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Taste(s) and Common Sense(s)

Abstract:

This paper explores the relationship between common sense and taste in the history of aesthetic thought. "Common sense" guarantees the communication of tastes through different modalities. It can either facilitate agreement among individuals, fostering mutual understanding and envisaging a universal aesthetic community, or provoke disagreement. In the former scenario, common sense is literally common to everyone, while in the latter case, it implies diversity and dissensus. By associating the concept of taste with judgement and the sensible (Arendt and Rancière), we scrutinize some contemporary political interpretations of Kantian aesthetics. Through this analysis, we illustrate that common sense is intertwined with certain metaphysical assumptions that not only hinder its claims of universality but also introduce structural paradoxes within the system of aesthetic judgment. In the last section of the article, we explore these paradoxes, proposing another communicability beyond the confines of the judgment of taste or subjective limitations.

Keywords:

common sense, taste, sensible, judgement, universality, public space

Introduction

The tradition of aesthetic thought has as much dealt with the subjective choices, tastes, sensory modalities, and judgments, as with the intersubjective conditions that make them possible. Exploring taste faces immediately the question of its diversity and multiplicity. How and why do we select our favorite author, or our favorite singers, in a way that resembles our friend's tastes? Do shared or differing tastes hold political implications? Does a community of taste have an impact on the political sphere? Is taste a passive sensation modelled by the culture industry, or is it an activity that necessitates aesthetic education?

This paper aims not to offer direct answers to these questions, but rather to highlight some significant moments in the history of aesthetic thought where the public nature of taste is elaborated. One of the pivotal concepts elucidating the social context in which diverse tastes are exchanged is "common sense." We will highlight how common sense guarantees the communication of tastes through different modalities. It can serve to facilitate agreement among individuals, fostering mutual understanding and envisaging a universal aesthetic community. Alternatively, it can also spark disagreement. In the former scenario, common sense is literally common to everyone, while in the latter case, it implies diversity and dissensus.

The tension between these two conceptions of common sense has shaped the aesthetic tradition since the first texts dedicated to the judgment of taste. We will first outline these two perspectives as influenced by the Kantian tradition before addressing some of the paradoxes that the aesthetic tradition encounters when analyzing the sociality of tastes.

I) From Standard to Indeterminate Norm

The aesthetic tradition not only recognizes the relational nature of beauty – no longer as an intrinsic quality of objects but arising through interaction between objects and subjects – but also acknowledges the subjective inclination toward beauty within a social context. The sociality of taste has raised questions regarding the rule or the rules that govern (or ought to govern), various aesthetic judgments.

The intrinsic social nature of taste has long posed a paradox in aesthetic thought. On one hand, modern essentialist views often aim to establish universally applicable principles, regardless of individual differences. On the other hand, the existence of empirically common senses resulting in diverse judgments of taste is seen as a theoretical obstacle. Notably, the notion of "beauty" varies significantly among art critics, medieval individuals, and children. Yet, the relativity of taste is often disregarded in modern aesthetics which seeks to apprehend the particular through the lens of general concepts.

In the English aesthetic tradition, spanning from Shaftesbury to Hutcheson, and continuing through Hume and Burke, multiple hypotheses have emerged to elucidate the alignment of diverse tastes or, as Hume articulates, their basis in a "standard." Hume acknowledges the "great variety of taste"[1] as an epistemological problem to be resolved. Despite Hume's proposed solution (the delicacy and finesse of perception to express human nature, presumed to be in harmony with the nature of objects provoking unanimous aesthetic reactions), the concept of a "standard" in his essay "On the Standard of Taste" remains ambiguous. Although Hume endeavors to outline the traits of a universal standard, he ultimately concludes in his essay that:

> There is just reason for approving one taste, and condemning another. But where there is such a diversity in the internal frame or external situation as is entirely blameless on both sides, and leaves no room to give one the preference above the other; in that case a certain degree of diversity in judgment is unavoidable, and we seek in vain for a standard, by which we can reconcile the contrary sentiments.[2]

In the third Critique Kant aims to resolve the problems posed by the diversity of tastes by grounding aesthetic sociability on common sense conceived as an indeterminate standard. Kant emphasizes that taste is all but a solipsistic or individual feeling; instead, it arises from humanity's inherent inclination toward sociability. "The empirical interest in the beautiful, Kant argues, exists only in *society*… . An individual

1) Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," 266.

2) Ibid., 280–81.

abandoned on a desert island would not adorn either himself or his hut, nor would he look for flowers, and still less plant them."[3]

However, Kant's endeavor goes beyond the empirical realm, aiming to elucidate the transcendental conditions that make possible aesthetic judgments. Due to our sociability, we tend to share the pleasure we feel in beautiful objects with others. Yet, this social inclination is not an additional condition appended to the initial pleasure but it provides the conditions necessary for making judgements. By surpassing mere agreeableness, the sociality of taste sets humans apart from animals devoid of reason. In this regard, taste becomes a "faculty" – albeit non-cognitive – for judging the beautiful. One should, then, "look upon taste in the light of a faculty for judging [*Beurteilungsvermögen*] whatever enables us to communicate even our feeling to everyone else, and hence as a means of promoting that upon which the natural inclination of everyone is set."[4]

As such, taste cannot be reduced to individual emotions and feelings that fail to go beyond the empirical level of agreeableness. Raised to the level of judgement, taste rests on *a priori* principles that allow Kant to avoid aesthetic skepticism. That is why he frequently employs the terms "judgment" and "taste" jointly in the third Critique.

