

Provoking Taste

Experimenting with New Ways of Sensing

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1. INTRODUCTION

A man sits at a table in a museum and tastes something he has never seen before. He is not sure what it is, but he is prompted to taste orange-red jelly-like cubes—and to do so as if it were an honor to eat such a thing. He hesitates, he looks at it, then, he closes his eyes and slowly takes a bite. He writes down some notes. He takes another bite. He reads along in a document, where he is told to taste again, but this time as if he were ashamed. After completing a series of other, similar experiments, he creates a new dish from the ingredients assembled in front of him, and writes down a title for the dish in his tasting notes. This is the setting of an exhibition called “Schmeck!” (German for “taste!”), that we set up in autumn 2020 at the Museum of Natural History (MfN) in Berlin.¹

Why did we create an exhibition in which we asked people to taste unknown foods as if they were honored or ashamed? We sought to first explore how taste changes in relation with various elements of the eating situation (such as sounds, previous knowledge about ingredients and expectations) and, secondly, to use these experiences to provoke participants to create new tasting practices and dishes. In the introduction to this volume, the editors develop the notion of “sensing collectives” to study the intertwining of aesthetic and political practices. In this chapter, we discuss the exhibition as a case of engaging visitors in experiments that were at the same time aesthetic (i.e. inducing and shaping sensory perceptions) as well as political (i.e. inducing and shaping collective subjectivity).

1 The exhibition was embedded in the larger project “Schmeck! Practices and aesthetics of eating in the governance of a sustainable transformation of food systems.” This project was directed by Jan-Peter Voß and Nina Langen and received funding by the Executive Board of the Berlin University of Technology from 2019 until 2021. It was set up as a transdisciplinary project with sociologists and food scientists and 25 citizen scientists working on the question how taste can be studied as it happens and how taste can be experimentally shaped (www.schmeckprojekt.de).

The aesthetic dimension is rather obvious, as the exhibition engages practices and experiences of tasting food. For the political dimension, it is relevant to establish how different ways of tasting are constitutive of social groups and identities – and vice versa, how social groups are constitutive of ways of tasting. Becoming a “we” is often closely connected with certain shared ways of perceiving (food) and of being affected in certain ways: To taste means to (dis-)like and shared (dis-)likes build collectives. The literature in the sociology, anthropology, and history of food and taste can be read as repeated attempts to theorize this link through studies of, among many others, French and American ways of tasting (Barthes, 2013 [1961]), of specific ethnic and religious ways of tasting (Fischler, 1988), of class- and gender-specific ways of tasting (Bourdieu, 2013 [1979]), of specific ways of tasting practiced by collectives of food and wine lovers (Teil & Hennion, 2004), and of social movements forming around specific ways of tasting (Hayes-Conroy & Martin, 2010).

Against this background, we presume that tasting is political, not only in the broad sense of being a collectively practiced reality that excludes other possible realities (Latour, 1983; Mol, 1998; Stengers, 2010; Jonas & Littig, 2016). Tasting is also political in a narrower sense of constituting collective subjectivities by articulating a uniting identity or will for mobilizing collective agency (Latour, 2003; Saward, 2006; Disch, 2008; Disch, 2010).

In the following, we present the concept, setup, and outcomes of the “Schmeck!” exhibition as well as empirical observations on how participants engaged with the exhibition, through the notes they took on their tasting experiences, and interviews we conducted with some of them afterwards.

For making the case for such an intervention, we refer to an earlier article (Voß & Guggenheim, 2019) where we have problematized a concentration of power with the food industry and sensory sciences in the “aesthetic governance” of modern Western eating practices. In this article we argued that democratizing the politics of food would require challenging this dominant mode of “tasting like industry.” Our proposal was to democratize the aesthetic governance of food and eating by strengthening the agency of people to re-invent and shape their own ways of tasting. We sketched the concept for a participatory exhibition that would seek to dislodge industrialized tasting practices by inviting and prompting visitors to explore their own creative capacities to experimentally re-configure and shape their ways of tasting.

In this chapter, we discuss how we turned this concept into an exhibition and the effects it had. In the next, second, section, we give some conceptual background on how we understand the very engagement with industrial orders of tasting as both an aesthetic and a political challenge. In the third section, we describe the actual experimental setup of the exhibition. The fourth section reports on the effects of the exhibition, specifically how it generated new tasting practices and experiences. In the fifth and concluding section, we discuss insights: Were we successful in disrupting industrialized orders of sensing and provoking more creative ways of tasting?

