

INTRODUCTION

Across philosophical traditions the question of taste has – at least paradigmatically since Kant’s third critique – been one of the most, perhaps the most central question within the discipline of aesthetics. The present issue of *NJA* explores ways in which this question can be addressed today; politically, analytically, historically, disciplinarily. The articles all stem from the inaugural conference of the research network Aesthetics Unlimited, which was held at Roskilde University, Denmark on 4–5 May 2017. Collaborating with Séminaire d’Esthétique Européen this new international research network for aesthetic studies is funded by the Danish Council for Independent Research and is led by Anne Elisabeth Sejten, Professor of Aesthetics at Roskilde University.

Questioning the concept of taste inevitably points to some deep roots of aesthetics. Already Baltasar Gratián indicated the social dimension of taste (*El Héroe*, 1637), and by associating *gusto* with the “je ne sais quoi” Gratián anticipated what was to be a central binding element of eighteenth-century discussions of taste, especially among the British philosophers (e.g. Shaftesbury and Hume) who were also inspired by French thought, particularly Jean-Baptiste Dubos’ *Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting, and Music* from 1719 and translated into English in 1748. The influences between English and French philosophers are indeed mutual and keep on going back and forth during the century; yet, what runs through the effervescence of taste in European Enlightenment is the fact that taste appears as more than a metaphor for aesthetic sensitivity; taste, increasingly implies a kind of understated epistemological faculty that involves beauty as much as it interacts with reason.

Even though judgments of beauty are not primarily mediated by inferences from principles or applications of concepts, but rather demonstrate immediacy (cf. Dubos’ famous ragout example: we “taste” beauty, as we taste a meal), judgments of taste require some amount of reasoning in order to taste the beauty of the fine arts, as well as the relationship between imagination and understanding is at the core of the judgment of taste in the Kantian conception of the beautiful. On the other hand, if aesthetics descends from taste, the concept of taste is astonishingly dismissed by philosophical aesthetics in the following centuries in order only to reappear – modernised and standardised – in mainly sociological terms of particular domains of taste, taste of fashion, taste of music, taste of cooking, etc. Taste is precisely as challenging and intriguing, as it takes us to the forgotten archaic concept of aesthetics. The papers

presented in this volume thus intend to revisit, investigate and put into perspective the concept of taste both currently and historically in order to consider its potentials and possible disjunctions in the exploration of current phenomena of aestheticisation. There is undoubtedly no direct way back to eighteenth-century aesthetics' category of taste, but between its early developments into bourgeois identity and future mass consumerism, between autonomy and the market, detours might be envisaged and explored.

Juliane Rebentisch, in the opening article "Distinction and Difference: Revisiting the Question of Taste," critically analyses the logic of distinction in our contemporary culture of difference and puts the question of taste in relation to contemporary art. The tendency towards ever greater individualisation may appear to have rendered social codes less impenetrable, but, Rebentisch argues, this does neither imply that it runs counter to standardisation nor that it suspends the social logic of distinction. On the contrary, the social logic of distinction, that was famously exposed by Pierre Bourdieu, has merely been differentiated further and still involves signifiers of status. Art undeniably takes part in this development, but, Rebentisch shows, certain contemporary artistic practices can also be seen as opposing the subject of aesthetic experience to the subject of consumerist taste.

From a more analytical perspective Carolyn Korsmeyer's article "Taste and Other Senses: Reconsidering the Foundations of Aesthetics" describes how recent philosophical perspectives on the history of taste as a metaphor for aesthetic discernment have included literal, gustatory taste. Korsmeyer summarises the disposition of taste in aesthetics through three stories about taste and considers, by means of the most recent of these stories, food in terms of aesthetics and its employment in works of art. She then reflects on the odd position of taste in the postmodern art world and points out the, often neglected, role of bodily senses in the apprehension of art. The question of literal, physical taste is also taken up by Anne Elisabeth Sejten. In her article "From Hume's 'Delicacy' to Contemporary Art" she thus investigates an aspect that relates to Korsmeyer's second story through an analysis of Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste" and the contradiction between subjective taste and the normativity of common sense. Sejten makes a close reading of Hume's use of the notion of "delicacy" and suggests that this can also be seen to have relevance for how we might address contemporary works of art.

In the article “The Origins of the Transcendental Justification of Taste – Kant’s Several Views on the Status of Beauty” Esther Oluffa Pedersen identifies Kant’s changing notions of aesthetics from the pre-critical period to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Pedersen argues that Kant’s pre-critical preoccupation with the cultural critique of Rousseau was decisive for his development of the doctrines of transcendental philosophy in the third critique and its transcendental aesthetics of beauty. Carole Talon-Hugon likewise makes a historical analysis of the relationship between the notions of taste and beauty, asking why taste during the eighteenth century became exclusively the sense of beauty. This change, Talon-Hugon argues, should be seen in relation to the end of a metaphysical conception of beauty, and to modern subjectivist, psychological and empirical perspectives. Her article, titled “The Aestheticisation of Taste, a Consequence of the ‘Aestheticisation’ of Beauty,” thus shows how the modern notion of beauty sees beauty as dependent upon sensitive experience and as no longer having a proper ontological consistency.

Finally, Morten Kyndrup’s article “Aesthetics and Judgment – ‘Why Kant got it right’” is a plaidoyer for the importance of aesthetic judgments. Kyndrup discusses this importance based on Thierry de Duve’s text “Why Kant got it right” in which de Duve looks at Kant as if he were a scientist who made a discovery about the true nature of aesthetic judgments. According to Kyndrup, aesthetic judgments are not only important in aesthetic relations and to the discipline of aesthetics, but they also contribute to the social cohesion of society. Through their address to a community, a “we” that is invited to share the aesthetic feeling of the person who pronounces the judgment, aesthetic judgments take part in the creation and maintenance of the social as such. It is decisive, Kyndrup stresses, that also professional aesthetic and artistic critique is aware of the social implications of this mechanism.

The issue is rounded off by Stefán Snævarr’s review of Richard Shusterman’s recent *The Adventures of the Man in Gold. Paths between Art and Life. A Philosophical Tale/ Les aventures de l’homme en or. Passages entre l’art et la vie. Conte philosophique*, and Nickolas Calabrese’s review of Pierre Klossowski’s newly translated *Living Currency*.

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