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## Is Gastronomy a Medium for Artistic Expression? The Problem of Consumption and the Purported Asymmetry Between Aesthetic Judgments and Judgments of Personal Preference

### Abstract:

This paper defends that gastronomy is a medium for artistic expression. It explores two arguments frequently used to defend that gastronomy is not an artistic medium: the problem of consumption and the asymmetry between aesthetic judgments and judgments of personal preference. The former defends that gastronomy and fine arts are fundamentally distinct because their products have very different characteristics. The latter defends that aesthetic judgments and judgments of personal preference differ in that the former are intersubjectively valid, while the latter are only subjectively valid. The paper counters the first argument by suggesting that accepting the problem of consumption leads to an undesirable consequence: the exclusion of certain art forms that are integral to artistic practice. In response to the second argument, the paper contends that empirical evidence from different sources suggests that the asymmetry between aesthetic judgments and judgments of personal preference fails to hold true in numerous contexts.

### Keywords:

gastronomy, fine arts, consumption, aesthetic judgments, judgments of personal preference

## 1. Introduction: A Hamburger at the End of the Road

Last summer, I ventured to the Pyrenees with some friends. There are numerous ways to characterize the Pyrenees: verdant, spacious, untamed, unfathomable, overwhelming, yet incredibly beautiful. After a long hike, we spent the night at the *San Nicolás de Bujaruelo* refuge. At its restaurant, we had the opportunity to taste an exquisite delicacy: a delicious burger made of beef grown in total freedom and fed the freshest, greenest Pyrenean pastures. I ordered a classic burger, without too many extras; just a bit of tomato, lettuce, onion, and some pickles, as I believe that excessive toppings may mask the flavor of even the finest cuts of meat.

The pleasure of eating the hamburger was so profound that I could not adequately describe it. The meat was exceptional, and the combination of flavors were so harmonious and balanced that I could hardly express the experience. I started searching for words, and suddenly, “beautiful” leapt to me. I recall thinking: is it ok to call a hamburger “beautiful”? Probably not, the term “beautiful” is more appropriate for art works such as paintings or sculptures. However, is not the delight derived from eating a culinary delicacy comparable, in some sense, to the pleasure we experience when a song touches us, or a painting stirs our emotions? In short, can we say that gastronomy is a medium for artistic expression in the same sense in which architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, or music are?

This article defends that gastronomy is a medium for artistic expression. It challenges two of the most popular arguments used to differentiate art and gastronomy: the argument from consumption and the asymmetry between aesthetic judgments and judgments of personal preference. Concerning the first argument, I will defend that accepting the problem of consumption leads us to an unwanted consequence: the exclusion of certain art forms that seem to be integral to artistic practice. I will assess one of the most compelling arguments defending that gastronomy is a proper means of artistic expression. I will demonstrate that the argument fails because it relies on a flawed comparison between musical and culinary objects. Then, I will propose a new analogy that more accurately reflects the similarity between gastronomy and fine arts, that between culinary objects and ephemeral sculptures. Regarding the second argument, I will contend, based on empirical evidence, that there is no substantial reason to distinguish between aesthetic judgments and judgments of personal preference.

Although it has traditionally been maintained that there is a clear distinction between the two kinds of judgments, I will show that this distinction is neither universal nor generalizable because there are situations in which aesthetic judgments and judgments of personal preference share similar traits.

The paper is divided as follows. Section 2 exposes the most fundamental characteristics of the modern art system, the system in which this work is settled. Section 3 introduces a paradigm crucial for understanding the traditional distinction between gastronomy and fine arts: the hierarchy of senses. Section 4 presents the problem of consumption, emphasizing the consequences of using this argument as a criterion to differentiate fine arts and gastronomy. Section 5 critically evaluates Monroe's argument, which posits that gastronomy is a means for artistic expression, ultimately concluding that Monroe's argument fails because of its reliance on an analogy between musical and culinary objects. Section 6 proposes a more appropriate analogy that better illustrates the similarity between gastronomy and other fine arts. Section 7 examines the asymmetry between aesthetic judgments and judgments of personal preference. Section 8 presents empirical data from two different sources, challenging the validity of this asymmetry. Finally, Section 9 assesses the impact of these findings on the distinction between gastronomy and fine arts.

## 2. Aesthetics and the Modern Art System

In this work, I use the terms “art,” “artist,” “artistic,” or “artistic medium” in close connection with the aesthetic dimension of the artwork. Thus, it can be said that I situate art, its disciplines, its products, and the artistic mediums by which they are produced, within what has been called the “modern art system”<sup>1</sup> The modern art system developed from the late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century and became consolidated by the mid-nineteenth century. It is characterized, among other things, by a separation of the artwork from its functional context, an emphasis on individual creation, imagination, and originality, and the mercantilization of the artwork, what has been termed the “museum mentality,”<sup>2</sup> (i.e., the compulsion to physically isolate

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1) Shiner, *Invention of Art*, 3–5, 111–15.

2) Berleant, “Aesthetics and the Contemporary Arts,” 158.

artworks from their contexts). All this enabled the emergence of what is perhaps the most defining characteristic of the artwork according to the modern art system: its aesthetic value. Detached from any functional, social, or political context, artworks are perceived in isolation, devoid of any interest beyond themselves. This favors contemplation and highlights their aesthetic value. In short, the modern art system prioritizes the aesthetic value of the artwork over its other elements or conditions. Art and aesthetics are, therefore, inextricably linked.

