

TASTE AND OTHER SENSES: RECONSIDERING THE FOUNDATIONS OF AESTHETICS

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ABSTRACT

The sense of taste has served as a governing metaphor for aesthetic discernment for several centuries, and recent philosophical perspectives on this history have invited literal, gustatory taste into aesthetic relevance. This paper summarizes the disposition of taste in aesthetics by means of three stories, the most recent of which considers food in terms of aesthetics and its employment in works of art. I conclude with some reflections on the odd position that taste has achieved in the postmodern art world, and I make a case for the often unnoticed role that bodily senses have in the apprehension of art.

KEYWORDS

Taste, Sense, Experience, Food, Aesthetic, Art

There is a mild insult in English that is sometimes directed at a person of low cultural sensibilities: “Your taste is all in your mouth.” As an insult it is pretty tame, but the philosophical assumptions that give it wit run deep. First is the recognition that “taste” refers both to the mouth sense and to aesthetic preferences. Second is the implicit recognition of the old sense hierarchy that considers the bodily senses of taste, touch, and smell inferior to the distance senses of vision and hearing. It also plays upon the idea that the notion of good taste can take on a snobbish aspect. Thus this little insult captures aspects of three stories about taste that will shape my reflections on the ways that reference to this sense permeates aesthetics.

APPROACHES TO TASTE: THREE STORIES

The first and most familiar story concerns the foundation of modern aesthetics during the Eighteenth Century, the so-called “century of taste,” during which time taste provides not only a metaphor but the very conceptual framework for philosophical investigations of beauty.¹ I begin by reviewing this well-known account in some detail because it contains contestable points to reconsider later.

Literal or gustatory taste—by which I mean the mouth sense that requires smell and touch as well—seemed an apt model for

appreciative responses to beauty for several reasons. First, reference to a sense foregrounds the immediacy of aesthetic response. Francis Hutcheson, an influential predecessor for both Hume and Kant, observed that finding something beautiful, like registering pleasure and pain sensations, depends neither on choice nor on rational decision. “By the very frame of our nature the one is made the occasion of delight and the other of dissatisfaction.”² The “frame of our nature” indicates that just as human beings are normally equipped with all five senses, we are all capable of sensing beauty. Thus the metaphor of taste adopts a democratic address to people of all societies and times (a point of dispute that will come up shortly).

Secondly, taste is demonstrably trainable. Just as the ear can learn to recognize a tonic chord, so the tongue can learn to distinguish subtleties of flavor. This trainability means that taste can be cultivated, paving the way for normative standards and a distinction between good and bad taste. Of course, all of our senses are educable, though taste stands out for its presumptive ties to pleasure and displeasure. Eighteenth-century theories widely analyzed beauty in terms of pleasure, as Hutcheson’s remark indicates. It was (and still is) assumed that, in contrast with other senses, taste rarely operates without liking or disliking what is sampled. Therefore, as our gustatory sense is cultivated, our pleasures also develop; and by extension of the metaphor, so does our capacity to discern beauty.

Other aspects of literal tasting also lend themselves to aesthetic uses, such as the requirement of first-hand acquaintance. One can’t make a judgment about the beauty of an object without seeing or hearing it, just as one can’t decide if a soup is well-seasoned without sampling it. Taste of both sorts requires a kind of immersion in its object, to invoke another metaphor. The acquaintance principle is challenged in contemporary theory, but as far as I know it was taken for granted in the Eighteenth Century. To my mind it remains one of the most important marks of the aesthetic, and I shall return to it later.

I suspect another factor also fortified the use of the taste metaphor. The flavor properties of food and drink that we respond to were, and to a degree still remain, somewhat mysterious. Certainly when aesthetics was developing, little was known about the chemistry of flavor perception. This makes literal taste ideal for thinking about sensitivity to its elusive cause—that *je ne sais quoi*—the objective correlate of beauty that is so difficult to pin down.

