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Aesthetic “Sense” in Kant and Nancy

Charles Shepherdson

I

I WOULD LIKE TO EXPLORE THE connection between two senses of “sense” in the context of aesthetic experience: “sense” understood as the *sensory* dimension of aesthetic experience, and “sense” understood as meaning, the *communicable and linguistic* dimension of this experience.

This is, of course, the problem Immanuel Kant addresses by speaking of aesthetic judgment as purely subjective, based not on concepts but on a *feeling of pleasure or displeasure*, while at the same time insisting that this feeling is something impersonal, something detached from my own individual interests or taste, something that consequently claims universality and is therefore “communicable” and even capable of giving rise to a *sensus communis* or “common sense.”¹ Aesthetic experience thus shuttles between a sensuous apprehension (sense) whose peculiar character requires elaboration, and a communicable universality (sense) that is nevertheless irreducible to conceptual determination. Put differently, it is an experience that moves between (1) the encounter with an example that is always particular and cannot be subsumed under any model or norm, but can only be “felt” as the peculiar and disinterested pleasure that we have in the presence of an individual case, and (2) a judgment whose peculiar “sense” is communicable, but in a manner that cannot be grasped by ordinary language or predication.

Jean-Luc Nancy addresses this question in many ways, often by stressing the double meaning of the word “sense,” a point Nancy often attributes to Hegel.² At stake in this double meaning is not only the ambiguity of a word, however, but a more fundamental question concerning the intrinsic relationship between sensation and language: it is as though, in aesthetic experience, the body were somehow destined toward language and communicability.

This would mean that aesthetic sense—the corporeal dimension of aesthetic experience—cannot be adequately grasped as a merely sensory or perceptual phenomenon, and that the body cannot be understood as

a biological or physiological entity separated from language, as is presupposed by many contemporary approaches to affect.³ It would also mean that language itself, at least in the aesthetic horizon, is never simply an autonomous formal system of signs, as structuralism and other theoretical perspectives often suppose, but rather carries within itself a debt and a bond to sensuous experience. The link between the body and language is thus one question that arises from the problem of “sense” in these two thinkers. A second question is whether aesthetic experience has a unique or privileged role in making evident this connection between the body and language—between “sense” and “sense.”

II

In *The Muses*, Nancy takes up these issues, reorienting aesthetic experience away from the transcendental horizon often attributed to Kant, turning it back in the direction of the senses, and exploring the way in which the “Fine Arts,” in their irretrievably plural form, are all “distributed” according to sensibility (music for the ear, painting for the eye, etc.). At the same time, despite this insistence on the bodily dimension of aesthetic experience, Nancy insists that the arts remain tied to intelligibility and language, and that they aim at some kind of communicable sense or meaning, even if this meaning is perpetually contested or indeterminate. These two points merit further examination. For the peculiar character of aesthetic “sense” distinguishes it from ordinary sensation (touch, hearing, sight), and obliges us to confront what he calls “a sense that surpasses the senses (*supersensuous*)” (*M* 13). Similarly, while the peculiar form of “sense” that emerges in the horizon of aesthetic experience is intrinsically bound up with language or “signification,” according to Nancy, this inheritance of what Kant calls “communicability” presents a second peculiarity, since we are faced here with a type of “sense” that disrupts ordinary signification. In Nancy’s formulation, “the sensuous and technical plurality of the arts is bound up with *intelligible sense*” (*M* 27, italics added), but this sense is at the same time a “suspension of signification” (*M* 22). The “intelligible sense” that is communicated in aesthetic experience, precisely by virtue of its ineradicably sensuous dimension (itself already beyond sensation as commonly understood), is a sense that suspends ordinary signification and that leads Nancy to claim that “art dis-locates ‘common sense’” (*M* 22).

The Kantian horizon of these remarks is unmistakable, which of course does not mean a coincidence or identity of these two thinkers, but rather a lineage that merits elaboration. For in Kant, we likewise find

a form of aesthetic "feeling" that is irreducible to ordinary sensation, and a "communicability" of this feeling that takes place in a mode that is distinct from cognitive judgment and ordinary predication. We thus have the elaboration of an aesthetic "sense" in two dimensions: *a sensuous one* that goes beyond our usual understanding of the senses, and that belongs uniquely to aesthetic experience (but that may, in turn, tell us something about the senses in general that we did not previously see); and *an intelligible one* of meaning or signification that disrupts ordinary language, and that may even reach in the direction of a "language" of the arts (tone, color, rhythm), but that in turn extends beyond aesthetics, to touch on our understanding of language in general.