According to the categorical framework transposed from the first to the third Critique, beauty, in terms of "quantity," is what universally pleases without the need for a concept. If a judgement of taste is to be communicated without being entirely bound by cognitive rules, it is essential to consider the object of such judgement since it contains a ground of pleasure for all individuals. However, the validity of such a judgement for everyone's taste is not achieved until the fourth moment wherein the necessity of the universality of aesthetic judgements is elaborated. The fourth moment focuses on the modality, specifically addressing the necessary conditions for a pure judgement of taste. Here, Kant refers to the concept of "common sense" [*Gemeinsinn*] which enables the communication of aesthetic judgements. A judgement of taste can expect the universal assent "under the presupposition of a common sense"[5] and consequently attain an objective value.

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3) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 126.

4) Ibid.

5) Ibid., 70.

The demand for agreement from everyone else relies on a shared ground that pertains to all, common sense. It enables us to broaden the value of our judgment of taste as extensively as possible aiming for universal acceptance. The essential condition for necessitating everyone's adherence to the judgment of taste, or the warrant of universal communicability of a feeling, hinges on the concept of common sense.

Kant consistently emphasizes that judgement's communicability must occur without the intervention of concepts. Common sense has nothing to do with understanding, laws, or given norms. It provides the horizon in view of which judgments are formed, inevitably prompting agreement from others. A judgment that is valid for everyone stands as a pure judgment, transcending mere feelings or pleasure. Hence, there exist exemplary judgments, namely pure aesthetic judgements, which inherently aspire toward universality. Put differently, the judgment of taste achieves purity and exemplariness through common sense. For such a judgment to be possible, a principle must be presupposed that would garner the assent of all. In the fourth moment, common sense assumes a unifying role in relation to the preceding moments of the analysis of the beautiful, leading Kant to assert that "taste can with more justice be called a *sensus communis*." [6]

As Allison notes Kant appears to have shifted in the fourth moment – from the *quid facti*, concerning the Analytics of the Beautiful that addresses the conditions for a pure judgement of taste – to the *quid juris*, involving the Deduction that outlines how one can legitimately demand agreement from others. We "solicit" [*wirbt um*] the assent of all to our evaluation by engaging common sense facilitating mutual understanding. Common sense serves as the *quid juris*, addressing the legitimacy of the claim to universality. The pursuit of universality presupposes the idea of common sense. Its legitimacy is based on this idea which establishes the conditions for how everyone ought to judge.

A pure judgement of taste rightfully seeks agreement from others when it considers common sense. However, the necessity for everyone to adhere to our judgement, which should be as exemplary as possible, can only be expected. In this way, common sense assumes a normative role, providing an ideal norm [*idealische Norm*] that dictates how everyone ought to judge rather than predicting how they actually

6) Ibid., 125.

judge: "It is only because the idea of a common sense serves as an ideal norm that the demand for universal agreement associated with the aesthetic discrimination of taste is even conceivable."[7]

The pursuit of developed taste hints at the connection between taste and morality. Kant highlights the alignment between the "beautiful" and the "good." Both the moral sphere and aesthetic judgment rely on a universal norm that while indeterminate, necessarily guides subjects toward the good and the beautiful. The common sense facilitating the communicability of aesthetic judgments holds a deontological nature. It contains an "ought": "the assertion is not that everyone will fall in with our judgement, but rather that everyone ought to agree with it."[8]

However, this norm is lacking. It is not given or established. There exist no definitive criteria for its application. Similar to the moral Law, the content of the judgement remains indeterminate. The moral rule, akin to the judgement of taste, ought to be universal. However, beyond universality, common sense does not encompass any ethico-esthetic rule. It does not outline the characteristics of a pure judgement or of moral action. Despite the Deduction attempting to resolve the *quid juris* by demonstrating how a pure judgement of taste rightfully demands agreement, "it is impossible to determine with certainty whether any given judgement of taste is pure."[9]

Thus, common sense is essentially a community sense – a space in which individuals must compare their own judgements not so much with the actual judgments of others but with their potential judgements. One of the maxims of common sense, as per Kant, is "enlarged thought." This maxim urges individuals to employ their imagination, by putting themselves in the place of others, thereby enhancing the value and legitimacy of their own judgements. The Other lacks a definitive form, giving rise to a radical and ambivalent dimension in aesthetic sociality.

The call for the development of taste based on moral principles implies a political idea. The underlying moral theme of judgement of taste, underscored by Allison, turns out to be an explicitly political issue in Arendt's interpretation. If an agree-

7) Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, 157.

8) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 70.

9) Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, 195.

ment between subjects is to be possible, a specific political assumption should be at work. Kant's pursuit of maximum communicability to garner widespread agreement, according to Arendt, aligns with "Kant's deliberation about a united mankind, living in eternal peace."[10] Kant emerges as a cosmopolitan philosopher of the Enlightenment, striving for a global community of citizens. For judgments of taste to achieve maximum universality, they must transcend cultural or religious distinctions and address humanity as a whole. Universality, stemming from reflective judgment, is more of an aspiration or task than an accomplished fact. This political perspective aligns with *Aufklärung*'s ideals, envisioning humanity's progress and toleration.

