingly culturally specific by design (rather than by selection or evolution) and is laden with social values and symbols. We can also reasonably presume that the flavours of the future will continue in this direction of displacement from nature and evolve into cultural expressions as different as Salvador Dali’s surrealism is from the natural world. Answers to questions concerning what this detachment says of humanity are yet to be comprehensively addressed by philosophy, leaving the topic open to artistic discussion.

As flavour chemistry has opened a doorway to explore the limits of human imagination within taste food science has radically transformed the food that we eat. The new tools of modern food science

¹³ Examples include groups such as the Art Catalyst, Art & Science Collaborations Inc. and SymbioticA

¹⁴ 2006 Data from the *Prepared Foods Processor Survey* attribute \$6.69 billion in sales revenues to the industry for the year, with an increase of 22.29% from the previous year.

have created near infinite scope for the application of the palette of flavour upon the canvas of sensory perception. In a recent project entitled *Disembodied Cuisine* by the Tissue Culture & Art Project, hosted by SymbioticA – the Art and Science Collaborative Research Lab, a biopsy was made on a living frog in which the cell sample was used to “grow frog skeletal muscle over biopolymer for potential food consumption” (Zurr & Catts, 2003). The still-living frog was exhibited alongside the “growing steak” during the *L’art Biotech* in Nantes, France (2003). The project culminated in a “feast” which included the consumption of the *in vitro* meat¹⁵. While this project was designed to confront the ethics of how and what we eat other creations have impacted our dining expectations and have altered priorities regarding why we eat. “Molecular Gastronomy”¹⁶ is a phrase coined in 1992 by scientists Herve This and Nicholas Kurti, to explain the new scientific discipline exploring how cooking processes occur; it has since produced an entirely new genre of *haute* cuisine. Made most famous by chefs as Ferran Adria (El Bulli), Heston Blumenthal (Fat Duck) and Grant Achatz (Alinea), molecular gastronomy has created a space in dining culture where participants seek to be amused/surprised by the food that they eat, more so than satiated. By utilizing new techniques, philosophies and equipment in food science the possibilities presented through the transformation of natural and synthetic ingredients into thought-provoking encounters has opened the way for a more complex, abstract dialogue regarding tasted art. One example of this new technology in practice is the Le Whaf: *Cloud of Flavour* innovations by biomedical engineer David A. Edwards, et al. (Harvard University) which utilises aerosol flavours in atmospheric taste experiences. This type of technology was also explored by the London-based food event designers Bompas & Parr during their event *Alcoholic Architecture* (2009), where participants walked through a cloud of breathable Gin and Tonic. This example demonstrates possibilities in the new ways that we can experience flavour and how these expressions have become the realisation of human ideas, rather than reconfigurations within the constraints of nature.

The detachment of flavour from nature and the creation of new tools for flavour delivery have resulted in a reality where taste is now suitably equipped to participate in the dialogue of art in way never before possible; however, medium alone is not enough to guarantee the creation of art, as the creations and the conversation of taste must also be relevant within artistic discourse.

On the separation of taste from food

Early 20th century philosopher David Prall proposes the argument that consumption does not necessarily need to follow the act of tasting food, as the object being tasted can be removed from the mouth before it is ingested (Prall, 1929). Korsmeyer confronts Prall’s separation of flavour from food by describing it as “perverse” and asking, “This line of defence, if pursued, would improbably sever the pleasures of tasting from the pleasures of eating. Tasting would be what makes food aesthetically valuable, swallowing an incidental matter of nutrition. Why would one want to draw these conceptual lines were it not for the hold that the sense hierarchy possesses over the terms of

¹⁵ Emerging from NASA experiments (Edelman, McFarland, & Mironov, 2005) which sought to improve the diet of astronauts, In Vitro meat (also known as “synthetic meat”) is a FDA approved (Catachem_Inc, 1995) meat product which is laboratory grown from living cells extracted from animals. As the host animal is undamaged and the potential for meat production from sampled cells is virtually unlimited In Vitro meat is viewed by its supporters as a non-violent solution to address the world’s burgeoning food crisis.