However, with the advent of contemporary art, this situation began to change. The rise of industrialism introduced new materials, objects, and techniques, for example, everyday articles “like newspapers, kitchen utensils, factory work and assembly lines” or techniques like “drilling and welding, dripping and splashing, transfiguring recorded sounds, splicing tapes, and composing by computer,”<sup>3</sup> allowing contemporary artworks to become dissociated from traditional mediums. Besides, several social changes fostered increasing democratization and the emergence of mass culture which ultimately led to a more inclusive way of experiencing art. This new mode of engagement is based, among other things, on the idea that the artistic object is no longer totally dissociated from the person experiencing it. In other words, it is no longer an object of aesthetic appreciation to be perceived as devoid of any interest, function, or concrete context. This shift in how art is experienced is evident in the emergence of certain new artistic practices, for example:

The blinding flash of spotlights on the audience, the entrance of actors and dancers through the audience, indeed at times *from* the audience, environments into which one enters or through which one passes, sculptures and assemblages containing mirrors or polished, reflecting surfaces which incorporate the viewer into the work both as image and as participant through the very act of perceiving it, direct addresses to the theater audience instead of mere asides.<sup>4</sup>

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3) Ibid., 160.

4) Ibid., 162.

In summary, art has become progressively detached from the aesthetic, making it possible to speak of a form of non-aesthetic art. As Peter Osborne says, there is “no critically relevant aesthetics of contemporary art, it is argued, because contemporary art is not an aesthetic art, in any philosophically significant sense of the term.”<sup>5</sup> Some even speak of “the end of art,”<sup>6</sup> referring to the end of the modern art system.

However, although contemporary art has ruptured with the modern art system, the influence of this rupture remains limited. As Larry Shiner states: “this conceptual revolution [the Great Division of 18th century] along with its related institutions still governs our cultural practices.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, although contemporary art seeks to break with prior traditions and the characteristics that once defined art, we must not overlook the enduring power of modern art as a complex system of beliefs, practices, and institutions. As Shiner further notes: “much of the current rhetoric about the death of art or literature or serious music—whether alarmist or celebratory—underestimates the staying power of the established art system.”<sup>8</sup> In a similar vein, Peter Osborne observes that “modernism, on my understanding of the term, is far from over. Indeed, it structures the entire field of contemporary art.”<sup>9</sup> A sign of this lasting influence can be found in the fact that people continue to use the term “art” in close connection with the ideas and concepts defining the modern art system. If we search in Sketch Engine<sup>10</sup> for the term “art” in a general reference corpus such as the English Web 2021 corpus,<sup>11</sup> we can see that speakers use the term “art” very frequently to talk about some of the practices and institutions of the modern art system. For example, some of the most usual expressions involving “art” are “art gallery,” “art exhibition,” and “art museum.” As can be seen, all three clearly point to the museum mentality, one of the most characteristic of the modern art system.

As said in the Introduction, the aim of this paper is to show that gastronomy is a medium for artistic expression. After what has been discussed in this section, we can

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5) Osborne, “Art Beyond Aesthetics,” 653.

6) Danto, “The End of Art,” 81.

7) Shiner, *The Invention of Art*, 5.

8) *Ibid.*, 8.

9) Osborne, “Modernisms and Mediations,” 164.

10) See <https://www.sketchengine.eu/>.

11) See <https://www.sketchengine.eu/ententen-english-corpus/>.

further qualify the statement and say that gastronomy is a medium for artistic expression even considering the characteristics of the modern art system. In this sense, my paper contributes an additional line of rupture to the hermetic division between fine arts and other so-called lesser arts like gastronomy, but, unlike contemporary art, it does so from within the modern art system. In other words, the purpose of the work is to push for “extending the range of what we have been willing to accept as art,”<sup>12</sup> as has occurred other times in the history of art and aesthetics.

### 3. The Hierarchy of Senses

Since ancient times, it has been maintained that there is a hierarchy of senses: on the one hand, the higher senses – sight, and hearing – and, on the other hand, the lower senses – smell, touch, and the sense of taste. A great tradition of thinkers has defended the hierarchy of senses. To illustrate, consider the following excerpt from Plato:

This is the sort of thing I mean: do sight and hearing afford men any truth or aren't even the poets always harping on such themes, telling us that we neither hear nor see anything accurately? And yet if these of all bodily senses are neither accurate nor clear, the others will hardly be so; because they are, surely, all inferior to these.<sup>13</sup>

For Plato, while it might be questionable whether sight and hearing yield true knowledge, it is clear that if these senses fall short of providing knowledge and truth, the other senses are even less capable. The distinction between higher and lower senses provides a foundation for another crucial distinction: “that between the beautiful, which can be perceived by eyes and ears, and the pleasant or agreeable, enjoyable sensations from the other sensory organs.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, the objective “intentional direction of vision and hearing aids our knowledge of the world and gives us aesthetic pleasure.”<sup>15</sup>

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12) Berleant, “Aesthetics and the Contemporary Arts,” 157.

13) Plato, *Phaedo*, 9–10.

14) Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 24.

15) Korsmeyer, “Delightful, Delicious, Disgusting,” 146.

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the separation between higher and lower senses, along with the belief that aesthetic appreciation could be achieved solely through the higher senses, was firmly entrenched. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel observed that “the sensuous aspect of art is related only to the two theoretical senses of sight and hearing, while smell, taste, and touch remain excluded from the enjoyment of art.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Edmund Burke noted that when judging beautiful things, “it must be observed too, that the pleasures of the sight are not near so complicated, and confused, and altered by unnatural habits and associations, as the pleasures of the Taste are.”<sup>17</sup>

Since then, this distinction has served as a criterion to separate the five fine arts – architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, and music – whose objects are considered to have aesthetic value, from other arts like gastronomy, whose objects are not. A fundamental difference between the higher and the lower senses lies in the nature of their interaction with objects. The higher senses allow us to experience objects from a distance, while the lower senses require direct contact. For instance, to enjoy a painting or a symphony, one can do so from a certain distance; in many cases, maintaining some distance is even preferable. In contrast, enjoying a meal necessitates direct contact. Moreover, gastronomic products not only require direct contact, but must be ingested by the organism that experiences them, leading to their consumption in the process.