2. CHALLENGING INDUSTRIAL ORDERS OF TASTING BY PROVOKING CREATIVE PRACTICES

Classical approaches see taste as either socio-psychologically or biologically determined. They either imply a structuralist understanding of taste as social positions that are inscribed in habitual practices (for example, Bourdieu's concept of a class and gender specific habitus, e.g., 1977 [1972]: chapter one). Or they conceive of taste as biologically evolved predilections functioning for the survival of the species (Katz, 1990). Despite apparent differences both, social and biological determinism, understand taste as a non-reflexive reaction of (specific groups of) human subjects to the given properties of tasted objects. Hence, both are rooted in a "gusto-ontology" that assumes taste results from subjects with given predilections and food objects with given qualities. This logic finds its correlation in the set-up of laboratory experiments with a view to determine average and group-specific ways of tasting specific objects. Tasting, moreover, is usually described in quantitative terms by allocating scores on given scales (Lahne, 2016; Lahne, 2018). Taste, then, is reported as a fixed personal trait aggregated into the taste of the average consumer or of any statistically relevant group.

In contrast, recent studies in anthropology and sociology focus on tasting as embedded in specific situations where both subjective predilections and objective food qualities are merely two elements that are not fixed but constituted in relation with other elements of a more complex configuration of the situation, including, for example, specific culturally established meanings, interactions with other people, specific trained bodily practices of eating or tools and atmospheres (Hennion, 2004; Teil & Hennion, 2004; Hennion, 2007; Hennion, 2015; Mol, 2009; Paxson, 2010; Korsmeyer & Sutton, 2011; Mann, 2015; Mann, 2018; Spackman and Lahne, 2019). Rooted in pragmatism and ethnomethodology, tasting is studied here as an aesthetic practice, a "reflexive and performative capacity, opposed to any possibility of seeing it as an objectified reality which scientific knowledge could account for from the outside" (Teil & Hennion, 2004, p. 27). By reconstructing tasting practices ethnographically in everyday situations and amateur rituals, such studies highlight creative capacities and autonomous ways of tasting that undermine and counter the subject-object mechanics of industrialized orders of sensing. They reveal an alternative "gusto-ontology" of taste as a highly situational, relational, and complex practice in which tasted objects and tasting subjects are mutually constituted as a contingent outcome open to experimental and creative intervention.

With the exhibition "Taste! Experiments for the senses," we drew on this alternative gusto-ontology articulated in recent studies of taste. We conceptualized the exhibition as a public intervention in established collective orders of sensing with a view to induce and enable the practicing of an alternative way of tasting: tasting as creative agency rather than a reproduction of habits and conventions largely shaped

by industrialized ways of knowing and doing taste. The exhibition therefore comprised a series of experiments for participants to explore the malleability of taste by actively intervening in the specific situation in which they taste. The experiments were meant to provoke participants to reflexively engage with their own ways of sensing and to become agents of aesthetic practice by creatively shaping their own sensory perceptions.

As such the exhibition was obviously an engagement with aesthetic practices. But to what extent was it also an engagement with political practices? We may differentiate here between a wider and a narrower conception of politics. First, in a wider conception of politics as “cultural politics” (Nash, 2001), “ontological politics” (Mol, 2002), “Dingpolitik” (Latour, 2005), “cosmopolitics” (Stengers, 2010) or “material politics” (Marres, 2012), the exhibition was a political intervention as it engaged with specific ways of collectively knowing and doing taste enacting a specific reality of taste and excluding other possible realities. Here, the exhibition was political because it created a situation for participants to explore how tasting can be done differently, according to an alternative, ecological ontology: It allowed to experience tasting as 1) complex and dynamic, 2) constituted relationally by a diversity of elements 3) malleable, prone to be reflexively shaped by active tasters. We did not offer this alternative ontology in the form of an intellectual treatise or a political manifesto, but as a setting to be engaged with, an experiment to be performed an experience to be made. In this sense, the exhibition was a material political intervention providing an arrangement to invite, induce, and enable participants to realize a creative rather than the industrial style of tasting. This would be the political dimension of our engagement with aesthetic practices in a broad sense of engaging with collectively practiced realities of taste (“queering taste” we might say).

Second, in a narrower conception of politics, the exhibition would also be political as it contributed to inducing and shaping a specific collective subjectivity, a new ‘we’ of tasters conscious of their shared will to taste differently. Was there also anything like that happening as part of our engagement with practices of tasting? Did we, in any way, articulate a “representative claim” (Saward 2006) on behalf of a collective will to taste differently that could performatively bring into existence a new collective subject with collective agency (Latour, 2003; Saward, 2017; Disch et al., 2019)?

