

KANT ON AESTHETIC COMMUNITY: A REGULATIVE MODEL FOR A HUMAN FORM OF LIFE

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Abstract. *In this article, I address the theme of the aesthetic shareability as presented by Kant in his Critique of the Power of Judgment. In the first part, I provide a brief overview of the topic, referring mainly to the Introduction of the Third Critique, in which I highlight the problematic nature of the normative character that Kant attributes to aesthetic judgment. I then analyse three theoretical positions, external to Kantian studies, showing their strengths and weaknesses in resolving some of the problems left open by Kant. I will refer to: 1. Hannah Arendt (aesthetics of sociability); 2. Samuel Fleischacker (aesthetics of liberty); 3. Pierre Bourdieu (popular aesthetics). In the last part, I return to Kant's text, with particular reference to the Deduction of pure aesthetic judgments. Following a suggestion by Hannah Ginsborg, I refer to Stanley Cavell and propose to trace the justification of the aesthetic community back to the very concept of humanity, as forms of life to be taken as given.*

Keywords. *Aesthetic Community; Kant; Arendt; Fleischacker; Bourdieu*

What has to be accepted, the given, is – one might say – forms of life.
(L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*)

Kant's notion of aesthetic community is a puzzle for aesthetic theory because it brings up an important question. This question asks us to justify the intersubjectivity of a feeling in the absence of a concept.

When you dig into this question, it is hard to understand and defend Kant's position and not use an empiricist explanation. Many interpretations have been given to this concept, and it has had a significant impact on the debate. I would like to discuss the theme of the

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aesthetic community elaborated by Kant in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* by pointing out possible interpretations and actualisations. I will consider three interpretations of the aesthetic community in Kant, all three of which are external to more rigorous studies of Kant.

I will refer to: 1. Hannah Arendt's reading, which I will call aesthetics of sociability; 2. Samuel Fleischacker's interpretation, which I will call aesthetics of liberty; 3. Pierre Bourdieu's critique, which I will call popular aesthetics.

After reconstructing how Kant outlines the aesthetic community, I will briefly define the three indicated positions and show their weaknesses. Finally, I will propose a possible alternative vision of the aesthetic community and open some questions to discuss its possible actualisation. At the end I will sketch a theoretical proposal that we can understand as regulative ideal for an aesthetic community.

1. *Kant's Aesthetic Community*

Typical tensions in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, notably leading to the definition of the aesthetic judgment, concern mainly the two elements justified from the *Deduction of pure aesthetic judgments*: aesthetic necessity and subjective universality. The tension between necessity and universality, on one side, and subjective nature, on the other, should be understood within the framework of the definition of the reflective judgment, as clearly outlined in the *Introduction* to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. What is at stake is the formulation of judgments in the absence of abstract and determinate concepts. These judgments are based on individual experience and thereby support an order and a rule that must necessarily be subjective¹. The aesthetic experience is then situated within the realm of reflection and not of logical knowledge.

¹ Kant's works are cited throughout the text according to the Akademie Ausgabe – I. Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, (ed. by Bd. 1-22 Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Bd. 23 Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, from Bd.

The aesthetic judgment is therefore the result of a reflection on the object whose representation is ‘necessarily’ connected to the feeling of pleasure. It is precisely the aesthetic necessity that allows the extension of the feeling of pleasure «not merely for the subject who apprehends this form but for everyone who judges at all»². This kind of necessity originates in the singular experience and «must always be cognized to be connected with this only through reflected perception»³. The judgment of taste is, in fact, singular, contingent and always connected with experience. The aesthetic judgement, however, has a peculiarity: «the judgment of taste, like every other empirical judgment, also only makes a claim to be valid for everyone, which, in spite of its intrinsic contingency, is always possible»⁴. The distinctive feature of the judgment of taste, what Kant calls «strange and anomalous», is that «it is not an empirical concept but rather a feeling of pleasure (consequently not a concept at all) which, through the judgment of taste, is nevertheless to be [*soll*] expected of everyone and connected with its representation, just as if it were a predicate associated with the cognition of the object»⁵.

Since aesthetic evaluations do not attach a predicate to the object, as beauty pertains to the subject’s feelings and not to things, the ‘should’ element ruling the experience of taste usually generates great puzzlement. How come that the same pleasure is to be expected from others face to the object? Kant’s way of putting it is very subtle. He does not imply an actual agreement, but he only sets its condition of possibility. The point is whether actual agreement is possible at all, and whether one is justified in requiring agreement,

24 Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Berlin, 1900ff – with an indication of the standard abbreviation, the volume and page number. I. Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in AA 05, p. 179-181; Eng. trans. by P. Guyer, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 66-68.

² KU, AA 05, p. 190; Eng. trans., p. 76.

³ KU, AA 05, p. 191; Eng. trans., p. 77.

⁴ KU, AA 05, p. 191; Eng. trans., p. 77.

⁵ KU, AA 05, p. 191; Eng. trans., p. 77.

knowing that justifying the possibility of the universal agreement does not justify compelling others to agree.

Kant firmly believes that the faculty of aesthetic judgment is part of man's natural endowment, but that it also requires education, development, and refinement. When defining common sense, as what warrants the universality and communicability of aesthetic feelings, Kant is adamant, in fact, that he takes the capacity for judging more as an acquired faculty than as an original and natural trait⁶. In Kant, then, the communicability of taste pertains to a deeper level. The communitarian nature of human beings is an irreplaceable reference point. But what is at stake is clearly not a «natural sociability». The condition of possibility of aesthetic agreement is transcendental and is given by the free play of faculties.