This is the reason why the lower senses have been identified with the bodily senses, defending that the knowledge (if any) they can produce is merely subjective. In contrast, the higher senses have been identified with the rational senses. Only they can provide universal knowledge and, because of it, aesthetic knowledge. For example, in the eighteenth century, Lord Kames, when discussing taste, identifies tasting, touching, and smelling as “merely corporeal,” but identifies seeing and hearing as “more refined and spiritual.”<sup>18</sup> In short, the higher senses can produce rational aesthetic knowledge, while the lower senses can only produce pleasant bodily sensations. The distinction between higher and lower senses has been the source of a central argument against

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16) Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 38.

17) Burke, *Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 15.

18) Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 12.

considering gastronomy a form of artistic expression: the argument from consumption. In the following section, I will analyze this argument in detail.

#### 4. The Problem of Consumption

A common argument against considering gastronomy as a genuine way of artistic expression is the problem of consumption: “food is often dismissed as a genuine artistic medium on the grounds that the object of culinary art is consumed as it is enjoyed.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, unlike a painting, a sculpture, or a piece of music, which once created can be observed or listened to repeatedly by countless people, when we eat something, we consume it, we exhaust it. Once ingested, it disappears, leaving no opportunity for others to experience it. It is true that we can order the same dish in a restaurant. Suppose you and I go to a restaurant and order two plates of osso buco. Certainly, the dishes we receive will be very similar, but they are not the same in the sense of being the same object of appreciation. However, if we visit the Louvre to see *La Gioconda*, we can both appreciate the same work of art.

This difference is crucial to say that meals and cathedrals, sculptures, or paintings are very different. The former disappear when consumed, while the latter endure and can be enjoyed by many people many times. In her book *Making Sense of Taste. Food and Philosophy*, Carolyn Korsmeyer attributes this argument to Hegel. Hegel distinguishes the modes of appreciation associated with the higher and the lower senses, noting that sight and hearing function at a distance, whereas taste and smell require direct contact with the object. Our appreciation of food, he argues, is inherently tied to its consumption: “we can smell only what is in the process of wasting away, and we can taste only by destroying.”<sup>20</sup> This does not occur in the case of a cathedral, a sculpture, or a painting since it is not necessary to consume them to appreciate them.

The difference in how the higher and the lower senses interact with their objects has led to a significant differentiation in their perceived qualities. The lower senses, which require direct contact with the object of appreciation, are considered practical and bodily. In contrast, the higher senses allow us to experience the object of apprecia-

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19) Monroe, “Can Food Be Art?,” 133.

20) Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 138.



tion from a distance, engaging our intellect, and are thus regarded as theoretical and rational. This assumption that the lower senses are corporeal and do not engage the intellect directly has led to the exclusion of their objects from the realm of artworks. Korsmeyer resumes Hegel's point succinctly: "They do not serve the mind sufficiently, so their 'subjectivity' curtails their artistic possibilities."<sup>21</sup> However, some authors have challenged this conception of gastronomy. For example, Dave Monroe defends that gastronomy is like other fine arts, which are universally recognized as legitimate forms of artistic expression. In the following section, I will present and assess Monroe's argument, showing that it fails due to a problematic analogy on which it is based.

## 5. Monroe's Argument Against the Problem of Consumption

Monroe begins by noting that not all legitimate artworks are composed of physical materials. For example, performance arts such as music, dance, or literature are considered non-physical or immaterial arts because "there is no particular physical 'thing' that one can plausibly take to be the artwork itself."<sup>22</sup> A particular performance of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*, unlike Michelangelo's *David*, does not exist as a tangible, stable, or concrete object. According to Monroe, formal aspects have a major role in performing arts. When it comes to musical objects, the performance is central, but not the sole element of importance. A particular rendition is recognized as an instance of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* not only because of the performance itself, but also because it follows a previously fixed formal structure, the score that Beethoven wrote in 1824. Monroe argues that a similar principle applies to gastronomy. He suggests that both music and gastronomy share "a kind of *formal structuring*."<sup>23</sup> Just as different performances of a musical piece are related to a score, a dish is a "combination of a set of material ingredients with a formalized method of preparation."<sup>24</sup> Monroe then invokes the principle of universalization, "treat like cases alike,"<sup>25</sup> to contend that,

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21) Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 62.

22) Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is," 5.

23) Monroe, "Can Food Be Art?," 138.

24) Ibid.

25) Ibid., 139.

in view that music and gastronomy share this defining feature, and considering that music is universally accepted as an art form, gastronomy should likewise be recognized as an art form.