This link between "sense" and "sense" is an enigma that haunts virtually all contemporary discussions of aesthetics, from Theodor W. Adorno to Jacques Rancière, from psychoanalysis to Gilles Deleuze and affect studies, and earlier from Kant to Freud, but without having been adequately developed. It concerns the relationship between the bodily dimension of aesthetics, variously developed as feeling, affect, emotion, pleasure, and sensation in contemporary thought, and the dimension of meaning or significance that, however ambiguous or obscure it may be in the aesthetic domain (and indeed sometimes precisely on account of this indeterminacy), gives art its social, political, ethical, and inter-subjective character. Although I focus here on Kant and Nancy, I will try to suggest that this question could be pursued across a much wider horizon in contemporary thought, and indeed back through the history of philosophy, which is often forgotten by those who claim that "aesthetics" is a distinctively modern conceptual and institutional invention.

III

Let us consider these two aspects of Nancy's argument more closely, starting with the sensuous aspect of aesthetic "sense." (1) Nancy refuses the apparent idealism (or subjectivism) of the Kantian tradition, in which—according to a well-established but perhaps overly hasty reading of Kant—"aesthetic feeling" comes to be purely subjective, a matter of the internal harmony of the faculties, privileging "form" and no longer connected with the body or the materiality of the object. Nancy thus stands at the end of the metaphysical tradition, especially as it develops through German idealism and its privileging of "subjectivity," insisting instead on the plurality of the "fine arts" in their sensuous multiplicity, but nevertheless, at the same time, he affirms a "supersensuous" sense of aesthetic sense that merits elaboration. (2) Nancy rejects *the traditional*

hierarchy of the fine arts, in which language always proves to be the highest and ultimately purest form of art (poetry over painting, music, dance, or sculpture), insisting instead on the technical plurality of the fine arts, which are conceived not only without hierarchy, but as multiple in a way that resists closure, since Nancy will entertain arts of design and technological production that do not belong to the traditional classification of the fine arts (M 3). Likewise, Nancy is wary of *the unitary concept of "Art"*—a philosophical invention of the nineteenth-century (according to Nancy and many others) that allowed Hegel and his followers to subsume the sensuous and technical plurality of the fine arts under a single *concept* of "Art," only to announce the "end of art," since Art, now understood by Hegel as a sensuous presentation of the Idea that reaches its highest form in language, could only fulfill its proper destiny by being handed over to philosophy, which finally grasped the "truth" of Art.⁴ Nancy emphasizes instead the sensuous plurality of "the Fine Arts," while nevertheless claiming that this very sensuousness can only be grasped through a certain relation to language, as a kind of "expression" or "signification" or "intelligible sense" that is distinct from ordinary language, just as aesthetic "sense" is distinct from ordinary sensation.

Nancy thus insists on the irreducibly sensory dimension of aesthetic experience, claiming that "art disengages the senses from signification"; but he immediately adds that art gives us "what one might just as correctly name the 'sense of the world'" (M 22). The arts dislocate ordinary language and withdraw from the circuits of everyday signification, not into an abyss of meaninglessness or a domain of pure sensation and affect (as claimed in some Deleuzian accounts), but toward another dimension of sense or meaning: "Out of something that was once part of a unity of signification and representation, it makes something else . . . which is no longer the unity of signification. It is a suspension of the latter; it touches on meaning's extremities" (M 22). As Martin Heidegger argues in *Being and Time*, when the tool malfunctions, no longer appearing useful or ready to hand, it suspends our everyday modes of being-in-the-world and the entire context of meaning that orients our activities in the world, only to *bring us back to the world as such*, and to our own being as being-in-the-world.⁵ In Nancy's formulation we find an echo of this analysis: art gives us "the sense of the world as suspension of signification" (M 22).