The agreement between imagination and understanding that underpins the possibility of aesthetic agreement makes it possible to conceive of a community based on taste: «for this is how we judge someone who is inclined to communicate his pleasure to others and is skilled at it, and who is not content with an object if he cannot feel his satisfaction in it in community with others»⁷.

In this regard it is significant that in the *Lectures on Anthropology* Kant claims that, while feeling can occur spontaneously, taste, as capacity for judging based on feeling, must be acquired. Taste is fundamentally grounded on the concept of humanity itself but it has to be developed through culture⁸.

It is then difficult to pinpoint the function of common sense, which is not based on experience, but rather makes it possible⁹, and

⁶ P. Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 126-130.

⁷ KU, AA 05, p. 297; Eng. trans., p. 177.

⁸ I. Kant, *Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1788/1789 Busolt*, in AA 25.2, p. 178-180.

⁹ Kant expounds this idea in §21 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. In this paragraph, Kant affirms the necessity that judgement be communicable, and that common sense be a prerequisite for communicability: «since the universal communicability of a feeling presupposes a common sense, the latter must be able to

which does not even entail an actual community sharing judgments and opinions. The community here envisaged is then a possible community based upon the sharing of feelings.

2. *Arendt's Aesthetics of Sociability*

As Hannah Ginsborg points out,

many philosophers have seen Kant's aesthetics as having significance for domains of philosophical enquiry outside both aesthetics and the study of Kant. [...] In an influential discussion, Arendt (1982) applies Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment within the sphere of political philosophy; relatedly, Fleischacker (1999) draws connections between aesthetic judgment for Kant and moral and political judgment generally¹⁰.

In this line, the 2001 collection of essays edited by Ronald Beiner and Jennifer Nedelsky, titled *Judgment, Imagination and Politics*, makes clear to what extent the new millennium has expressed the need for a suitable theory of judgment, fulfilling the task of defining the nature and norms of judging¹¹. In line with this purpose, and in the light of the contemporary debate, I will firstly go back to Hannah Arendt's interpretation of Kant's judgment, as the one which most thoroughly undertook the scrutiny of how the transcendental subject performs judging.

Arendt's interpretation of Kant is far from being rigorous. Nevertheless, one should acknowledge the significant impact of Arendt's

be assumed with good reason [...] as the necessary condition of the universal communicability of our cognition, which is assumed in every logic and every principle of cognitions that is not skeptical» (KU, AA 05, p. 239; Eng. trans., p. 123).

¹⁰ H. Ginsborg, *Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology*, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022 Edition), ed. by E.N. Zalta and U. Nodelman, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/kant-aesthetics/>.

¹¹ R. Beiner and J. Nedelsky (eds.), *Judgment, Imagination and Politics. Themes from Kant and Arendt*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2001, p. x.

ideas on judgment on the general orientation of the reception of Kant's Critique in the second half of the twentieth century. Arendt should also be credited with a great interpretative intuition, namely the idea that the 'critique of judgement', as a topic and as a text, is concerned with the power of judgment in general, and not only with aesthetic judgment. Based on this assumption, Arendt takes the power of judgment as strictly connected to community life, thereby developing the topics of intersubjective communicability of reflective judgments and of exemplary validity. She thus gives prominence to a series of topics in Kant, such as the opposition between logic judgment and reflective judgment; the subject of judgment as spectator; the broad-minded way of thinking, in connection to disinterest and freedom; the notion of common sense; the topic of the public use of one's reason¹².

Furthermore, we mainly owe to Arendt's contributions the pinpointing of two fundamental aspects in Kant's aesthetic judgment, concerning which the contemporary debate identifies a core tension: the impossibility to give a veritative criterion to the evaluation and simultaneously the evidence that what is at stake is not a merely private judgment. Arendt's suggested solution – clearly not backed up by Kant's text¹³ – defines the aesthetic community gathered around the judgment by giving up on the regulative aspect, so to speak the promise of a communitarian union outlined by Kant's text, in favour of an actual community. Within such a definition it is even more important to establish a good balance between the first two maxims that according to Kant account for the aesthetic judgment: thinking for oneself and a broad-minded way of thinking, in

¹² See S. Feloj, *Think for Oneself and Broad-Minded Thinking. Hannah Arendt on Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment*, in S. Marino and P. Terzi (eds.), *Kant's 'Critique of Aesthetic Judgment' in the Twentieth Century*, Berlin-New York, De Gruyter, 2021, pp. 159-176.

¹³ Arendt's proposal differs from Kant's text and cannot be understood strictly as a critical study, since Kant does not explicitly address the aesthetic community, there is no political meaning of taste, and aesthetic agreement is addressed only in terms of its conditions of possibility.

other words the autonomy of judgment and the ability to put oneself in everybody else's standpoint. In the attempt to establish such balance, the aesthetic judgment brings out the distinctive features of what is humanity. Arendt's interpretation insists heavily on the anthropological aspects of Kant's aesthetics and on the idea, partially presented by Kant himself, that a definition of humanity should be sought in the form of judgments independent of truth and favouring the function of imagination.