Although Monroe's argument is appealing, it faces two types of problems. On the one hand, there are problems related to the ontology of the musical work. Monroe seems to support the two-level type/token theory,<sup>26</sup> which posits that musical works encompass two different levels of objects: i) types of sound-sequence events; and ii) the various performances that instantiate these types. While Monroe does not explicitly state his stance on the nature of musical works, several aspects suggest his alignment with the two-level type/token theory. Firstly, Monroe's terminology, such as referring to performances as "instances," implies a two-level framework. For example, he notes that "philosophers sometimes refer to these manifestations as 'instances';"<sup>27</sup> or "Despite these wildly fluctuating conditions, each is a recognizable performance (i.e., instance) of *Moonlight Sonata*."<sup>28</sup> According to the two-level type/token theory, the relationship between types and tokens is precisely one of instantiation. Secondly, Monroe seems to focus on sound-sequence events when discussing the formal, non-material aspects of a musical work: "Music, for example, might be understood as a collection of performed notes arranged in a very specific way."<sup>29</sup> Thirdly, Monroe emphasizes that the formal, non-material element is essential for something to qualify as a musical work. However, opposing views to the two-level type/token theory do not usually consider any formal, non-material element in defining the nature of musical works.

For these reasons, it seems plausible to conclude that Monroe subscribes to the two-level type/token theory as the proper explanation for the nature of musical works. This presents a problem, though, because there is no consensus on what constitutes a musical work. The two-level type/token theory is endorsed by many authors, although there are also significant dissenting viewpoints. For example, materialist approaches reduce musical works to their concrete manifestations, such as "musical performances, recordings of musical performances, playing of recordings

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26) See, for example, Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is"; and Dodd, *Works of Music*, chapter 1.

27) Monroe, "Can Food Be Art?," 137.

28) Ibid.

29) Ibid., 136.

of musical performances, certain mental events.”<sup>30</sup> In line with this, Ben Caplan and Carl Matheson defend a theory that “takes musical works to be fusions of performances.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Caterina Moruzzi supports *Musical Stage Theory*, which states that “the musical work is a stage/performance connected by a privileged relationship to other stages/performances.”<sup>32</sup> Another route available to the materialist is to adopt an eliminativist perspective, which argues that musical works do not exist. Ross P. Cameron, for example, defends that “there are no musical works in our ontology.”<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, musical and culinary objects differ in several significant ways. Firstly, music is considered a non-physical art because musical works are not tangible, physical entities. In contrast, culinary objects are unequivocally physical objects. Additionally, certain aspects of gastronomy are closely related to the physical and bodily dimension, such as the nutritional value of food. This leads us to the second key difference: the necessity of direct contact. To experience and enjoy a symphony, direct contact is not necessary; it can be appreciated from a distance through the exercise of our intellect. However, experiencing a dish necessitates direct contact; it is impossible to experience or enjoy a dish unless it is introduced into our organism.

Someone might argue that, in the case of music, there is also direct contact as sound reach our ears and is processed by our brains. However, culinary objects function differently, and the issue of distance is central here. Consider cases in which a certain distance from the artistic object not only does not impede the appreciation of the object in question but improves it, for example, viewing a pointillist painting twenty centimeters away versus from a few steps back or listening to a symphony from within the orchestra versus from the auditorium. This is not the case with culinary objects. When you want to experience a lasagna, whether in a restaurant or at home, distance does not enhance appreciation. On the contrary, it likely prevents adequate engagement with the culinary object. At best, you might be able to smell it, but this is far from the full appreciation that only occurs when the food is actually consumed.

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30) Tillman, “Musical Materialism,” 15.

31) Caplan and Matheson, “Defending Musical Perdurantism,” 60.

32) Moruzzi, “Every Performance Is a Stage,” 342.

33) Cameron, “There are no Things that are Musical Works,” 295.

In conclusion, drawing parallels between musical and culinary objects may not be the best strategy if the aim is to argue that gastronomy qualifies as an art form comparable to other fine arts. Firstly, instead of accepting the two-level type/token theory and secure a formal, non-physical element that persist after the dish is consumed, one could be a gastronomic materialist, asserting that a dish is nothing more than the fusion of all its executions. This parallels the idea that a musical work is reduced to its performances, making gastronomy susceptible to the problem of consumption. Secondly, musical and culinary objects possess very different characteristics. Monroe himself recognizes this potential problem: “The [universalization] principle requires that we treat like cases alike, but if the cases are dissimilar, then the principle does not hold.”<sup>34</sup> In the next section, I will present examples where the principle of universalization can be applied more effectively, avoiding the complications associated with comparing to musical works.

## 6. Of Ephemeral Sculptures

In light of the possibility that comparing musical and culinary objects could not be the most effective way of demonstrating that gastronomy is an artistic medium, we might want to consider other instances in which the universalization principle can be applied. In the remainder of this section, I will argue that ephemeral sculptures are an ideal candidate for applying the principle of universalization, supporting the view that culinary objects are indeed artistic objects. This is because ephemeral sculptures and culinary objects share two main characteristics: first, its lifespan is limited; and second, both are tangible physical objects. Moreover, I will show that there are certain ephemeral sculptures for which direct contact is necessary for proper appreciation. It is true that ephemeral art is commonly associated with contemporary art, but it is important not to forget the profound influence that the modern art system still has today. This influence is evident in the fact that the two examples of ephemeral art I am going to present in this section are clearly shaped by the museum mentality: both works were exhibited in museums or galleries. But first of all, let us define what ephemeral art is.

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34) Monroe, “Can Food Be Art?,” 140.

According to the *Tate Museum*, ephemeral art emerged in the middle of the twentieth century and includes practices ranging from sculpture to performance that produce works of art “that only occurs once, like a happening, and cannot be embodied in any lasting object to be shown in a museum or gallery.”<sup>35</sup> Other sources describe ephemeral art as “a work that, by its nature, is destined to disappear, self-destruct, deteriorate, or decompose.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, one of the most defining features of ephemeral art is its limited lifespan, much like dishes.

