

Rainbow pixels

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Publisher statement: Taste usually occupies the bottom of the sensorial hierarchy, as the quintessentially hedonistic sense, too close to the animal, the elemental and the corporeal, and for this reason disciplined and moralised. At the same time, taste is indissolubly tied to knowledge. To taste is to discriminate, emit judgement, enter an unstable domain of synaesthetic normativity where the certainty of metaphysical categories begins to crumble. This second title in the 'Law and the Senses' series explores law using taste as a conceptual and ontological category able to unsettle legal certainties, and a promising tool whereby to investigate the materiality of law's relation to the world. For what else is law's reduction of the world into legal categories, if not law's ingesting the world by tasting it, and emitting moral and legal judgements accordingly? Through various topics including coffee, wine, craft cider and Japanese knotweed, this volume explores the normativities that shape the way taste is felt and categorised,

within and beyond subjective, phenomenological and human dimensions. The result is an original interdisciplinary volume – complete with seven speculative ‘recipes’ – dedicated to a rarely explored intersection, with contributions from artists, legal academics, philosophers, anthropologists and sociologists.

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Rainbow Pixels

Pil and Galia Kollektiv

Ingredients:

Supercook food colouring gel kit

A minimum of nutrients

iPhone X

A curved plate with a smartphone holder (optional)

Method:

For maximum unicornification, choose food that closely follows a Photoshop gradient.

Select portrait mode on your iPhone X.

Avoid harsh shadows and dark spots. Use natural light.

Avoid a flash or harsh, direct sunlight.

Use an HB2 filter for a cooler temperature to capture those mermaid tones.

Before serving, geotag your picture.

The requirement of conspicuous wastefulness is not commonly present, consciously, in our canons of taste, but it is none the less present as a constraining norm selectively shaping and sustaining our sense of what is

*beautiful, and guiding our discrimination with respect to what may legitimately be approved as beautiful and what may not.*¹

According to Veblen, aesthetic norms are shaped to some degree by a social need to demonstrate ‘wastefulness’, to consume beyond the satisfaction of a particular use, conspicuously, so that others are able to appreciate one’s ascent beyond mere use value. Veblen writes that this social requirement to show an ability to waste beyond utility has determined, to some extent, the faculties of judgement and that what is considered beautiful, decent or even novel is linked to the pecuniary quality of the object at hand, to its known and social market value rather than its private use value. This is not unlike Foucault’s principle of the internalisation of the principle of authority, where one’s behaviour is guided by an external fear of being under surveillance, even in the absence of the verifiable presence of power.

Taste is performative by nature: it is meant to signal to others where one belongs in a particular social hierarchy and what one’s affiliations are. Just as the main concern of the judicial process is not to determine truths but to demarcate socially tolerable behaviours, to announce what normative modes of being are and what deviances will not be acceptable, culinary taste does not simply make judgements about good or bad food. This is summed up by the priest in Franz Kafka’s *The Trial*, who concludes his interpretation of the famous ‘Before the Law’ parable by saying to K, ‘you don’t need to accept everything as true,

¹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1973[1899]), 64.

you only have to accept it as necessary'.² To an extent K's mistake is to search for absolute truths when the social necessity of the law is simply to declare which territories fall inside and which outside its gate.

In the last decade, the conspicuous quality of taste has been accelerated and enhanced by the growing use of social media. On these platforms, eating moves further and further away from the subjective realm of use value as a sensuous experience and into the realm of social advertising. Social media users will often broadcast their latest culinary adventure, the exotic location in which they have had cocktails tonight, the talked about starter in an impossible-to-book restaurant, the end of a long queue in front of a 'secret' pop up downtown. The experience itself is often of secondary importance to the way it is broadcast to a network of professional affiliates and hopefully enhances one's cultural capital. In this respect Veblen's conspicuousness has been democratised – trickled down from the affluent leisure classes. It has become the norm by which post-Fordist workers measure their integration into an inherently socialised workforce. In order to prove one's rightful place amongst the cadre of professionals, one must constantly share taste preferences and be able to decipher and pass judgement on others' expressions of tastefulness.

But conspicuous taste goes even deeper than that. Sharing food experiences on Instagram produces new objects of consumption and when the eating becomes a

² Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Mike Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009[1925]), 159.

photographic opportunity, the meal becomes a photo session and the plate a backdrop against which the palate becomes less important than the eye. Rainbow-coloured unicorn grilled cheese, a chocolate doughnut balanced on top of a chocolate cupcake, pink and purple smoothie bowl, a slice of spaghetti and meatball pizza or 19 scoops of ice cream in two cones are all images governed by the law of the lens. The Instagrammable monstrosities of our times, from unicorn cupcakes to mermaid bowls, are in many ways successors to the aspic rings and carved vegetable flowers of yesteryear. But the role of photography in documenting these prior to consumption has produced new criteria for the production of these foods. A recipe for our times would therefore read as a ratio of colours spread across 1080px by 1080px.

References

- Kafka, Franz. *The Trial*. Translated by Mike Mitchell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009[1925].
- Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1973[1899].



Image: Pil and Galia Kollektiv