Despite the enthusiasm with which gustatory taste was exploited, modern European theories largely leave literal taste behind,

stressing that the sense serves only as a metaphor for aesthetic sensibility. Gustatory taste seems too individual to conform to the normative standards sought for aesthetic judgments. Kant famously declares that liking for canary wine is an example of the agreeable, about which no standards need apply.³ Moreover, literal taste is tied to appetite, and the satisfaction of appetite is the wrong kind of pleasure, being sensuous, bodily, and “interested” rather than contemplative, “disinterested,” and aesthetic. These presumptions confirmed the venerable sense hierarchy of western philosophy, supporting the idea that only the distance senses of sight and hearing sustain aesthetic standing.⁴ In 1762, Henry Home, Lord Kames, extended that sentiment to include artistic limitations: “The fine arts are designed to give pleasure to the eye and ear, disregarding the inferior senses.”⁵

In sum: the first story about taste, which has dominated our historical understanding for three centuries, adopts the gustatory sense as a metaphor—but only a metaphor—for aesthetic sensibility, recognizes the normativity of aesthetic pleasures, and stresses the universal grounds for standards for taste, which ideally unite us all in common appreciation.

THE SECOND STORY: A CRITICAL VIEW

Story number two challenges this happy picture. According to this version, which gained currency in the latter part of the Twentieth Century, the very concept of taste is an imposition of elite cultural values and an exercise of social power, manifesting political anxieties peculiar to the modern period. With the rise of middle class wealth in modern Europe and the weakening of older class divisions that had served to stabilize social relations, the task of taming divergent sensibilities fell to taste. Developing the aesthetic preferences of each individual is a kind of socialization—making communities harmonious by corralling pleasures such that they converge. According to this analysis, philosophies of taste select an idealized image of a privileged, educated person (man, actually), who is held to represent the best of human nature and whose preferences should guide others.⁶ Tellers of the second story emphasize the times—and they are not infrequent—that theorists demean peoples from cultures not their own. Thus those who endorse the first story obscure the preferences of different nationalities, classes, genders; and they occlude the recognition of such differences by asserting as the norm the aesthetic refinement of a socially privileged group.

The sociological studies of Pierre Bourdieu support this second story. He maintains that both literal and aesthetic taste preferences are elements of the same forces, summed up in the term “habitus,” which includes social class, economic position, education, and other determinants that influence the ways we understand and experience the world. By his way of thinking, the gustatory and the aesthetic uses of taste are virtually inseparable: “The dual meaning of the word ‘taste’. . . [reminds] us that taste in the sense of the ‘faculty of immediately and intuitively judging aesthetic values’ is inseparable from taste in the sense of the capacity to discern the flavours of foods which implies a preference for some of them.”⁷ But those preferences divide rather than unite. Kant’s prescribed disinterested pleasure, for example, represents a contemplative, detached attitude possible only among people wealthy enough for leisure, ignoring those who adopt a “taste of necessity.”

Just as the first story is evident in my opening insult, aspects of the second story have also entered popular discourse. I recently received a gift of a wine glass etched with a quote attributed to cultural critic Susan Sontag: “Rules of taste enforce structures of power.” The insult and the inscription are amusing, but they also demonstrate that both of these philosophical positions have a certain currency outside of academia.⁸

Perhaps what the second story best illuminates is why philosophy has a history at all—a question that ought to be puzzling because it is the usual conceit of philosophers that they address matters of perennial concern and not just those that arise in specific historical circumstances. Yet clearly there are times when certain philosophical issues come into notice with particular urgency. In eighteenth-century Europe, questions of human subjectivity became especially pressing not only because of changes that societies were undergoing, but also because of the spread of empiricist perspectives that displaced objectivist theories with a conception of beauty—and values in general—as a type of pleasure rather than an independent quality belonging to certain objects. As Luc Ferry puts it, “With the concept of taste the beautiful is placed in relation to human subjectivity so intimate that it may even be defined by the pleasure it provides, by the *sensations* or sentiments it evokes in us.”⁹

Placing pleasure at the center of a theory of value creates formidable difficulties, the chief of which is to avoid the pitfalls of relativism. Hence the driving problem of early modern aesthetics: the establishment of a *standard* of taste. The most famous attempts remain those of Hume and Kant, both of whom posited ways to

identify beauty with aesthetic pleasure (though Hume did not have that term at his disposal) and at the same time to regulate its norms. These shifts in ideas about beauty renewed with vigor the ancient puzzle that Socrates posed to Euthyphro two millennia before: is something valuable because we take pleasure in it, or do we take pleasure in it because it is valuable? Even when it comes to positions wrapped in a social agenda—and the second story is doubtless correct to point that out—the Euthyphro question still commands attention.