It might seem odd and even improper to take Heidegger's analysis of the broken tool, which would seem to belong to the horizon of utility or technology, as a means of elucidating the work of art. Such a gesture would certainly not accord with Kant's orientation, which rigorously separates utility from aesthetic judgment; and yet, this way of marking

the porous border between technicity and art, or utility and aesthetics, coincides well with Nancy's argument, which seeks among other things to question the border between the "fine arts" and technical production, as is clear from his remarks on the arts of design in this text. "No doubt a religion of art always risks fastening a sacred respect on the 'work' there where one should only look to (look at) its operation, which is to say also its *technique*. The technicity of art dislodges art from its 'poetic' assurance, if one understands by that the production of a revelation" (M 37). Indeed, Nancy goes on to argue that attention to the technicity of art is currently putting an end to the historical formation of "aesthetics" as it developed during the Romantic period: "In this manner, a certain determination of 'art,' which is ours . . . is perhaps coming to its end, and with it the categorization of the 'fine arts' that accompany it, and with these a whole aesthetic feeling and judgment, a whole sublime delectation" (M 37–38). The contemporary reconfiguration of a certain inherited (Romantic) version of aesthetics does not, however, eliminate the question of the peculiar character of aesthetic "sense," but on the contrary, makes that question emerge with renewed force. In an anticipatory formulation, one could therefore say that Nancy, following Heidegger, elaborates through aesthetic experience a breakdown of ordinary language, a suspension of the everyday, practical, ethical, scientific, appetitive, or utilitarian "functioning" of language, in order to approach another sense of "sense." Art thus gives us "the sense of the world as suspension of signification" (M 22). Insofar as this sense is also "communicable" and indeed "common," it would inherently disclose my being as something more than my own, something that does not belong to me in my personal individuality, but that marks me as already being-with and belonging-with others (as Heidegger also argues in his account of *Mit-Sein* in section 26 of *Being and Time*). As I will try to suggest, the "common sense" that one finds in Kant's account of aesthetic judgment is closer to such a dispossession or "deconstruction" of the subject than one might expect.

Nancy's formulation—art gives us "the sense of the world as suspension of signification"—is remarkably close to Kant's own analysis in the *Critique of Judgement*, which distinguishes aesthetic feeling from appetite and merely personal liking, on the one hand (the order of biological need or satisfaction, as well as that of merely personal taste or enjoyment), and from practical, useful, or conceptual determination on the other hand (the order of utility and perfection, as well as that of ethical or scientific cognition). In addition to detaching itself from utility and other purposes (appetitive and cognitive), aesthetic feeling also *detaches me from myself*. This detachment (what Freud might have

called a suspension of the interests or libidinal investments of the ego) characterizes what Kant calls “a man of *enlarged mind*” who, according to Kant, “detaches himself from the subjective personal conditions of his judgement,” and this is why “I say that taste can with more justice be called a *sensus communis* than can sound understanding; and that the aesthetic, rather than the intellectual, judgement can bear the name of a public sense, i. e. *taking it that we are prepared to use the word ‘sense’ [Empfindung] of an effect that mere reflection has upon the mind; for then by sense we mean the feeling of pleasure [Gefühl]*” (*CJ* §40, 295, italics added). For Kant, this “sense” of aesthetic pleasure forms a stronger foundation for the community in which I find myself (or toward which I find myself projected, as I detach myself from my own social and historical milieu of belonging, habit, and taste), a stronger foundation for the common or “public sense” than any determinate judgment or consensual agreement.⁶ One sees here the vast distance that separates any *demand for consensus*, as well as the form of language that is implied by such a demand (the form of community that is expected from agreement over the content of a determinate judgment), from the *very different universality* that is generated by reflection.⁷ This is implied in the concept of “taste.” As Kant says: “We might even define taste as the faculty of judging *what makes our feeling in a given representation universally communicable* without the mediation of a concept” (*CJ* §40, 295, italics added). This very “feeling,” irreducible to cognition and peculiar to aesthetic pleasure, detaches itself from appetite, utility, and other interests, suspending the circuits of ordinary intelligibility and carrying my “own” feeling beyond myself, into a public or common domain, while bearing within itself a communicability and a “sense” that challenges ordinary forms of language and predication (what Kant calls “determinate judgment”).⁸

