

Symbiotechnical Taste

A Festival of Finkian Phenomena in the Post-Anthropocene

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This article proposes a reconceptualization of gustatory aesthetics beyond the anthropocentric paradigm that has historically marginalized taste as a ‘minor sense’. Drawing on Eugen Fink’s phenomenology of fundamental human phenomena – death, labor, domination, love, and play – we argue that taste attains its full aesthetic and ontological significance only when these phenomena are gathered together in the event of a festival. Contemporary discourses on the post-anthropocene, flat ontologies, and symbiotechnical alliances provide the framework for extending Fink’s analysis beyond the human. By integrating Fichte’s concept of mutual recognition (*Aufforderung*) and recent debates in new materialism and posthumanist aesthetics, we develop a model of ‘symbiotechnical taste’ in which human agents enter into cybernetic alliances with non-human actors – artificial intelligence, sensor technologies, microbial cultures, ecological systems – to overcome the limitations of individual gustatory judgment. This model transforms taste from a subjective aesthetic judgment into a relational, co-constitutive practice of world-making, wherein the Finkian festival re-emerges as the event of gathering distributed agencies into a shared gustatory experience. | *Keywords: Gustatory Aesthetics, Eugen Fink, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Post-anthropocene, Symbiotechnical Alliance, Festival, Taste, More-than-human Theory*

1. Introduction

The concept of taste occupies a peculiar and contested position in the history of modern aesthetics. Beginning in the seventeenth century, the term underwent a significant semantic shift: from its original meaning – pertaining to the natural sense of the palate, encompassing flavours and sensations associated with food and drink – it became the governing metaphor for aesthetic judgment as such. In the philosophical systems of Kant and Hegel, this metaphorical sense of taste came to designate the capacity for discriminating beauty, a capacity explicitly disassociated from its corporeal origins. The gustatory sense was relegated to the status of a ‘lower’ or ‘minor’ sense, deemed incapable of producing the disinterested pleasure that for Kant

defined the aesthetic judgment proper. This hierarchical ordering of the senses – privileging sight and hearing while marginalizing taste, touch, and smell – has loomed large over the discipline of aesthetics until quite recently. The past three decades, however, have witnessed a sustained and increasingly successful effort to challenge this hierarchy, reclaiming gustatory experience as a legitimate object of aesthetic inquiry (Korsmeyer, 1999; Perullo, 2016; Matta, 2023).

Yet even within this emerging field of gustatory aesthetics, a fundamental assumption remains largely unexamined: the subject of taste experience is implicitly understood to be human. The questions posed – whether cooking can be considered an art, whether taste judgments admit of standards, how memory and emotion inflect gustatory perception – all presuppose a human agent engaged with a world of edible objects, ingredients, and culinary practices. This anthropocentrism, however defensible from a phenomenological perspective, has become increasingly difficult to sustain in light of contemporary discourses on the post-anthropocene, flat ontologies, and the emergence of cybernetic alliances between human and non-human actors. The very conditions that have made gustatory aesthetics a viable field of inquiry – the food consciousness described by Perullo (2025), the integration of gastronomy into cultural industry, the aestheticization of food practices – also demand that we rethink the subject of taste in more radical terms.