Now, let us consider some examples of ephemeral sculptures. *Anya Gallaccio*, for instance, is known for working with organic materials such as ice, flowers, fruits, or sugar, creating installations that change over time as they melt, decompose, or even new life sprouts from them. One of her notable works, *Preserve Beauty*,<sup>37</sup> consists of bright red flowers arranged in four rectangular compositions under large transparent glass panels. As the exhibit progresses, the flowers wither and die, and this process of decay can be observed through the glass or on the floor where dead flowers fall. Visitors interact with the installation using both their senses of sight and smell. Depending on how long the exhibition has been open, they may smell the aroma of fresh flowers or the strong stench of decay.

Similarly, Linda Swanson uses materials such as bentonite, salt, water, metal, wood or mylar to create sculptures that change over time. For example, her installation *Sulcus Primigenius*<sup>38</sup> includes a field of bentonite powder with a single furrow irrigated by water. As the bentonite absorbs the water, it swells up and erupts into flowering earth. In ancient Rome, one of the most important ceremonies when founding a new city was the plow of a first furrow in the land called *sulcus primigenius* (perimeter groove). This first furrow determined the limits of the city and, both the furrow and the earth that was raised in doing so, were considered to be sacred. Swanson’s sculpture seeks to recreate this experience, representing the ritualistic moment when new limits are established, where a cut in the earth delineates two distinct realms.

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35) See <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/e/ephemeral-art>.

36) See <https://www.riseart.com/article/2606/top-5-ephemeral-art-styles>.

37) See <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/gallaccio-preserve-beauty-t11829>.

38) See <https://www.lindaswansonstudio.com/copy-of-wearetime-ssubjects>.

As illustrated, both sculptures have a limited lifespan, just as culinary objects. While the duration of these sculptures is not totally similar to that of dishes – *Sulcus Primigenius*, for instance, had a two-month fixed duration, and *Preserve Beauty* can last for several weeks – it is evident that both culinary objects and ephemeral sculptures are very different from musical works and other artistic objects such as cathedrals, paintings, or traditional sculptures. Many traditional artworks may eventually disappear and, indeed, many have, but numerous others have remained intact for more than five hundred, one thousand, or even ten thousand years. This distinguishes them from dishes and ephemeral sculptures, which have a much shorter lifespan. However, although the great majority of ephemeral sculptures and culinary objects have a limited lifespan, maybe there are a few exceptions. Consider, for example, a sculpture made of honey, a gastronomic product known for its durability. In this case, we would be dealing with a durable yet edible sculpture.<sup>39</sup> I would argue that such an object possesses a dual nature: it is a sculpture, appreciable from a distance through the higher senses, and at the same time a culinary object, appreciable only through direct contact via the lower senses. Nevertheless, it should be noted that such cases are very rare. First, because honey is virtually the only everlasting edible material. Second, because most ephemeral sculptures and culinary objects are not made from materials that are both durable and edible.

Likewise, both culinary objects and ephemeral sculptures are physical objects. In *Preserve Beauty*, the materials used are flowers and glass panels for arranging the flowers. In *Sulcus Primigenius*, the components include water and bentonite powder. For dishes, the ingredients are the fundamental elements. This is expected, as both sculpture and gastronomy are inherently physical arts.

As mentioned earlier, there can even be similarities between certain ephemeral sculptures and culinary objects in terms of the need for direct contact for a correct appreciation. Since ephemeral sculptures are designed to disappear, they often use perishable materials, making it more likely that senses other than sight and hearing will come into play. For example, while part of the appreciation of Gallaccio's work *Preserve Beauty* relies on sight – a superior sense – and can be experienced from a distance, another equally significant aspect is rooted in the sense of smell – a lower

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39) I owe this example to an anonymous reviewer.

sense. The experience of the scent is crucial for the full appreciation of the work and, more importantly, involves direct contact between the piece and the observer. Similar to how we must smell a perfume or taste a dish to experience them, this level of direct contact is indispensable. Such an intimate mode of engagement is inconceivable for other arts such as architecture, painting, or music.

Many other examples could be given to illustrate this point,<sup>40</sup> but it is clear that these two sculptures are similar to dishes in that they are both physical objects with limited lifespans. Besides, *Preserve Beauty* shares with culinary objects an additional characteristic, the requirement of direct contact. Therefore, by applying the principle of universalization, we can argue that dishes, being similar to ephemeral sculptures in their physical and transient nature, also deserve to be considered artworks, as ephemeral sculptures are recognized as such. However, there is still room for debate on the part of those who maintain that gastronomy is not a form of artistic expression. This argument shifts the focus from the objects of artistic appreciation to the judgments themselves. Specifically, it highlights an asymmetry: aesthetic judgments, such as those regarding cathedrals, sculptures, or paintings, are intersubjectively valid, whereas judgments of personal preference, such as those concerning culinary objects, are only subjectively valid.

## 7. The Asymmetry Between Aesthetic Judgments and Judgments of Personal Preference

Another common argument against the idea that gastronomy can be considered an artistic medium focuses on the asymmetry between aesthetic judgments and judgments of personal preference. To maintain a clear distinction between the fine arts and the culinary arts, one could highlight a difference not in the characteristic products of these arts, but in the judgments that serve to express our approval or disapproval of these products. In a nutshell, those who argue that gastronomy is radically different from architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, or music often point to the fact that

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40) Ephemeral artwork can be associated with both painting and sculpture. Examples of the former include street art such as graffiti and stencils; examples of the latter include ice sculptures, sand sculptures, and land art.

aesthetic judgments are intersubjectively valid, whereas judgments of personal preference are only subjectively valid.