II) Toward a Shared Common Sense

While Kant asserts that common sense allows us to agree, his aesthesis cannot be reduced to an irenic scenario. In reality, common sense involves the same paradoxes present in the moral Law. The Kantian subject must imagine the judgment of others but the aporia arises as he can never be certain if others align with his judgment. If the fundamental question of the moral law is, as Lacan argues,[11] "what does he want?" due to the subject's lack of knowledge about the Other's desire, aesthetic judgement is immediately confronted with the question "what does he judge?".

Although imagination is supposed to garner agreement from others, the Kantian subject cannot decide whether his judgement stems from an inner capacity to feel what may be universally shareable or is placed under the sign of the Other. He must differentiate himself in order to tend toward the indeterminate norm of common sense. One cannot however place himself in the point of view of the Other without a form of displacement. Consequently, common sense is not a homogenizing principle but rather a carrier of uncertainty, plurality, heterogeneity, paradoxes, and dissensus. We explore these characteristics by focusing on two contemporary thinkers who, each in their own way, appeal to an idea of common sense: Arendt and Rancière.

10) Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 270.

11) Lacan, "Kant with Sade."

a) Taste as Judgement

The Kantian aesthetic universality mirrors Arendt's thought particularly her vision of a political community. In the Kantian idea that the judgment of taste holds a "pluralistic validity,"[12] Arendt finds the essential grounds of her own conception of public space, which is based on the plurality of actors within the city. For Arendt, the essence of the political community lies not so much in its ruler's sovereignty but in the integration of the plurality. The "in-between" space, simultaneously connecting and setting us apart from others, constitutes the essence of political life that implies interaction and exchange.[13]

Taste, considered by Arendt as "the chief cultural activity,"[14] encapsulates the essence of this diversity, and thus it is categorized among human's political faculties. Following Kant, she correlates taste with judgement, emphasizing its origin in the human rational faculties. Judging is anything but an individual pursuit. It prompts individuals to engage in discussions and debates regarding what they consider as beautiful. Judging does not imply a passive observation but rather an active participation in public space as political subjects endowed with judgments. By exploring the phenomenon of taste, Kant posits that "judging is one, if not the most, important activity in which this sharing-the-world-with-others comes to pass."[15] In Kant's prioritization of judgment over the rare virtue of genius, Arendt underscores precisely this shared space open to plurality:

> The faculty that guides this communicability is taste, and taste or judgment is not the privilege of genius. The condition sine qua non for the existence of beautiful objects is communicability; the judgment of the spectator creates the space without which no such objects could appear at all. The public realm is constituted by the critics and the spectators and not by the actors or the makers. And this critic and spectator sits in every actor and fabricator.[16]

12) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 108.

13) Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 52.

14) Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 223.

15) Ibid., 221.

16) Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 262.

The capacity for judgment is not exclusive to the spectator or the artist alone but is equally shared among all individuals. As political subjects, we engage in persuasion, debating, and deliberating based on our judgments, and "in this persuasive activity, we actually appeal to the 'community sense'."[17] Relying on taste's public nature (its communicability), Arendt sets the *sensus communis* at the core of the political community. Here, the question is not seeking agreement between subjects, but rather fostering the exchange of diverse viewpoints without a ground or historical finality.

For Arendt, the universality of judgment of taste does not hinge on whether the Other consents or not. The question does not arise in this way for her. She might rephrase the Kantian maxim of common sense, indicating that it does not guarantee universal acceptance of our judgment but rather the acknowledgement of a public debate regarding its universal validity. The focus shifts from seeking unanimity to embracing a void universality: inherently plural. Arendt multiplies then the Kantian notion of the Other:

> Critical thinking is only possible when the standpoints of all others are open to inspection. Hence, critical thinking while still a solitary business has not cut itself from "all others." [By] force of imagination it makes the others present and thus moves potentially in a space which is public, open to all sides; in other words, it adopts the position of Kant's world citizen.[18]

Arendt emphasizes the critical role of imagination, which devoid of determinate concepts, becomes a vector of freedom. In her eye's, the content of judgement matters less than its plural framework. If the common exercise of judgment holds any promise for political freedom, the inability to exercise judgment can lead us to the void of thought where the specters of totalitarianism looms. What matters in judgement is imagination, the free faculty that has both an aesthetic and political function. Here, freedom does not only mean the absence of rules; it encompasses the expansion of the world through encounters of pluralities. This freedom is realized within a shared

17) Ibid., 270.

18) Ibid., 257.

world among equals who engage in debates about their judgements. True freedom necessitates a common public space, "a politically organized world into which each of the free man [can] insert himself by word and deed."[19]

This freedom emerges, however, only within the city where the essence of humanity is in question. Drawing from the Aristotelian legacy, politics is reserved to those who, through the *logos*, are able to communicate and debate on public matters. In other words, the common world is exclusively human, and politics manifests solely among humans, being uniquely open to plurality.

In Kant's usage of the Latin term *sensus communis*, Arendt discerns an additional meaning linked to human's specificity, a kind of additional mental capacity that disposes us to enter into a community. Arendt, in this regard, revives the Roman concept of *sensus communis*; as Gadamer suggests,[20] this sense persists through modernity until the times of thinkers like Vico and Shaftesbury. Essentially, it refers to a communal life – a tangible collective sense that embodies the manner of living together for the pursuit of the common good.

