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The Taste of Truth

A Mediological Approach to Eating

ENGLISH

ABSTRACT 

The article aims at developing a theoretical framework for analysing the cultural significance of taste. Instead of reviewing the relevance of taste and of eating for culture – cooking, eating rituals – the paper focuses on the importance of taste as a cultural metaphor. The paper proposes a mediological approach to the domain of taste, and identifies three different dimensions: a physiology, an aesthetic and a symbology of taste. In this analysis, the paper argues that Christian culture is a very rich source of taste-based cultural metaphors, and that taste does play a major role in the way Christianity has developed its own understanding of knowledge, ethics and human life in general.

DEUTSCH

Der Geschmack der Wahrheit. Eine mediologische Annäherung an das Essen
In diesem Beitrag soll ein theoretischer Rahmen für die Analyse der kulturellen Bedeutung des Geschmacks entwickelt werden. Somit wird nicht die Relevanz des Geschmacks und des Essens für die Kultur – Kochen, Essensrituale – untersucht, sondern es wird auf die Bedeutung des Geschmacks als kulturelle Metapher fokussiert. Anhand eines mediologischen Ansatzes werden drei verschiedene Dimensionen des Geschmacks identifiziert: eine Physiologie, eine Ästhetik und eine Symbologie des Geschmacks. In dieser Analyse wird argumentiert, dass die christliche Kultur eine sehr reiche Quelle geschmacksbasierter kultureller Metaphern ist und dass der Geschmack eine wesentliche Rolle darin spielt, wie das Christentum ein eigenes Verständnis von Wissen, Ethik und menschlichem Leben im Allgemeinen entwickelt hat.

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| KEY WORDS

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1 Introduction

The relationship between the sense of taste and culture can be interpreted in two different ways: on the one hand, of course, it can indicate that eating is a very important part of every culture. The cultural significance of eating and of taste has been stressed by cultural anthropology and other social sciences since their beginning. The many different ways to respond to the human need for food – and the even more human desire for taste – can be dissected, studied, compared and analysed, as they have been for many years.

On the other hand, this kind of relationship between eating and culture can be reversed: instead of understanding eating as a part of every culture, it is possible to understand culture – and human experience in general – through the metaphor of eating and of tasting. From this standpoint, the significance of the sense of taste becomes even more radical and encompassing: instead of analysing taste as a part of culture, we analyse culture as an inherently gustative act.

**Christian truth is not something to simply contemplate:
it must be tasted.**

While this discourse can seem abstract, the Christian tradition offers us an unprecedented model of “taste-based” understanding of the human experience. According to this tradition, the history of man starts with a gastronomic choice (the tasting of the forbidden fruit). The Catholic relationship to truth, before being visual or acoustic, is based on the sense of taste: we listen to the Word of God, we see His work, but most importantly we eat His flesh and blood, becoming one with the truth of incarnation.

The Christian tradition is an incredibly rich reserve of gustative metaphors for knowledge, truth, salvation and religious experience in general. Christian truth is not something to simply contemplate: it must be tasted; one shall become one with it.

A very interesting example of this cultural mind-set is the legend of the *Lactation of St. Bernard*. According to this tale, while he was praying in the Church of Saint-Vorles de Châtillon sur Seine, ca. 200 kilometres away from Paris, St. Bernard was blessed with a miracle: the image of the Virgin he was praying to became alive, and a fountain of milk gushed from her bosom directly into his mouth (cf. Koering 2021, 147–155; see Fig. 1). The importance of this tale is that it represents very clearly the Christian

approach to truth and salvation: in the Christian imaginary of the human-divine relation, taste plays an essential role.

In this paper I would like to provide a minimal theoretical framework in order to analyse the relevance of taste in the history of Western culture. In particular, I will propose to analyse the question of taste from the point of view of media theory, understanding taste as a medium, and many cultural expressions as a metaphoric extension of this natural medium. In this way, it will be possible to show why and how the question of taste goes well beyond the question of eating.