A THIRD STORY: VINDICATING GUSTATORY TASTE

There is a third story now gaining ground in philosophy that offers a different assessment of the literal sense of taste. Whereas Bourdieu would *lower* the notion of aesthetic sensibility to the level of gustatory taste, this third story seeks to *elevate* gustatory taste and claim a place for it within the aesthetic. While modern theory took literal taste as its guide to illuminate the nature of the aesthetic, the third story does the reverse, considering the nature of the aesthetic to elucidate the operation of gustatory taste and to argue that this bodily sense should be granted aesthetic standing. While there are plenty of theorists who still hold out for the traditional distinction between aesthetic and nonaesthetic senses, there are others—myself among them—who maintain that the experiences of eating and drinking admit an aesthetic zone of their own.¹⁰

To understand why gustatory taste has gained philosophical interest in the Twenty-First Century, we need to note some theoretical shifts of our own era that have brought the physical and the mental closer together. For some time, the familiar distinction between mind and body has been challenged from a variety of directions, ranging from feminist critiques of traditional dualisms to the discoveries of neuroscience. These scientific shifts have been unevenly absorbed in aesthetics. As Emily Brady remarks, “It is worth noting that, although recent materialist theories of mind have all but defeated the mind/body split, this seems to have had little effect on aesthetic theory in terms of expanding its attention to the other senses.”¹¹ While change may be slow, it is nonetheless the case that many philosophers now question at least some of the values embedded in the traditional sense hierarchy.

An aspect of this theoretical shift that underwrites the inclusion of physical sensations as modes of aesthetic apprehension comes from emotion theory—a brief digression that will become relevant shortly. Many theories of emotion posit that emotions must be understood not only as mental events but also in terms of the physical

disturbances that mark them—changes in blood pressure, trembling, shortness of breath, and so forth.¹² It is now widely acknowledged that emotive responses to art, including their bodily aspects, are indispensable forms of understanding and appreciation.¹³ Weeping for Anna Karenina, gasping as Harry Lime flees through the sewers of Vienna, a pounding heart at horror movies—all are bodily effects that both manifest and enhance understanding of the artworks that provoke them. Recognizing these aspects of appreciation marks a dramatic contrast with the views of some mid-twentieth-century philosophers who scorned the arousal of emotion as a legitimate response to art.¹⁴ Challenging the clean distinction between the mental and the physical and recognizing the impact of somatic responses to art also paved the way for blurring the distinction between distal aesthetic and proximal nonaesthetic senses, for it legitimizes bodily sensation as an aesthetic response.

Exactly how does this point pertain to taste? There remain some thorny issues to resolve before taste is situated on firmly defensible ground. First, we need to determine what kind of philosophical standing taste should be accorded; second, what kinds of aesthetic properties the sense of taste registers; and third, we need to examine the artistic range that includes the gustatory sense and the bodily senses generally. These questions are entangled and hard to wrest apart, but they require separate address. I shall discuss them more or less in order.

To stake a claim for philosophical attention, gustatory taste must shed the commonplace presumption that it resists normative standards—ensconced in the maxim “There’s no disputing about taste.” Not only is this relativism presumed by the first story—as with Kant’s dismissive comment about canary wine and merely agreeable sensations—but it was given renewed vigor by the second story, which implies the absence of any salient objective qualities to which taste is sensitive, ceding the roots of aesthetic proclivities to social forces. In fact, however, taste warrants dispute for at least two reasons. First, the term “taste” can refer to the properties of objects (and as such be “objective”) as well as to sensations (“subjective” experiences).¹⁵ If there were no objective pole to tasting, there would be no possibility of developing discriminating taste, which entails that there is something out there to discriminate. Are these seasonings balanced? Is this pepper hot enough? Is this wine ready to drink? The possibility of cultivating expert taste is one dimension of the aesthetic potency of food and drink, as cooks throughout the ages have understood, and that perhaps is most recognized with wine.¹⁶