Nancy thus insists on a distinctive aesthetic sense that surpasses the five senses in their ordinary functioning (as Kant’s notion of aesthetic “feeling” surpasses ordinary sensation and personal pleasure), and he stresses the need to elaborate the language or communicability or “sense” that aesthetic sense entails. He also insists on the need to conceptualize the *subject* of this experience, which suggests that, even when we situate ourselves at the “end” of the metaphysical tradition and refuse the transcendental subject of philosophy in the name of sensuous and plural materiality, we nevertheless remain today *in the shadow of Kant*—not because of some error or mistake, or from insufficient vigilance about a traditional philosophical inheritance, but rather because aesthetic experience itself delivers us to these difficulties concerning sense and language, and obliges us to confront them—unless, as Nancy repeatedly warns, we wish to renounce these difficulties and conclude, against all evidence,

that art is simply one more form of sensuous experience among others, an effect of social and material practices that belongs to the signifying network of the "social text," without any peculiar or disruptive features.

Contemporary debates about the aesthetic, from Adorno to Rancière, Deleuze, and others, could be assessed with respect to their ability to articulate these two dimensions of "sense." A variety of theoretical approaches, critical of the isolationism that has marked some forms of aesthetic discourse, have proceeded as if the "aesthetic" as such does not exist, and as if the peculiar features of aesthetic experience can simply be dispensed with, claiming that art is simply one more historical and institutional practice among others, a "material" or "ideological" effect no different from any other cultural product or commodity, whose meaning can be read alongside any other cultural "artifact," as a "sign of the times" that speaks the same language and implies the same community as the discourses and practices that surround the work of art. Nancy clearly disagrees: "Art disengages the senses from signification," he writes, but it gives us "what one might just as correctly name the 'sense of the world'" (M 22).

IV

With this framework in mind, let us consider the first issue in more detail, concerning the "sensory" dimension of art. It is true that the arts are always addressed to the senses in some way, and also that they aim at some kind of communicable sense or meaning, even if this meaning is perpetually contested or indeterminate. And the arts have sometimes been classified in terms of their relation to the senses—painting for the eye, music for the ear, and so on. But the sensory dimension of aesthetic experience is not homologous with the classification of the senses. As Nancy points out in *The Muses*, the classification of the five senses does not coincide with that of the fine arts—music, painting, sculpture, dance, poetry, and so on. Some of these arts are addressed to multiple senses, and some senses are excluded from the arts by tradition (an exclusion Nancy takes pains to question, as he questions the distinction between "technical" and "artistic" production). Is there an art addressed to the sense of smell, or that of taste? Perhaps we can speak of the art of cooking or perfumery, but these lie on the border, or beyond the border, of what are usually called "the fine arts." Touch also is traditionally excluded from our sensory relation to the arts.

Beyond this heterogeneity separating the division of "the arts" from that of "the senses," there is also the deeper and more enigmatic problem

of what we call “aesthetic experience,” understood as a unique or distinctive kind of experience. What is the “sense” of aesthetic experience? As Nancy says, even if the arts are irrevocably addressed to the senses, the arts are not there simply to provide more sensation, of the kind already available in everyday experience: “If . . . art is in fact conceived as having to be ‘for the senses,’ that is, if the moment or the meaning of its truth and its activity is in the senses, one nonetheless implies that it is not there just to provide additional sensory stimulations. . . . The whole question of art could be posed thus: why these sensations that are supposedly *supplementary*?” (*M* 10, italics added). This “supplementary” character of aesthetic sensation will eventually be linked by Nancy to what he calls its “supersensible” character. “Sense,” in the domain of aesthetic experience, maintains its sensuous dimension, but acquires a distinctive character.