I will proceed as follows: in the first part of the paper I will provide a brief methodological introduction, where I try to show why we need a mediological approach to taste. After that, I will analyse taste under three different aspects: physiology, aesthetics and symbology. The core aim of this operation is to offer the most complete possible answer to the question concerning the role of taste in the whole of human experience.



Fig. 1: Alonso Cano, *Lactation of St. Bernard* (1650)
Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado

1.1 Methodological prolegomena: why a “mediology” of taste?

Before starting my analysis, I would like to offer a brief sketch of what I mean with the term “mediology”. This word has been used by French intellectual Régis Debray (1991) in order to designate a “new” discipline, namely the study of the «means of symbolic transmission and circulation» (Debray 1991, 15). In this article, however, I will use the term “mediology” to indicate the study of media in its general sense. The domain of mediology, in this sense, is still quite fragmented and lacks methodological unity: we speak of media theory, media studies, *Medienwissenschaften*, media philosophy; at the same time, the study of media is often covered by other disciplines such as semiotics, ICT studies, science and technology studies, philosophy, anthropology (cf. Weber 2003). Different names often correspond to very different approaches, along with different notions of what a “medium” is.

For the sake of this article, I will start from Marshall McLuhan’s intuition that (technological) media are extensions of our own body, and specifically of our sense organs (cf. McLuhan 1994, 45). According to this view, all forms of technologies are *artificial* extensions of those *natural* media that are our senses. In this formulation, the word “extension” must be understood in two different ways: first of all, it is a *literal* extension. McLuhan means no metaphor, since he explicitly refers to the physical extension and implementation of our material bodies. In a second sense, however, artificial mediation does “extend” our senses in a different, non-physical way: it extends the influence of sense organs to other domains of awareness. In other words, artificial media have a “*metaphorical*” function: they do not simply extend our perception in space, but they translate the role of perception to other modalities of expression and data elaboration (the so-called *superior faculties*, imagination and rational thought).

All levels of human awareness and expression are rooted in our sensuous experience through the mediation of artificial media.

In this case, the use of the term “metaphor” does not simply refer to the – horizontal – skill of «understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in term of one other» (Lakoff/Johnson 1980, 5). At the core of McLuhan’s media theory lies a much more radical hypothesis: all levels of human awareness and expression, even rationality and abstract thought, are rooted in our sensuous experience through the mediation of artificial media.

In this way, a “mediology” of taste is the study of how that particular natural medium – our sense of taste – is able to shape human experience in general, and therefore what aspects of our cultural and technological experience are rooted in our sense of taste.

1.2 What is a “medium”?

Based on this approach, another problem arises: what do we mean with the term “medium”, be it natural or artificial? In other words: what is mediation? For the sake of the paper, I will offer a brief clarification of my use of this notion.

As we have already seen, Debray’s understanding of mediation tends to identify it with transmission (cf. Debray 1991). While Debray’s contribution is essential for many reasons – not last for his deep understanding of the significance of Christian culture in the history of media – I will not follow this identification. Other scholars have provided a very complex notion of “transmission” (cf. Krämer 2015), but I still think that the notion of mediation can be differentiated from the notion of transmission, as well as from two other notions: relation and transformation. By analysing the difference between the concept of mediation and these other concepts, I will be able to propose at least a “negative” definition of what I mean with this term.

A dynamic, asymmetrical and heteronomous function

First of all, mediation is not a relation because relations¹ are static, and mediation is dynamic. In other terms, mediation is not a *fact*, but rather an *act*; it is not a *property*, but a *function*.

Secondly, mediation is not a transmission because, while it can surely “alter” the content of its object in some way, transmission leaves the ontological status of the object unaltered. On the contrary, mediation is always a process that modifies the status of the object. I will attempt to clarify this position with an example: if I take a picture of a letter, and send it to a friend, the message of the letter is transmitted (it is a message before and after the transmission); however, the letter itself is mediated: its way of being is radically altered, since after the mediation process it exists in the form of an image. A consequence of this feature of mediation is that, differently from transmission, it is *asymmetrical* and *irreversible*: I can send back a message, but I cannot “mediate back” an object.