It seems then that Arendt's political interpretation diverges form Gadamer's perspective who asserts that Kant's notion of common sense is solely a formal and intellectual category, and as such, depoliticized: "The concept of *sensus communis* was taken over, but in being emptied of all political content it lost its genuine critical significance. *Sensus communis* was understood as a purely theoretical faculty: theoretical judgment, parallel to moral consciousness (conscience) and taste."[21]

It is worth noting that Gadamer overlooks Kant's opposition to this "vulgar" common sense – a "common understanding" [*gemeine Verstand*] often associated with perceptions of truth, traditions, and justice.[22] Kant thematizes common

19) Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 148.

20) Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 17–27.

21) Ibid., 24.

22) "Common human understanding which, as mere sound (not yet cultivated) understanding, is looked upon as the least we can expect from anyone claiming the name of a human being, has therefore the doubtful honour of having the name of common sense (sensus communis) bestowed upon it; and bestowed, too, in an acceptation of the word common (not merely in our own language, where it actually has a double meaning, but also in many others) which makes it amount to what is vulgar – what is everywhere to be met with – a quality which by no means confers credit or distinction upon its possessor" (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 123).

sense as it carried out by reflective judgments, differing from Gadamer's understanding of Roman *sensus communis*, which relies on the subordination of the singular to the general.

Nevertheless, while Kant endeavors to remove any specific concept from the notion of common sense he maintains, as Arendt's interpretation suggests, something akin to the Roman *sensus communis*. It is evident in the idea that common sense is a mental capacity bestowed only upon political beings possessing *logos*. Both the Roman and Kantian *sensus communis*, regarded as virtues or excellences, pertain to the elevated faculties of human reason. Contrary to Gadamer's depiction, for Kant the *sensus communis* is not an abstract reason, but rather a quality enabling us to enter in a political community where human essence can be achieved. In this view, the Other appears as someone akin to me, judging based on the same *a priori* principles, and sharing the same essence or rationality as me.

b) Taste as Sensible

The question arising from Arendt's pluralistic conception of judgement is whether one has to do with the exemplarity of the aesthetic judgment guiding political judgments, portraying Kantian reflective judgments as the pinnacle for political actions? Or does it outline the aesthetic essence within every political judgment, and reciprocally, the political nature inherent in aesthetic judgments?

Arendt seeks to establish a shared ground – the imagination – where aesthetic and political judgments converge. However, her extension of the postulate of *sensus communis* from aesthetics to politics involves certain reductions akin to those present in Kantian aesthetics. These reductions, as formulated by Derrida, stem from the violence of the framing that "begins by enclosing the theory of the aesthetic in a theory of the beautiful, the latter in a theory of taste and the theory of taste in a theory of judgment."[23]

To short-circuit these conceptual reductions, Rancière offers an alternative conception of aesthetics that is articulated differently with politics – an aesthetics wherein the "sensible" takes precedence as the primary category. The intertwinement,

23) Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, 69.

thematized by Rancière, between politics and aesthetics finds a precursor in Arendt's idea, albeit with a shift away from judgment to the irreducible multiplicity of the sensible. While Arendt emphasizes a diverse, prolific, and decentered nature of judgement, for Rancière the sensible is so. Both radicalize, in their own way, the conflictual dimension inherent in a Kantian aesthetic – a dimension present as a germ and an obstacle to overcome in the universal communicability of aesthetic judgments. While Kant intellectualizes and navigates the diversity of empirical sensibilities through the *sensus communis*, it is not necessarily so for Arendt and Rancière. However, they introduce other regulating principles or maxims, which regulate the differentiation amidst multiplicity. To shed light on this alternative interpretation of common sense, let us briefly examine Rancière's notion of the sensible.

According to Rancière, the sensible is inherently shared, yet politics demands its redistribution. This convergence marks the juncture where the aesthetic and the political intersect. The "police" define the rules of its distribution within public space, while politics emerges when this configuration is disrupted or reconfigured. Politics occurs at the moment when a rupture (or *dissensus*) arises within the established order of the sensible. Politics, writes Rancière, "consists in reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible which defines the common of a community, to introduce into it new subjects and objects, to render visible what was had not been, and to make heard as speakers those who had been perceived as mere noisy animals. This work involved in creating dissensus informs an aesthetics of the politics."[24]

How does this refiguration become possible? It results from the actions of equal individuals because politics is the verification of the egalitarian presupposition that challenges the established social hierarchy. Given the equality of subjects and the absence of an *arkhé* within the community, anyone, through their action in public space, can contribute to reshaping the landscape of the sensible. This enterprise, as Rancière himself notes,[25] could be interpreted as a synthesis of Kant's notion of the sensible and Foucault's analysis of power. To politicize Kantian aesthetics through

24) Rancière, *Aesthetics and Discontents*, 25.

25) "Aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense – re-examined perhaps by Foucault – as the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience" (Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 13).

Foucault means that there exists always a given configuration of space-time (the *a priori* forms of sensible experience) that makes possible the sensible experience. This configuration is framed by power (or, in Rancière's terms, the "police"), dictating what can or cannot be felt, tasted, perceived, seen, heard, or accomplished. The political moment thus demands a new experience of the relationship between speech, sight, hearing, action, creation, and thought.