“There is no arguing about taste” means, at root, that there is no accounting for preferences. Supposedly, with food either you like or you do not like something, and that’s the end of it. However, there are reasons to loosen the presumptive tie between taste sensation and preference, that is, between recognizing flavor and liking it. Without distinguishing between perception and enjoyment, we cannot account for acquired taste, when we learn to appreciate a flavor previously disliked. As with the objects of vision and hearing, taste can distinguish between properties perceived and the pleasures or displeasures they may or may not arouse, making it not only a highly discerning faculty but also one capable of normatively robust judgments of quality. As Barry C. Smith notes, “while liking may be a part of, or an accompaniment to, my experience of tasting, it is not part of a food or liquid’s taste. Likes and dislikes may vary between individuals but the tastes we like or dislike need not.”¹⁷ Dangerous relativism is forestalled by recognizing that taste registers properties of objects “out there in the world.”

TASTE AND AESTHETIC COMPLEXITY

What about the aesthetic range of gustation? This question is rather hard to separate from claims about the artistry of the kitchen. Some proponents of the third story about taste often go on to defend cuisine or wine-making as creative art forms. Most have in mind *haute cuisine*, meals that demand attention and discernment far beyond the satisfaction of appetite. And the increasing prominence of restaurants with spectacularly inventive chefs corroborates claims that artistic genius operates in the kitchen as well as at the keyboard. The always multi-sensory aspects of eating are exploited to the hilt at many of these venues, where presentation is as important as flavor. Perhaps, therefore, we can say that the success of fine cooking is recognized in delicious food just as the success of fine art is measured by beautiful works. Pursuing that parallel, the appreciative palate can detect a spectrum of subtleties, just as the art expert can judge excellence in music or poetry. The comparison is apt to some degree, but a defense of taste that solely relies on cuisine as an art form quickly reaches limits. Those limits are entailed by the chief criterion for excellence in dining: namely, that the meal taste good, for note that discernment here is largely a matter of savoring flavors. This may seem an odd critique, but the fact is that aiming at pleasure truncates the expressive possibilities of any artistic endeavor; moreover, it leaves apologists open to the charge that objects of taste do not achieve the same cognitive standing as objects of vision or hearing, no matter how complicated or

delicious they may be. The divide between distal and proximal senses would persist on the grounds that only the former are capable of delivering meaning of any depth or complexity. This concern breaks down into two issues: the scope of meaning that objects of taste can provide, and whether there are limits to the ways that tastes can be deployed to convey those meanings.

It may seem as if gustatory taste is a sense that delivers pleasure and affords conviviality, but is relatively free of any particular cognitive significance. This far from the case, for taste is as cognitively complex in its own way as are the other senses. Meaning is evident in what we eat and drink, for foods are chosen for their significance depending on occasion. This is the case with ordinary daily fare, where a cup of tea offered to a guest signals hospitality or warm soup on a cold day not only produces but also signifies comfort. Even routine eating is full of meaning, although when those meanings become absorbed into habit they rarely come into notice. The import of certain foods is even more obviously the case with the fare served at special events: the celebration of a wedding cake, the honor marked by raising a glass of champagne, ritual food and drink that mark religious traditions and holidays. Moreover, there are many foods whose histories constitute important narratives that can be summoned to mind with their flavors.¹⁸

This brief on behalf of taste has its critics, however. The strongest argument against the cognitive richness of the bodily senses comes from Roger Scruton, who observes that meanings such as comfort, reverence, home, and so forth are largely dependent upon learned associations, and the same could be said for their histories. As such, it is the context within which tastes are deployed that provides meaning, not the tastes by themselves. He draws attention to the difference between what we *experience in* a perceived object (of taste, of sight), as opposed to what the experience merely *reminds* us of. In this respect, a meal, no matter how fine the occasion, contrasts with an artwork such as a painting. Naturally, paintings can inspire associations, but they also present whole scenes in themselves regardless of the contexts in which they are placed. Scruton draws a distinction “between those objects of sensory enjoyment which acquire meaning only by association of ideas, and the objects of sight and hearing, whose meaning can be directly seen and heard.”¹⁹ While *seeing-in* characterizes the perception of pictures, there is no such thing as *tasting-in*.²⁰ To illustrate: “A prophet in a cave is not something that you can taste in a wine as you can see St. Jerome in Titian’s painting.”²¹ I think that Scruton is largely right, although his case is sounder with vision than with the other

distance sense, hearing. While it is true that one can hear the summer storm in Vivaldi's *Four Quartets*, could one really do so without the program notes? Music, while perhaps not as dependent upon association as taste, still requires a good deal of surrounding context for a hearing-in phenomenon to manifest.