¹ Of course, here I am using a very specific notion of relation. I mostly refer to Aristotle’s idea of relation (*pros ti*) as a category, namely as a property of beings (Cat. VII, 6a).

Finally, mediation is not simply transformation, because transformation can be an autonomous process. In other words, transformation is still possible in a completely monistic ontology. On the contrary, mediation structurally requires *heteronomy*, namely the tension between what is mediated and “something else”, the medium itself (cf. Krämer 2015, 165ff.).

In this way, it is possible to describe mediation as a dynamic, asymmetrical and heteronomous function. Now, in the case of the senses it is possible to distinguish three different forms of mediation:

- *Physiological mediation.* At this level, the object is mediated into the sensible through physiological (eminently material) processes: the object is now light, vibration, pressure. The physiological level is where our sensible disposition is analysed.
- *Aesthetic mediation.* At this level, the sensible is mediated by the sense organ. The sensible becomes sensation, sense data (colour, brightness, pitch, volume, texture, smell etc.).
- *Symbolic mediation.* Finally, the forms of our sensibility can be extended beyond the physical dimension, and they can become active on other levels of awareness: imagination, language, abstract thought. In this case, sensibility itself is mediated into a symbolic form (cf. Cassirer 1980, 73–85).

It is important to clarify that, of course, these three aspects cannot be conceived as separated; they can be distinguished only for the sake of the analysis. This brief sketch should be enough to clarify the kind of analysis I will offer in the three following sections. Each section, in fact, will focus on one of these dimensions of taste.

2 Physiology of Taste

2.1 *Minimal life*

The first and most peculiar feature of taste is its structural connection with nutrition, namely with the simplest and most fundamental faculty of living beings in general. More radically, one could say that taste is the expression of the nutritive function in the life of humans.

In a way, this means that among the senses, taste is the only truly unavoidable one. We can live, in principle, without looking, smelling or listening –

with touching, the situation is far more complex – but there is no life without taste. This unavoidability has been well remarked in Western culture. On the one hand, the peculiarity of taste is that it is the only sense that is at the same time a capital sin: no other sin is so strongly connected – almost identified – with one of the five senses. On the other hand, however, the sinful nature of tasting is highly problematic, because it is necessary.

**In the case of taste there is no external medium:
the body itself is the medium for the sensation.**

Thomas Aquinas underlines this ambiguity of taste in his discussion of gluttony (Thomas 2003, 405). Quoting Saint Gregory the Great, he remarks how «no one can avoid gluttony», because «in eating, pleasure is mixed with need», and «no one sins in regarding what one cannot avoid». For this reason, Thomas will establish a merely quantitative criterion in order to identify the sinful nature of taste: gluttony is not defined by pleasure, but rather by the excess of pleasure over need.

From a physiological standpoint taste appears as the most “immediate”, the “lowest” of the senses. However, the history of philosophy gives us another reason to think so: according to Aristotle, in fact, «an object of taste is something tangible» (Aristotle 2016, 43). The strong connection between taste and touch helps us identify the sense of taste as most immediate. In fact, unlike vision or hearing, taste requires a direct contact with the object. In the case of taste there is no external medium: the body itself is the medium for the sensation.

Let us go back to Gregory’s quote: in the case of taste, necessity and pleasure cannot be separated. As we will see, the reference to mixture is a frequent element in the analysis of taste. However, at this stage of the analysis it is possible to highlight how taste is also the foundation of the structural, physiological connection between life and pleasure.

An old prejudice pushes us to think nutrition as an “inferior” function, as opposed to “superior” functions such as desire or rationality. However, this point of view can be reversed: Aristotle’s distinction between vegetative, desiderative and rational soul could be used to emphasise how fundamental nutrition is (cf. Coccia 2018): there is no life without nourishment. In the case of human beings, being alive means tasting.

