

TASTING JOYCE

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Edited by Elisa Oliver



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A Small Taster

Tasting Joyce took place at the James Joyce Centre Dublin on **Nov 3rd 2017**. Developed as part of the publishing project *Feast* www.feastjournal.co.uk *Tasting Joyce* utilised food as a lens to provide a specific point of access to Joyce's writing. The development of particular ingredients referenced by Joyce, but perhaps not always prioritised in re-imagining the food in his writing, was the starting point to develop an eight course tasting menu taking us on a journey of food flavourings, imaginings and associations. Devised in collaboration with Dave Power, Head Chef at Temple Bar's Boxty House, the menu enabled a very direct oscillation between past and present as the flavours and ingredients of Joyce's Dublin merged on diners' tongues, bringing traces of the city's past into its present. Pursuing ideas of trade, the social and political symbolism and function of food, and new dietary concerns emerging in early 20th century Dublin *Tasting Joyce* omitted the "inner organs of beasts and fowls", relished by *Ulysses'* Bloom, for a vegetarian menu that allowed reference to, but sometimes inversion of, the masculine sexual innuendos and food play that Joyce's writing excels in.

The power of an approach that temporarily isolates a subject area was brought home to me by artist Rebecca Chesney's work *The Brontë Weather Project (2011–12)*. Addressing the descriptive use of weather in the Brontë novels, Chesney set up a weather station at the parsonage and with local weather collectors monitored the weather

over a 12 month period. She then cross referenced this data with weather as it appeared in the Brontë novels and letters to create new artwork exhibited in the Brontë home. The project raised questions and provided new inflections on the role of weather in the siblings' writing. Always thinking of Yorkshire in *Wuthering Heights* (1846) as permanently wet, it is then surprising to have revealed that it was generally rather sunny. This knowledge does not undermine established understandings of the novels but enables a whole range of other inflections that resist a repetition of the familiar to reveal new reflections on the writing and its context.

In a similar way the focus on food in Joyce provides a particular concentration that enables us to think about place, identity, trade, politics, memory and desire in a nexus of cross references that can be contemporarily made visceral through the textures, tastes and scents of the foods, and lack of it, that people Joyce's novels. Recreated as a menu that brought some of those flavours up to date, the development of Irish cuisine is also made visible.

This publication is both a reflection of the *Tasting Joyce* event and an opportunity to further explore the many issues raised by the evening and its particular utilisation of food. We were very pleased to have Deirdre Ellis King, Chair of the Board of the Joyce Centre, provide the preface to this publication drawing on her experience of two Feast events, having attended 2016 *The Devil's Supper* at the International Anthony Burgess Foundation in Manchester. The contributions that then form the publication provide an intentionally interdisciplinary take on the subject and drift across different areas of expertise to spotlight the varied lines of enquiry that food in Joyce engenders.

My own essay *Taste – A Thinking Process* addresses the philosophy of taste from a point of aesthetics to an experiential mode of curation and interpretation as it currently exists in contemporary art practice, raising questions about connections between gastronomy and aesthetics. Marty Gilroy's contribution *Tasting the World – Food, Empire and the Global in Joyce's Ulysses* explores a narrative of trade in the novel that establishes Dublin in the early 20th century as a city containing the whole of the world despite, or perhaps because of, the novel's close reading of the particularities of the city. Thanks to Dave Power's recipes, published alongside the quotes that framed the course they were part of, we are now able to create our own 'taste' of Joyce at home. Paul Kavanagh's photo essay creates a contemporary melding of food, space and wandering as he pulls on Irish Food Trails' www.irishfoodtrail.ie tours of the city to create a reflection on connections between place, food and self. *Food and 'A Day in the Life' of Ulysses' Leopold Bloom* by Flicka Small provides a semiotics of ingredients that takes us directly to food in Joyce but demonstrates how these references communicate a multitude of topics within the writing. *Tasting Joyce* were very pleased to work with artists Nuala Clooney and Kaye Winwood who had a selection of work projected throughout the meal. Both independently and collaboratively Clooney and Winwood are interested in the 'expanded' space of eating and dining and how the artefacts around it make visible the intimate and visceral connection of food. In particular they are interested in the way food interfaces with the space of desire and self, a concern so often also preoccupying Joyce. Together they have used word and image to reflect on the development of these ideas into a series of objects that function as eating and drinking vessels, underlining oral

pleasure and ricocheting us back to Molly and Bloom's mouth to mouth passing of chewed seed cake in *Ulysses*. Orality as a theme continues in Máirtín Mac Con Lomaire's essay *Orality in Joyce: Food, Famine, Feasts and Public Houses*, where food as absence and presence frames a discussion of famine and feasting in Irish literature, identifying what closes the mouth to food and what opens it to story telling and song in the hospitality of the Irish pub.