However, it should be borne in mind that Arendt's interpretation is part of her own theoretical work. Upon her sudden death on 4 December 1975, a sheet of paper titled 'Judgement' was found in Arendt's typewriter. The text was meant to complete *Thinking and Willing*, the first two parts of *The Life of the Mind*, posthumously published in 1978. Kant's retrieval is here meant to answer the need to complete Arendt's political theory by means of an investigation on judgment. J. Glenn Gray writes in this regard:

as Kant's Critique of Judgment enabled him to break through some of the antinomies of the earlier critiques, so she hoped to resolve the perplexities of thinking and willing by pondering the nature of our capacity for judging¹⁴.

In 1970 Arendt held thirteen lectures on the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, thus probably completing the groundwork of her account on the topic. Based on these lectures one gathers that, according to Arendt, judgment is the power of judging in particular circumstances. Judgment requires the ability to distance oneself from something as well as impartiality. From this perspective, when I make a judgement, I am called upon to take the point of view of others, to judge taking into account a position that is not only individual. In this sense, judgment has to do with our community life; since it is based upon shared feeling and imagining, it is what allows us to have open access to a condition of plurality. Here lies, according

¹⁴ J.G. Gray, *The Abyss of Freedom – and Hannah Arendt*, in *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, ed. by M.A. Hill, New York St. Martin's Press, 1979, p. 225.

to Arendt in *Thinking*, the link between morality and politics. Judgment means political ability; it is «the most political of man's mental abilities»¹⁵, since it allows us to find orientation in the public space. Judgment is ultimately what, against the dangers of indifference and abstention, gives political relevance to thinking.

In the 'Post-scriptum' to *Thinking*, Arendt states her intention to devote the third part of her work to an account on judgment in Kant. In this text, Arendt declares her wish to follow the hints of that «silent sense» that in the practical realm is called «conscience», this sense having a voice which «cannot be said to be 'silent'»¹⁶. The goal is then to define that 'universal voice' outlined by Kant in his aesthetics and provide it with a political function. While giving a – inevitably individual – body to such voice, though, one runs the risk to significantly weaken it, to the point of even depriving it of theoretical foundation.

Arendt firmly believes that the main elements of Kant's political philosophy are to be found more in the third Critique than in his political writings and, as to justify this idea, she makes reference to the notion of 'sociability', which would be, according to Kant, indispensable for the good functioning of reason. Based on Arendt's reading, the need for a social life and for the comparison with other human beings is, therefore, key to the correct understanding of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

In this regard, Arendt writes:

the topics of the Critique of Judgment – the particular, whether a fact of nature or an event in history; the power of judgment as the faculty of man's mind to deal with it; sociability of men as the condition of the functioning of this capacity, that is, the insight that men are dependent on their fellow men not only because of their having a body and physical needs but precisely for their mental faculties – these

¹⁵ H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. Vol. 1: Thinking*, ed. by M. McCarthy, London, Secker & Warburg, 1978, p. 193.

¹⁶ Ead., *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. by R. Beiner, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 4.

topics [are] all of them of eminent political significance – that is important for the political¹⁷.

Besides a political interpretation of the third Critique, this passage features the core element of discussion as well when it comes to Arendt's interpretation: the idea that Kant's theory of judgment is based upon human beings need to communicate with the others and that sociability is the prerequisite for the functioning of the capacity for judging¹⁸. For Kant, the universal voice is inevitably individual since it is the individual subject that believes to speak with a universal voice. Arendt gets even as far as to openly claim that «critical thinking, while still a solitary business, does not cut itself off from 'all others'»¹⁹ and that the public nature of judgment should be taken as some sort of transcendental principle.

Arendt is certainly aware of the cosmopolitan nature Kant sees in universality and adds that, even though judging is enabled by belonging to a community, the reference here is to «a world community by the sheer fact of being human»²⁰. However, it is not the common belonging to civilization what guarantees that our judgment is both universal and subjective; this is rather ensured by the sociability element, which, according to Arendt, is featured in the third Critique as the very origin of the civilization process, not as its goal. Within the framework of the above outlined socialization of judgment²¹, what Arendt's reading tends to overlook is the possibility to provide a deduction of the rooting of judgment in common sense. All in all, Arendt claims that sociability and community sense lay the foundations of the judgment, but she does not explain how that is possible.

An explanation is nevertheless due, given that Kant himself states that taking sociability as foundation of judgment makes for

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 14.

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 8.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 43.

²⁰ Ivi, p. 75.

²¹ J.-F., Lyotard, *Sensus communis*, «Le Cahier (Collège International de Philosophie)», 3, 1987, pp. 67-87.

‘too weak’ of an interpretation. Kant warns us against such an approach very clearly, when, after comparing sociability and likeability (§7), at §9, he claims:

that being able to communicate one’s state of mind, even if only with regard to the faculties of cognition, carries a pleasure with it, could easily be established (empirically and psychologically) from the natural tendency of human beings to sociability. But that is not enough for our purposes. When we call something beautiful, the pleasure that we feel is expected of everyone else in the judgment of taste as necessary²².