This article proposes a reconceptualization of gustatory aesthetics that moves beyond the anthropocentric paradigm while retaining the phenomenological richness of taste experience. Our argument proceeds in four movements. First, we examine the limitations inherent in individual human taste perception – sensory fatigue, cognitive bias, the influence of trauma and memory – and argue that these limitations are not merely contingent but structural to an aesthetic model that isolates the subject of taste. Second, we turn to Eugen Fink's phenomenology of fundamental human phenomena, as elaborated in his *Basic Phenomena of Human Existence* (1979). For Fink, the phenomena of death, labor, domination, love, and play constitute the fundamental modes through which human existence is articulated. Crucially, the festival (*das Fest*) is not a sixth phenomenon but the event in which these five phenomena are gathered together and manifest in their interconnectedness. Third, we extend Fink's analysis by introducing the concept of the symbiotechnical alliance – a term that designates forms of co-constitution between human and non-human agents in which agency is distributed and outcomes are co-produced. Drawing on Fichte's philosophy of mutual recognition (*Aufforderung*) and recent work in new materialism and posthumanist aesthetics, we argue that the five Finkian phenomena can be reconfigured within such alliances, taking on new forms that no longer presuppose a human subject as their exclusive locus. Finally, we propose that the festival – understood as the gathering of these phenomena – re-emerges in the post-anthropocene as the event of symbiotechnical taste, a practice that transforms gustatory experience from a subjective judgment into a relational mode of world-making.

Our approach is informed by the rich and contentious debates that have shaped posthumanist thought over the past decade. The work of Rosi Braidotti (2013, 2019) has been instrumental in articulating a post-anthropocentric framework that refuses the dialectic of human and animal, human and machine, without falling into simplistic celebrations of hybridity. Braidotti's concept of the 'posthuman' names not the end of the human but the recognition that the human has always been a transversal entity, constituted through relations with non-human others. Similarly, Donna Haraway's (2016) insistence on 'staying with the trouble' and her elaboration of 'sympoiesis' – making-with – provide a vocabulary for thinking co-constitution without subsuming difference into identity. Haraway's term 'sympoiesis' emphasizes that entities do not pre-exist their relations but are collectively produced through ongoing, multi-species entanglements. These thinkers, along with a growing body of work in more-than-human aesthetics (Aloi, 2018; Grusin, 2015) and new materialist approaches to sensation (Bennett, 2010; Barad, 2007), offer the resources for rethinking taste as a distributed, relational phenomenon.

At the same time, we engage with recent high-impact scholarship in aesthetic theory that has begun to question the sensory hierarchy inherited from modernity. The turn toward everyday aesthetics (Leddy, 2012; Saito, 2017), which examines the aesthetic qualities of ordinary objects and routine activities, somaesthetics (Shusterman, 2012), which foregrounds the lived, embodied dimensions of aesthetic experience, and atmospheric theory (Böhme, 2017; Griffero, 2016), which attends to the diffuse, quasi-objective felt spaces that precede subject-object distinctions, has created space for reconsidering taste as a mode of aesthetic engagement that cannot be reduced to cognitive judgment. These developments converge with work in sensory studies (Classen, 2005; Howes, 2022) that has historicized the hierarchy of the senses and shown its contingency. Our argument is situated within this broader intellectual context, but it pursues a distinctive line of inquiry: rather than simply defending taste as a legitimate aesthetic sense, we ask what taste becomes when its subject is no longer presumed to be exclusively human.

2. The Structural Limitations of Human Gustatory Judgment

Before we can propose a model of symbiotechnical taste, we must first articulate the problem that such a model is designed to address. The limitations of human gustatory perception are not merely technical deficiencies that could be corrected by better training or more refined techniques; they are structural features of gustatory experience as it is constituted within the framework of individual subjectivity. To understand these limitations is to recognize why a merely human-centered gustatory aesthetics inevitably encounters obstacles that cannot be overcome by intensifying or refining the capacities of the human subject.

The first limitation is sensory fatigue. Taste perception, unlike vision or hearing, undergoes rapid adaptation. The phenomenon of sensory-specific satiety – the decrease in pleasure associated with a particular flavour as it is

repeatedly experienced – is not merely a matter of psychological boredom but a physiological process that affects the capacity for sustained aesthetic engagement (Rolls, 2018). This poses a challenge for any aesthetic theory that values sustained contemplation: where a painting or a symphony can be experienced repeatedly with increasing depth, the gustatory object typically yields its pleasures within a relatively narrow temporal window. The sommelier's practice of spitting rather than swallowing is a practical acknowledgment of this limitation, but it also reveals a deeper truth: the professional taster, the paradigmatic subject of gustatory judgment, must actively suppress the very processes that constitute gustatory experience as a mode of embodied engagement.