¹⁶ While the term Molecular Gastronomy has become the most widely used for describing this type of cuisine it remains a largely disputed term amongst its practitioners. Other terms such as Modernist Cuisine and Experimental Cuisine, and many others are synonymous for this scientific approach to cuisine.

evaluation employed?" (Korsemeier, 1999, p. 105) This emphatic question is a fair one and demands to be answered. There are several reasons why this approach may be taken to address the challenges confronting the aesthetic virtues of gustatory taste, one of which is most certainly an acknowledgement of the "hold that the sense hierarchy possesses over the terms of evaluation employed". If the digestion of food and the functional benefit that is provided by ingestion is an obstacle for the inclusion of taste in art then, at least for the moment, let us separate the two processes; a separation which is increasingly effortless and offers clarity. Korsemeier correctly states in response to Francis Hutcheson exclusion of taste from aesthetics (on the grounds that it is a practical activity with intimate interests), "Traditional thinking about bodily pleasures was not disposed to challenge the separation of the two sorts of taste [taste and ingestion]". (Korsemeier, 1999, p. 50) However perverse the act of taste separation may be, this "imposition of such unnatural conditions upon taste" (Korsemeier, 1999, p. 105) is now common practice within the food industry. Diners of *modernist cuisine* do not pay to satisfy their stomachs but to intrigue their senses (taste in particular) answering the question posed by Ferran Adria, "Imagine for a moment that food wasn't a physiological need; what would our relationship with food be then?" (Andrews, 2010, p. 32) The incredible growth of the flavour industry reflects our demand for taste stimulation more so than our desire to eat, where taste is an expression of human culture in contrast to the survival instinct of digestion.

My intention in separating taste from food is to redirect the question of aesthetic value from food as an object of aesthetic pleasure to taste as a medium for conceptual discourse, to replace pleasure with meaning as the measuring stick for value judgements regarding taste. As the focus of Symbolists on *correspondence* advanced the perceived associations between visual symbols and values, the isolation and application of flavours in such a way as to decant commonly understood meanings associated with taste would also greatly advance the possibilities for taste in art.

Tasting with meaning

Although the instinct to eat is a survival reflex imbedded deeply within the primitive human animal the choice of what we eat is profoundly cultural. The food scientist Heribert Watzke presented the term "coctivor" (J. Muth and U. Pullman, 2010) to describe the human as an animal that eats cooked food (Watzke, 2010), as the care in preparation that we commit to our cuisine as well as the ability to educate our food preferences is a uniquely human trait. The activity of food preparation and its consumption is so laden with cultural meaning that sociocultural anthropologist R.S. Khare uses the term "gastrosemantics, to refer to its unusual powers of multiple symbolization and communication" (Khare, 2007, p. 156)¹⁷. The foods and flavours that we choose to eat are not solely the result of availability for the purpose of nourishment but they are also rich in cultural meaning. For example, philosopher Mădălina Diaconu, aptly remarks that "vegetarianism has an encompassing aesthetic component which is irreducible to the sense of taste but implies the idea of a cosmic harmony and an ethical and even religious background." (Diaconu, 2006) One area of sensory study which is associated with taste is the emotional response of disgust, and while disgust is not limited to distaste this is often a dimension of it. Psychologist Paul Rozin makes a distinction between disgust as distaste and "core disgust", where he explains that the former protects the body