Rancière owes in fact his conception of the sensible to the transcendental aesthetic in the first Critique. However, Rancière does not approach the *a priori* as universal, operating independently of empirical experience. He acknowledges that time and space can be constructed in different ways giving rise to incommensurable forms of experiences. Nevertheless, these remain fundamental axioms intrinsic to all sensible experience. Every new experience must be integrated in a spatiotemporal framework. Similar to Kant, Rancière thematizes the notion of the sensible experience that transcends mere sensation. The constant susceptibility of our sensory experiences to change is palpable; a simple shift of position would be enough to see what was invisible, reshaping our sensory domain.

Following Rancière's definition of the aesthetic regime, any work of art or image, depending the spatiotemporal framework it opens (its exhibition site, historical concept, diverse audience, and variable reception), can be viewed as an intervention in the established sensory order, therefore assuming a political dimension. Even Jeff Koons' tulips, showcased in a city's public space without a museum, might be perceived as reshaping visual experience and altering bodily movements, unveiling what was previously invisible.

Nevertheless, individual sensibility alone, according to Rancière, lacks the capacity to reconfigure the distribution of the sensible, because no necessity links the individual emancipation and the political emancipation which is intrinsically collective. For the reshaping of the sensible landscape to occur, the community must draw upon common sense or intelligence to initiate an aesthetico-political dissensus.

Rancière examines the sensible from a transcendental point of view, investigating the fundamental conditions for possible experiences. This transcendental aspect is capable of interconnecting shared sensibilities. Equality serves, for him, as the transcendental principle. Politics commences when the "police" logic of the distribution of the sensible clashes with the egalitarian logic. Put differently, the political

moment arises when and where the actualization of this maxim of equality occurs, redistributing the visibilities and the invisibilities.

Rancière's concept of equality pertains, however, to the intelligence. Political interruption occurs only through free and intelligent subjects capable of initiating or recognizing the aesthetico-political dissensus. In other words, Rancière's notion of equality does not concern sensibilities but rather pertains to *logos*. Consequently, the transition from the presupposition of the equality of intelligences to the redistribution of the sensible within the political sphere goes not without raising some problematics.

The equality of the intelligences can be formulated through the equation "being = thinking = speech" to which we can also add "feeling." If the philosophical anchoring of the principle of equality is, as Marx once said,[26] the "me = me" concept of German idealism, its aesthetic translation is "sensible = sensible." The dissensual refiguration of the sharing of the sensible, which signifies a political rupture, results from the actualization of the egalitarian presupposition. Consequently, the sensible experience must ascend to the level of intelligence insofar as it involves speech, without which the sensible remains confined to the empirical realm and thus, according to Rancière, devoid of any political significance. Therefore, there exists the necessity for a regulating principle, valid for all men, which politics relies on: equality of intelligences.

Rancière emphasizes that equality itself is not inherently political; it is its verification or its realization in a dissensual form, that sparks a political moment. In Rancière's thought, the Kantian Other takes on a performative significance, as it becomes crucial to verify in a political moment, the universal sharing of *logos* among all subjects.

A presupposition that demands verification operates similarly to Kant's notion of common sense. However, for Rancière, this common sense is not conciliatory; rather, it serves as a regulating idea governing the interplay between sensibilities and intelligence. The equality of intelligences, just like common sense, ensures the connection of the particulars to the universal. It is then "the absolute condition of all communication and any social order."[27]

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26) "Equality in nothing but a translation of the German 'ich=ich' into the French, i.e., political form" (Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, 123).

27) Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, 34.

He reactivates then a different notion of common sense through the maxim of intelligence positioning humans as the only political beings capable of entering in political community. A modern rendition of this maxim can be traced back to Descartes's idea according to which "good sense" (*le bon sense*) is the most evenly distributed thing in the world.[28] Even though Kant attempts to distinguish his concept of common sense from Descartes's "*bon sense*," he reproduces, as Deleuze points out,[29] similar postulates: the *bon sense* and *le sense common* are two complementary instances constituting the "'dogmatic image of thought' that seeks to subordinate thought to the deployment of predetermined universals."[30]

The subjects of equality are restricted then to speaking beings, those who possess the same substance or intellect. "To unite humankind, writes Rancière, there is no better link than this identical intelligence in everyone. It is this [intelligence] that is the just measure of similarity."[31]

The realm of sensible communication, similarly, does not possess the capacity to be politicized through intelligence, as not all sensibilities possess this political potential. Both *logos* and the regimes of expression are, as Rancière points out himself,[32] inevitably intertwined with poetic and aesthetic elements. However, mere aesthetic alteration or manifestation alone does not lead to either agreement or disagreement, they do not suffice to bring about a political interruption into community. It is within a political interlocution that the equality of intelligences can be verified. The empirical feeling should invoke the intelligence, a faculty available to anyone at their discretion: "by the will we mean that self-reflection by the reasonable being who knows himself

28) Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, 5.

29) Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, 161.

30) "For Kant as for Descartes, it is the identity of the Self in the 'I think' which grounds the harmony of all the faculties and their agreement on the form of a supposed Same object… . For while common sense is the norm of identity from the point of view of the pure Self and the form of the unspecified object which corresponds to it, good sense is the norm of distribution from the point of view of the empirical selves and the objects qualified as this or that kind of thing (which is why it is considered to be universally distributed)" (Ibid., 133–34).

31) Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 71–72.

