

The Secret of Taste

Derrida on Non-Appropriation

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This article investigates taste in the corpus of Jacques Derrida, focusing on its emergence across published works and unpublished seminars. Starting from *A Taste for the Secret* and *Economimesis*, and through a close reading of *Manger l'autre* (1989–1990) and *Rhétorique du cannibalisme* (1990–1991), it follows the ways in which taste appears as an experience of auto-affection that maintains a structural relation to what exceeds and resists consumption. Rather than presenting taste as a pure alternative to appropriation, the article interprets it as a limit-experience in which contact, incorporation, and knowledge encounter what cannot be fully assimilated. It thus proposes to understand taste as a non-appropriative posture, capable of orienting the relation between aesthetics and ethics without resolving it into a normative synthesis. Approaching the seminars as a theoretical laboratory, the contribution shows how taste operates in Derrida's thought as a critical instance with respect to any economy of appropriation. | *Keywords: Taste, Disgust, Auto-Affection, Ex-Appropriation, Jacques Derrida*

1. Introduction

At first sight, taste may seem to occupy only a marginal place in Jacques Derrida's corpus: it does not appear as one of the most immediately recognisable names of deconstruction. Yet a closer reading of Derrida's published texts and unpublished seminars reveals that taste belongs to a broader constellation of motifs through which Derrida repeatedly interrogates the limits of appropriation. Taste, in this sense, is a privileged site for thinking the unstable passage between contact and assimilation, pleasure and rejection, knowledge and incorporation. It allows us to ask whether there can be a mode of knowing that does not take the form of an objectifying possession.

This article traces a number of sites of taste in Derrida's corpus, outlining a trajectory that moves across published texts such as *A Taste for the Secret* (2001 [1996]) and *Economimesis* (1975), as well as unpublished seminars, in particular *Manger l'autre* (1989–1990) and *Rhétorique du cannibalisme* (1990–1991), in order to investigate taste as a modality of auto-affection inscribed

within a reflection on ex-appropriation.¹ The gradual posthumous publication of Derrida's seminars has progressively revealed the value of these pages and their crucial role in the genesis of the published works. Approaching the unpublished seminars as a living laboratory of Derrida's philosophical practice makes it possible to foreground their theoretical significance and to identify a missing element in the trajectory of taste within Derrida's corpus.

When asking whether Jacques Derrida ever engaged with the question of taste, the most explicit point of reference is *A Taste for the Secret*, a dialogical volume structured around a series of interviews in which Derrida responds first to questions posed by Maurizio Ferraris and later by Gianni Vattimo, and offers a seminar-style commentary on a text by Maurice Blanchot. The title refers above all to a strongly idiomatic expression – *avoir le goût de, avoir le goût pour* – to have a taste for something, an inclination, a fondness, a desire, but also a recurring habit that may appear capricious or gratuitous. In this idiomatic choice one may discern in Derrida himself a certain fondness for an ambiguous terminology whose meaning never stabilises, but continually shifts between literal and figurative senses. Taste names both a sensible experience and a disposition, both a bodily contact and an affective or intellectual orientation. In both cases, it implies a self-reflexive structure: tasting is never only tasting an object, but also tasting oneself in the very act of tasting. Every gratification involves, at least minimally, a form of self-gratification; every relation to what is tasted passes through an experience of auto-affection.

Why, then, speak of taste in relation to the secret? Taste, understood as a form of gratification, operates here by orienting pleasure, and with it desire, towards a lack destined to remain such, towards what cannot be exhausted by possession. Like desire, taste does not simply consume its object. It may seek contact with it, but this contact does not abolish distance. By orienting pleasure, Derrida explains, the taste for the secret indicates a movement of desire towards what is lacking, towards what cannot or must not be said: something that comes to a halt before being uttered, held within by the closure of the lips, an emblematic threshold, not merely metaphorical, of the space of the proper. The presence of the secret thus takes the form of absence: of silence, which is itself a mode of presence. Whether kept silent or rendered silent, the secret is what remains private even when it is inscribed within a public space, without being absorbed into a normative or affective system, as in the case of the secret that inhabits the most private of private spaces: the unconscious. The secret is both inside and outside, retained and expelled: *le secret*, in its literal ambivalence, is at once secret and secretion. It remains within, yet unintegrated, and precisely for this reason remains external to what contains it, as an excess.