Beyond this, we must also consider that “sensation” and “perception” are not identical, since (as Freud also says) the brain processes an enormous amount of sensory data (both internal and external), filtering some content so that it never reaches consciousness, while organizing and synthesizing other content into what we call “perception,” which is therefore always a kind of synthesis and screening of sensation—a synthesis that allows us to put together touch and sight and sound, for example, assembling them and attaching them to one and the same object, as a “perception” of that object (that intensely blue, cold water that smells of seaweed). All perception is therefore a kind of synthesis or synesthesia, but perhaps *aesthetic* synthesis or synesthesia is not identical with *perceptual* synesthesia. In more philosophical language, we can say the phenomenological constitution of the object as an object of perception is not the same as its aesthetic constitution. As Nancy notes in a footnote to this essay, commenting on Deleuze and Maurice Merleau-Ponty: “‘Synaesthetic perception is the rule,’ writes M. Merleau-Ponty,” for the phenomenology of perception and lived experience, but “we disagree with G. Deleuze about the continuity that he seems to suppose between perceptive synaesthesia (which he takes over from Merleau-Ponty) and the ‘existential communication’ of the senses in artistic experience”—a continuity that Nancy finds in Deleuze’s book on Francis Bacon. “If there is indeed a unity or synthesis in the two cases,” Nancy writes, “they are not of the same order” (*M* 106n16). Indeed, “art dis-locates ‘common sense’ or ordinary synaesthesia” (*M* 22), Nancy tells us, contrary to Deleuze.

The sensuous experience of art and that of “lived experience” in the broader phenomenological sense are therefore not homologous, but the one is somehow “in touch” with the other and “communicates” with the other. The question of their relationship, in fact, is born in the late

eighteenth century, at the end of the Enlightenment, with the notion of "aesthetic feeling." As Nancy puts it: "To get beyond this antinomy, one can only envision . . . another sensuous integration, a proper sense of art. . . . It is this 'sense' that will be born (or at least baptized) with the aesthetics of the eighteenth century and that romanticism will have inherited" (*M 13*).

Aesthetic "sense" is therefore a kind of "sixth sense" (*M 13*) that goes beyond the five senses. According to Nancy, it "surpasses the senses (supersensuous)" (*M 13*), and is at the same time their expression or their communication. This special "supersensuous" sense or "sixth sense" that we now call *aesthetic* at the same time expresses or touches on the unity of *the senses themselves*. This means, of course, that a special "sense" is being preserved for what we call "aesthetic experience," while at the same time this sense is not quarantined within a "purely aesthetic" domain, but on the contrary "communicates" with what exceeds its boundaries, *touching* on lived experience without being reducible to it. Nancy writes of this aesthetic sense that "such a sense is necessarily a sense of the *assumption* of the senses—that is, of their *dissolution* or of their *sublimation*" (*M 13*, italics added). Between these three alternatives—"assumption" (a Hegelian synthesis or *Aufhebung* of the senses in art), or "dissolution" (a *dérangement* or fragmentation or dispersion of the senses), or "sublimation" (a Freudian transformation of the senses into aesthetic pleasure)—an enormous task of elucidation is proposed, which Nancy does not pursue, but which clearly bears on the possible paths that might be traced across contemporary thought on aesthetics in Merleau-Ponty, Adorno, Deleuze, Freud, Rancière, Lacan, and others.

V

One further point must be made in this context, namely that Nancy claims this aesthetic "sense" opens up a quasi-transcendental dimension of the subject, something that is irreducible to empirical accounts of sensory experience (as is evident from his use of the somewhat scandalous word "supersensuous"). Here again, the kinship with Kant's account of "aesthetic feeling" should be evident, whatever differences may separate the two thinkers. For as Kant observes in the course of distinguishing aesthetic judgment and aesthetic pleasure from the very different domains of cognition, utility, and appetite that border aesthetic formations of pleasure and judgment, something about the very nature of "subjectivity" *in general* is revealed by this discovery. The discovery of aesthetic feeling (or rather its excavation—since Kant claims merely to

be describing in a quasi-phenomenological way something within us that has previously been hidden, and that logical reasoning cannot disclose) concerns a distinctive aesthetic domain, but at the same time reveals something fundamental about the subject as such: "This particular form of the universality of an aesthetic judgement, which is to be met with in a judgement of taste, is a remarkable feature, not for the logician certainly, but for the transcendental philosopher. . . It brings to light a property of our cognitive faculties which, without this analysis, would have remained unknown" (*CJ* §8, 213).