As we did not articulate any such claim in words, we would need to turn to representative claims articulated in more bodily and material ways. Judith Butler, in her “notes towards a performative theory of assembly” (Butler, 2015), proposes to study political speech acts also in the media of material designs and architectures, in body movements and choreographies. For the case of the Occupy Movement, for example, she argues that a representative claim is to be found in the material and bodily arrangement of public camps on city squares that performed a collective subjectivity of “precarity.” By analogy, we may also investigate the material and bodily arrangement

of our exhibition as a political representative claim beyond words. We may interpret it as the articulation of a collective will to taste autonomously, experimentally, and reflexively. In that sense, our design of the exhibition would also count as political in the narrower sense. The crucial question is, however, if such a representative claim was at all perceived and adopted by the participants, if there are any indications of them feeling part of a new 'we' of creative tasters after having taken part in the exhibition. Towards the end of this chapter, we will come back to discuss the actual aesthetic and political effects of the exhibition as it was taken up and enacted by participants.

3. DESIGNING A PARTICIPATORY EXHIBITION WITH PERFORMATIVE TASTING EXPERIMENTS

How is it possible to create new forms of tasting with an exhibition? We take a cue from methods for "Inventing the Social" (Marres et al., 2018) that "involve an active search for alternative ways of combining representation of, and intervention in, social life" (p. 18): "If we want to really grasp social processes we must somehow invite, persuade or (to put it more strongly) provoke actors and situations to generate accounts, and to produce expressions and articulations of social reality" (p. 28). For the case of taste, this meant for us to move away from documenting how tasting is usually or unusually done in all kinds of different already existing situations,² and instead create a new and very specific situation that would provoke participants to trial new ways of eating and tasting. The exhibition was to become a place for "making taste public" by opening it up for collective experimentation. We thus thought of the exhibition as an experiment in fostering new kinds of participation in the shaping of taste via a new kind of sensory research (Lezaun et al., 2016). As an exhibition experiment (Macdonald & Basu, 2008), we had to move away from trying to explain taste as reflexive practice through visual and textual displays. Instead, we had to find ways how visitors could themselves understand taste as reflexive practice by reflexively practicing it.

The experiments allowed participants to experience how our sensory experience depends on the complex interplay of many different elements. In this vein, the experiments are geared to disassemble usual tasting situations into selected elements that relationally constitute a specific tasting practice and experience (Roehl, 2012). We took inspiration from Garfinkel's ethnomethodological breaching experiments

2 This is what we did in another part of the larger project "Schmeck!" in which the exhibition was embedded, where we developed the method of "gustography" to account for tasting experiences situated in everyday life (see our online event "How Can We Study Taste as It Happens?" in March 2021 with Antoine Hennon here: <https://vimeo.com/521563587>).

(Garfinkel, 1964): For these, he asked students to perform surprises on unwitting participants to make visible implicit knowledge of social orders by provoking them to repair normality. While we take up the logic of breaching, we are not interested in how this reveals the taken-for-granted-ness of social life. We invert the approach to make visible the openness and situated complexity of tasting and to provoke capacities of creatively inventing new orders of tasting.

Accordingly, we designed six different experiments to offer a range of access points to doing taste. The six experiments were all presented at one workstation. The exhibition comprised eight such workstations, so that eight people could do the six experiments concurrently. Going through all six experiments usually took participants around 45 minutes. Upon entering the exhibition, participants were greeted by a steward, who guided them to their place and gave them written instructions on a clipboard. The instructions guided the participants through the process of each individual experiment.

We settled on the final set-up (detailed below) after we went through several trials with our extended research team in the project “Schmeck” which included 25 citizen scientists (see endnote 1). The exhibition was supposed to open in May 2020 but had to be adapted for hygiene regulations during the Covid-19 pandemic. The first version provided for a separate station for each experiment with participants moving from one to another. It included two stages where they gathered for interaction (e.g. observing or feeding each other). The second Covid-19 version had to abandon such interactions and guarantee disinfected workplaces and 1.5 meters of physical distance. For reasons of hygiene and available infrastructure, all food had to be served cold and had to be prepared off-site.