Nevertheless, we must grant that, by and large, we rarely taste a subject in a flavor in the same way that we see a village scene or a depicted action in a painting. (Sometimes in fact we can, but not as a rule.)²² But this need not entail that taste does not function cognitively, both when we eat and in the apprehension of art, only that its function is of a different sort than vision's—which is no surprise; the senses operate differently from one another. Here again we can take a cue from emotion theory: understanding the triggering object of an emotion is, at the very least, intensified by the bodily disturbances it prompts. Emotions, after all, are often *felt* as bodily sensations. I venture to say that the bodily senses are indirectly but strongly aroused with much art, including art that appears at first only to appeal to sight. The following examples engage not only vision, imagination, and cultural familiarity, but also touch, taste, and affective visceral response.

Literature, painting, drama, film are art forms with narrative content that often depict scenes of eating and drinking. Audiences do not literally eat and drink alongside characters, but imaginative participation in the lust or enjoyment of eating is commonly part of the reception of scenes from films such as *Rampopo* or *Tom Jones*. The sceptic will scoff that this is not taste at all but vicarious fantasy, but I think what this means is that we are not “tasting-in” in Scruton's sense but intensifying and amplifying dimensions of our appreciation by means of sensory imagination, which leads us to participate in slurps and swallows almost as though we could taste the foods on screen ourselves.²³ The intensifying aspects of visceral responses are even more evident when the object being eaten is not delicious but horrible.

Rubens' painting of *Saturn Devouring his Son* (1636) depicts a huge man with bulging eyes, his teeth sunk into the skin of the infant he holds in his arm. Both taste and touch are imaginatively summoned by those teeth plunged into the baby's flesh, as one apprehends the ripping flesh and the terror of the child by experiencing a pang of visceral horror, part disgust, part fascination. Or to choose an example from drama: In Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, when Queen Tamora learns that she has just eaten the flesh of her sons, the reader is likely to experience a small gag of disgust. Horror invades the very mouth, intensifying the imagined moment with a

sympathetic taste-of the abominable. Without that bodily engagement, synaesthetic, subtle, or even subliminal though it may be, one's grasp of these works would be diminished. It seems that the bodily senses are at work covertly even here.²⁴ I do not intend to equalize the cognitive yield of the senses, so to speak, but rather to point out that they are engaged by art in different ways. The physical response—the sensation prompted by imagination—furnishes intense immediacy by enlisting one's very body. It is this phenomenon that sustains the importance of acquaintance as a descriptor of aesthetic response. One grasps not only that it is, but also how it is—what it is like. This sort of thing is more detectable in works that disgust than in those that delight or soothe, probably because the disturbance of negative emotions is simply stronger than the pleasant ones, sad to say, an observation that takes us back to the limits of taste pleasure.

Artists themselves will be the first to point out that art has never been constrained by the pursuit of pleasurable experiences. Artworks are filled with difficult content, including pain, sorrow, suffering, and cruelty—all reminders of the tragedies that fortune can dispense. The harrowing and the horrid are as aesthetically powerful as the beautiful, but the palate does not tolerate equivalent values. Creative cooks may tease the senses and surprise the diner, as with unexpected flavor combinations or dishes that do not taste the way the eye anticipates. But unlike the objects of the eye and the ear, objects of taste, smell, and touch can sicken and kill.²⁵ For this reason, the gauges of success for cuisine (and for scents as well) have remained more tied to pleasure than are other art forms.²⁶ If we focus only on the arts unique to them—cuisine, wine, perfumery—the full aesthetic power of the bodily senses is apt to be overlooked. For fully exploiting the significance of the objects of taste takes us beyond the dinner table.