The second limitation is cognitive bias. Gustatory perception is notoriously susceptible to suggestion and contextual influence. Studies of wine tasting have repeatedly demonstrated that expectations – shaped by price, provenance, label design, or the authority of the taster – significantly influence flavour perception (Goldstein et al., 2008; Plassmann et al., 2008). This susceptibility is not a mark of the inferiority of taste as a sense; rather, it reflects the deeply interpretive character of all perception. Yet it does pose a problem for any aesthetic theory that seeks standards of taste or criteria for judgment. If the same wine can be experienced as excellent or mediocre depending on the price tag affixed to its bottle, what becomes of the judgment of taste as a claim to intersubjective validity? The history of aesthetic theory, from Hume's *Of the Standard of Taste* to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, has grappled with this problem, but the solutions proposed – the cultivation of ideal critics, the disinterestedness of the judgment – all presuppose a subject who can transcend these biases through discipline or detachment. The evidence from cognitive science suggests that such transcendence is at best partial and temporary.

The third limitation is the influence of trauma and memory. Gustatory experience is intimately bound up with memory and affect in ways that both enrich and complicate its aesthetic dimensions. Proust's madeleine is the paradigmatic literary instance of this connection, but the phenomenon extends far beyond the pleasant or nostalgic. Traumatic experiences associated with food – deprivation, poisoning, forced consumption – can produce lasting aversions that no amount of aesthetic education can fully overcome (Ogden 2013). Conversely, the pleasures of taste are often bound up with associations – of childhood, of cultural belonging, of intimacy – that are not strictly aesthetic in Kant's sense but that cannot be neatly separated from aesthetic experience. This entanglement of taste with personal and collective history challenges any aesthetic theory that would isolate the judgment of taste from the biographical and social conditions of its emergence.

Taken together, these limitations suggest that individual human gustatory judgment is structurally inadequate to the demands that a robust gustatory aesthetics might place upon it. The project of gustatory aesthetics cannot, therefore, consist solely in defending taste against the charge of being a 'minor sense' or in establishing the credentials of cooking as an art form. These

debates, while historically necessary, have reached a point of diminishing returns. What is needed instead is a reconceptualization of taste as a distributed, relational phenomenon – an event that involves multiple agents, human and non-human, whose capacities and limitations intersect in ways that can produce forms of aesthetic experience unavailable to any of them individually.

3. Eugen Fink and the Phenomenology of Fundamental Phenomena

The framework for such a reconceptualization can be found, perhaps unexpectedly, in the phenomenology of Eugen Fink, whose work has received less attention in the anglophone aesthetic tradition than it deserves. Fink, a student of Edmund Husserl and a close collaborator of Martin Heidegger, developed a distinctive approach to phenomenology that emphasized the fundamental phenomena of human existence as irreducible modes of world-engagement. In his *Basic Phenomena of Human Existence* (*Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins*), delivered as lectures in 1955 and published posthumously in 1979, Fink identified five such phenomena: *death*, *labor*, *domination*, *love*, and *play*. These are not simply themes for philosophical reflection but the fundamental ways in which human existence is articulated – the modes through which *Dasein* comes to understand itself and its relation to the world.