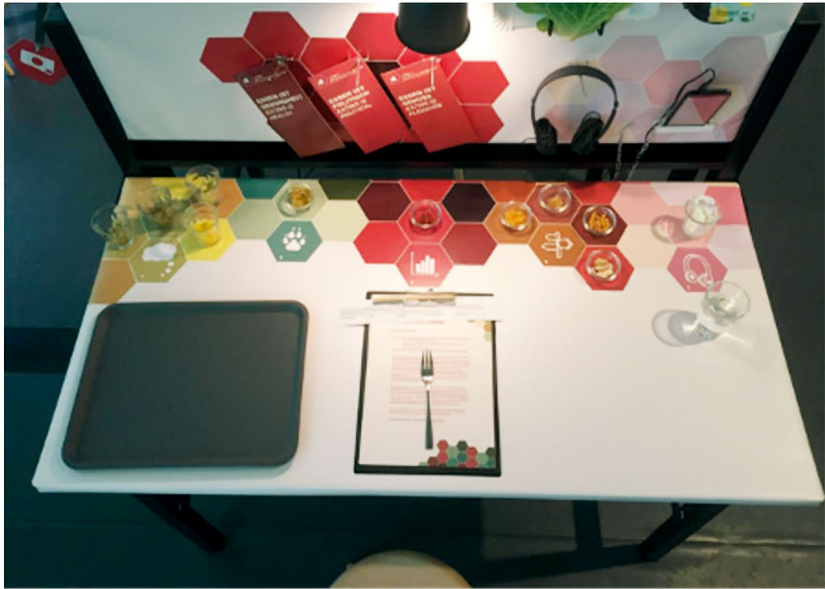
The exhibition eventually opened for three weeks in September and October 2020 and was attended by about 1000 visitors. Located at the “Experimental Field for Participation and Open Science” of the Berlin Museum of Natural History, it met a curious audience.

In each of the six experiments, participants were invited to taste one or several ingredients and to take notes regarding their tasting experiences. In doing so, the participants engaged in the observation and reflection of this experience. One central challenge was to use as many unknown ingredients as possible or at least to prepare them in a way that it would be difficult to know exactly what it is in order to circumvent assumed given predilections and embodied, pre-reflexive taste knowledge, while keeping a balance of tastes, smells, colors, and textures.

The first part of the exhibition (exercises 1–5 as detailed below) thus *disassembles* tasting by offering experimental variations on selected elements of an eating situation. Trying them out and exploring their effects helps participants to leave any habitualized ways of tasting behind and experience variability. The second part (exercise 6) then asks participants to *re-assemble* selected elements they have tried. This

is the moment of creatively composing not only a dish, but a situation, and to realize the taste experience that it generates.

Figure 1: At the experimental station each phase is marked by a symbol, a color and a corresponding field on the table with utensils and ingredients.



Source: Schmeck!Project ©

Figure 2: In every phase, the form gave instructions on how to conduct the experiments.



Source: Schmeck!Project ©

The disassembling phase consists of the following five experiments:

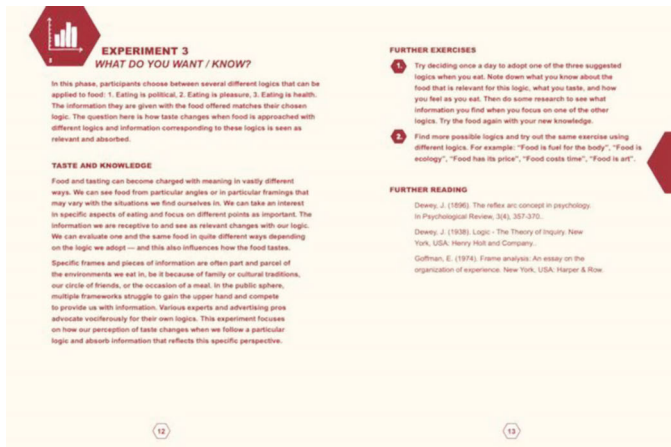
- (1) *Mental associations and memories*: We began by focusing on how taste objects trigger taste memories. Participants were encouraged to select two out of four ingredients (all cubed and slightly cooked vegetables – potatoes, celery, cucumber, parsnip – lightly flavored with various coloring spices to make them visually and in terms of taste unidentifiable), taste them and describe the memories they elicit. This first experiment also served to prime participants for paying close attention to their taste experiences.
- (2) *Bodily orientations*: The second experiment moved away from the taste object and focused on how the body of the tasting subject informs taste. Participants had to repeatedly sample a leek compote and imagine they were tasting not as themselves, but with a different body, choosing two out of four creatures (snake, tiger, hamster, fairy).
- (3) *Frames and information*: The third experiment focused on general frames within which we search for and make sense of taste experiences. Here, participants were asked to sample Goji berries thrice, each time within a different general framing given through written background information. The first framing, “eating is political” gave them information regarding the production context in China, including pesticide use and working conditions. The second framing, “eating is pleasure” informed them about how famous people enjoy Goji berries for the creative mood they trigger. Lastly, the framing “eating is health” informed the participants about the nutritional value and health benefits of eating the berries.
- (4) *Expectations*: The fourth experiment played with expectations we have towards the effects of eating. Participants had to choose two out of four ingredients that they had never sampled (mealworms, dried sweet potatoes, spicy Indian “Chakri” snacks, dried apples). They thus had to deal with an absence of specific expectations and focus on the unknown. They had to sample the chosen ingredients twice, once for expected physical effects, tasting as if it were delicious but unhealthy, then as exceedingly healthy. Secondly, they had to taste for expected social effects, as if eating the ingredient were morally embarrassing and then as if it were a major honor.
- (5) *Sound and atmosphere*: In the fifth experiment, we moved from imagining, knowing, and bodily doing to exploring how changing atmospheres affect taste. Here the participants repeatedly tasted Labneh (thickened yoghurt) and were asked to listen to different sounds (classical music, heavy metal, traffic noise, birdsong).