The very properties of food that constrain its expressive use in cuisine at the same time provide a wealth of meaning in art. Many artists now incorporate foods into their performances and installations. Sometimes that food is meant to be consumed by visitors, manifesting hospitality and greeting. (The works of Rirkrit Tiravanija or Felix Gonzales-Torres are well-known examples.)²⁷ Often, however, food is employed to convey something darker. The things we eat and drink are transient; they spoil, mold, and rot, and in the end they disgust. Therefore, food lends itself to a sort of natural symbolism that signals corporeality in its least noble forms. Think of Jana Sterbak's *Flesh Dress* of 1987 that clad a model in gradually rotting meat (not to mention Lady Gaga's coincidentally similar garment of 2010). Many of Damien Hirst's vitrines present

items that might once have landed on a dinner table but are now food for maggots. Artists who make such use of foods exploit the meanings implicit in decay and putrefaction, in counterpoint to the emphasis on savoring that is invoked in the defense of the artistic status of cuisine. Indeed, they may deliberately arouse affective responses that are the reverse of the satisfaction of appetite, challenging sensibilities and arousing disgust.²⁸ And this point makes us realize that taste has now entered some very strange territory.

A PARADOX OF TASTE

Ironically, the historical circumstances that have recently invited the bodily senses into philosophical company include changes within the artworld that reject the very traditions of aesthetics that gave rise to the taste metaphor itself. This immensely complicates the assessment of the concept of taste in its present-day aesthetic modes. Dominant in the artworld today is a wholesale *anti*-aesthetic that contests older concepts of art, aesthetic quality, and the very idea of “good taste.” Inclusion of edible substances in art often represents not an embrace of the aesthetic value of the sense of taste but rather a rejection of the values that were first elaborated with the metaphor. This refusal of the very notion of aesthetic value represents a shift even more radical than the dissolution of the distinction between aesthetic and nonaesthetic senses. A recent writer on the subject, Luca Vercelloni, suggests that art has so departed from aesthetic concerns that taste no longer fits with that agenda:

Once alienated from aesthetics, the art of the twentieth century was no longer the object of collective devotion, and instead became an initiation rite that was to discriminate against the tastes of the masses, to challenge people’s ability to comprehend, and to mock their primitive sensibilities.²⁹

I would supplement this observation with what seems to me to be a revealing anecdote: At a conference not too long ago, I met a distinguished chef and cookbook author who had dined at Ferran Adrià’s famous *elBulli* restaurant (birthplace of so-called molecular gastronomy). To his disappointment, he did not enjoy his dinner. Only half joking, he quipped: “Well, it wasn’t very good as food, so I figured it must be art.”

The anti-art, anti-aesthetic movement is not new, but its effects on what we can make of the revised concept of taste are a bit hard to untangle. Certainly, the rejection of traditional aesthetic values in the contemporary artworld amplifies the complications of the

third story about taste. In fact, we confront a paradox. In contesting traditional values by means of exploiting the expressive and representational range of foodstuffs, artists often rely on the very sense hierarchy that is under challenge by those who would argue on behalf of taste as an aesthetic sense. That is, an artist uses food in art because to do so violates the standard sense hierarchy, whereas defenders of the third story maintain on fairly traditional grounds that taste operates in a truly aesthetic way. The former depends on retention of that hierarchy, the latter seeks to dissolve it. So their challenges to theoretical tradition pull in opposite directions. Thus when food enters the artworld displaying its full expressive capacity, including the meanings conveyed by decay and rot, the traditions of aesthetics are all but abandoned, rendering unclear what kind of standing is achieved for the sense of taste and its objects.

The unsettled position of literal taste within the current artworld throws into stark relief the whole question of what the label “aesthetic” now amounts to. The term has accrued a variety of meanings, some quite vague, but in its formative years theorists were at great pains to provide a fairly crisp definition, which they did by contrasting aesthetic pleasure with sense pleasure. At present, many of their early stipulations have receded. So what is left of the original position that the metaphor of taste captures? I conclude by revisiting the first story, assessing again the terms of its dominant metaphor.

The first story compares the literal sense of taste and aesthetic taste in terms of discriminative capacity and judgment by means of pleasure. Literal taste has discriminative facility quite like the capacities of vision and hearing, and as far as fine discernment is concerned, taste for both food and art are on a par. If we emphasize the meanings that the senses register, then a wider field of apprehension and appreciation opens. Although aesthetic acquaintance tends to be underrated in contemporary theory, reflecting on the bodily senses confirms its importance by pointing out ways in which physical response intensifies appreciation. When we touch we are in physical contact with something. What we smell is near enough that its molecules enter our nasal passages. The objects of taste are literally inside one; our very bodies are palpably changed by eating and drinking, as well as by deprivation and excess. The bodily senses by their nature entail experiences of particular immediacy and intimacy. Just such qualities render the metaphor of taste highly illuminating and appropriate to describe the allure of artworks: the ability of a phrase, a poem, an image, a passage of music, to acquaint us with some emotion, scene, even some truth, in a direct and deeply felt way.