Each contribution provides a taste of the ways in which food can become a tool of interpretation, creating and synthesizing memories, experiences and pleasures in which we can encounter and re-encounter Joyce via the continued trace of taste.

I would like to express heartfelt thanks to all participants for the generous contribution of their time and expertise and to the James Joyce Centre for the privilege of being able to host *Tasting Joyce* at Great North George Street.

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Taste — A Thinking Process

Elisa Oliver

It is to our
sensations that we
owe all our ideas

(Encyclopédie, 1782)

The sense of taste's multifarious history extends from one of "individual sensation of the tongue and palate... subjective, fleeting and ineffable" to one where "taste can also mean knowledge... the sensorial assessment of what is good or bad... this evaluation... begins in the brain before the palate" (Montanari, 2006, p.61).

Across these positions that identify at one point as both, purely subjective to one that considers it the basis of a more reasoning knowledge, there is a potential role for taste in utilising a mode of access to the past facilitating a bridge from sensation to understanding, from feeling to knowledge (Von Hoffmann, 2016). This route is a complex and contentious one though, traveling from taste as a metaphor for removed aesthetic discernment to more recent concerns to incorporate, often directly via immersive art practices, literal gustatory taste as a process of understanding (Korsmeyer, 2017). Today this is brought into sharp relief through ongoing questions about gastronomy as art and the alternative traffic of art utilising gastronomy (Winwood, 2018). Pursuing this area moves us closer perhaps to understanding the ways in which taste can temporarily establish or interrogate meaning and, in doing so, clarify its potential as a mode of interpretation, an approach underpinning *Tasting Joyce* (Oliver, 2018).



Historical Reflections

With a dependence on interaction with the other sensory areas, taste is often seen as the lowest of the senses (Von Hoffmann, 2016, p.73). However, it is equally seen as one that can be trained or learnt, evident in the familiar phrase an ‘acquired taste’. Montanari asserts that taste’s ability to discern between good and bad and its response to learning and understanding distinctions between flavours identifies it not as subjective but “rather collective and eminently communicative. It is cultural experience transmitted to us from birth along with other variables that together define the ‘values’ of a society” (Montanari, 2006, p.62). Korsmeyer confirms this position but asks whether gustatory taste, as a value, remains as an aesthetic metaphor rather than an aesthetic experience given its tie to the satisfaction of appetite with appetite as “the wrong kind of pleasure, being sensuous and bodily, ‘interested’ rather than contemplative, ‘disinterested’ and aesthetic” (Korsmeyer, 2017, p.22). Certainly, pleasure of a particular kind, which the gustatory plays to, was readily associated with knowledge in the 18th century ‘of taste’. The Age of Enlightenment was fascinated by the senses. Though sight remained primary, all the senses were considered central in self preservation and the receiving of knowledge, the means by which we understand and communicate with the world (Von Hoffmann, 2016, p.95). Hence taste and pleasure became entwined with philosophy and knowledge and taste’s ability to distinguish between what could heal and what could harm seen as the ultimate knowledge in preserving the body.