In *A Taste for the Secret*, Derrida describes this logic in terms of what has persistently occupied his attention: that which eludes the system, interrupting its closure without constituting itself as a mere exteriority:

¹ For a psychoanalytically informed reading of orality in Derrida, see Guyer (2007). For a transversal reading of Derrida's work centered on alimentary motifs, see Perullo (2011).

I have constantly attempted to single out that element which would not allow itself to be integrated into a series or a group, in order to show that there is a non-oppositional difference that transcends the dialectic, which is itself always oppositional. There is a supplement, or a *pharmakon* – I could give many more examples – that does not let itself be dialectized. Precisely that which, not being dialectical, makes the dialectic impossible, is necessarily retaken by the dialectic that it relaunches. At this point, we have to remark that the dialectic consists precisely in dialectizing the non-dialectizable. (Derrida, 2001 [1996], p. 32)

With respect to the system, Derrida lingers on what does not allow itself to be integrated, what interrupts closure without assuming the form of a simple outside. This is a logic that, in the following lines, Derrida will explicitly define as one of *ex-appropriation*: that which prevents dialectical reabsorption and describes the movement of expropriating inclusion that characterises the relation to all alterity, to every intimate estrangement.

One might then ask whether this image of the secret also implicitly says something about taste itself, or more precisely whether, in this failure of appropriation, one might also discern the secret of taste. To what extent is there, in taste, a dimension that eludes appropriation, that exceeds it, and yet persists? To what extent can taste be considered a sensible modality capable of retaining without consuming? And to what extent does Derrida in fact speak of taste in these terms?

My claim is that taste becomes philosophically significant in Derrida precisely because it occupies this unstable threshold, neither simply aesthetic nor simply ethical. It belongs to aesthetics insofar as it concerns sensibility, pleasure, disgust, and judgement; it becomes ethically charged insofar as every act of tasting implies a relation to alterity, to what is welcomed, consumed, rejected, preserved, or left to remain. Derrida's scattered reflections on taste allow us to think taste as a limit-experience of appropriation. Far from being a pure alternative to appropriation, or a relation to alterity untouched by violence, assimilation, or consumption, taste marks the point at which appropriation encounters what it cannot fully master. In this respect, taste belongs to a logic of *ex-appropriation*: a movement in which what is most proper is constituted only through an exposure to what exceeds it, displaces it, and prevents it from closing upon itself. To taste is to receive, to retain, and to be affected by something other; yet what is tasted is never simply possessed. It leaves a trace, a memory, an aftertaste, but it also withdraws from full incorporation.

Once taste has been introduced as an auto-affective modality that shares the logic of the secret, the article turns to *Economimesis*, where Derrida examines Kantian aesthetics and the role of disgust within the economy of judgement. Before taste is explicitly thematised as such, disgust already functions as a limit-element: something at once internal and external to the system, capable of interrupting its closure. Disgust marks what cannot be assimilated, represented, or transformed into a concept. It is expelled, but its expulsion reveals the fragility of the system that requires it.

From there, the analysis moves to the unpublished seminars *Manger l'autre* (1989–1990) and *Rhétorique du cannibalisme* (1990–1991), where taste, eating, auto-affection, and *restance* are most explicitly brought together. In these seminars Derrida examines the material, symbolic, and religious meanings of the alimentary act, of incorporation, and of taste, turning them into privileged sites from which to interrogate the relation between aesthetics and ethics.² It is here that some of Derrida's rarest and most valuable reflections on taste emerge, understood as a sensory faculty, bound up with memory and with a form of retention capable of preserving without consuming. In the course of the seminar lectures, Derrida also outlines a genuine semiotics of flavours, which often extends beyond immediate sensoriality in order to describe the affective tone, the aftertaste, of moods and feelings. What is at stake here is precisely the flavour of particular *secreta*: of tears, which can be salty and at the same time sweet or bitter, and of milk and honey, whose sweetness is invoked to figure an infusion of maternal or divine love.

Through these stages, it becomes possible to show how Derrida's attention turns to taste across the broadest range of its meanings, allowing it to be thought as a non-appropriative mode of knowing, in close contact with the question of the indeconstructible *restance*, *le reste*.