We are indebted to Kant for providing one of the first expositions of this idea. For Kant, aesthetic judgments are universal, unlike judgments of personal preference, because they are free from all personal interest. However, one might wonder: why are aesthetic judgments considered universal and judgments of personal preference are not, given that both are ultimately rooted in individual subjective experiences? Kant's answer, which has become one of the most well-established pillars of aesthetics, is to postulate a kind of intersubjective universality for aesthetic judgments. Aesthetic judgments are subjective as they encompass "an element of the subjective side of representation which is not objectively valid,"<sup>41</sup> the feeling of pleasure or displeasure, but as "the pleasure which the object occasions in the person judging it should be felt by every other member of its eventual audience as well,"<sup>42</sup> aesthetic judgments are intersubjectively valid. In other words, aesthetic judgments possess intersubjective validity because someone who makes an aesthetic judgment has reason to expect that others will feel the same pleasure:

For, since the delight is not based on any inclination of the subject (or on any other deliberate interest), but the judging subject feels himself completely free in respect of the liking which he accords to the object, ... he must regard it as resting on what he may also presuppose in every other person; and therefore he must believe that he has reason for expecting a similar delight from everyone.<sup>43</sup>

Then, further on:

Many things may for him possess charm and agreeableness – no one cares about that; but when he declares something to be beautiful, he expects the same delight from others. He judges not merely for himself, but for

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41) Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 63.

42) Ibid., 63.

43) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 43.



everyone, and then speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. Thus he says the *thing* is beautiful; and it is not as if he counted on others agreeing in his judgement of liking owing to his having found them in such agreement on a number of occasions, but he *demand*s this agreement of them. He blames them if they judge differently, and denies them taste, which he still requires of them as something they ought to have; and to this extent it is not open to men to say: Every one has his own taste.<sup>44</sup>

Other authors have committed to this type of universal intersubjective validity for aesthetic judgments. Consider the following excerpt from Edmund Burke's book *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*:

I never remember that any thing beautiful, whether a man, a beast, a bird, or a plant, was ever shewn, though it were to an hundred people, that they did not all immediately agree that it was beautiful, though some might have thought that it fell short of their expectation, or that other things were still finer.<sup>45</sup>

According to Kant, when someone uses the term "beautiful" to describe an object, they expect the same delight from others. In other words, when we make an aesthetic judgment and declare something to be beautiful, we expect others to concur with our judgment. Similarly, Burke suggests that it is impossible for people to disagree on something that is acknowledged as beautiful.

However, this is not the case with judgments of personal preference. If someone enjoys licorice, sushi, or artichokes, they are unlikely to expect others to share the same tastes. For example, if I like artichokes, and you do not, that is perfectly fine; each person has their own taste preferences. As the old saying goes: *De gustibus non est disputandum* (there is no arguing about taste). However, it is more difficult to consider a disagreement on *Guernica*'s quality as a simple matter of taste. Essentially, aesthetic judgments can be deemed correct or incorrect based on a general and expected agree-

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44) Ibid., 44.

45) Burke, *Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 15.

ment among people. Unlike them, judgments of personal preference are correct only in relation to the individual who makes them.

Before proceeding further, it is important to clarify that Kant's argumentation in the *Critique of Judgment* is more complex than what has been presented here. His concepts belong to the domain of transcendental philosophy. For Kant, when we make an aesthetic judgment about an object, we are judging how the pleasure the object causes in us relates to our cognitive faculties. Since these faculties are shared among all human beings, it is expected that others will experience similar pleasure. However, as Peter Guyer argues, Kant's theory in the *Critique of Judgment* includes a psychology-based explanation of the mechanisms involved in our experience of beauty, but also "a logico-linguistic analysis of the claims that we make on the experience of ourselves and others when we call something beautiful."<sup>46</sup> It is this second aspect that interests me in this work and which some contemporary authors, whom I will introduce below, have emphasized more directly.

In more recent discussions, the difference between aesthetic judgments and judgments of personal preference has been characterized by the degree of pressure they exert on the audience. Aesthetic judgments involve high-pressure terms like "beautiful" or "unified," which suggest a broader expectation of agreement, while judgments of personal preference contain low-pressure terms, for example, "tasty" or "sexy," reflecting a more individualistic perspective. Consider the following passage:

So what distinguishes "beautiful" and "unified" on the one hand, from "tasty" and "sexy" on the other? The answer has something to do with the normative demands that an assertion involving those terms places on those around us. When we say that something is tasty or sexy, we don't typically place a great deal of pressure on our listener to agree with our claim, whatever such agreement might amount to. By contrast, if we describe something as unified, or beautiful, we do typically place pressure on our interlocutor to agree or to defend her own judgments.<sup>47</sup>

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46) Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, xiv.

47) Sundell, "Aesthetic Negotiation," 84.

Although the emphasis is different, the idea is similar in all the mentioned authors. When we make an aesthetic judgment, we expect the audience to agree with us, thereby exerting significant pressure for them to align with our view. However, in the case of judgments of personal preference, we do not expect the audience to agree with us, resulting in minimal pressure for others to share our perspective. In the end, the asymmetry between aesthetic judgments and judgments of personal preference offers a basis for setting the fine arts and gastronomy apart and, therefore, for thinking that gastronomy cannot be considered a form of artistic expression. However, as I will show in the next section, empirical evidence suggests that this distinction may not hold universally across all contexts.