¹⁷ "Gastrosemantics may be generally defined as a culture's distinct capacity to signify, experience, systematize, and communicate with food and food practices by pressing appropriate linguistic and cultural devices to render food as a central subject of attention." (Khare, 2007, p. 164)

from harm while the latter protects the soul from harm; an emotion which evolves culturally and can become linked to morality. (Penn State University, 1997) While the emotion of disgust may be the psychological safeguard between the human animal and the primitive beast of man, the cultural relevance of specific tastes have also evolved since early civilization. It is premised that the first food which was farmed and bred for size and variety by early humans was the snail, where “snail-dumps” in Greece offer evidence of snail consumption by humans dating from about 10700 BC (Fernandez-Armesto, 2001 , p. 65). While the meat of snails is often treated with contempt (and even disgust) in common dining, in France (in particular) has crawled to the top of the *haute cuisine* menu. Beyond national food preferences food is employed in cultural ritual, celebration and rites of passage. The flavours in food can demonstrate poverty or wealth, conflict or peace, political, functional or religious ideologies, migration, trade, as well as other social values¹⁸; however, these meanings need to be better codified, for while linkages exist they are not represented by symbols with the recognition as is common in visual art.

Answering the judgements against taste

That taste is subjective and directs attention inwards towards the body of the perceiver rather than to the world around, is the most often fielded verdict against taste. It is important to acknowledge the partial truth behind this statement, which is that taste preferences tend to be subjective; however, these preferences are largely culturally cultivated rather than individually concocted, which would seem to draw attention to an interesting arena of artistic discourse rather than to discount it from artistic merit. Having said that, the majority of people find agreement upon the basic nature of tastes¹⁹; although one person might adore the taste of Roquefort cheese while another despises it, the majority of people are likely to agree upon the cheese’s tasting notes as salty, creamy and umami. It is this common consensus over taste features (regardless of dislike verdicts) that has allowed for the evolution of cuisine. Although such tastes may be received with varying degrees of fondness, the idea that subjectivity distorts flavour to the degree that it becomes irrelevant is simply untrue. In this concept of *tasted art*, where tastes are significant for their conceptual and representational value rather than their exact taxonomy, an objective consensus on the nature of their complexity is not required. When two different people view Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*, agreement upon the exact colour of the urinal is of little importance to the significance of the art work. In taste, as with other mediums of art, the object of taste remains universal while the impressions, considerations and preferences of the perceiver react subjectively to the artwork. In regard to tasted objects, within the science of the flavour industry the replication of taste has become as uniform and replicable as notes in music or colours in painting.

The claim that taste is inwardly directed and cannot provide us information about the outside world is to deny taste one of its most fascinating dimensions - that of exploration. Through taste we are able to directly participate in the lives and cultures of others, in particular, those most unlike us. While other senses may offer distant insights into the differences between people, flavour provides

¹⁸ Consider the heavy-handed spicing of foods and gold ornamentation in Renaissance Poland in an effort to project an image of culinary modernity and sophistication. (Dembinska, 1999, p. 13)

¹⁹ In the 1990s, Linda Bartoshuk identified that a percentage of the population had higher taste acuity than average (more common in women as well as in individuals of Asian and African descent), in particular to bitter tastes. (Bartoshuk, 1991) While these variations do exist they are not sufficient to obstruct the use of flavour in art any more than the percentage of colour-blind individuals detract from the visual arts.

an intimate avenue for participation in the lives of others in a way that physically becomes a part of us. These flavours may represent locations in geography (a country)²⁰ or in society (home), sacred moments (tea ceremony) or religious rites (communion), the past (*Liquamen*²¹) or the future (synthetics), as well as other social distinctions. To make the sweeping argument that flavour does not facilitate opportunities for cogent discourse and tells us only about the taster (as Kant and Hegel contended) is a failure to acknowledge this most powerful facility of taste.