32) "Having to do with the very nexus of the logos and its being taken into account with the aisthêsis (the partition of the perceptible), its logic of demonstration is indissolubly an aesthetic of expression" (Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, 57).

in the act. It is this threshold of rationality, this consciousness of and esteem for the self as a reasonable being acting, that nourishes the movement of the intelligence."[33]

Rancière reproduces thus similar paradoxes to those of Kantian common sense. On one hand, he defines equality as an ungrounded or empty property[34] requiring verification to incite a political moment. This equality, on the other hand, pertains solely to *logos* as a condition of possibility of speech, appearance, visibility, and action within political space. In this way, he replicates the framework of an argumentative and aesthetic rationality historically associated with the European citizen figure, despite attempting to encompass the capacity of all individuals as speaking beings within this figure. In other words, Rancière attempts to base his notion of politics on the absence of a foundation or an *arkhé* of the community, yet simultaneously leans into a certain primacy of subjectivity by centralizing the speaking being within the perceptible world. He confines the disagreement to a subjective dispute. Much like Kant, the human being seems to be the measure of all things. Beyond cultures and distinct individual sensibilities lies a "supersensible substrate of humanity"[35] guiding both agreement and dissensus.

III) Common Sense Deconstructed

Let us reformulate the paradox within Kant's system of aesthetic judgement. Kant employs a twofold approach to establish a sensible community. On one hand, he tends to strip common sense of any content, making it the foundation for a concept-free judgment that would correspond to all particular examples. Yet, concurrently, this unanimity requires a regulating idea to define the ideal of beauty. The norm of common sense is indeterminate, yet simultaneously strives for an ideal. In other words, the ideal of beauty lacks concepts and rules but can only stem from someone capable of generating a pure aesthetic judgment – namely man, the being endowed with reason and the ideal of beauty.

In the last section of the article, we examine the consequences of these paradoxes for the realm of aesthetic sociality. Ultimately, we propose a glimpse into another communicability beyond the confines of the judgment of taste or subjective limitations.

33) Ibid., 57.

34) Ibid., 34.

35) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 168.

a) Social Framing

Unlike Arendt's portrayal of Kant as a cosmopolitan figure, Bourdieu presents Kant as entrenched in his cultural particularity. In Bourdieu's eyes, Kant's third Critique is "the expression of the sublimated interests of the bourgeois intelligentsia,"[36] deriving self-justification from its intellectual, scientific, and artistic accomplishments. According to Bourdieu, the pure and noble taste reflects the interests of the ruling class. The other side of the coin is the disgust of easy, coarse, frivolous, futile, primitive, childish, popular, and in a word all impure tastes, which are forms of enjoyment confined to mere sensations. Pure aesthetic judgment represents the *ethos* of the dominant class. This social "distinction," embodied in taste, implies a symbolic violence: "What pure taste refuses is indeed the violence to which the popular spectator consents … it demands respect, the distance which allows it to keep its distance. It expects the work of art, a finality with no other end than itself, to treat the spectator in accordance with the Kantian imperative, that is as an end, not a means."[37]

Bourdieu perceives the judgment of taste as anhistorical and ethnocentric, universalizing the predispositions associated with specific conditions related to the experience of the *homo aestheticus*. By returning to the sensible, Bourdieu aims to reveal the underlying social dimension of the empirical. In his reading of Kant, pure pleasure not only rids itself of all sensuous or sensible interests but also absolves itself of any social interest.[38]

There are certainly clues, underlined by Bourdieu, in the third Critique where Kant links pure aesthetic judgment to progress and civilization. "When civilization has reached its height, Kant argues, it makes this work of communication almost the main business of refined inclination, and the entire value of sensations is placed in the degree to which they permit of universal communication."[39] Ripping subjects away from their simple empirical sensations, common sense is then a civilizing force that advances as taste becomes more refined. As a true figure of the Enlightenment,

36) Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 492.

37) Ibid., 488.

38) Ibid., 493.

39) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 127.

Kant envisions an ideal standard of beauty that "should" be taken into account by the man of progress.

Bourdieu overlooks, however, that Kant describes the transcendental conditions of taste which, independently of empirical experiences, describe potential judgments and not actual judgments. Kant emphasizes that a pure exemplary judgement is a reflective one, that originates from the particular but has the capacity to demonstrate the universality that could not otherwise be determined. Moreover, suggesting that Kant lacks interest in the social, by asserting that universality is merely an illusion,[40] oversimplifies the intricate nature of common sense in Kant's philosophy.

That taste relies on the rejection of disgust, Bourdieu owes this idea to Derrida. However, Bourdieu dismisses both Derrida and Kant, perceiving them as confined within the autonomous realm of philosophical discourse, addressed primarily to scholars. Before turning to the question of disgust, it is important to note that Derrida's deconstructive reading put accent on the presuppositions that undermine the idea of pure judgment of taste within Kant's very conceptual framework. Derrida posits that despite Kant's assertion, the exemplary judgement is not entirely devoid of concepts and rules, which contradicts Kant's exigence to be so. A judgment of taste, Kant emphasizes, is not a form of knowledge. For a pure and exemplary judgment of taste to be possible, it does not have to be determined conceptually in order to leave free the imagination. If universality is demanded while lacking general concepts or rules, the primary reference becomes the exemplarity of taste – a singular product that is immediately valid for all.

Derrida problematizes here the production of this ideal judgment within Kant's conceptual structure. He highlights that the exemplar does not imitate itself and has for its supreme model an idea that each individual must produce himself. The paradox can be formulated as follows:

> The autoproduction of the *Muster* (pattern, paradigm, paragon), Derrida writes, is the production of what Kant calls first an *idea*, a notion which he specifies at once by substituting for it that of *ideal*. The idea is a concept of reason, the ideal is the representation of a being or of a particular

40) Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 493.