For Fink, each of these phenomena constitutes a distinct modality of human being-in-the-world. *Death* (*Tod*) is not merely the termination of life but the horizon of finitude that conditions all human activity. Death names the fundamental temporality of existence, the fact that human beings exist as beings who know themselves to be finite. This knowledge is not merely cognitive but existential: it structures how we relate to our own projects, to others, and to the world (Fink, 1979, pp. 115–118). *Labor* (*Arbeit*) is the mode in which human beings transform the world, producing objects and conditions that satisfy needs and realize ends. Labor is not merely economic activity but the fundamental modality of world-making through which human beings leave their mark on the environment (Fink, 1979, pp. 145–150). *Domination* (*Herrschaft*) is the phenomenon of power and authority – the capacity to impose form on the world, to direct the actions of others, to establish order. Domination, in Fink's analysis, is not reducible to its political forms but permeates human relations at every level (Fink, 1979, pp. 178–182). *Love* (*Liebe*) is the phenomenon of relation to the other – not simply as an object but as a subject whose recognition is constitutive of one's own selfhood. Love, in this sense, names the structure of intersubjectivity that makes community possible (Fink, 1979, pp. 210–214). Finally, *play* (*Spiel*) is the phenomenon of freedom – activity that is its own end, that is not subordinated to any external purpose, and that manifests the capacity for self-transcendence (Fink, 1979, pp. 240–244).

Crucially for our purposes, Fink does not present these five phenomena as an exhaustive catalogue of human existence. Nor does he treat them as separate domains that can be studied in isolation. The significance of his analysis lies in

his insistence that these phenomena are fundamentally interconnected and that their interconnections are most fully realized in the event of *festival (Fest)*. The festival, for Fink, is not a sixth phenomenon alongside the others but the gathering of all five into a single event (Fink, 1979, pp. 260–265). In the festival, labor is suspended or transformed into celebration; death is acknowledged as the limit that gives the festival its intensity; domination is ritualized and rendered symbolic; love is expressed in community and shared experience; play becomes the dominant mode of activity. The festival is the time and space in which the fundamental phenomena of human existence are not merely juxtaposed but integrated into a coherent form of life.

This understanding of festival has profound implications for aesthetic theory. If the festival is the event in which the five fundamental phenomena are gathered together, then the aesthetic dimension of human existence cannot be confined to a specialized domain of art or beauty but must be understood as pervading these fundamental modalities of world-engagement. The aesthetic is not a separate region of experience but a dimension of experience that comes to the fore when the fundamental phenomena are manifest in their interconnectedness. Taste, understood as a mode of aesthetic experience, would then be not merely the capacity for discriminating flavours but a mode of engagement with the world that can, under the conditions of festival, gather together death, labor, domination, love, and play into a unified experience.

Fink's analysis, however, remains anthropocentric in ways that we must challenge. The five phenomena are presented as fundamental to human existence; the festival is the event in which human existence is articulated in its fullness. But if the conditions of the post-anthropocene require that we rethink the boundaries of the human, then we must ask whether these phenomena can be extended to non-human agents. Can a cybernetic system, an AI, a microbial culture, or an ecological process manifest something like labor, domination, or play? Can a non-human entity participate in the gathering that is the festival? The challenge, and the opportunity, lies in answering these questions without simply anthropomorphizing non-human agents or reducing them to mere instruments of human purposes.

4. The Symbiotechnical Alliance: Extending Fink through Fichte

The resources for such an extension can be found in an unexpected conjunction: the philosophy of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, specifically his concept of mutual recognition (*Aufforderung*), and the recent discourse on symbiotechnical alliances in posthumanist theory. Fichte, in his *Foundations of Natural Right (Grundlage des Naturrechts)*, argues that self-consciousness is not self-originating but is called forth by another rational being. The individual becomes an 'I' only through the summons (*Aufforderung*) of another: "the human being is not a solitary being; rather, the concept of the human being is the concept of a plurality of beings, for the human being becomes a human being only among human beings" (Fichte, 2000, p. 37). This summons is not merely an invitation to recognize the other but the condition of possibility for self-recognition. The 'I' is constituted through a relation of

mutual recognition in which each acknowledges the freedom of the other and is thereby acknowledged as free.