2. The Economy of Disgust

An initial interest on Derrida's part in the logic of taste, and more specifically of disgust, emerges in *Economimesis*, where it is already possible to discern the search for a limit-element, both internal and external to the system, capable of interrupting its closure.³ After having examined the Hegelian dialectical-speculative system in *Glas* (1974) as an incorporative and metabolising apparatus without leftovers, Derrida turns in *Economimesis* to Kantian transcendentalism, understood as a philosophical method that institutes a system of exchanges governed by an economic logic. Whereas Hegelian discursivity is regulated by an infinite incorporative movement, conceived as a work of mourning, Kantian transcendentalism occupies the position of a frame, filter, or threshold. It operates as the condition of possibility of the categorical system, rendering the organisation of thought accessible through analogical relations.

Starting from the *Critique of Judgement*, and through an analysis of the conception of the beautiful in Kantian aesthetics, Derrida seeks to show how it is structured through a series of analogies between moral taste and bodily taste, within an economy of exchange that finds its limit in disgust. Beauty,

² These two seminars constitute the second and third acts of the cycle devoted to *The Politics of Friendship*, initiated in 1988–1989. Initially delivered at the EHESS in Paris, the seminars were later presented in the United States. Copies are held at the Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine (IMEC) and in the Jacques Derrida Papers at the University of California, Irvine. Reproductions also held in the archives of the Princeton University Library. A substantial part of the second half of *Manger l'autre* was later taken up and reworked in the article *Reste – le maître ou le supplément d'infini*, dedicated to the historian of religions Charles Malamoud (Derrida, 2002). For a discussion of Derrida's seminar *Rhétorique du cannibalisme*, see Krell (2006).

³ Published in 1975 in the collective volume *Mimesis, des articulations*, *Economimesis* is connected to two texts from the same period: the article *Parergon* (1974), later further developed in *La vérité en peinture* (1978).

insofar as it comes to express aesthetic ideas, is grounded by analogy in the verbal expression of the human body, in which the mouth performs this function, as the site of the tongue, which is language while also fulfilling a perceptual role. Within it, the complicity of the senses allows hetero-affection to become auto-affection. As an opening, an orifice and a point of transition from outside to inside, a transitional space situated neither within nor without, the mouth embodies the Kantian transcendental mechanism, whereby concrete experience is filtered and transformed into universal concepts. Taste assumes a transcendental function whenever it operates a synthesis that confers meaning on perceived objects, transforming subjective inclination into an experience that appears necessary, that is, oriented towards universal ends. Taste for beauty would thus be the sign of nature's orientation towards moral ends, as well as the basis of its teleology.

This system, however, is not entirely continuous and circular, but is interrupted by disgust: nature, even in its most genuine authenticity, can give rise to repulsion. Disgust provokes the vomiting of an element that is impossible to assimilate, that is, to classify, represent, or name. It is something that can only be partially digested, insofar as it constitutes an excess that cannot be transformed into a concept or assimilated to the categorical system, and thus remains outside the scope of judgement. Disgust is itself an alterity that is at once internal and external to the system, and that assumes a function akin to that of the *parergon*. Like the frame, which is situated at the margins of the work of art without being an integral part of it, disgust operates at the limits of the transcendental system. However, it moves in the opposite direction, as a resistance to incorporation, as an internal drive towards expulsion. In proximity to sensible disgust, in the literal sense, moral disgust, or contempt, is founded by analogy. For Derrida, the reference to rejection thus assumes a supplementary function, making it possible to refer to alterity without reducing it to an absolute exteriority that would be radically unnameable.⁴

If Kant thus insists on the disinterested character of the judgement of taste, that is, its lack of practical, moral, or cognitive interest, Derrida notes that mimesis is never neutral, but always enacts an exchange of meanings, power, and values through a "double scene". The apparently free representation is sustained by an underlying dynamic that organises its sense.⁵

From this observation of disgust as an alterity internal to a system that only appears to be closed, Derrida will later continue to think taste in relation to alterity, and I want to shift the emphasis towards the persistence of what

⁴ Among philosophical studies of disgust, Winfried Menninghaus's historical and theoretical survey approaches Kantian disgust, unlike Derrida, as a form of radical expulsion. His perspective remains of interest above all for the parallel it draws between disgust and laughter (Menninghaus, 2003, pp. 103–115). For a broader discussion of *Economimesis*, see Campos-Salvaterra (2021).