What Arendt misses in her account of Kantian judgment is the need for an a priori foundation, in other words its transcendental quality, which ultimately defines its confinement within a singular, pre-constituted community. As suggested by Arendt, the judgment ends up forming a given community of those who judge. But in Kant the strength of this community is ensured by the a priori relation among their faculties. It is the shared humanity element what establishes the public dimension of judgment, not the need of human beings to communicate with their peers. To back up her position, Arendt retrieves the notion of moral dignity. Sociability would then be guaranteed, in her reading, by considering the human being as an end in itself. Since human beings have no other end than themselves, sociability, considering the existence of other human beings, would be the ‘end’ of the existence of men understood as plurality.

On these premises, Arendt provides a schematic outline of the first part of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*:

men = earthbound creatures, living in communities, endowed with common sense, *sensus communis*, a community sense; not autonomous, needing each other’s company even for thinking (‘freedom of the pen’)²³.

²² KU, AA 05, p. 218; Eng. trans., p. 103.

²³ Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, p. 27.

Needed by human beings even to be able to think, sociability entails a notion of communicability of taste that, while having little to do with the Kantian ultimate end and the freedom of the will power, is connected to a more general Enlightenment-based theory of freedom, as freedom of speech and thought, echoed by Kant's claim that «reason is not made to stay in isolation but to join a community»²⁴. Arendt takes this claim against the backdrop of sociability. Although she relies on Kant's philosophy for support, when it comes to the validity of thinking, Arendt's position seems to move away from Kant's.

Arendt detects the root of Kant's critical thinking in the Socratic Plato, notably in the *logon didonai*, understood as being accountable to the others, as political act inevitably conveyed through language. It would be interesting, instead, to ask whether a political act could instead be pre-linguistic, acting in virtue of the 'community of feeling' expressed by that super-individual 'universal voice' that the intellectual categories of language can hardly grasp.

3. Fleischacker's *Aesthetics of Liberty*

Another point of view, which also brings the notion of aesthetic community back to the political sphere, is that of Fleischacker in his books *The third concept of liberty* (1999). This research work is particularly indebted to Isaiah Berlin and seeks to elaborate a liberal political theory from a comparison between Kant and Adam Smith.

While Samuel Fleischacker is not typically associated with a specific theory of aesthetic community in Kant, his work does delve into aspects of Kantian aesthetics, particularly as they relate to the idea of community. One key aspect is Fleischacker's emphasis on the social nature of human beings and the role of community in shaping our values and judgments. Applying this to aesthetics, one could argue that aesthetic preferences and judgments are not formed in

²⁴ «Die Vernunft ist nicht dazu gemacht, daß sie sich isoliere, sondern in Gemeinschaft setze» (I. Kant, *Reflexion*, in AA 15, refl. 897, p. 392, my transl.).

isolation but are influenced by the cultural and social context in which individuals exist.

If we consider aesthetic judgments as inherently tied to notions of fairness and shared understanding, then aesthetic communities may form around principles of inclusivity, respect for diverse perspectives, and the recognition of the subjective nature of aesthetic experiences.

Moreover, Fleischacker's exploration of the role of sympathy and empathy in Kantian ethics is applied to aesthetics as well. Aesthetic experiences often evoke emotional responses, and the ability to empathize with others' perspectives can contribute to the formation of a communal aesthetic sensibility. Shared emotional responses to art could potentially foster a sense of belonging and shared identity within a community.

Fleischacker states that a discussion of Kant's third Critique could be the core of a liberal theory on politics. The vision we arrive at «fits moreover into an old but relatively little discussed tradition of liberalism: the series of thinkers, from Friedrich Schiller and Wilhelm von Humboldt in the late eighteenth century to Hannah Arendt in our own day, who have been inspired by Kant's *Critique of Judgment*»²⁵.

Fleischacker however takes distance from these interpretations of the third Critique, especially from Arendt's lectures, and he is convinced that «artistic appreciation is a much better model for both philosophical and political reasons»²⁶. Leaning away from Arendt's emphasis on «spectatorship» in the *Critique of Judgment*, in accordance with Bernard Williams he believes that the account of judgment itself is much more valuable.

In the chapter dedicated to a definition of Judgment, in his book on liberty, Fleischacker asks himself:

What is 'judgment'? I will argue that judgment is a complex skill that draws on what we do in aesthetic interpretation, in

²⁵ S. Fleischacker, *A Third Concept of Liberty: Judgment and Freedom in Kant and Adam Smith*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. X.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

sorting through empirical evidence, in making decisions in the common law, and in evaluating our ends for cogency and value²⁷.

He admits that what exactly goes into such judgments is a complicated question, but we can say that ‘to judge’ is paradigmatically to apply a general rule to a particular case, a universal to an instance of that universal. It can be contrasted, then, to ‘feeling’ or ‘drifting’ or mentally lazing around rather than thinking in any sense, to musing on generalities or particulars without drawing any conclusion about them, and, above all, to thinking in the sense of drawing general conclusions from other generalities – what we do in advanced mathematics or physics, what we call, standardly, ‘theorizing’.

But what Fleischacker has in mind is to use the aesthetic judgment as a model for judging in general, especially for its political consequences²⁸.

But one of the main claims I want to advance is precisely that knowing how to make judgments of beauty is essential to making any judgment, that one condition for fostering moral and political judgment across a citizenry is to ensure that people understand well what beauty is, and have broad access both to art and to natural beauty. In addition, the workings of aesthetic judgment richly illuminate the workings of judgment in general. So the time spent here on Kant’s aesthetic theory has a direct as well as an indirect payoff for the moral and political case I want to build²⁹.