> essence *adequate* to that idea. If we follow here this value of *adequation*, we find the dwelling place of *mimèsis* in the very place from which imitation seems excluded. And at the same time, of truth as adequation in this theory of the beautiful.[41]

One does not acquire taste by imitation, but Kant's system necessitates the submission of taste and the imagination to the idea of beauty. Thus, paradoxically, "ideal beauty will never give rise to a pure judgment of taste but to a partly intellectualized judgment of taste, comprising an idea of reason which determines *a priori* the internal possibility of the object according to determinate concepts."[42]

This ambivalent approach also affects the notion of common sense. Derrida points out that Kant's analysis fails to determine whether common sense, presumed to engender pure taste, represents a faculty constituting the possibility of aesthetic experience or whether it functions as an idea of (practical) reason, that is to say an idea of the unanimous universal community that directs the idealizing process of the pure judgment of taste.[43] In other words, the status of Kantian common sense oscillates between being an *a priori* principle constituting aesthetic experience and a regulating principle that provides the ideal horizon for the judgment of taste.

These analytical oscillations and undecidabilities that intrude into the core of the Kant's analysis of the pure judgment of taste, are in part, a result of attempting to transplant the logical framework from the first Critique onto the third Critique, imposing an analytic of concepts onto a process devoid of concepts. "The frame, writes Derrida, fits badly."[44] Kant's analogy between these two Critiques is a conceptual forcing, which re-establishes the *mimèsis* where it is excluded. This analogy, for Derrida, is an effect of *parergon*: "by reason of its qualitative universality, the judgment of taste *resembles* the logical judgment which, nonetheless it never is, in all rigor. The nonconceptual resembles the conceptual."[45]

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41) Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, 110.

42) Ibid., 111.

43) Ibid., 116.

44) Ibid., 69.

45) Ibid., 76.

The *parergon* closes and opens at the same time, contaminating all concepts (or all the metaphysical oppositions) that Kant employs to delineate the pure taste. These internal paradoxes reveal the underlying understanding at work in the pure taste. Similarly, Kant's concept of common sense rests on the idea of a rational subject capable of utilizing his own intellectual faculties.

However, one cannot simply infer that this movement is exclusive to a specific social class. Tastes and the objects of taste are ensnared by a mimetic logic that blurs and multiplies the boundaries of the social framing implied by the notion of "distinction." When Edgar Morin, in contrast to Bourdieu, identifies universality in the figure of Charlie Chaplin[46] (an artist appealing to workers, children, the middle class, and non-Westerners), this universality operates through a multiple framing. Chaplin's appeal spans diverse social groups, not to homogenize them but to showcase their differences according to its various facets. What garners universal appeal is not a homogenizing object but rather something that constantly reframes and diversifies social frames.

b) The (an)Economy of Kantian Aesthetics

The historical context in which inquiries into the diversity of tastes and their potential agreement flourished coincides with the surge of spectacles and artworks that circulated more readily due to technological advancements, particularly printing and the expansion of communication means in the eighteenth century. As these artworks garnered increasing audiences, they became subjects of public evaluation. Common sense, in this context, evolved into a principle of equivalence, fostering trade between individuals based on their respective tastes.

Indeed, the notion of taste initially revolves around the aesthetic value of an object. Kant's assertion that the universal communicability of pleasure augments indefinitely its value,[47] hints at an economico-aesthetic correlation. The pursuit of maximum communicability for attaining universal agreement can be seen not only as a reflection of perpetual peace but also as a precursor to the globalization of the liberal economy that led to the commercialization and commodification of arts.

46) Morin, *The Cinema or the Imaginary Man*, 199.

47) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 127.

Hence, common sense can serve as an economic ground, facilitating the circulation of judgments. There is a parallel between beauty and money, and therefore between aesthetic common sense and financial common sense. Just as money gains its exchange value, as Simmel mentions[48] from economic intersubjectivity, the mechanism at work in aesthetic communities relies on intersubjective evaluation. Aesthetic common sense, in the Kantian system, establishes a sociality based on something devoid of any intrinsic utility, yet functioning similarly to exchange value, ensuring social mediation. The indeterminate norm of common sense, like money, should be universally accepted by all. The wider circulation of an aesthetic judgment augments its value.

The economic principle of mass reception and public exchange of judgements not only undermine one of the prerequisites for a pure aesthetic judgement (its disinterestedness) but it reveals other paradoxes within Kant's system of judgement of taste. Although Kantian aesthetics operates within an economy that rejects non-productive judgments as unassimilable waste, it cannot totally get rid of these uneconomic or non-productive forces. The imagination, which serves as the foundation for common sense commanding the creation of possible forms of intuition, falls short as a productive faculty in all instances.

The sublime, in Kant's system, offers a glimpse of this an-economic excess. It overflows sensible forms, disrupting subjective faculties. The "absolutely great," the "colossal," the negative, and forbidden pleasures do violence to the imagination engaging an experience of limitation. It is compared by Kant, "with a shaking, i.e. with a rapidly alternating repulsion and attraction produced by one and the same object."[49]

The sublime remains nevertheless a projection of reason, existing only due to the limitations and inadequacies of our different subjective faculties. It does not completely annihilate the productive faculties of the subject. It reveals the abyss but simultaneously offers a way to avoid it. The economy of the fine arts can assimilate the sublime, appropriating the ugly, evil, false, monstrous, horrible, abject, obscene, negative, colossal, or unpleasant. Despite Kant's exclusion of the communicability of the sublime, we should note that the public is not only gathered or divided by its collective taste for the beautiful, but also by a taste that operates in a negative manner.

48) Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*.

49) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 88.

What the system of the judgment of taste suppresses, Derrida writes, is "an irreducible heterogeneity which cannot be eaten either sensibly or ideally and which … by never letting itself be swallowed must therefore cause itself to be vomited."[50] For Derrida, the *parergon* in the Third Critique, which shapes the entire system while withdrawing from its content, is the vomit. The disgusting, the unrepresentable, the inassimilable, and excluded waste; the undigested, the vomit, the absolutely heterogeneous – what Derrida calls "the transcendental of the transcendental"[51] – is irreconcilable with the system. The disgusting exists beyond ethical or aesthetic categories and eludes apprehension through subjective faculties.

The disgusting is the impossible object of sensation that overwhelms all subjective faculties and erases representational distance. By excluding this "outside," which remains insensible and unintelligible, the economy of the judgment of taste functions as an economy of pure productivity. In other words, this economy's condition of possibility lies in the original rejection of the disgusting.

Thus, the concept of disgust goes beyond a mere subjective negative reaction toward certain things; it represents that which lies beyond the confines of subjective taste structure. Put differently, taste continuously gravitates toward and is redefined by that which cannot be appropriated or encompassed within its subjective framework.

Derrida emphasizes that taste, conditioned by what lies external to it, is inherently linked to a notion of the secret that has to do with "not-belonging."[52] He contrasts this with the idea of the public space, where the individuals are summoned to articulate, display, and debate their judgments. The secret eludes economic exchanges, whether of words, sensibilities, or intelligences, within the public space. Invisible, it resists the demand for visibility in the public space: "something" presents itself in the public space but simultaneously escapes it.

Derrida emphasizes that this non-public surplus, this unshareable element, is not asocial. Rather, it forms a spacing inherent to social exchanges. Fundamentally, it is the secret that is shared: "the secret, writes Derrida, is like good sense in Descartes,

50) Derrida, "Economimesis," 21.

51) Ibid., 22.

52) Derrida and Ferraris, *A Taste for The Secret*, 59.

the best shared thing in the world; but it is the sharing of what is not shared: we know in common that we have nothing in common."[53]

The secret is not then to be understood as a cryptic dissimulation or an inaccessible interiority. This secret lacks depth or content, it is "a secret without secret."[54] Similarly, the taste for the secret, for the unappropriable object, is not intentional or subjective in a psychological sense. It remains foreign to the subject himself. The structure of the secret, writes Derrida, "is not subjective or subjectible, even though it is responsible for the most radical effects of subjectivity or of subjectivation. It is superficial, without substance, infinitely private because public through and through."[55] This suggests that while the secret lacks depth, it paradoxically influences profound effects on subjective tastes.

There is no taste without an encounter with the Other. Being receptive to what comes is a way of welcoming what does not depend on the subject – a singular and idiomatic encounter that unfolds uniquely each time. Like an inassimilable waste in the judgement of taste, the secret eludes the sensible structure yet generates countless tastes, expanding and multiplying what is considered "public" within the public space.

Conclusion

One of the key concepts in the history of aesthetics which explains the sociality of taste is common sense. Taking the Kantian common sense as its point of departure, this article aimed to demonstrate the rich conceptual tools it offers for analyzing taste.

We have shown that common sense is entangled with a set of metaphysical assumptions. These not only hinder its claims of universality but also introduce structural paradoxes within the system of aesthetic judgment. One of the maxims of common sense, enlarged thinking, implies that the subject should put himself in the place of the others. However, in this process, the subject cannot determine whether his pure judgement of taste belongs to himself or to the Other. The Kantian subject must differentiate himself to approach the indeterminate norm of common sense.

53) Ibid., 58.

54) Derrida, *Couterfeit Money*, 94.

55) Ibid., 170.

A double bind lies then at the heart of the communicability of aesthetic judgment. By opening up to the Other, Kantian common sense incorporates an expropriation that undermines the entire structure of aesthetic judgment. Rather than disqualifying the Kantian aesthetic system, this undecidable dimension has led to various interpretations, some of which have been outlined in this article.

By associating the concept of taste with both judgement and sensible, we have underscored its political dimension. Arendt and Rancière extend Kantian discourse, intersecting aesthetics with politics, albeit through distinct lenses. Derrida delves deeper, emphasizing the unrepresentable and unassimilable aspects – such as the disgusting and the secret – that resist categorization within Kant's system. Derrida's perspective on the secret accentuates an aspect that transcends subjectivity, delineating a non-shareable yet socially impactful space.

These variations on the theme of taste serve not merely as modalities of translations but also try to show that the concept of taste is inseparable from the constellation in which judgement and the sensible hold significant roles. Ultimately, these discussions propel us to reconsider taste's dynamics, acknowledging encounters with the Other and the inassimilable elements that elude aesthetics frameworks. Taste, seen in this light, becomes an evolving and diverse phenomenon that extends beyond individual subjectivity, giving rise to a rich tapestry of experiences. It emerges as a deeply social construct but at the same time as an irreducible surplus beyond conventional aesthetic categories such as judgement or the sensible.

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