This confirms a continuity (which is hardly an identity) between Kant and Nancy around the question of the subject ("Who feels aesthetic pleasure," one might ask, after the "subject" of the metaphysical tradition?), a question that many contemporary thinkers on aesthetics have tried to avoid by simply refusing or denouncing the problem of the subject as an obsolete remnant of the metaphysical tradition, in the name of a material or affective or historical analysis that offers to explain aesthetic phenomena without ever confronting the double question of "sense" that Nancy is pursuing in this text. It is certainly true that Nancy registers reservations about the phenomenological tradition, insofar as that tradition was oriented by the question of intentionality, which sometimes led in the direction of a *subjective constitution of reality* (which indeed finds some common ground with Kant). Nancy thus rejects the language of a "constituting subjectivity" that might "donate sense": "Infinite sense that touches itself," he writes, "is not 'given,' by anyone and to anything or anyone"; "it does not relate presentation to a subject for which or in which it would take place" (*M* 34). Rather, we are dealing with "a signifying more ancient than any intentionality that donates sense" (*M* 32). It could be said, of course, that phenomenology already discredits such idealism insofar as it reveals that the subject is equally *constituted by* the objects and the world in which it exists, since the concept of intentionality, far from being limited to a "subjective constitution of reality," also goes in the opposite direction, as a primordial co-constitution that is implied by very concept of intentionality, and by the formula "being-in-the-world"—a co-constitution Merleau-Ponty develops in terms of the "flesh" in "Eye and Mind."⁹ Be that as it may, Nancy's criticism of the phenomenological account of "sense" does not simply eliminate the question of the subject, but rather poses the question of how we should understand the reconfigured form of subjectivity that is touched and revealed by art, the being to which art addresses itself, and the type of community that is generated by this address—a question that in fact dominates the conclusion of Nancy's text, when he speaks of *ēthos* as a kind of dwelling in "sense": "sense as ethos" (*M* 38), he writes, "which

is also to say that we are touched" (*M* 35) in a way that exceeds the self-enclosed ego of the philosophical tradition. Who, then, is the subject touched by aesthetic sense?

In Kant's formulation above, moreover, we again find an analysis that (1) insists upon the unique character of aesthetic pleasure and judgment and refuses to elaborate that experience in terms of cognitive, practical, or merely personal sensuous enjoyment, but, in the very process of isolating this experience as uniquely "aesthetic," simultaneously (2) reveals something that goes beyond the borders of the aesthetic and touches on subjectivity as such (what Kant calls "a property of our cognitive faculties which, without this analysis, would have remained unknown" [*CJ* §8, 213]). In a similar (synecdochic) gesture that links the part and the whole while simultaneously marking their difference, Kant's analysis of "reflective judgment," which is *only one kind of judgment*, quite distinct from the "determinate judgment" that appears in the first and second Critiques, nevertheless tells us something about *judgment as such and in general*, and this is why reflective judgment is able not only to establish its own distinctive domain, but also simultaneously to bridge the abyss that would otherwise remain between judgment in its other forms (in the contradictory domains of freedom and necessity, or moral and epistemological truth). Indeed, as Kant's very title makes clear, the *Critique of Judgement* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*) is a critique of *judgment as such*—and not merely a critique of *aesthetic* judgment or even merely a critique of *reflective* judgment, but rather a treatise that shows how it is possible to demonstrate the unity of the first two critiques and complete the critical project as a whole. The role of "the aesthetic" as unique and distinctive, and yet simultaneously extending beyond itself, is clear. As Derrida rightly observes in *The Truth in Painting*, Kant imports the table of categories from his first Critique (quantity, quality, relation, modality) when he begins the third Critique, only to abruptly change the order without explanation, putting quality (disinterestedness) first, and then announcing, without further justification, that "it is chiefly in those acts of judgement that are called aesthetic, and which relate to the beautiful and sublime, whether of nature or of art, that one meets with the above difficulty."¹⁰ As Derrida notes, there is no explanation as to why it should be "aesthetic" judgments (or "those estimates that are *called* aesthetic") that reveal the kind of "reflection" that concerns Kant; nor is there any discussion of whether the kind of experience that is operative in this reflective judgment, "chiefly" met in aesthetics, is perhaps not exclusively met there, but possibly elsewhere as well.¹¹ This is what I have called the "discontent" of aesthetics, which belongs to a carefully delimited realm that, precisely because of its distinctive character, exceeds