## 8. Questioning the Asymmetry Between Aesthetic Judgments and Judgments of Personal Preference

In this section, I will present empirical evidence from two different sources that challenge the purported asymmetry between aesthetic judgments and judgments of personal preference. First, recent studies in “experimental philosophy of aesthetics”<sup>48</sup> has revealed that people do not generally consider aesthetic judgments to possess greater intersubjective validity compared to judgments of personal preference. A first study by Florian Cova and Nicolas Pain challenged the idea that people attribute intersubjective validity to aesthetic judgments. They conducted three vignettes-based experiments representing disagreements between two individuals concerning three different types of objects; works of art, natural objects, and human beings; using predicates like “beautiful” and “ugly.” Participants were asked to determine whether they believed only one person involved in the disagreement was right, if both were right, or if neither was right nor wrong because it made no sense to talk about correctness in that situation. If participants were to attribute universal intersubjective validity to aesthetic judgments, it would be expected they answer mostly the first option. However, the results of the three experiments “were unambiguous: people do not claim universal validity for aesthetic judgments,”<sup>49</sup>

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48) Cova, Garcia, and Liao, “Experimental Philosophy of Aesthetics,” 929–32.

49) Cova and Pain, “Can Folk Aesthetics Ground Aesthetic Realism,” 258.

since they almost unanimously chose the second option, that is, the option indicating subjective judgment.

One pressing issue with this study was the limited and homogeneous sample size. Specifically, across the three experiments mentioned above, only around 80 people participated, all of whom were students recruited from *Paris' Quartier Latin*. To address this limitation, Florian Cova and his colleagues tried to replicate the experiment on a larger scale. In this subsequent study, they involved more than two thousand people in nineteen different countries across four continents (North and South America, Europe, and Asia). Participants were initially asked to describe something they found beautiful. Then, they were asked to imagine encountering someone who does not find that thing beautiful. Finally, they were asked to decide whether they or the other person was right, both were right, or neither was right nor wrong because it made no sense to talk about correctness in that situation. The results indicated that “most people do not endorse the idea that aesthetic judgments have intersubjective validity”:<sup>50</sup> only seven percent opted for the first option, forty one percent chose the second option, and fifty two percent selected the third option. Note that the experiments carried out by Cova and his colleagues clearly align with one of the two dimensions that Peter Guyer mentioned as relevant for considering Kant's theory: a logico-linguistic analysis of the statements we and other people make when we say of an object that it is beautiful.

Cova and his colleagues argue that most people do not attribute universal intersubjective validity to aesthetic judgments. However, one could further argue against drawing a sharp distinction between aesthetic judgments and judgments of personal preference by considering the opposite perspective, that is, defending that people sometimes attribute universal intersubjective validity to gastronomic judgments. In real discussions about gastronomy, for instance, people might make judgments based on personal preference, yet behave as if they expect universal agreement. Consider the next discussion on Reddit:

- (1) speaker 1: I've been on a celery kick, mainly just for snacking. When I cut and clean my celery for storage I would save the leaves, and put them in my salads.

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50) Cova, et al., “*De Pulchritudine non est Disputandum?*,” 325–26.

My girlfriend and I were having dinner and I pulled out the salad and she asked why I had celery leaves in there. I think they taste good when mixed with lettuce, gives a little taste to it. She said that's crazy, you're not supposed to use the leaves. She's a lot smarter than me, so am I stupid for that?

- (2) speaker 2: No and fuck celery cause it's a poser vegetable. Third rate vegetable at best. Right down there with the rutabaga.
- (3) speaker 1: Nah, rutabaga wishes it was celery. That's your poser vegetable. Celery is crunchy, doesn't have an overwhelming flavor, and is very versatile. Rutabaga is for quitters, don't put my celery with that garbage.
- (4) speaker 2: Oh please. Doesn't have an overwhelming flavor? Well no shit because it tastes like nothing. It is crunchy, I will give you that, but so is sand.
- (5) speaker 1: Just add some peanut butter. Or some dressing. It goes good with everything. Like your mom.
- (6) speaker 2: I mean I hate to tell you this, but celery is one of the worst vegetables in existence. I was trying to be diplomatic about it, but now the gloves are off. Everyone knows it. Just like everyone hates new jersey, everyone also hates celery. I guess you didn't get the memo.
- (7) speaker 1: I will not have a battle of wits against the unarmed, comrade.
- (8) speaker 2: You take some celery and I'll take a rutabaga (which is a loser as well, just not as much as celery) and we'll see who wins. Yours might be longer, but mine is harder.
- (9) speaker 1: Challenge accepted.

In the example, the two speakers are arguing about which vegetable is better, celery or rutabaga. The discussion begins when, after speaker 1 enquires about the consumption of celery leaves, speaker 2 replies expressing disapproval about celery. Note that, although it is presumed that both speakers make judgments of personal preference, that is, low-pressure judgments, both behave as if their judgments are universal and intersubjectively valid.

Firstly, both speakers put high-pressure on each other to agree with their respective judgments. Furthermore, the fact that they both realize they have different taste standards in no sense reduces the pressure they put on each other. Several authors have defended that when people realize that their taste standards are different, they

often cease to disagree. For example, Timothy Sundell defends that we “care about how similar or different we are in our tastes and aesthetic standards. Much of the time we want to reduce differences.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, when speakers realize their taste preferences differ, one might expect them to move “from ‘Oh yes/Oh no’ dialogue to ‘Ok/Ok’ dialogue.”<sup>52</sup> However, as can be seen in (1)–(9), the speakers not only fail to reach mutual acceptance of each other’s tastes – indicating a shift from high-pressure to low-pressure scenarios, where judgments are seen as subjectively rather than intersubjectively valid – but also attempt to persuade each other using various arguments, eventually leading to strong confrontation and personal disqualifications.