⁵ In a different context, the Kantian account of disgust leads to conclusions comparable to Derrida's. Aurel Kolnai, a pioneer in the philosophical study of disgust, describes it as a "two-faced Janus", characterized by a perverse magnetism that repels while simultaneously attracting the revolting object, a reading emphasized by Carolyn Korsmeyer (Kolnai, 2004 [1929], pp. 1–36). Derrida's intervention radicalizes this insight by stressing that this process is not manifest, but operates instead through introjection or phantasmatic incorporation.

remains after appropriation. This does not exempt sensible relation, once and for all, from consumption or from a certain form of violence. Derrida's point is more unstable and more demanding: what is at stake is the exposure, from within, of the limit of appropriation. The same mouth that tastes is also the mouth that eats, speaks, incorporates, rejects, and expels. There is therefore no innocent taste, no relation that would simply leave the other intact. What taste makes thinkable, rather, is a relation in which appropriation is exposed to what persists without allowing itself to be objectified: a trace, a supplement, an aftertaste, a persistence of sense. The remainder is not only an indigestible residue, a leftover of assimilation, but above all that impalpable dimension of experience which survives consumption, insists in memory, and continues to act without becoming fully available. In this sense, the non-appropriative dimension of taste, rather than opposing appropriation from the outside, emerges at the point where appropriation encounters what can be retained, but not possessed. It is for this reason that such a reading is ethically relevant, insofar as it considers sensible experiences not merely as subjective states, but as deeply relational experiences. They imply a relation to what is other: to what is welcomed, incorporated, rejected, preserved, or left as remainder. Derrida's reading of disgust thus prepares the later analyses of eating by showing that the aesthetic economy of taste is already traversed by a question of alterity and assimilation. The ethical significance of taste neither prescribes a norm nor converts aesthetic experience into moral judgement; rather, it shows that every relation to the other is marked by the failure of any claim to assimilation. In this sense, taste orients ethics "negatively", by making sensible the impossibility of fully appropriating what one encounters. The following section pursues this limit into the unpublished seminars, where the question of taste is displaced from the economy of judgement to the scene of incorporation.

3. Tasting Oneself and The Other

Manger l'autre and *Rhétorique du cannibalisme* are two seminars devoted to the psychoanalytic, anthropological, and religious implications of the alimentary act, and to the meaning of eating in its elusive scope. Through references to food that is sacred and profane, raw and cooked, natural and cultural, Derrida explores within them the dimension of taste and of sense, of tears, bread, flesh, blood, milk, and honey. In these lectures, eating is situated at the intersection of three major philosophical questions: the proper, the *cogito*, and the thing. It thus concentrates a series of ambivalences and paradoxes that lend themselves to deconstructing the limits of the body, the subject, and the text, as well as those of the meal and of food itself.

The playful seriousness that characterises Derrida's approach throughout these seminars takes the form of irony, farce, or parody. This tone belongs to a moment in which Derrida, at the height of his international visibility, had for several years been exposed to criticism and reassessment, and continued to confront accusations that understood deconstruction as a practice of decomposition, rumination or even nihilistic dissolution. Against this polemical background, the alimentary lexicon does not remain external

to deconstruction; it also comes to name the very risk to which deconstruction exposes itself in interrogating appropriation. A comparable problem emerges, in dialogical form, in *A Taste for the Secret*. Vattimo, in the course of a discussion on violence, experience, and the encounter with the other, describes the work of exegesis on the master as a way of consuming, metabolising, and eating (Derrida, 2001 [1996], p. 91). The metaphor thus marks the point at which philosophical interpretation recognises its own exposure to the alimentary logic it analyses. If deconstructing also means working over what one encounters, then the deconstructive gesture is never simply foreign to appropriation; it exposes itself performatively to the very economy it interrogates.

Derrida's response clarifies the stakes by distinguishing violence from brutality. Even the most respectful argument, he suggests, preserves a certain violence, without which there would be no culture; brutality, by contrast, is the dogmatic, impoverishing, and repetitive violence that leaves no room for the other (Derrida, 2001 [1996], pp. 91–92). Deconstruction therefore cannot consist in the simple elimination of violence or appropriation. Its critical force lies rather in exposing, within its own operation, the limit at which reading risks becoming consumption. Taste suggests, in this sense, not only a relational dynamic, but also a posture of reading in which contact does not coincide with assimilation and understanding does not require complete possession.