Emphasizing acquaintance confirms aspects of the early metaphor so exploited at the advent of modern aesthetics, tying contemporary theory nicely to its roots. At its very inception, “aesthetic” introduced a term to describe a zone of knowledge, not general conceptual understanding but felt insight into the distinctive qualities and meaning of a particular event or object, as for example when vivified in poetic expression. Although the inventor of the modern term, Baumgarten, became less influential than those who followed him, his notion of sense or emotive cognition still describes an important aspect of the aesthetic.³⁰ This kind of engagement has little to do with sensuous pleasure; it has much more to do with immediate affective understanding, with a specific mode of first-hand knowing made vivid by sensation and feeling. (Perhaps I am overly wary in wanting to distinguish pleasure from insight. Agamben, for example, refers to taste as “pleasure that knows and knowledge that enjoys.”³¹ Nonetheless, I would avoid placing pleasure at the center of the concept because of its potential to mislead.)

The fine arts were traditionally understood to appeal to the eye and the ear, whose fields of perception seem to offer complexity and meaning beyond bodily satisfaction. I have presented some speculative thoughts about ways in which the bodily senses operate even when we do not think they do, including with standard, old-fashioned works of art that appear at first only to engage eye or ear. Here is where considering the aesthetic capacities of the senses converges with insights from emotion theory. Emotions often involve quite noticeable sensations, evident for example in the queasy stomach characteristic of disgust or the sweaty palms of fear. A flush of anger or embarrassment is part of recognizing outrage or clumsiness, a constricted throat is a constituent of grief, smiles part of amusement. The physical sensations of emotive disturbance are components of one’s understanding of an object or event. That thesis pertains to the arousal of emotions in general, and it applies with somewhat greater complexity to the ways that affective arousal functions with works of art. Does taste align with such bodily engagements with artworks—that is, with artworks that do not directly make use of foodstuffs? I believe that a case can be made that the imaginative arousal of eating sensations often contributes to our whole experience of a work, and that activation of the bodily senses in general can make aesthetic encounters vivid, immediate, and intimate. Moreover, we can recognize their power without utterly breaking down the hierarchy of the senses, which after all, is part of our inherited cultural framework and underwrites some of the meanings that food lends to the arts as well as to our daily lives.