In this perspective our judgments of beauty are a precondition for our judgments of knowledge, and they are pleasurable because they show knowledge to be possible. What the aesthetic judgment shows is not how to organize the world, but that the world is organizable.

²⁷ Ivi, p. 8.

²⁸ See I. Schreiber, *Egoism and Sociability in the Kantian Public Sphere*, «Journal of the History of Ideas», 86 (3), 2025, pp. 507-535.

²⁹ Fleischacker, *A Third Concept of Liberty*, p. 23.

A completely chaotic world would not allow for knowledge; the confusion we feel when we first approach a Pollock is disturbing because it threatens our entire capacity for making cognitive judgments. Once we begin to interpret the painting, we are relieved, and the relief of this cognitive need is the pleasure on the basis of which we call something beautiful³⁰.

The centrality accorded to aesthetic judgement in such a political theory is certainly interesting and promising. However, Fleischacker shows that he misrepresents certain aspects of Kant's aesthetic judgement and ultimately runs the risk of giving it an entirely cognitive interpretation. Leaning on Guyer's interpretation, Fleischacker in fact argues that Kantian aesthetic judgement is a judgement of interpretation and that this very activity generates the agreement that guarantees its function of social cohesion: «What we do in reflective judgment is reinterpret an object that we feel we have hitherto insufficiently or inaccurately conceptualized»³¹.

In Fleischacker's view the fact that I find an object resistant to determination by a concept, that I judge it to be beautiful, makes me interested in hearing about other people's attempts to conceptualize it. Its interpretability makes it good matter for discussion. Thus, although the play of the faculties does not depend on talking to others, it does lead us to such talk. For Fleischacker,

that a subjective 'harmony' or activity should be identical with a capacity for an intersubjective activity seems odd, of course, but he stresses that 'communicability' is not the same as 'communication': communicability is a mere capacity, not an activity. The communicability of a state or activity is thus a mere potential of that state to contribute to some other activity³².

Communication becomes then worthwhile only when two factors coincide: when there is enough agreement on a subject matter to make sharing our thoughts with others possible, while at the same time there is enough disagreement about it to give us some interest

³⁰ Ivi, p. 25.

³¹ Ivi, p. 27.

³² Ivi, p. 29.

in learning from or teaching others. The play of the faculties will necessarily exemplify this coincidence.

Why? – asks Fleischacker –

Well, we know from ordinary experience that claims to beauty are simultaneously universalizable and highly idiosyncratic, susceptible of endless discussion and resistant to being resolved by such discussion. Conversation about beauty is thereby a process continuous with the very free play of the faculties that constitutes aesthetic response³³.

On this reading, Fleischacker derives a profound theory of the origins of conversation and of the nature of sociability. He is convinced that Kant's own explicit attention to communicability in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* reveals that Kant reserves judgment, among our mental faculties, for conversation with others. As Kant characterizes them, reason, understanding, and imagination are lonely and silent processes, shared with others and informed by others only via their coming together in judgment.

What we have already placed into a rational theory or category of a theory is beyond interesting discussion; what we have merely sensed, with all the peculiarities of our individual capacities for sensation, is not yet expressible in linguistic terms. Only judgment is simultaneously formed enough to be discussible and indeterminate enough to be worth discussing³⁴.

As Fleischacker recognized there is a hint here of what Wittgenstein eventually made explicit: that judgment provides the foundation of language, of what human beings should share. In any case, judgment provides the foundation of the kind of conversation relevant to morality: conversation about particulars that must be placed in some evaluative category but are, often, too distinctive to fit easily into any single such category. A feeling for the nuances of aesthetic interpretation will thus be essential to the nuances that morality requires.

³³ Ivi, p. 30.

³⁴ Ivi, p. 31.

By emphasizing the social nature of human beings, the role of community in shaping values, and the importance of empathy, Fleischacker's work provides then a basis for exploring how aesthetic communities might emerge and thrive within the context of Kantian aesthetics.

The perspective he proposes is undoubtedly interesting for a re-actualisation of Kant's aesthetic community, however it is never detached from a cognitivist reading of aesthetic judgement, which is always read as an interpretive act. This perspective is not an explicit opposition to Arendt's reading, but rather an alternative reading of Kant's aesthetic community that refers to a theoretical background different from Arendt's.

4. Bourdieu's *Popular Aesthetics*

A still different point of view that nevertheless allows for reflection on the political significance of the aesthetic community is that of Pierre Bourdieu. In his well-known book *The Distinction*, Bourdieu proposes a sociology of taste that is also an aesthetic theory, explicitly anti-Kantian. What Bourdieu starts from, is the idea that it is impossible to sustain, as Kant would have it, a pure judgement of taste. Reading Kant's aesthetics through Marx and Weber, Bourdieu argues for the inevitability of conflict, especially in matters of taste. And aesthetic judgement would be directed not so much at form as essentially related to the function of representation, or of what is represented. As with Fleischacker, although in a very different tradition what matters is the analysis of what happens in the ordinary practice of judgement. Opposite to Fleischacker Bourdieu is convinced that the empirical evidence is not of the universality of taste, but the aesthetic judgment is essentially a tool of social distinctions³⁵.

³⁵ P. Bourdieu, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979), transl. by R. Nice, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1984.

