

# SYMPOSIUM ON AESTHETIC TASTE

## Introduction

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Imagine two people holding up a screen to anticipating homeowners, who long to see the recent renovation. Suddenly, they drop the screen to reveal the final product of weeks of renovation. The cameras pan over to reveal the new look. The area that would have been a yard full of grass and shrubbery was changed to a lime green-painted cement with about 50 pink flamingos. The house was painted in an iridescent pink. As a spectator of this television show, you watch as the proud renovators announce that this might be their best design to date.

This exaggerated anecdote illustrates two key ideas. First, there is a 'standard' of taste that we appeal to on a regular basis; if not, we would take these renovators seriously if they attempted to call this home beautiful. What is more, if you think this example doesn't sound so bad, there is probably some other combination of color and design that you would find disagreeable, regardless of how well it functioned. Second, the cultures in which we live help to shape our taste. We could imagine that a society existed where this color combination, perhaps, made sense. Given how much we deploy our individual and cultural tastes in our daily lives, it seems strange that theories of taste are largely absent from contemporary discussions of aesthetics.

Theories of aesthetic taste thrived in the eighteenth century, as George Dickie proclaimed with the title of his 1995 book *The Century of Taste*. Despite the pervasiveness of taste in popular culture, the concept has not thrived as much in recent academic discourse. Aesthetics has continued to be present, with traditional concepts like beauty and sublimity ebbing and flowing. But robust theories of taste have not maintained as much interest, not like the eighteenth century anyway. This symposium is a modest attempt to start bringing aesthetic taste back to the foreground of philosophical aesthetics.

The papers in this Symposium on Taste bring the conversations into the contemporary world. João Lemos notes in his paper, "A Taste of Moral Concerns: On the Applied Judgment of Taste," that the conversations surrounding Kant's notion of taste have emphasized the judgments of free beauty. Lemos, however, appeals to Kant's idea of an applied judgment of taste, which is a judgment of dependent (or adherent) beauty, in order to show that this kind of aesthetic judgment can connect to moral considerations. In other words, an applied judgment of beauty does not have to separate itself from the moral and political ideas within a work of art.

Also focusing on Kant, in "Kant's Feeling: Why a Judgment of Taste is *De Dicto* Necessary," José Fernández offers an important distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* by arguing that judgments of taste in Kant's theory are not statements about objective facts. In each of Kant's three *Critiques*, necessity is important for making a judgment. In a judgment of taste, the kind of necessity is viewed as exemplary. Fernández argues that the necessity at work here can apply only to the proposition (*de dicto*) and not to the object (*de re*).

Bringing the discussion of taste into a, perhaps, surprising context, Carsten Friberg's "Taste and Surveillance Capitalism" asks why taste is not often included in discussions around contemporary culture, especially involving capitalism. As data collection has become increasingly prominent in our digital lifestyle, taste is needed as a necessary critique to this form of capitalism.

Finally, in "Aesthetic Taste Now: A Look Beyond Art and the History of Philosophy," I explore how theories of taste can be influential in areas beyond art, such as prisons, engineering, and business. While formal discussions of taste have waned from academic discourse since the eighteenth century, aesthetic taste, no less than beauty, sublime, and aesthetic experience, has continually played a role in addressing human needs. Rather than being passive about taste, I suggest reasons why individuals and communities both stand to benefit from actively understanding and developing this aesthetic concept.

We hope that this symposium helps to stimulate some new discussions on aesthetic taste, while maintaining the contributions of history.

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