Secondly, the expressions used by both speakers also suggest that they conceive their judgments as intersubjectively valid. On the one hand, the focus is on the objects rather than their personal experiences. It is commonly argued that when making an aesthetic judgment, “we utter a sentence that ascribes an aesthetic predicate to an object (“This painting is beautiful”) rather than utter sentences that only express the way this object makes us feel (“I love this painting”).”<sup>53</sup> In the case at hand, constant references are made to the two vegetables and their defining characteristics. For example, “celery is a poser vegetable,” “rutabaga wishes it was celery,” “Celery is crunchy, doesn’t have an overwhelming flavor, and is very versatile,” “Rutabaga is for quitters,” or “celery is one of the worst vegetables in existence.” On the other hand, there are no explicit marks of subjectivity in the conversation, that is, linguistic marks that unambiguously indicate “the presence (or absence) of an experiencer, that is, a sentient individual who perceives the property in question,”<sup>54</sup> such as “I love celery,” “I find rutabaga tasty,” “in my opinion,” “your personal taste,” or “to me.”

Now, consider how Noël Carroll describes aesthetic disagreements:

For example, people involved in disputes about aesthetic properties act as though they think that they are disagreeing about the real properties of objects. They behave as though they think that there is a fact of the

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51) Sundell, “Aesthetic Negotiation,” 91.

52) Stojanovic, “Talking about Taste,” 694.

53) Cova and Pain, “Can Folk Aesthetics Ground Aesthetic Realism?,” 256.

54) McNally and Stojanovic, “Aesthetic Adjectives,” 24.

matter to be determined. They speak as if one side of the disagreement is right and the other wrong.<sup>55</sup>

The speakers in (1)–(9) act precisely in this manner. It seems that, despite the fact that the topic of discussion is gastronomy, we should declare the disagreement as an aesthetic disagreement.

All these phenomena lead to a common conclusion: it is possible that the judgments we make to express our aesthetic preferences and our gustatory preferences often have very similar characteristics. This suggests that aesthetic judgments may not always possess universal intersubjective validity, and judgments of personal preferences may sometimes possess intersubjective validity, challenging Kant and one of the longstanding tenets of traditional aesthetics.

## 9. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have tried to defend the idea that gastronomy is an artistic medium. To support this claim, I have presented multiple objections to two of the most popular arguments that advocate for a clear distinction between the five fine arts – architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, and music – and gastronomy: the problem of consumption and the asymmetry between aesthetic judgments and judgments of personal preference.

Regarding the first argument, I have shown that accepting the problem of consumption inevitably has an undesirable consequence: the rejection of ephemeral sculptures as artworks. Someone who would still maintain that gastronomy is not an artistic medium could defend that ephemeral sculptures are not art. However, this is problematic because other forms of ephemeral art should be rejected as well, for example, street art, performance art, or self-destruction. While one might consider these artistic practices to be marginal and of limited relevance, disciplines such as self-destruction are becoming increasingly central to the very definition of art.

Consider Banksy's self-destruction of *Girl with Balloon*. Banksy is widely recognized by both the general public and the art world. One of its most iconic

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55) Carroll, *Philosophy of Art*, 117.

pieces, *Girl with Balloon*, which was voted the favorite artwork by the British public in 2017,<sup>56</sup> was partially destroyed by Banksy itself. The painting was auctioned at Sotheby's for just over a million pounds. However, shortly after the auction, the work was partially shredded by a mechanism hidden in the frame,<sup>57</sup> a device Banksy had placed there in anticipation of the auction. Banksy has not said too much on its intentions. The few statements made in this regard on October 5 and 6, 2018, which undoubtedly follow its elusive style, do not give us too many clues: "Going, going, gone..." (@banksy, October 5, 2018),<sup>58</sup> or Picasso's famous phrase "The urge to destroy is also a creative urge." Regardless of Banksy's true motives, the self-destruction of *Girl with Balloon* has profoundly affected the world of art. There are even those who compare Banksy's performance with Duchamp's *Fountain* or Andy Warhol's *Brillo box*.

With respect to the asymmetry between aesthetic judgments and judgments of personal preference, I have offered empirical evidence suggesting that aesthetic judgments may not possess intersubjective validity, while there are scenarios where judgments of personal preference do. Several questionnaire-based studies indicate that individuals often do not consider aesthetic judgments to have universal intersubjective validity. Conversely, I have shown that, in certain contexts, individuals discussing culinary issues treat their judgments as having intersubjective validity. This should not be surprising because, although traditionally has been thought that gastronomic discussions about culinary objects involve mere judgments of personal preference, the context and the development of the conversation can easily transform the nature of these judgments:

In our discourse about personal taste, we sometimes do not place any pressure on those around us to agree with the preferences we express. But sometimes we do. Sometimes it varies over the course of a conversation. A conversation that begins low pressure – simply a sharing of facts about personal preference – can turn high pressure, with participants

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56) See Kennedy, "Banksy Stencil Soars"; and British Broadcasting Corporation, "Banksy's Balloon Girl."

57) For more information, see Reyburn, "Banksy Painting Self-Destructs."

58) See <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bokt2sEhlsu/>.



digging in their heels and demanding that others share their preferences or defend their own.<sup>59</sup>

In other words, whether a discussion on gastronomy involves high-pressure or low-pressure judgments depends more on the context, including the attitudes and objectives of the participants and the way the conversation progresses, rather than on the inherent nature of the topic being discussed.

Therefore, there are compelling reasons to consider food as an artistic medium, not necessarily on the same level as architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, or music, but as a unique form of art with its own distinct characteristics. To fully appreciate this perspective, we must question some of the core assumptions in aesthetics, ideas that have persisted for a long time, perhaps longer than necessary.

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59) Sundell, "Aesthetic Negotiation," 90.

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