In his 'anti-Kantian aesthetics', Bourdieu departs from Kant's classical aesthetics, challenging and redefining the traditional notions of taste, cultural capital, and the social dynamics influencing aesthetic judgments.

Kant, in his *Critique of Judgment*, posited a universal and ahistorical framework for aesthetics, asserting that taste and judgments of beauty are grounded in a set of transcendent principles. In contrast, Bourdieu, drawing on his sociological insights, rejected the idea of a universal aesthetic standard. He argued that aesthetic preferences are deeply entwined with social structures and the distribution of cultural capital within a given society.

Central to Bourdieu's anti-Kantian aesthetics is the concept of habitus, which encompasses the socially ingrained dispositions, tastes, and preferences acquired through an individual's socialization. Bourdieu posits that one's habitus significantly influences their aesthetic sensibilities, shaping their perception of beauty and artistic value. Therefore, what is deemed aesthetically pleasing is not a result of a universally objective standard but is rather contingent on one's social background and cultural context³⁶.

Furthermore, Bourdieu introduced the notion of cultural capital, which encompasses the knowledge, education, and cultural experiences that an individual accumulates. He argued that individuals with greater cultural capital possess a distinct advantage in the realm of aesthetics. This advantage manifests in the form of a predisposition to appreciate certain forms of art and culture that are often associated with higher social classes. Bourdieu's anti-Kantian aesthetics thus challenges the idea of an impartial and universally valid aesthetic judgment, revealing how social hierarchies influence taste³⁷.

In Bourdieu's framework, taste is not only a matter of personal preference but also a marker of social distinction and symbolic power. The aesthetic choices individuals make are, according to Bourdieu, a means of expressing their social identity and positioning

³⁶ Ivi, pp. 169-174.

³⁷ Ivi, p. 12.

themselves within the broader social hierarchy. This perspective disrupts Kant's notion of disinterested aesthetic judgment, as Bourdieu emphasizes the inherently social nature of aesthetic preferences.

As he writes in the Preface of the English edition:

Finally, I realize how much the specificity of the French intellectual field may have contributed to the conception of this book, in particular to its perhaps immoderate ambition of giving a scientific answer to the old questions of Kant's critique of judgement, by seeking in the structure of the social classes the basis of the systems of classification which structure perception of the social world and designate the objects of aesthetic enjoyment³⁸.

To illustrate his anti-Kantian aesthetics, Bourdieu conducted empirical research on cultural consumption patterns. His studies revealed how individuals from different social classes gravitate towards specific forms of art and cultural products, demonstrating that aesthetic taste is closely tied to social position. This empirical approach adds a layer of concreteness to Bourdieu's critique of Kantian aesthetics, grounding his theories in observable social phenomena.

According to Bourdieu, taste should not be treated within a system of judgement based on knowledge but as a political tool. And his description is formed through sociological observation, not based on a transcendental ground. Precisely because of his observation of ordinary language, through sociological investigations, Bourdieu wants to elaborate a popular aesthetics in which aesthetic judgement becomes an instrument of distinction between classes. A pure aesthetic judgement «implies a break with the ordinary attitude towards the world which, as such, is a social break»³⁹. This is for Bourdieu «a systematic refusal of all that is 'human'», by which he means the passions, emotions and feelings which ordinary people put into their ordinary existence, and consequently all the themes and objects capable of evoking them: «People like a play when they

³⁸ Ivi, p. XIII.

³⁹ Ivi, p. 31.

are able to take an interest in the human destinies put before them», in which «they participate as if they were real-life events»⁴⁰.

The interest in the content of the representation which leads people to call 'beautiful' the representation of beautiful things, especially those which speak most immediately to the senses and the sensibility, is rejected in favor of the indifference and distance which refuse to subordinate judgement of the representation to the nature of the object represented. «Everything takes place as if the 'popular aesthetic' were based on the affirmation of continuity between art and life, which implies the subordination of form to function»⁴¹. One could say that the political relevance given to aesthetic judgement in this interpretation is also a move as strong and as un-Kantian as the cognitivist reading. Bourdieu's aesthetics is so opposite to Kant, and he states:

Nothing is more alien to popular consciousness than the idea of an aesthetic pleasure that, to put it in Kantian terms, is independent of the charming of the senses. [...] In short, Kant is indeed referring to popular taste when he writes: 'Taste that requires an added element of charm and emotion for its delight, not to speak of adopting this as the measure of its approval, has not yet emerged from barbarism'⁴².

In conclusion, Pierre Bourdieu's anti-Kantian aesthetics offers a compelling alternative to Kant's universal and transcendent framework. By emphasizing the role of habitus, cultural capital, and social context in shaping aesthetic judgments, Bourdieu challenges the notion of a timeless and objective standard of beauty. His work invites us to consider the social dynamics at play in the realm of aesthetics, urging a more nuanced understanding that recognizes the influence of social structures on individual tastes and preferences.

Bourdieu's reading is interesting because it focuses on conflict, both aesthetic and social. But the question here is another: is it

⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 32.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² Ivi, p. 42.

still possible to use Kantian aesthetics to foster social cohesion, while at the same time looking at the ordinary use of judgement?