Contemporary Transformations

Contemporary thinking around the gustatory and aesthetics addresses taste more fundamentally as an encounter with the world, associating it with philosophical positions around inside and out, self and other, particularly as dualities of mind and body, in Feminism for example, have been confronted. To support this position Korsmeyer references Bourdieu – who acknowledges no difference between an aesthetics of taste and a more literal discerning of flavours in food (Korsmeyer, 2017, p.23, Bourdieu, 1984) a position which can only be interested rather than disinterested and therefore starts to place pleasure and the personal at the centre of theories of value. Korsmeyer identifies the dangers of this position, which is open to problems of relativism as opposed to an aesthetic standard of taste. However, the philosophical shift that confronted a duality of mind and body and looked to a more holistic understanding of knowledge including emotive responses and their physical manifestations, be it the vomiting of abjection (Kristeva, 1980) or crying while listening to music, takes us to a point where the ‘interested’ enables rather than clouds aesthetic appreciation. It starts to be acknowledged that such a physical response, an ‘interested’ response, does not prohibit discernment: we can experience emotion while still making sense of it as part of a wider context or in relation to other concerns. As Korsmeyer continues, the same can be said of food; that the like, or dislike, of particular tastes can move beyond personal preference to a position of discrimination. Whether something needs more seasoning, or whether particular flavours marry together in a dish or not is a learning process. Like the aforementioned ‘acquired taste’ a sense of value via taste can be developed, trained from immediate experience to achieve the philosophical aesthetic standard rising above purely subjective reaction (Korsmeyer, 2017, p.25).

How taste then further establishes meaning or understanding, and the depth of that meaning, becomes more complicated. As the latest edition of *Performance Research*, dedicated to taste, says: a sense of embodied understanding has to be considered to more fully understand the role of any of the senses in this context (Abrams, J, Gough, R, 2018, p.1). In relation to a performative notion of taste, it is the ways that taste is initially engendered from sight and smell and then secondarily from ingestion that creates particular modes of understanding. Taste is unique in literally being inside us and also in the fact of being destroyed in the process of understanding.

Mark Clintberg's essay 'Gut Feeling' (2012) employs this unique ingested quality of taste to establish the gut as a thinking organ that seeks to interpret, via taste, and thereby understand or make sense of something. Applying this idea to the phenomenon of artist established restaurants, Clintberg addresses how projects like Carsten Holler's *Double Club* London (2008) interrogate ideas of consumption and identity through the creation of a restaurant space, with the food eaten in it integral to the disruptions the work aims to initiate. Holler's temporary space *Double Club* created a pastiche of nationalities combining decorative aesthetics from French Bistros, English Clubs, and decorative details familiar from Democratic Republic of Congo restaurants. Art works and foods from each nationality peopled the space, raising questions about the easy equation of food and nationhood. *Double Club* underlined this by having the space and the menu split, keeping national signifiers separate so, as Holler said, he could demonstrate "the power of letting things stand next to each other with identical claim to importance" (Clintberg, 2012, p.214). This situating of disparate cuisines in juxtaposed spaces, Clintberg suggests, made the gut work harder, and is in-fact perhaps the key mode of interpretation, as it works to establish a relationship to other cuisines and decorative signifiers in the space, identifying the key message of the work as the rejection of an coherent formation of identities.

Instead identities exist as fragmented and it is the experience of eating in the space that becomes the ultimate glue in achieving this understanding.

In a different context Paul Geary's article 'What do you taste like. Experiencing the other through the mouth' (2018) for *Performance Research* identifies the disruption of patriarchal gender structures through taste in Kaye Winwood and Sarah Hamilton Baker's alternate Valentine's Dinner, *Diabolical Roses* (2016). Comprising an immersive and performative seven course tasting menu, echoing the structure of sex from seduction to consummation, *Diabolical Roses* included a dish imitating breasts over which diners were encouraged to squirt syringes of salty yoghurt. As Geary points out both the act of ejaculation and the following dual consumption of breast and yoghurt disrupts the privileging of ejaculation and masculine sexuality by making it visible, and, through taste, confronts binary gender constructions by allowing both male and female to merge on the tongue. Geary underlines the potential of such an experience saying "to taste is more complex than just the perception of those five qualities (sweet, salty, sour, bitter, umami); it is the perception and understanding of the experience in the mouth" (Geary, 2018, p.79) reaffirming Clintberg's assertion of the body's response to taste as a 'thinking' one.



Taste and Interpretation

It is clear that the complexity of taste registers meanings in a range of ways, from aesthetic encounter to the disruptive interrogation of *Diabolical Roses*. Frequently the process of ingestion is the final and very visceral piece of the equation that helps establish meaning or a connection as in Holler's *Double Club*. This role of taste as part of a process of thinking and interpreting has foregrounded taste and the other senses in the context of curating (Oliver, 2018) where it has been advocated for its immediacy and ease of access, getting us more quickly to a point of understanding.