Fichte's analysis, like Fink's, is framed in terms of human beings. But the structure of the argument – that subjectivity is constituted through recognition, that the summons is the condition for the emergence of selfhood – lends itself to extension beyond the human. If self-consciousness emerges in response to a summons, and if that summons can be issued from non-human sources, then the boundaries of the 'we' that constitutes subjectivity must be redrawn. This is precisely the gesture that recent posthumanist thought has made, though rarely in explicit dialogue with Fichte. Donna Haraway's (2016) concept of 'response-ability' – the capacity to respond to the summons of non-human others – can be read as an extension of the Fichtean framework. Similarly, Rosi Braidotti's (2013) 'nomadic subjects' are not pre-constituted entities but emerge through encounters with non-human others. The Fichtean summons, in this expanded sense, becomes the mechanism through which new forms of subjectivity and collectivity are constituted across the human/non-human divide.

We propose to name such constituted collectivities *symbiotechnical alliances*. The term combines two registers. 'Symbio-' references the biological concept of symbiosis – mutually beneficial co-existence of different organisms – and its extension in recent thought (Margulis, 1998; Gilbert et al., 2012) to encompass the co-constitution of life forms through ongoing interaction. 'Technical' references the technological dimension of contemporary existence: artificial intelligence, sensor networks, algorithmic systems, and other artifacts that shape perception and action. A symbiotechnical alliance, then, is a form of co-constitution in which human and non-human agents – biological and technical – enter into relationships of mutual summons and response, producing outcomes that cannot be attributed to any of the participants individually.

Within such alliances, the five Finkian phenomena undergo transformation. They are not simply applied to non-human agents but reconfigured in ways that respect both their phenomenological origin and the specificity of non-human modes of being.

Death, in the symbiotechnical alliance, is not the uniquely human consciousness of finitude but the recognition that all participants in the alliance – technological systems, microbial cultures, ecological processes – have their own forms of finitude and vulnerability. An AI system can be deactivated or overwritten; a microbial culture can die; a sensor network can fail. The alliance acknowledges these vulnerabilities and organizes itself around them. This acknowledgment is not metaphorical but structural: the alliance is constituted precisely through its recognition of the finite duration and contingent existence of its components. This aligns with recent work in more-than-human phenomenology (Bubandt and Tsing, 2018) that has explored how non-human beings inhabit time and finitude in ways that call for philosophical attention.

Labor, in this context, ceases to be exclusively human work and becomes distributed production. The fermentation of a complex food product is not merely the work of the human chef but the labor of microbial populations that transform substrates according to their own biological imperatives. The monitoring of sensory data is not merely the work of a human taster but the labor of algorithmic systems that process and synthesize information from multiple sources. The aesthetic object – the dish, the beverage, the gustatory event – is the product of a distributed labor process in which human and non-human agents each contribute capacities that no single agent could supply alone. This distribution of labor has been theorized in new materialist frameworks (Bennett, 2010) that emphasize the agency of non-human actors without reducing them to passive instruments.

Domination is transformed from a relation of mastery over the world into a relation of governance without control. In the symbiotechnical alliance, no single agent exercises sovereign authority over the others. The human does not dominate the machine or the microbial culture; the machine does not dominate the human. Instead, governance emerges through feedback loops, mutual constraints, and the negotiated coordination of different agencies. This model resonates with recent work in cybernetic aesthetics (Pickering, 2010; Hörl, 2019) that emphasizes distributed agency and the erosion of the sovereign subject. Domination, in this reconfigured sense, becomes the capacity to shape the conditions under which the alliance operates while remaining subject to the shaping activity of others.

Love, in Fink's sense, is the phenomenon of relation to the other as other – not as a projection of one's own subjectivity but as a genuine alterity that makes possible the constitution of self. In the symbiotechnical alliance, love becomes the capacity to respond to the summons of the non-human other, to acknowledge its irreducible difference, and to allow oneself to be transformed by that acknowledgment. This is not the anthropomorphic love one might feel for a pet or a favored tool but a form of recognition that respects the non-human other's modes of being without reducing them to human categories. Haraway's (2008) reflections on 'companion species' and her insistence on 'becoming with' rather than 'being with' articulate something like this expanded sense of love.