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- 2 Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), ed. Peter Kivy (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 24.
- 3 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790), trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 55.
- 4 Vision and hearing are ranked higher for their cognitive capacities as well, and hence they are often labeled the "intellectual senses."
- 5 Henry Home, Lord Kames, *The Elements of Criticism* (1762/1970) Vol. I. (Hildesheim, NY: Georg Olms Verlag), 6-7.
- 6 E.g. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 23-25. Also essays in Paul Mattick, ed., *Eighteenth Century Aesthetics and the Reconstruction of Art* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993). For discussion of the gender implications of taste, see section I, "Gender and Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory," in *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*, ed. Peggy Zeglin Brand and Carolyn Korsmeyer (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).
- 7 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge USA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 1.
- 8 The second story can be found in the current artworld as well. One of Jenny Holzer's famous Truisms reads: *Money Creates Taste*. <http://www.jennyholzer.com/Projections/site/Providence2006/>. 23.8.2917.
- 9 Luc Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus: The Invention of Taste in the Democratic Age*, trans. Robert de Loazia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 19.
- 10 The distinction is maintained by Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson, *Functional Beauty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Advocates for aesthetic dimensions for taste include Elizabeth Telfer, *Food for Thought: Philosophy and Food* (London: Routledge, 1996); Carolyn Korsmeyer *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Nicola Perullo, *Taste as Experience: The Philosophy and Aesthetics of Food*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Kevin Sweeney, *The Aesthetics of Food: The Philosophical Debate about What We Eat and Drink* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017).
- 11 Emily Brady, "Smells, Tastes, and Everyday Aesthetics," in D. Kaplan, Ed., *The Philosophy of Food*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 73.
- 12 E.g. Jesse Prinz's theory of embodied appraisal in *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Prinz and many others have revived the old James-Lange perspective, which posits that physical reactions are indispensable for there to be emotions at all.
- 13 E.g. Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper Than Reason: Emotion and its role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- 14 O.K. Bouwsma, "The Expression Theory of Art," in *Aesthetics and Language*, ed. William Kennick (Oxford: Blackwell, 1954), 73-99; John Hospers, "The Concept of Artistic Expression," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1954-55), 313-44; Alan Tormey, *The Concept of Expression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).
- 15 Michael Shaffer, "Taste, Gastronomic Expertise, and Objectivity," in *Philosophy and Food: Eat, Drink, and Be Merry*, ed. Fritz Allhoff and Dave Monroe (Blackwell Publishing, Malden MA), 73-87. Barry C. Smith, "The Objectivity of Tastes and Tasting," in *Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine*, ed. Barry C. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 41-77.
- 16 Fritz Allhoff and Dave Monroe, Eds., *Philosophy and Food: Eat, Drink, and Be Merry*. (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2008), Barry C. Smith, Ed., *Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine* (Oxford: Signal Books, 2007). Cain Todd, *The Philosophy of Wine: A Case of Truth, Beauty and Intoxication* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).
- 17 Barry C. Smith, "Tasting and Liking: Multisensory Flavor Perception and Hedonic Evaluation," in *The Taste Culture Reader* 2nd edition, ed. Carolyn Korsmeyer (Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2017), 251. For an argument against this position, see Cain Todd, "Tasting in Time," *The Monist*, forthcoming.
- 18 Just one example is the Portuguese sausage called *alheira*. See Theodora Sutcliffe, "Portugal's Sneaky Sausage that Saved Jews," BBC Travel at <http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20170911-portugals-sneaky-sausage-that-saved-jews>. 14.9.2017.
- 19 Roger Scruton, *I Drink Therefore I Am: A Philosopher's Guide to Wine*, (London: Continuum, 2010), 122.
- 20 This is an allusion to Richard Wollheim's thesis about seeing-as and seeing-in. See *Art and its Objects*, 2nd edition (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
- 21 Scruton, 125.
- 22 A case of tasting-in is provided by the English Fairy tale "Cap-'o-Rushes," in which a father tastes in a dish of saltless meat the lost love of his daughter. See Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 133-134.
- 23 Although he is referring to the fact that the anticipation of flavor affects reception, a comment by Jean-François Revel is suggestive here: "Gastronomical imagination, in fact, precedes experience itself, accompanies it, and in part substitutes for it." *Culture and Cuisine: A Journey through the History of Food*, trans. Helen R. Lane (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), 5.
- 24 Scientific studies support the claim that the arousal of one sense can activate others, as for instance when a visual image stimulates apprehension of taste or smell. See e.g. Charles Spence, "Crossmodal Convergences," *Attention, Perception, and Psychophysics* 73 (2011): 971-95. In "Film and the Senses" (presentation to the American Society for Aesthetics November 16, 2017) Cynthia Freeland advances this point, pointing also to the work of Luis Roche Antunes, *The Multisensory Film Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

- 25 A reviewer for this journal rightly pointed out that microwave acoustic attacks below the threshold of hearing can also cause serious damage.
- 26 However, see Larry Shiner, "Art Scents: Perfume, Design and Olfactory Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 55:3 (2015), 375-92.
- 27 *Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art*, Stephanie Smith, ed. (Chicago: Smart Museum of Art, 2013).
- 28 Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust: The Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 29 Luca Vercelloni, *The Invention of Taste: A Cultural Account of Desire, Delight and Disgust in Fashion, Food and Art*. Trans. Kate Singleton (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 117.
- 30 "The richness of aesthetic objects arises precisely from the way in which they suggest an inexhaustible wealth of information and ideas that cannot be reduced to any simple concept." Paul Guyer, "Pleasure and Knowledge in Schopenhauer's Aesthetics," in *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 269.
- 31 Giorgio Agamben, *Gusto*, quoted in Perullo, 12, 65, 126.