This is why, during the seminars, Derrida confronts Heideggerian disorientation directly, positioning his own gesture less as an alternative than as a continuation, as its other face. A recurrent question thus arises: what does it mean to eat? Derrida adopts the mode of Heidegger's seminar *Was heißt Denken?* (1951–1952), in which, by multiplying questions around the initial problem, the inquiry slides across the different layers of meaning that can be discerned within the question itself, depending on how it is formulated. What, then, is a thing to be eaten, and, prior to that, what is a thing? Derrida poses this question by returning once again to Heidegger, drawing not only on the lecture *The Thing* (1950), but above all on the earlier seminar *The Question of the Thing* (*Die Frage nach dem Ding*), delivered between 1935 and 1936. Eating, ultimately, is like writing: it leaves traces. Beyond the fact that food cannot be classified as a "thing" among others, nor framed as a simple object of knowledge, it inevitably entails the production of wastes. Since a component of the thing remains inaccessible and cannot be assimilated, Derrida asks what it is that is not assimilated in the thing that is eaten. What is the unassimilable?

In the final lectures of *Manger l'autre*, from the tenth session onwards, Derrida begins to suggest a shift from the thing to the restance, *le reste*, in search of an instance destined to remain an indeconstructible limit. He identifies four meanings of the restance, which he sets out by closely following Heidegger's definitions of the subject in his seminar, almost as if seeking to replace them. What emerges is a term that is difficult to translate: that which subsists as substance and remains after a disappearance; the leftover

of food, which one ought not, does not wish to, or cannot eat; the remains of a dead body; and difference as the excess produced by an arithmetical operation. Alongside these meanings, a fifth is added that traverses them structurally: restance as what is left over from an ontological project centred on being, that is, alterity as such, which is also the restance of restance. Restance is bound up with a general idea of dirtiness: it is corruptible, insofar as it concerns organic matter that decomposes and separates, thereby threatening the indivisibility of a proper, clean body (*propre*). At the same time, this logic of restance is articulated through more concrete figures of residue. Waste, as decomposing matter, marks what must be expelled in order for the body to maintain its integrity. Leftovers, by contrast, refer more specifically to what remains of a meal, what one does not, cannot, or must not eat. In both cases, contamination does not concern the residue as such, the *quoi*, the thing, but above all the individual to whom it is connected, the *qui*, namely the one who has handled it, cooked it, or left it behind. Leftovers, indeed, are always someone's leftovers. The *who* thus put into question by restance, prior to being a subject, is defined in relation to what it expels and to its capacity to become edge, orifice, and boundary of the body. It is therefore not possible to delimit what is proper to the *who* except, paradoxically, in what remains after all its residues have been taken away from it. The *who* is both the subject of restance and that which remains, at once including and included within the logic of what exceeds it. And yet, paradoxically, the human subject is anything but its waste or its leftovers.

In the eleventh lecture, eating the other thus becomes a problem of delimitation between the body and what it leaves behind. What is at stake is a displacement of the boundary between inside and outside, bringing it inward: not only because self-assimilation is possible, but because in eating one makes the other part of oneself. Yet if every heterophagy entails homophagy – understood not only as derived from *ōmos* (raw), but also from *homos* (same, similar) – it also becomes autophagy. Observing the topology of sensibility in the classical distribution of the five senses, Derrida notes how, in the alimentary act, they are difficult to isolate from one another, and he returns to the notion of auto-affection, of which touch – also implicated in taste and in tasting oneself – is the paradigmatic example. Every contact is always a contact of the other with oneself and, at the same time, a contact with oneself perceived as other. Described in terms of intentional consciousness, transcendence, and intersubjectivity, the experience of restance comes to overturn its own value: from waste and impure residue it becomes substratum, substance, an ineliminable ground, the being of non-being. In relation to the body, once the distinction between body and non-body (soul, spirit, consciousness) has been overcome, restance functions as a delimitation of the proper, clean body (*propre*). The body is what remains once its waste and leftovers have been removed, with which it retains no relation of ownership. By attending to sensoriality, Derrida thus comes to outline a transcendental aesthetics starting from touch as an auto-affection implicated in taste.