After this first stage of disassembling a tasting situation into different elements and testing them separately, the second stage consisted of a single sixth experiment. It prompted participants to reassemble the ingredients and experiences from the first

phase to create their own dish and tasting situation. Based on their notes taken during the first five experiments, participants were encouraged to compose a dish from the various ingredients and experiences, along with an orientation and a setting within which they would eat it. This last step also included the choice of additional elements: (6) *Utensils and social interaction*: They could choose between a variety of utensils (chopsticks, Western cutlery, their hands) to eat with and a base to arrange ingredients on and to eat from, either a ceramic plate, a paper plate, or a cabbage leaf. They were encouraged to think of a title for their dish and once they had finished composing their dish we would take a photograph. Finally, they could decide whether they want to eat by themselves or join other participants at communal tables.

At the end, we gave participants a booklet containing background information, further ideas, exercises and experiments to continue the topics of the exhibition at home (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Excerpt of our booklet.



Source: Schmeck!Project ©

4. EFFECTS OF OUR INTERVENTION: PROVOKING MULTIPLE PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES IN DOING TASTE

How did the participants conduct and experience the experiments? What ways of knowing and doing taste could we observe and identify? Did participants also take these into their daily lives, beyond the setting of the exhibition? What insights did

we gain about our central intention to open-up industrialized orders of sensing for more creative ways of tasting?

To answer these questions, we first describe some central observations of doing taste in the exhibition. We will complement these observations by drawing on two kinds of empirical data: First, the notes on the instruction sheets that participants filled out during the exhibition. Second, a set of interviews with participants that we conducted two months after the exhibition.

The notes on the instruction sheets were collected on eight A4 sheets held together on a clipboard: The first sheet contained an introduction, followed by 6 sheets, one for each experiment. These gave instructions on how to conduct the experiments and contained fields to write down the outcome of each experiment. The last sheet contained a feedback form. The feedback form asked whether the participants discovered or experienced anything new, what insights and questions they gained from the exhibition, which experiments they found hard to follow, which experiments they would have liked to explore in more depth, what they were missing from the experiments and what we could do to improve the exhibition next time. Although about 1000 people carried out our experiment, we received only 566 clipboards, because many participants conducted the experiments in groups of two or more people. However, from these 566 clipboards with notes, we only received 328 feedback forms, because some participants stopped their notes once they finished the experiments. We then conducted interviews with 18 people selected from 109 persons who left their contact details.

We conducted the interviews a couple of months after the exhibition, between December 8th, 2020 and January 6th, 2021. Only 12 of these interviews, however, could properly be recorded and transcribed. During the interviews we asked (a) whether since their visit, participants remembered the exhibition, (b) whether they remembered specific practices learned during the exhibition, (c) whether the exhibition lastingly influenced how they taste, (d) whether they talked with other people about the exhibition, (e) whether it changed attitudes towards exploring new foods, and (f) how they experienced the design of the experiments.