2.2 Beyond objectuality

In his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel famously remarks how the proper medium for the appreciation of the fine arts are sight and hearing, the two «theoretical senses» (Hegel 1988, 38). While sight and hearing require a distance from the object, taste is immediately sensuous. I would like to point out the profoundly tautological character of Hegel’s remark. Sight is the most “theoretical” of the senses precisely because we are used to a visiocentric understanding of thought itself (even the term “theoretical” comes from the Greek *theaomai*, “to watch”). If we start from this implicit understanding of the nature of rationality, Hegel’s remark is not only true, but circular. The proper question to be asked, therefore, is the following: what is it like to understand rationality and thought starting from the sense of taste, rather than from vision?

There is no taste without mixture of subject and object.

Before answering this question – something which I will do in the section dedicated to taste as a symbolic form – let us analyse the physiological features of taste as such. First of all, the most peculiar and unique feature of taste is that it *consummates* its object. In the process of tasting the object is literally transformed into the subject. Secondly, already Aristotle highlights (cf. 2016, 43) how the physiology of taste requires the mixture of object and moisture. In other words, there is no taste without mixture of subject and object.

These two aspects tell us that, unlike vision, the physiology of taste – and subsequently its aesthetics – is structurally based on the overcoming of the separation of subject and object.

2.3 A Metaphysics of Nutrition

This intuition leads us to a remarkable discovery: we live in a world made up of individual objects only if we interpret the world starting from vision. Taste, however, is the clear negation of this standpoint: the ontology of taste refuses any clear separation between living things, or between living and non-living things. As Emanuele Coccia points out, «nutrition is the evidence of the impossibility to consider the form that informs each living being – in its individual and specific identity – as something substantial,

autonomous and especially essential» (Coccia 2020, 123). The ontology of taste is completely different from the ontology of vision: it does not recognise steady boundaries; it has no place for individuality as such.

If we follow the structure of taste, the ancient truth of Anaxagoras becomes utterly evident: mixture is the basic principle of all there is, and life itself can be understood as a steady and unending passing-through of forms and identities. Based on taste, the difference between subject and object is continuously overcome. Here I have only highlighted the physiological roots of this overcoming, but it will express itself much more radically on the aesthetic and symbolic level.

3 Aesthetics of Taste

After having analysed taste from the physiological standpoint, I will focus on taste as a proper sense, namely as a perceptual experience. It is this experience that will be extended and metaphorically translated to another dimension, turning taste into a proper symbolic form.

3.1 *Alimentation and gourmandise*

I have remarked that taste is the most necessary and inevitable of the senses. However, unlike plants – and animals, in a certain way – the peculiarity of the human experience of taste is that we are able to distinguish alimentation from *gourmandise*. I use this French word because, unlike the English “gluttony”, while referring to a capital sin, “*gourmandise*” also refers to a much wider and nobler feature of human experience. Being *gourmand* does not necessarily mean being culpable of gluttony. And in a way, *gourmandise* does express a peculiar trait of humanity: the human being is the only living being that can authentically be *gourmand*.

The Italian philosopher Umberto Galimberti points out that, among the senses, taste is the most prone to excess because it is the most primitive and animalistic of our senses. When we taste, when we eat, we are like animals (cf. Galimberti 2003, 49). I would like to reverse this statement: taste is precisely the aspect of human experience that distinguishes us in the clearest way from animals. Taste is what defines the human being, its capability to be *gourmand* is what differentiates it from other life forms.

What is *gourmandise*? In his groundbreaking book *Physiology of taste* (1825), Anthelme Brillat-Savarin defines it as «a passionate, reasoned and habitual

preference for the objects that please the taste» (Brillat-Savarin 2009, 141). In other words: *gourmandise* is the ability to consider the object of taste independently from the object of nutrition. The importance of this ability cannot be overstated, since it plays a pivotal role in the history of human self-consciousness.