4. The Flavour of Emotions and Taste as the Indestructible

The experience of taste thus becomes a threshold experience when flavours are called upon to describe emotions. Derrida ventures into a universe of flavours capable of articulating emotional tones, and it is in the pages of these seminars that he perhaps for the first time describes the taste of the *secreta*. The fourth lecture of *Manger l'autre* opens with the image of a raft in the middle of the sea, the sole means of survival for shipwrecked figures who, exhausted by hunger and thirst, might yield to a form of cannibalism sometimes considered justified by extreme circumstances. In that same context, where survival would render otherwise abominable acts acceptable, thirst might also lead one to drink seawater, which, beyond its debilitating effects, has the salty taste of tears. Devoted to the sea, the abyss, and tears, this lecture includes intense interrogations into the meaning of eating. Freud's narrative, which traces Eucharistic ritual back to the totemic meal, is itself traversed, in a *mise en abyme*, by the sacrificial dynamic it describes: the denial of filiation and parricide, so that the son may take the place of the father. From the *goût de la mer*, Derrida thus comes to speak of the *goût de la mère*, shifting attention from the father to the mother, and from tears to wine and milk. It is for this reason that he presents Augustine's *Confessions* as a great book on tears and on the temptations of the flesh, focusing on the passages devoted to Saint Monica, Augustine's mother, and commenting as well on her taste for wine, which in this case appears as a vice.⁶

Sweetness, by contrast, is at the centre of the fifth lecture of *Rhétorique du cannibalisme*, in which Derrida lingers on the passage from the Book of Ezekiel (3:1–15), where the prophet receives from God the command to eat the scroll containing his word, which will be for him "sweet as honey". Honey, Derrida remarks, is a peculiar nourishment: it concentrates those features that render food an inappropriable "object", even with respect to structural categories. It might be described as natural, even though it is produced by an animal society and by the industrious activity of bees. It is both pure and processed, a vegetable substance that becomes animal and retains the fragrance of flowers. It is a secreted fluid that separates from a body and, like seed, egg, or germ, is dense with life and regenerative power. Like milk, it is a gift, a sign of peace, produced in nature without putting any living being to death. It represents sweetness par excellence and in itself. Sweetness, Derrida insists, arrives with dessert, when hunger has already been satisfied, in order to respond to a desire that exceeds need, in pure taste. Sweetness is indeed the taste of the Good, something that remains good beyond hunger, a comfort, as if it possessed in itself a certain "spiritualising" power. There is sweetness in contact, in the caress, as well as in the eyes, in the gaze, which is capable of being haptic. Beyond a phono-logocentric perspective that would restrict sweetness to the human being and to God, Derrida asks whether it is possible to deny certain living beings, certain animals, the experience of sweetness and of the caress. And how are we to think the soul and love, if not starting from

⁶ *Confessions*, IX.8.18; see also the concluding sections of Book IX on the death of Saint Monica.

sweetness? The power of the trope of sweetness allows it to invade the sensory sphere only to exceed it, offering itself to an inner feeling that, almost paradoxically, becomes the supplementary taste of words themselves. It is here that Derrida describes taste as an excess, as the part of food that is not eaten and that, insofar as it remains inappropriable, participates in the ethical dimension of *restance*.

5. Conclusions

What Derrida outlines across the texts and seminars considered here is an epistemological ethics inscribed within aesthetics: one that reintegrates corporeality, sensibility, and the alimentary act as domains of philosophical interest, while at the same time questioning how such reintegration might avoid becoming another form of re-assimilation. A certain claim to totalisation, often an unacknowledged risk, concerns the summarising operation of every tradition, as well as of every discourse that seeks to include, classify, interpret, and comprehend. It is for this reason that the question repeatedly returns: how can one include without annihilating?

Taste gives this question a sensible form. It knows through contact, retains through memory, disappears and returns when recalled; yet, although it interiorises, it does not simply annihilate, consume, or possess what it preserves. Its non-appropriative dimension consists neither in a pure exteriority nor in a complete interiority with respect to incorporation. In this sense, taste shares the structure of the secret and participates in the dimension of *restance*: it is retained without being fully integrated; it insists without becoming entirely available. Derrida then suggests, in one of the concluding lectures of the seminars, that starting from taste the task is therefore to think another ethics, or another law, of *restance*: not an ethics imposed on sensibility from the outside, but one that emerges from the very way in which sensibility enters into relation with what it cannot make entirely its own. If there is a pedagogical value of taste here, it concerns the possibility of educating desire not towards the renunciation of contact, but towards the recognition of its limit.

Over an extended temporal arc, and across texts separated by many years, the trajectory reconstructed here bears witness to Derrida's return to taste as a limit-experience, irreducible both to conceptual knowledge and to ethical normativity. In taste, according to a modality that extends across the entire sensory sphere, Derrida finds a posture of knowing and of contact grounded in the renunciation of totalising appropriation. To understand the other as other, to let the other remain wholly other, means renouncing the fantasy of a fully determinable relation. From this renunciation, and from the loosening of the subjective grasp on the object, there also follows the possibility of restoring value to every alterity, to every singularity.

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21787923