Another criticism levelled against the sense of taste is that there are no principles of order in the sense of taste. This argument may contain elements of truth however I contend that this absence is the result of philosophical neglect rather than inherent design. Before man attached meaning and value to the objects perceived by the senses of sight and sound there also were no obvious principles of order beyond human instinct, creating order within nature is cultural taxonomy. The concepts of harmony, symmetry, balance, notes, and length are all terms that are regularly employed in the evaluation of tasted objects. As taste is a chemical sense, much of the terminology used to measure its properties exist within the scientific community and although the language of science and the organisational principles of chemistry may be prohibitive for artists and philosophers this does not mean that principles of order do not exist. The use of language in aesthetic discourse is not only important for principles of order but also for ascribing representative value and meaning; perhaps the neglect of taste's linguistic development has also been a factor in its exclusion from aesthetic discourse. Vision is complex partly because we have taught it to be so, yet, the problem of tasting complexity is not that we do not have the capacity to perceive intricately but, in large part, because we have not taught ourselves to do so. We have not ascribed taste a language to communicate with, have not prescribed it formal values, and have not trained the "taster" in the same way that we have done for vision and hearing. Upon recognising the significance of the absence of specific terminology from the study of the sense of scent, linguist and scent artist Sissel Tolaas devised a language to define smells; she called it "Nasalo". Tolaas discovered that associations with other objects had an influence on a perceiver's evaluation of a scent²² and therefore created a dictionary for scent that was completely context free (Tolaas, 2011). This sort of project would do much to advance discourse surrounding flavour yet language must also be applied in order for it to be of use; a slow process in most cases however a universal language to support a range of tastes properties does seem feasible (Majid & Levinson, 2008).

In the work, *Taste, Smell and Aesthetics* (Sibley, 2001), philosopher Frank Sibley chooses to avoid consideration over whether or not tastes can be works of art by employing two arguments that would suggest its exclusion²³. In the first, Sibley states that, "it is generally accepted that works of art must be artefacts", and secondly, that, "it is often held also that they must be products of some specific or general intention, e.g. that they should be intended of aesthetic consideration or appraisal or satisfaction". In the case of the artifactual nature of art, the rise of the Happening

²⁰ In cultural anthropology, foodways are often used to trace patterns of migration and to assess levels of integration with host communities.

²¹ *Liquamen* (fermented fish sauce) was an essential sauce used for seasoning dishes in ancient Rome; how would their recipes taste to us now?

²² Sissel Tolaas observed that, "In one experiment, subjects rated a body smell as more pleasant when it was labelled 'cheddar' than when it was labelled 'body smell'. Another experiment showed that a mere label was enough to make subjects imagine a smell even when they were sniffing clean air."

²³ Although Sibley excludes taste from art he does acknowledge the aesthetic virtue of flavour.

(Kaprow, 1993) and performance art offers challenge to the traditional notion of art as artefact. Happenings and performance art has been discussed at length by the art industry (which is concerned largely with the collection, display and sale of works of art) yet the artistic integrity of performance art is now commonly recognised. While the collectability of such works of art is problematic, this challenge is a matter for galleries to contend with rather than for artists and critics. The type of flavour art which I intend to illustrate through this research does for the most part land squarely within the reach of performance art.

Sibley's second consideration, that art is intentional, exclusive for the purpose of art, takes us back to Hegel's notion of "artistic autonomy", art for art's sake. Although Hegel argued that taste was not a suitable medium for art as it provoked an immediate sensual response, Hegel asserted that art must be intentional and speak to the *Absolute Spirit* of man:

...these sensuous shapes and sounds appear in art not merely for the sake of themselves and their immediate shape, but with the aim, in this shape, of affording satisfaction to higher spiritual interests, since they have the power to call forth from all the depths of consciousness a sound and an echo in the spirit. In this way the sensuous aspect of art is spiritualized, since the spirit appears in art as made sensuous. (Hegel, Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, 1975)

This line of argument marks the starting point for the theory of conceptual art, where the sensory properties of nature alone are not sufficient to evoke a spiritual response; instead, the concept of the artwork must be "beautiful" (that is to say, possessing artistic virtue) in order to be deemed "art". It is upon this conceptual basis that I assert taste as being suitable for art, rather than strictly on its sensual merit. I do not contend that tastes in themselves are aesthetic (although this argument can certainly be made) but that through the creation of conceptual artistic works which employ the sense of taste as their principle medium, the diversity of meanings and symbolism that tastes evoke can compel considered and meaningful artistic discourse.

How is this research different?