While eating has a fundamental symbolic importance in many cultures (see for instance Viveiros de Castro 2014), a peculiar aspect of Christian culture is that it strongly emphasised the importance of *gourmandise*. The very beginning of human culture, the original sin, is nothing but an act of *gourmandise*: by choosing the forbidden fruit, Eve chooses taste over obedience, at the same time establishing a long-lasting link between knowledge and pleasure. I will come back to this connection in the following sections, but for now let it suffice to say that the history of Christian ideas is – among many things – also a history of taste-based conceptions of truth and of knowledge.

3.2 *The most intimate of the senses*

If one had to choose one attribute in order to describe the specificity of the experience of taste, “intimacy” would be a very good candidate. The first reason is immediately clear if we go back to Hegel’s remark, that we cannot taste an object without consummating it. Unlike what happens in the case of vision or hearing, it is impossible to taste the *same* object: the experience of taste is utterly *singular*, unrepeatable and unsharable.

Utterly singular, unrepeatable and unsharable

This singularity is not the only reason for the intimate character of the experience of taste. All the other senses are unitary experiences. From a physiological standpoint, it is possible to unpack every sensory experience and describe its phases; however, if we consider the perceptual experience, it is clear that taste, much more than any other sense, is a process. Already Brillat-Savarin identified three different stages in the process of tasting (with the frontal part of the tongue; with the back of the mouth; swallowing, cf. Brillat-Savarin 2009, 47). Contemporary science has advanced even more in the analysis of the experience of taste (cf. Vitaux 2007). This long, intimate process of discovery and deliberation is nothing else than the process through which we turn the external world into ourselves: through taste, the external becomes internal; the object becomes subject.

Therefore, one could say that taste is a unique, always repeatable but also always new experience that actively takes part in the shaping of our own self, both from a physical and from a spiritual point of view.

3.3 *An apology of secondariness*

The perceptual experience of taste has been object of a very specific taxonomy in the history of modern philosophy. According to a tradition that counts Quentin Meillassoux among its latest endorsers (cf. Meillassoux 2010), but that can be traced back to Plato through the Middle Ages and Descartes and Locke, it is possible to analyse perception by distinguishing between primary and secondary qualities (cf. Locke 1999, VIII, 9). According to this theory, while primary qualities – shape, motion, rest, extension – have an objective character, secondary qualities – for instance colour, taste or smell – are inherently subjective.

Of course, this distinction has been understood not only as a logical, but also as an axiological one: since primary qualities are objective, they are more certain and thus more important than secondary qualities. Now, on the basis of the analysis I have developed, I would like to highlight that the “secondariness” of taste is not a flaw, but a direct – if not obvious – consequence of the way taste works. Taste cannot be as objective as sight is, because only sight takes place according to a disposition that divides the world into subject and objects. Taste works in a completely different way: its “secondariness” is not an epistemological lack of precision, but rather a structural – ontological – peculiarity. Taste takes place in a world where the difference between “objective” and “subjective” is constantly questioned and sublated. This means, of course, that “salty”, “sweet”, “sour” or “bitter” are not properties of an object in the same way of other attributes such as “square” or “two inches long”. More precisely, they are not properties of an object, but as an interaction that overcomes the distinction between subject and object.

4 **Symbology of Taste**

With the passage from aesthetics to symbology we enter the domain of culture, namely of technology. In this paper, I will use the notion of technology in the broadest possible sense, without limiting it to the domain of material artefacts or to the dimension of techniques and practices: with

a definition that would need further clarification and is certainly not free from some problematic aspects, but that is clear enough for the sake of this paper, I will understand technology as the domain of all forms of artificial mediation.

Even though it is possible to mediate and extend the physiology and the aesthetics of taste through prostheses and other artificial devices, we have focused on these two mediation processes without taking into account the role of technology. However, of course, this influence, along with the constant interplay between these three dimensions, must never be forgotten. This being said, the symbolic dimension is structurally technological: it is based at the very least on the specific form of artificial medium that is language. In this final chapter I will come back to some aspects of the experience of taste I have already brought to attention, and I will investigate their symbolic dimension.