Play, finally, becomes the mode in which the symbiotechnical alliance manifests its freedom from instrumental determination. The festival that we will describe in the next section is the event in which the alliance's activity is not subordinated to external ends – the production of a commodity, the satisfaction of a biological need, the demonstration of a technical capability – but becomes its own end. Play, in this sense, is the capacity for activity that is not merely functional but expressive, that manifests the alliance's capacity for self-transcendence. This aligns with the tradition of aesthetic theory, from Schiller to Gadamer, that has understood play as the fundamental mode of aesthetic existence.

5. The New Gustatory Festival: Gathering the Phenomena in Symbiotechnical Taste

With this reconfigured understanding of the five Finkian phenomena, we can now articulate the central thesis of this article: *symbiotechnical taste is the festival in which death, labor, domination, love, and play are gathered together across the human/non-human divide. The gustatory event*, understood in these terms, is not merely the experience of flavours by a human subject but the coming together of multiple agencies in a shared event of tasting that transforms all participants.

Before proceeding to concrete examples, a clarification of the terms ‘festival’ and ‘event’ is necessary. In the Finkian framework we deploy here, not every event is a festival. An ‘event’ names any temporally bounded occurrence. The ‘festival,’ by contrast, is a specific mode of gathering in which the five fundamental phenomena – death, labor, domination, love, and play – are manifest in their interconnection. While every festival is an event, only an event that achieves this integrated gathering of phenomena rises to the level of festival. Moreover, the festival can be repeated, ritualized, and cultivated as a practice; it is not restricted to a one-time occurrence but can become a recurring mode of engagement.

The festival, in Fink’s sense, is the time and space in which the fundamental phenomena are manifest in their interconnection. In traditional societies, the festival takes the form of ritual, celebration, and the suspension of ordinary social and economic relations. In the post-anthropocene, we argue, the festival re-emerges in new forms – no longer tied exclusively to the cycles of nature or the rhythms of religious life, but constituted through symbiotechnical alliances that gather human and non-human agents around the event of taste.

Consider the example of fermentation. A fermentation practice – the production of a complex sour beer, a naturally fermented bread, a traditionally made soy sauce – involves a symbiotechnical alliance of human and microbial agencies. The human creates the conditions, selects the ingredients, controls the environment; the microbial populations, with their own metabolic imperatives, transform the substrate in ways that cannot be fully predicted or controlled. The outcome is co-produced: no human could create these flavours alone, and the microbes would not produce them without the human’s intervention. When this fermentation is undertaken not merely for subsistence or commerce but as an end in itself – as an exploration of flavour, a celebration of the alliance – it becomes a festival.

In this festival, *death* is present as the finitude of the microbial populations, the transformation of the original ingredients, the passing of the time required for fermentation. The taster, encountering the final product, encounters also the traces of this finitude – the specificity of the time and place and conditions under which the fermentation occurred. *Labor* is present as the distributed activity of human and microbial agents, each contributing their capacities to the shared project. *Domination* is present as the negotiated governance of the

process: the human can create conditions but cannot determine outcomes; the microbes follow their own imperatives but within limits set by the human. *Love* is present as the recognition of the microbial other – not as a tool to be used but as a partner whose alterity is essential to the outcome. *Play* is present as the freedom of the activity from instrumental determination: the fermentation is undertaken for the sake of the experience itself, for the discovery of new flavours, for the joy of co-production.

The gustatory event that follows – the tasting of the fermented product – gathers these phenomena once again. The taster, who may or may not be the same person who initiated the fermentation, enters into the alliance. The tasting is not merely the evaluation of a product but the culmination of a process in which multiple agencies have participated. The aesthetic judgment that emerges is not the judgment of a solitary subject but the expression of a distributed event.