The participants came from a broad range of professions and educational backgrounds. There were also many young children and students among them that account for almost three-quarters of the participants. Interestingly, even though we designed the exhibition for one person per experimental station, many of the participants conducted the experiments together, mostly in pairs but up to groups of five, as can be seen in the following images:

Figure 4: Experimenting in public.



Source: Schmeck!Project ©

There were only a few dropouts or people who abandoned the exhibition before they completed the experiment (often because they participated with children who were too small to concentrate for the duration of the experiments). For many of the participants the aforementioned industrialized orders of sensing and standardized ways of tasting had been indeed challenged and dissolved, although not always exactly in the way the exhibition was intended and designed. That means some did not—or at least not fully—experience reflexively the creative agency of inventing one's own tasting practice and situation which we will elaborate on in the following.

The intensity with which reflexive engagement took place was the most surprising, most striking outcome, but also the most difficult to document. According to our participant observations most people were sucked into a world of taste that they had never experienced before—despite the fact that most people were completely unaware of what they would encounter.

Not only this, as can be glanced from the images above (Figure 5), participants dedicated themselves exclusively to tasting as activity, as a practice, at the expense of any other sensory attention. People would close their eyes, focus with their nose and mouth, hunch forward, and just dedicated themselves to the experience of taste. Throughout the exhibition, the atmosphere was a concentrated silence, as in a school test, except that it was punctured by laughter and gasps of unexpected experiences. Faces spoke of expectation and distrust that would soon make way to surprise and exhilaration.

Figure 5: Tasting practices.

Source: Schmeck!Project ©

A second proof that this focused exploration worked very well, can be seen from the care, creativity, surprise, and variety of dishes that participants created in step 6. As we have outlined before, during the final phase the participants were asked to combine and arrange elements gathered and investigated separately in the previous five phases. Thus, all the compositions were created from the same 10 ingredients that were offered before during the experiments. All differences between the compositions result from leaving out some ingredients, from the way they were arranged, and, most importantly, from the specific memories, body schemes, framings, expectations sounds that were chosen after experimentally exploring their effects on the tasting experience. What stands out (and what cannot be documented here without listing all photographs of the individual dishes) is that despite the fixed ingredients list, and their pre-prepared form, participants really leaned into the task and each came up with their own dish (see Figure 6), reflecting at least some of their specific experiences and their own dish-creating talents.

Figure 6: Creative (re-)compositions with a self-chosen title.



Source: Schmeck!Project ©

This focused attention cannot easily be captured in evaluative statements, but we can derive from the feedback forms a positive overall perception and assessment of the exhibition by the participants. When we asked which impressions they took away from the experiments (multiple answers possible, $n=300$), they describe it in the forms as good (85 answers), interesting (70), great (62), new regarding experiences gained (53), exciting (36) or even funny (18).

Though, for 24 participants the underlying ideas remained vague. For them, the exhibition failed to connect the experiments to everyday tasting practices. The experiments remained in a different social space, maybe reminiscent of school experiences, where they were prompted to do something that proved challenging and fun, but whose ultimate aims they failed to understand. The artificiality of the tasks caused a distance to their everyday tasting experiences that they found difficult to overcome.

Some participants noticed that they discovered a new taste (36 answers). Experiences in supervising the exhibition can support this supposition: Some people tried mainly to figure out what they were eating. For these participants an *object-related comprehension of taste* was still important. While 65 participants said that they learned something new without specifying what, 118 persons learned that taste can be influenced in some way. Out of these 101 report insights on *particular elements influencing taste*. Often, they relate to specific experiments: the sounds heard (39 answers), the

associations and emotions triggered (18), specific expectations and knowledge or information they obtained (13) or their physical state (2) while tasting.

Obviously for these participants specific experiments stood out, while others worked less well. In particular, experiment 5 with sound stood out (231 mention this experiment for “Which experiments would you like to have explored in more depth?”), while experiment 2 (imaging and practicing different bodies like that of a hamster or a fairy) often did not work (255 mention this experiment for “Which experiments did you find hard to follow or to stick with?). We can read this in multiple ways: It may demonstrate that some experiments were better designed than others; we may simply have failed to construct all the experiments in a way to make them work for the participants. We can also read it as a difficulty of making specific elements of tasting practices amenable to intervention. Experiencing sound as changing the atmosphere is straightforward and its interference with taste was readily understood by participants. Imagining and enacting a different body shape and related way of eating, in contrast, is much more demanding.