4.1 *Taste and knowledge*

The first element to consider with more depth and from a new standpoint is the already mentioned connection between knowledge and pleasure. In his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Immanuel Kant remarks that taste is a faculty of judgment, since it evaluates the wholesomeness of food before ingestion (cf. Kant 2016, 51). The means by which taste judges is pleasure: wholesome food is tasty. Before analysing taste in its more general and reflective sense – an analysis that Kant will offer both in the *Anthropology* and in the third *Critique* – Kant already highlights how the interconnectedness of pleasure and knowledge is a core aspect of any experience of taste.

The judgement of taste as a source of «embarrasement»

The etymological connection between *sapere* and *sapor* is well-known. Giorgio Agamben has stressed the importance of Kant's reflection on the faculty of taste, since the German philosopher highlights for the first time how this identification of knowledge and pleasure is highly problematic (cf. Agamben 2015, 11). Since Plato, according to Agamben, knowledge and beauty are clearly distinguished, but at the same time, their reciprocal relation is constantly interrogated. The judgment of taste is a source of «embarrasement» precisely because it belongs to the faculty of cognition, but

at the same time shows a direct connection to the feeling of pleasure (Kant 2000, 57).

In this way, according to Agamben, taste – here understood as an extended faculty that goes well beyond the physical sense – is the key to comprehend the connection between cognition and ethics (cf. Agamben 2015, 12).

4.2 Taste and social structure

This close connection between cognition and ethics describes a very peculiar kind of knowledge, one that structurally changes the subject. Extended to a new, broader level of awareness, taste acquires a paradoxical nature: it is at the same time utterly subjective and objective, singular and universal, unrepeatable and intersubjectively sharable. Kant's paradoxical definition of beauty is closely connected to the medial extension of the experience of taste to the social and intersubjective dimension: the judgment of taste consists of «a relation of the representation of the object to the subject» (Kant 2000, 97). This relation expresses the “mixture” of subjective and objective that we have already seen in the physiological and aesthetical analysis of taste experience. The universality of the judgment of taste is not based on a concept – since the experience of taste is utterly singular – but on an expectation that is structurally impossible to confirm. Even though in the experience of taste as an extended symbolic form the object is not “consummated” as in the actual experience of taste, the inherently singular structure of taste remains.

A pivotal role in the constitution of the social space

Pierre Bourdieu has provided one of the most famous analyses of taste as a means of social distinction (cf. Bourdieu 1979). According to Bourdieu, taste is a *habitus*, namely a scheme that has a radical influence on the subject's own structure and behaviour. In particular, two elements of the notion of *habitus* are important here: the first is that *habitus* is not a skill that can be externally “applied” to the subject, but rather a form of subjectivation itself (cf. De Cesaris 2021). The second is that the notion of *habitus* is closely connected to the notion of *repetition*. Thanks to taste, the subject shapes and reshapes its own constitution. It chooses the objects that constitute its habitat, it creates its own environment in a circular process: the environment influences its taste, and its new taste contributes to the modification

of its environment. The exercise of taste is a repeated activity, where every occurrence keeps its structural singularity.

The pivotal role played by taste in the constitution of the social space is based on the fact that it overcomes the simple opposition between subject and object: taste is utterly subjective, but it belongs to a subjectivity that does not exist without a constant tension with a world of external objects. Taste expresses the process through which “objects” are metabolised as part of the social sphere.

4.3 *The metabolism of truth*

Following this analysis, it is possible to ask what conception of truth and of knowledge can be developed starting from the experience of taste, instead of that of sight or hearing. I would like to summarise a few core elements:

- *Truth as subjectivation.* As remarked, a “gustative” account of truth understands it beyond the opposition of subject and object. Truth is not something to contemplate, it is not an object at a distance: it is something that the subject *is* and *becomes*, rather than something that the subject has or possesses. According to a metabolic understanding of truth, it is something that is processed by the subject and becomes part of it. The Christian idea of *ruminatio* is an example of this idea: according to this idea, the biblical text is not to be “read” or “listened to”, but literally eaten, absorbed as we do with a nourishment (cf. Koering 2021, 156). However, it is a core assumption of Christian faith – perfectly expressed by its liturgy – that truth is something that has to be eaten (cf. De Lubac 2009, 23–46). François Jullien has highlighted the importance of the metaphor of nourishment in Chinese culture (cf. Jullien 2005).
- *Truth as pleasure.* Another strong element connected to the idea of truth as something we “taste” is the image of knowledge as something pleasurable. Knowledge is not separated from pleasure, and therefore it is not separated from ethics. It is not something we must “attest”, but rather something that we must savour, enjoy with every fibre of our body. This anti-intellectualistic account of truth leads, again, to the idea that it is something that engages the subject as a whole, affecting it structurally.
- *Truth as event.* If truth is tasted, then it vanishes when experienced. Each experience of truth is utterly singular, it is intimate and sub-

jective. It is an event, since truth is not a steady object that rests in front of our gaze, but rather something that becomes indistinguishable from ourselves. For this reason, a taste-based understanding of truth conceives it as an event, rather than as a static relation. Truth is not a fact, it is not a substance, but a singular act, a process that has a beginning and an end.

- *Craving for truth.* A direct consequence of the last point is that, while singular, the experience of truth does not last. It must be constantly repeated in order to be kept alive. Our desire for truth cannot be satisfied once and for all, it is not an image that we can recall with our imagination, or a formula that we can memorise. It is rather a craving that invests the subject as a whole, and that forces it into a never-ending process. In this sense, truth becomes a *habitus*: not something we can simply be, but rather a vital constituent of our own subjectivity that we must constantly nourish.

5 Conclusion

At the end of this analysis, I would like to conclude by underlining some questions that remain open. In particular, I would like to address an issue that I have set aside in the text, but that after this analysis can be considered under a new light. Just like we can have a taste-based understanding of truth, or of knowledge, we can have a taste-based experience of technology. How does this analysis help us shed some light on the way we interpret our condition in the new digital environments?

How can we shed some light on the way we interpret our condition in the new digital environments?

Our experience of technology is often understood through taste-based metaphors. A *feed* constantly gives us news and data; we speak of digital bulimia, of binge-watching as a visual form of binge-eating. We even speak of the “chronophagic” nature of digital devices (cf. Galibert 2013). If the metaphor of taste can help us express some core aspects of our experience of truth or of technology, it can also help us conceptualise some pathological elements of our present condition.

While eating disorders are among the most important issues connected to the experience of taste (cf. Ravasi 2012, 190–193; Galimberti 2003), the

close connection between knowledge and pleasure, which I have stressed more than once, is a critical aspect of taste-based experience. The close connection between nourishment and pleasure can lead to forms of overload that turn nourishment into venom, and pleasure into addiction. A first question could be precisely the following: what aspects of our current experience of technology can be best described by referring to a taste-based hermeneutical model?

Once we have identified the role taste plays in our present technological condition, we will be able to ask how to face the problems connected with it. Plato understood the relationship between nourishment and pleasure as an opposition: in his *Gorgias*, fine cuisine and medicine are considered as completely opposite, since the first aims at giving pleasure, and the second aims at providing health (cf. Plastira-Valkanou 1998). On the contrary, gastronomy has been conceived precisely as the discipline that takes care of the best possible balance between pleasure and health, *gourmandise* and alimentation (cf. Vitaux 2007; Brillat-Savarin 2009, 62). Hence the second and final question: do we need a “digital gastronomy”? A taste-based approach to the problems related to our digital experience could help us identify new possible solutions, or at least consider the same problems from a new perspective.

As I said, the question is not whether we must abandon our oculocentric approach to technology and adopt a taste-based understanding of culture and of technologically mediated experience. On the contrary, the aim of this analysis is to isolate and identify aspects how we conceptualise the world that are never truly separated: in the concrete flow of our experience, our senses are constantly interacting both on the aesthetical and symbolic level. By studying the cultural significance of taste, we can better understand this interplay and we can investigate in more depth the complexity of our relation to ourselves, to each other and to the world.

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