Lizzie Ostrom for example has recently developed museum tours using scent under the guise of her alter ego Odette Toilette. Tate Sensorium (2016) saw Ostrom develop scents that would either heighten the experience of abstract painting or, in figurative work, take us directly to a scent suggested by the work. For Richard Hamilton's collage *Interior II (1964)* 1940s hairspray and the perfume L'Air du Temps were used to bring alive the film noir female figure placed in the image. Move further away and you could smell 1960s household cleaning products reflecting the Modernist interior but also Pop Arts', which Hamilton's collage would be counted as part of, fascination with everyday brand projects www.odettetoilette.com

The result is a type of first hand acquaintance that is hard to reach any other way. The sensory can provide a different point of access, prioritize concerns perhaps underplayed by only using the more dominant senses and shift perception enough that new connections can be made. This is different I would suggest to a synthetic exploration of the senses being undertaken by groups such as Charles Spence's *Crossmodalists* where there is a concern to employ multi-sensory connections across disciplines to confront those disciplines

such as art and science, scent and music. It is an interrogation of boundaries that is occurring in this context www.crossmodalism.com The sensory as curation and/or interpretation employs the senses to create a point of connection that can provide a platform for new understandings or invert old ones, as Korsmeyer says "activation of the bodily senses in general can make aesthetic encounters vivid, immediate, and intimate." (Korsmeyer, 2017, p.32). Equally taste keenly puts into play the position of understanding history as a product of the present. Taste connects us to the past but, via the immediate moment of tasting, enables an oscillation between past and present allowing one to interrogate the other as they circle over each other. This maintains an engaged but critical position in relation to curation, creating interpretation rather than replication.

In *Tasting Joyce* this was achieved by placing a lens on vegetarianism, as opposed to the more typical Joycean association with meat, particularly in *Ulysses (1922)*, where Joyce describes how leading man Bloom "ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls" (Joyce, 1922, p.35). A vegetarian menu shifted the point of focus to allow another food taste to be foregrounded and with it a range of other points of reference. Vegetarianism was gaining ground from the late 19th century in Dublin and was embraced by cultural reformists and intellectuals. As such it was embraced by the developing feminist movement in the city, compounding its association with women and a notion of sensitivity that translated into an equation of vegetarianism with intellectuals and poets. This is clearly still culturally prevalent in the early 20th century when Joyce writes *Ulysses*, enabling Bloom to comment "those policemen sweating Irish stew into their shirts; you couldn't squeeze a line of poetry out of him. Don't know what poetry is even" (Joyce, 1922, p.105).

This allowed Tasting Joyce to focus on associations with creativity, the 'female', maternal body and the ways that these are played out in Joyce through certain food tastes. Frequently in the

writing this is a rift on the notion of ‘mother Ireland’ and an assertion of Irish identity, conflated with the nurturing, maternal production of milk; home produced milk being seen as an important resistance to British imported goods. The maternal body therefore becomes a metaphor for this and is later sexualised in the taste of the thick cream of Molly’s breast milk, milked into Bloom’s breakfast tea, highlighting the female body but reducing it to the site of male consumption (Small, 2014, p.44).

Privileging the female body in *Tasting Joyce* through associations with vegetarianism allowed an inversion, or at least a critical pause, in these connotations. This was echoed in the colour palate of the evening of orange and pink; pink for the female body and digestion and orange as the colour scheme that Joyce used for the Calypso section of *Ulysses*. This section has a reversal of gender domestic roles, as Molly stays in bed while Bloom makes breakfast for her and the whole underlines the power of the female as Bloom succumbs to his enchantment by Molly and inability to refuse her impending meeting with her lover. Orange also of course has political meanings in relation to the orange men or unionism and has a sense of the exotic and other in its reference to the scents and tastes of imported goods flooding Dublin’s docks in Joyce’s remembrance of the city as he writes this novel.

In these ways, by leading with particular tastes evoked by food references in Joyce’s writing, *Tasting Joyce* was able to take us to both a particular historical moment in Dublin and understand that moment in the present via the evolution of cooking techniques and tastes as potato soup became potato velouté olives, olive tapenade, and potted meat, mushroom pâté. *Tasting* created a performative, immersive and ingested experience but allowed the ‘tasting’ to do the thinking.

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