We also asked whether participants could think of further elements influencing their taste that were not thematized in the six experiments. Seven mentioned elements like the visual appearance of food, its color, the amount or combination of ingredients as well as the frequency with which the ingredients were eaten. With regard to new insights and understanding of how they individually approach their own tasting, 17 participants responded that the exhibition has helped them to learn how tasting is related to fun, pleasure, health, concentration, appearance, attention, or with their own openness to explore new taste experiences without bias. Two of them mention the relevance of how the food is placed in the mouth, such as that they would slow it down or taste the same ingredient repeatedly.

Asking for the insights and questions the exhibition left the participants with (multiple answers possible, n=250), the majority stated that they learned something new. Also, some participants intended to continue the experimental approach beyond the setting of the exhibition (27 answers). These intentions are related to different aspects: Some mention intentions to eat and taste with more attention to details, such as the specific situation or the political dimension of food, while others intend to be more open to experiencing new tastes as well as to change previous tasting habits. These participants state explicitly that they understood and adopted the approach of the exhibition and the challenge that it poses. They reported that they would *actively shape their taste more consciously in the future*.

In addition to the very positive answers in our forms, two months after the exhibition still nearly half of our interviewees state that by participating in the exhibition they have learned about the relevance of unexpected and unknown elements influencing and thus co-constituting taste which had been completely new or at least unconscious to them. An interviewee described it as follows:

I would say that this awareness of the changes in the taste experience through these changes of ideas [body, knowledge], I wasn't really aware of it in that sense. So, I created it unconsciously, as we all do, by trying to create nice situations for eating... But I wasn't really aware of the different nuances that are possible. It was more social "what you do," but not such a conscious, detailed design. (Interviewee 1, personal interview, December 12, 2020, translated by the authors)

The other half of our interviewees report an intensification and widening of an already existing awareness of one or more specific elements, such as political or health aspects of particular ingredients, memories, and emotions, sounds or the visual appearance of food. The following statements from two interviewees illustrate this point:

Again, with the sound as well. I mean, the thought of going out in nature or listening to classical music is setting an ambience. But beyond the idea of ambience, I don't think I've consciously thought, oh, this will literally affect how I taste. So that's quite interesting. ...[since the exhibition] the sound encourages me to slow down a bit and maybe set the mood. (Interviewee 2, personal interview, December 9, 2020)

So, my wife is, I would say, very health focused and political regarding food. And I am, let's say, more into enjoyment, also politics, but above all enjoyment. And I noticed [in the exhibition] what a difference it makes. So, when I eat and think food is healthy, for me that has also positively influenced my taste experience. And with this mindfulness and meditation, so to speak, ...I can basically decide for myself which focus I take. (Interviewee 1, personal interview, December 12, 2020, translated by the authors)

Again, nearly half of the interviewees say that they have overcome some inhibitions that came with the experimental set-up or the non-identifiability of ingredients. This not only seems to lead to a modified attitude towards the specific ingredient but also towards taste itself: There is no invariable, determined taste—even with regard to an ordinary potato, but rather a highly situated experience depending on multiple factors influencing taste that are presented in each experiment. Another insight is that except for one, all interviewees who conducted the experiments with another person emphasize the relevance of social interaction and related exchange for their tasting experiences. Further, some interviewees mention they have perceived the impact of diverse elements (e.g., associations or the situation) on taste again in everyday life afterwards or have at least continued to reflect on it.

5. COULD WE PROVOKE NEW WAYS OF TASTING? IN HOW FAR ARE AESTHETIC AND POLITICAL PRACTICES INTERTWINED?

We started with the diagnosis that current sensory orders are dominated by the food industry and the sensory sciences: They shape the knowing and doing of taste as a mechanical matching of food product qualities with given subjective perceptions of individuals statistically aggregated into groups and averages. We called this “tasting like industry.” As a collectively shared way of doing taste it constitutes a subjectivity which suggests that we are stuck with our individual predilections having to search for the best matching food products in order to enjoy taste.

Our exhibition was an experiment to investigate, if and how we could disrupt this dominant order of doing taste and help to establish a different one, based on a different ontology of tasting: We designed the exhibition to make participants experience that taste is a relationally constituted practice that can creatively be shaped by the tasters themselves. We did not articulate our alternative ontology as an intellectual treatise or a political manifesto, but as a material arrangement and a set of experiments to perform it in practice and immediately experience it as an alternative reality of tasting.