There is a long history of dialogue concerning art and the sense of taste; as such, the question of what separates this research from that of artists and writers in the past is a fair one. A notable gap becomes apparent when examining the development of the idea of taste in art in that it has existed largely as a theoretical discussion with remarkably few examples to either prove or disprove relevant theory. Where examples do exist, there is very often a strong visual component to the artwork, where it should be argued that such works find their artistic merit through the visual sense rather than through the tasted component. An example of such a work would include the alleged colour themed menus of Elagabalus. In other cases, the artistic merit of the tasted element seems to be contrived, such as the Futurist multisensory meals of Marinetti (Marinetti F. , 1989, p. 77). Although such performances are sensual to their core, they tend to lack substance in their message, a sort of sensory tickling that excites but offers little more than reactionary response. Another category that food art tends to engage is what Carolyn Korsemeier refers to a "Stunt Cuisine" (Korsemeier, 1999, p. 126), where food is the medium of the art but is constructed for the consideration of sight. Examples of this include the architectural structures of Antoine Careme (Kelly, 2003), the visual

manipulations of Sandy Skoglund²⁴, or the *Flour Arrangements* (1967) of Bruce Nauman. In order for artistic compositions which utilise the sense of taste to be relevant in artistic dialogue they must contribute to the discourse in art in a meaningful way upon the strength of taste as the messenger of art.

While the historic discourse over the aesthetic capacity of taste in art has offered a rhetorical starting place for the medium the relative absence of applied examples indicates that tasted art is in its infancy. In order to achieve a meaningful discourse in regard to the suitability of taste as art we must first begin to generate examples; as such, the concept being communicated must be obvious, relevant and communicated in such a way so that the act of tasting is the dominant element. The research that this paper represents seeks to develop this starting place by applying a contemporary understanding of taste in art, the beginning of an exploration into taste's inherent technical and philosophical potential to perceive what our eyes, ears and skin cannot.

Significance/impact of this research

The intended purpose of this research is to demonstrate how the sense of taste can meaningfully contribute to the on-going discourse in art. The theory and practice produced throughout this research endeavours to underpin and facilitate the future development of taste in art and to open a door of possibilities for artists who seek to harness the perceptive powers of this often overlooked sense.

While participation in the arts through taste is the primary objective of this research, outputs will also have an associative effect on activities within the food and beverage industry. One such area is in the practice of the critical review of cuisine. To date, the level of critique in the restaurant industry has been low. Food critics tend not to be adequately trained to fulfil their mandate through focussed academic rigour, as is the case with visual art, music and literature. The result has been a breed of charismatic journalism which elevates subjective like/dislike verdicts to the false platform of academia but wields the opinion power to destroy careers and establishments with little recourse. This evangelistic mode of critique fails to serve the functions of what true criticism should achieve, that being to guide the practice of gastronomy into the future and to mediate between the forums of the chefs and the public (among other interested parties). The establishment of tenable theories for taste in art would facilitate deeper consideration and evaluation of cuisine and contribute to the elevation of food critic as journalist to that of scholar.

Finally, as the foods that feed the world become increasingly detached from nature this research offers a lens in which to understand and consider the food and flavours of the future. Molecular gastronomy, synthetic food and flavours, trigeminal sensations, pharming, GMO, cloning and nanotechnology are coming out of the laboratory and onto the plate; although science is able to explain the process it does not explore the significance of these foods. Art, in its prophetic way, is alone capable of embodying the eyes, ears, hands, mouth and spirit of the sum of humankind and perceiving what the individual cannot.

²⁴ Noteworthy works are *Spirituality in the Flesh* (1992), *Atomic Love* (1992), *Body Limits* (1992) and *The Cocktail Party* (1992)

“It is very important to mention that the artistic intelligence does not depend on the format; ... But under certain circumstances, cooking can also be considered as an art.” (Gifre, 2008)

Roger M. Buergel, Artistic Director for Documenta 12
(on the inclusion of Ferran Adria in the Documenta programme)

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