5. Aesthetic Judgment and Social Cohesion

At this point we have considered three completely different interpretations of Kant's aesthetic community. The one by Hannah Arendt sees the aesthetic judgment as symptom of human sociability and considers it as a linguistic practice. The one by Fleischacker recognizes the importance of the transcendental ground but gives a merely cognitive interpretation. Bourdieu's theory of popular aesthetics states that the aesthetic judgment is more a tool of distinction than a function of social cohesion. In opposition to all these interpretations I would like to elaborate a theory of aesthetic community as based on a pre-linguistic element, as non-cognitive theory and considering the opportunity to build a dynamic and multicultural community⁴³.

The article by Ruth Ronen of 2021, dedicated to aesthetic community, suggests the idea that one's judgement of taste has exemplary validity for everyone, is part of what taste ought to be. Universal assent reflects a demand of reason that one's taste converges with the taste of others, that our judgement is guided by such an ideal agreement⁴⁴. Whether or not there is in fact such a common sense (i.e., a universal faculty), one ought to acquire taste so that it produces a «confluence of the feeling of everyone with that of each»⁴⁵. Kant's concern is to generally validate a judgement (of taste) transcendently unconditioned by interest, concept, or purpose.

This Kantian idea of taste invites us to examine the relation of taste to the demand of a universal assent. Taste is exemplified here by a certain inclination, or attunement to matters of taste that one

⁴³ See S. Feloj, *Aesthetic Normativity in Kant's Account: A Regulative Model*, «Con-Textos Kantianos», 12 (2020), pp. 105-122.

⁴⁴ R. Ronen, *Aesthetic Community*, «Dialogue», 60 (2), 2021, p. 2.

⁴⁵ KU, AA 05, p. 240; Eng. trans., p. 124.

ought to develop. Having developed taste already equals the expectation that others would agree, that there will be a confluence of the feeling of everyone with that of each.

As Ronen writes, even before Kant examines the role of common sense in the broader functioning of judgment (in the course of the *Deduction*), it already figures in the *Analytic of the beautiful* as what Henry Allison calls a fundamental condition from which the other elements of the analytic may be derived. Kant holds that everyone should agree in an aesthetic judgment: «one solicits assent from everyone else because one has a ground for it that is common to all»⁴⁶. He insists that a judgment of taste attains validity only if it commands universal assent: «as a necessity that is thought in an aesthetic judgment, it can only be called exemplary, i.e., a necessity of the assent of all to a judgment that is regarded as an example of a universal rule that one cannot produce»⁴⁷.

For Kant, the very demand for agreement presupposes common sense, and Allison shows that this common sense makes aesthetic judgment possible (thus subsuming the three other moments). While those moments exhaust the content of judgments – being disinterested, grounded in a free harmony of the faculties, and concerned with the form of the represented object – the requirement of consensus re-orients taste judgments from purely subjective terms to a shared sensibility, in effect «postulating a capacity that is a necessary condition of taste, understood as a *sensus communis aestheticus*»⁴⁸. In other words, common sense underlies aesthetic judgment by indicating that it conforms to what it ought to be: this is Kant's universal account of aesthetic community. This idea of common sense, Allison notes, «combines within itself all of the factors analyzed separately»⁴⁹.

According to Ronen, Henri Allison's reading of Kant hence allows us to identify aesthetic common sense as a prior condition of

⁴⁶ KU, AA 05, p. 237; Eng. trans., pp. 121-122.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ H. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the 'Critique of Aesthetic Judgment'*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 155.

⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 144.

judgements of taste. I am not totally convinced by this interpretation even if it puts us on the right path. The notion of common sense is taken by Kant from Hume and this ‘sense’ that we have in common with others has an empirical nature that it is not enough to ground a transcendental theory on aesthetic community. I believe instead that we should consider the conclusion of the *Critique of the aesthetic judgment* and to identify in the general concept of humanity the ground of the aesthetic communicability.

I am convinced that the most promising intuition on aesthetic community is the one given by Stanley Cavell. As Hannah Ginsborg points out⁵⁰, Cavell connects the subjective universality which Kant ascribes to judgments of beauty with the appeal made, in ordinary language philosophy, to «what we should say»⁵¹. This connection is explored further in Baz⁵² and Makkai⁵³, both of which draw on Cavell for their understanding of the philosophical significance of Kant’s account of judgments of beauty⁵⁴.

In Cavell’s *The claim of reason* we can read:

Kant, if I understand, in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, reverses the Aristotelian field and thus redirects the problem of connection. He regards the human being as a species of the genus of rational beings, to wit, the species

⁵⁰ Ginsborg, *Kant’s Aesthetics and Teleology*.

⁵¹ S. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp. 94-96.

⁵² A. Baz, *The Sound of Bedrock: Lines of Grammar between Kant, Wittgenstein, and Cavell*, «European Journal of Philosophy», 24(3), 2016, pp. 607-628.

⁵³ K. Makkai, *Kant’s Critique of Taste: The Feeling of Life*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 2021.