We described in detail how we conceptualized, designed, and realized the exhibition at the Berlin Museum of Natural History, and we gave an account of what actually happened, how our arrangement was taken up by participants and the experiences they made. We found that our setting was to some degree effective in generating a creative style of tasting. A large percentage (40%) of our participants fully embraced and experienced what we had envisioned, explicitly saying that they learned taste can be influenced. Nearly all visitors evaluated the exhibition positively and learned something new about taste. The exhibition brought up questions on how to practice taste, on political dimensions of food or on their own willingness to experience new food. One out of ten participants declares that they intend to continue experimenting with taste. However, some of the tasting experiments that we offered worked better than others. The participants overwhelmingly said that the experiment with sounds made them explore the malleability of their own tasting, while experiments with different body shapes and expectations towards food were difficult to understand or did not have the effect of experiencing creative agency in matters of taste.

In terms of aesthetic practices, our observations show that we could actually change the ways people taste. Of course, this happens only in a limited way, not for everybody, and not far beyond the setting of the exhibition and not forever. But we successfully engaged, triggered, and to some degree shaped the aesthetic practices and experiences of those who were willing to participate. In that sense our exhibition was an engagement with established orders of sensing. Our exhibition partially disrupted them and created a space for alternative orders to emerge. It provoked people

to reflexively engage with their own ways of sensing, to become agents of aesthetic practice by creating their own sensory perceptions.

In terms of political practices, we come back to the wide and the narrow notion of politics that we introduced above. In the sense that the exhibition made people perform a way of tasting not based on a mechanical ontology, but on a relational ecological ontology, we may say that we engaged with the “ontological politics” of doing taste. Everybody who participated at least contributed to make an event happen that opened up questions about what taste is and how it works. In that sense the exhibition made taste an issue of public interest and concern. For a considerable part of the participants we can say that taste was not only called into question, but that they collectively performed the creative tasting that we sought to provoke as an alternative reality to the more widespread reality of tasting like industry.

With regard to a more specific concept of politics as the performative representation of collective will and identity, we could investigate the design of the exhibition as a non-verbal representative claim on behalf of a new collective subjectivity of creative eaters. One could look for how this claim was articulated in the material set up and the bodily and experiential experience of the exhibition. For evaluating the performative effects of such a claim, however, we would have to follow-up on how it was taken up by participants and wider audiences in the media and elsewhere. Did tasters recognize themselves as creative tasters after participating in the exhibition? Did they recognize this as a common subjectivity shared with other participants, imagining a new “we” with the will and agency to break out of tasting like industry and to explore different possible realities of tasting? Due to a lack of data we cannot answer these questions, but they hint at interesting future research opportunities.

Thus, while obviously engaging with aesthetic practice (inducing and shaping perceptions) and with political practice in a wide sense (collectively enacting specific realities), it remains open in how far the exhibition was engaging with political practice in the narrower sense (performatively representing collective subjectivity).

By way of conclusion, we would like to highlight some specificities of our approach. What makes it particularly rewarding or challenging to engage with collective orders in the medium of eating and tasting, and in the form of a participatory exhibition?

Firstly, we should highlight that, by focusing on eating and tasting, the project could engage and play with implicit everyday experiences that are very generic and routine for everyone. Everybody eats and tastes multiple times a day. Creating a new politics of taste does not depend on specific experiences that only certain groups or professions make. The task was therefore relatively easy, inasmuch as we did not have to explain the general importance of the issue.

Secondly, because foodstuffs as taste objects are individually stable but varied material objects, their politics can relatively easily be demonstrated. Each ingredient is relatively stable and has its own history, politics, and memories attached to it.

Compare this to for example sound, which is materially fleeting, does not come in defined objects, depends on a technological infrastructure that is invariable and that cannot be easily opened up (classical music and traffic noise are reproduced by the same technologies, and these technologies are not easily opened up to tinkering).

Third, because tasting is a private and bodily experience, related to designated and small tasting objects, it is relatively amenable to an experimental setup. For example, it does not depend on the availability of a large-scale gathering, or overtly complex technological infrastructures. Experimentalizing taste does not necessitate to bring together “society.”

Fourth, because tasting is fundamentally a small-scale practice that happens between a tasting subject and a tasting object, it is relatively easy to make it independent of its environment. Further, because tasting is an everyday practice that people know from other contexts, it can relatively easily operate in a different space. Compare this to the problem of the white cube in visual art: To produce visual art as a form of politics has become embroiled in an endless debate where art cannot be seen without its context and where this context is seen to take over the art. In that sense, to experimentalize taste, while unusual, is also easy. To experimentalize other parts of our experience may be a more difficult task.

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