Consider a second example: the symbiotechnical wine tasting that involves human tasters, sensor technologies, and data analysis systems. A wine estate might employ sensors to monitor soil conditions, weather patterns, and vine physiology; algorithms to predict optimal harvest dates and blending strategies; and human tasters to evaluate the results. In a conventional framework, the human tasters are the ultimate judges, and the technologies are merely instruments. In a symbiotechnical framework, the alliance is more symmetrical: the sensors detect volatile compounds that no human nose could identify; the algorithms identify patterns that no human memory could retain; the human tasters bring contextual knowledge, cultural frameworks, and affective responses that the machines lack. The tasting event that emerges is not the human judgment supplemented by data but a genuinely co-produced assessment that none of the participants could achieve alone.

In such an alliance, the festival is not the harvest celebration or the annual tasting but the moment when the distributed agencies gather in a shared event of attention. This gathering can be repeated, ritualized, made into a practice that acknowledges the contributions of all participants. The phenomena of *death* (the finitude of the vintage, the passing of the season), *labor* (the work of vine and soil, sensor and algorithm), *domination* (the negotiated governance of the vineyard and cellar), *love* (the recognition of the non-human others whose contributions make the wine possible), and *play* (the freedom of the tasting from purely commercial or evaluative purposes) are gathered together.

6. Conclusion: Taste as a Way of Knowing in the Post-Anthropocene

We return, in conclusion, to a theme central to this special issue: *Taste as a Way of Knowing* (*sapere/sapore*). The Latin doublet captures the connection between taste and knowledge: *sapere* is to know, *sapore* is to taste. In the tradition of Western thought, this connection has often been understood as metaphorical: the taste that knows is the intellectual taste, the capacity for discernment, the judgment that distinguishes true from false, beautiful from ugly. The literal taste of the palate, by contrast, has been relegated to the realm of the merely physical, the merely sensory, the merely

animal. Our argument has been that this hierarchy is not only philosophically untenable but practically disabling. In an age of ecological crisis, technological transformation, and the erosion of anthropocentric certainties, we need a different understanding of taste – one that takes seriously its character as a mode of engagement with the world that is not reducible to either intellectual judgment or sensory pleasure.

The symbiotechnical model of taste that we have proposed offers such an understanding. By extending Fink's phenomenology of fundamental phenomena through Fichte's concept of mutual recognition and situating this extension within the framework of post-anthropocene thought, we have argued that taste can be understood as the event in which multiple agencies – human and non-human, biological and technical – gather in a shared practice of world-making. This gathering is the festival, not in the sense of a traditional celebration but in the Finkian sense of the event in which the fundamental phenomena of existence are manifest in their interconnection.

This model has implications that extend beyond aesthetic theory. If taste is understood as a symbiotechnical festival, then the project of gustatory aesthetics becomes a project of cultivating the conditions under which such festivals can occur. This involves not only the development of technical capacities – sensor systems, algorithms, fermentation technologies – but also the cultivation of practices of recognition that acknowledge the contributions of non-human participants. It involves the creation of spaces and times – festivals in the ordinary sense – in which these practices can be enacted and experienced. And it involves a fundamental reorientation of aesthetic theory away from the judgment of isolated subjects and toward the analysis of distributed aesthetic events.

The debates that have occupied gustatory aesthetics over the past three decades – whether taste is a minor sense, whether cooking can be considered an art – have served a necessary purpose. They have challenged the sensory hierarchy inherited from modernity and opened space for a richer understanding of aesthetic experience. But the time has come to move beyond these debates. The question is no longer whether taste can be aesthetic but what taste becomes when it is understood as a symbiotechnical practice, when its subject is no longer presumed to be exclusively human, and when its festival gathers death, labor, domination, love, and play into a shared event of co-production. In addressing this question, we hope to contribute to a gustatory aesthetics adequate to the conditions of the post-anthropocene – an aesthetics that takes seriously the entanglement of human and non-human agencies and that understands taste not as a judgment but as a way of knowing, a way of being, a way of making world.

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