⁵⁴ Somewhat relatedly, Bell draws a connection between Kant’s view of aesthetic judgment and Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations (D. Bell, *The Art of Judgement*, «Mind», 96(382), 1987, pp. 221-244.); on this line, Ginsborg invokes Kant’s aesthetic theory as a basis for a response to the skepticism about rules and meaning which Saul Kripke attributes to Wittgenstein (H. Ginsborg, *Primitive Normativity and Skepticism about Rules*, «Journal of Philosophy», 108(5), 2011, pp. 227-254).

that has the distinction of being animal, i.e., being embodied: the human being is the animal rational. [...] This results from, and serves, Kant's purpose, which is not to explain the fact of our freedom but to show the possibility of it, i.e., to vindicate our inescapable conviction of it; one might say: our attitude toward ourselves and others as possessing it. Being human is aspiring to being human. Since it is not aspiring to being the only human, it is an aspiration on behalf of others as well. Then we might say that being human is aspiring to being seen as human⁵⁵.

I stand here with Cavell, maybe in a more strictly Kantian way, in affirming that the regulative model of an aesthetic community is essentially an ideal for humanity. The ideal we ought to have in order to communicate with other, with all the others. This is not to be understood as an actual communication but as an expectation of communicability, that of course could be frustrated but that is the condition of possibility for judging, communicate and at the end to make a community possible.

In the theoretical and practical realms, the normativity of the law, respectively of natural laws and of the laws of reason, establishes the universality of the subject as member of the necessary community of the law. In the aesthetic realm, instead, the constitution of a community of feeling made of a plurality of subjects immersed in experience is required without any a priori normativity. It is then an ideal community: an intersubjectivity – an us – formed as an ideal, through variations in imagination and eidetic comparisons: an intersubjectivity as need for relations with the others, where the subjects feel themselves by feeling the others. It is not then an already constituted community, but a mobile horizon constantly constituting and reconstituting itself. It is ultimately a 'community to come'. Through the ideal and undetermined normativity of the judgment of taste a possible community is outlined, the idea of which alone would make an actual community possible. It is in this sense that Kant identifies the common sense as a universal condition and as the a priori possibility

⁵⁵ S. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason. Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 399.

of feeling. Having a shared sense with others, a common sense, means having an intersubjective experience that involves feelings. And precisely thanks to the indeterminacy of feeling, the subject is able to conceive a community as a dynamic community:

a man [reveals his] way of thinking if he sets himself apart from the subjective private conditions of the judgment, within which so many others are as if bracketed, and reflects on his own judgment from a universal standpoint (which he can only determine by putting himself into the standpoint of others)⁵⁶.

The normativity of judgment is thus coupled with an intrinsically non-normative experience, such as the aesthetic one, where the right use of thinking amounts to the ability of putting oneself in the standpoint of others, where sharing is not prescribed by law and it is not even a simulation of the others nor feeling the same thing. The aesthetic experience defines, instead, the capacity for universalizing one's standpoint (and one's feeling), so that the aesthetic 'should' relies on a notion of common sense, as theoretical ground of taste's communicability, not justified by first order experience nor legitimized by the common sociability of people. From Kant's point of view, it is rather a transcendental matter.

Kant is then able to lay out in few lines the transcendental foundation of the universality of taste. The capacity for judging concerns only the subjective conditions of taste, that is to say the faculty which can be legitimately assumed to be shared by every human being. In this respect, «the correspondence of a representation with these conditions of the power of judgment must be able to be assumed to be valid for everyone a priori, i.e., it can rightly be expected of everyone»⁵⁷.

Common sense displays a very peculiar transcendental character determining the overall quality of its deduction. It is a principle which does not concern the conditions of a possible experience, as it is the case within the realm of logical knowledge, but rather the (subjective) conditions for the actual achievement of an experience for the subject. Universality here is not based upon some human need

⁵⁶ KU, AA 05, p. 295; Eng. trans., p. 175.

⁵⁷ Ivi, p. 290; Eng. trans., p. 170.

for ‘tuning in’ with others, but it is ultimately based upon the concept of humanity as an end in itself. It is the fact that we share the same faculties that guarantees universality in a subjective judgment such as the reflective one. Shared humanity is what lays the ground for the public dimension of judgment, not the human need for communicating with one’s peers. Based on Kant’s perspective, in fact, the universal voice is not the ground of judging, but rather its testing ground; similarly, subjective universality is a confirmation of the accordance between subjects’ faculties, not its origin.

It is this sort of ‘subjective translation’ between the faculties of the intellect and of the imagination what makes the experience of beauty universally communicable; it is not the comparison with others that gives validity to the aesthetic feeling, as if its expression could guarantee its existence.

Differently, one can argue that, according to Kant, those who utter a judgment of taste feel like the spokespersons of a community; somehow, they become a ‘super-individual’ voice in virtue of the element of humanity as an end in itself shared by all those who judge. The appeal of Kant’s proposal lies then in the prelogical quality of the reflective judgment, in other words in the capacity to shape a feeling-based experience that can be shared by others, not based on common language, communicability or sociability, but based on the common capacity for feeling.

Consistent with this argument, Kant can therefore conclude in § 60 by stating that the condition of possibility for an aesthetic community is the sharing of the concept of humanity itself:

The propaedeutic for all beautiful art, so far as it is aimed at the highest degree of its perfection, seems to lie not in precepts, but in the culture of the mental powers through those prior forms of knowledge that are called *humaniora*, presumably because humanity means on the one hand the universal feeling of participation and on the other hand the capacity for being able to communicate one’s inmost self universally, which properties taken together constitute the sociability that is appropriate to humankind, by means of which it distinguishes itself from the limitation of animals⁵⁸.

⁵⁸ Ivi, p. 355; Eng. trans., p. 299.