its own borders, impinging on judgment in general and on language and subjectivity as such, beyond the confines of the aesthetic. Aesthetic experience has its own distinctive character and domain, irreducible to the forms of discursive practice that surround it, but one cannot grasp that specificity if one confines the aesthetic to its own domain, as critics of aesthetics do when they lament the “apolitical” or “ahistorical” or “purely disinterested” character of aesthetics, as an ideological form that would somehow quarantine itself off from everyday life or historical and political reality—a territorialization that in fact misses, according to Nancy, the distinctive character of the aesthetic.

A problem thus presents itself: on the one hand, Nancy insists on the sensuous and bodily dimension of aesthetic experience, exploring its own peculiar “language” or “sense,” and refusing to subordinate this multiple and sensuous “sense” to any idealizing determination, thereby directly questioning the Kantian gesture that would situate aesthetic pleasure at a purely transcendental level, conceiving it as a pleasure that issues not from any relation to the senses or exteriority, but as a purely subjective feeling of the harmony of the faculties, a kind of auto-affection of the subject that is characteristic of the metaphysical tradition; but, on the other hand, Nancy simultaneously insists that the sense of sense that is given to us in aesthetic experience has a “supersensuous” or quasi-transcendental dimension that bears on the status of the subject in general. In an implicit critique of the transcendental tradition of aesthetics, Nancy would insist on the bodily dimension of aesthetic sensation, and the fact that art is addressed (as a “communication,” again) to the senses, and further on the fact that the “subject” of this experience is not the self-enclosed subject of the philosophical tradition, but is rather always already open and exposed by the sensuous plurality of art to the “sense of the world” as being-in-the-world; at the same time, however, this analysis does not evacuate, but on the contrary *requires*, a new form of subjectivity that we might call quasi-transcendental—a conception of the subject that is closer to Kant’s than one might believe. Thus, after speaking of the way in which aesthetic sensation, irreducible to ordinary sensory experience, introduces another sense of “sense,” a kind of “sixth sense . . . that surpasses the senses” and is therefore “supersensuous,” amounting to an “assumption” or “dissolution” or “sublimation” of the senses, Nancy immediately adds: “Unless it is a matter of thinking a *metaphysical sense of the ‘physical’ that remains ‘physical,’ therefore sensuous and singularly plural*. This is doubtless the core of the problem” (*M* 13, italics added). It is this supersensuous sense, which “remains physical” and *touches* us, communicating itself to us and making itself felt in the domain of experience, that we call aesthetic.

What should we make of this insistence on a quasi-transcendental dimension of the "subject," which reveals itself in the very sensuous dimension of aesthetic experience? By insisting on a "sense" that somehow goes beyond the senses, and on a "subject" of this experience, a subject who can be touched by this experience, and by whom in turn it is communicated, Nancy receives and reconfigures a philosophical heritage that cannot be escaped or circumvented in favor of a materialist or affective or sociohistorical determination of art, which amounts to a false exit that effaces the aesthetic itself, reducing it to the familiar and everyday forms of both sense and meaning. Thus, Nancy insists on a certain quasi-transcendental dimension of the aesthetic and observes: "The most difficult thing, no doubt, in talking about art, is to move the discourse away from a sacred reverence or a mystical effusion" (*M* 36). It is not an insistence on the transcendental subject, but on something that emerges from sense itself, in its peculiar aesthetic mode, in which sense reveals an excess that reaches beyond itself: "One could also put it this way: art is the transcendence of immanence as such" (*M* 34). It is no surprise that Nancy can quote Adorno in this context, who says "it is the art-work itself that points beyond its monadic constitution," but who immediately adds, as Nancy points out, that "the only way to relate an esthetic particular to the moment of universality is through its closure as a monad" (*M* 35). One does not reach the "reality" or the "truth" of art by reducing it to ordinary sensation, or indeed to the discourses and practices that surround the work of art, but only by entering the peculiar "monadic" space that allows art to "point beyond its monadic constitution," touching on those practices and communicating with them, even if this appears to maintain a quasi-transcendental tradition in the elaboration of its "sense." In Nancy's own formulation, almost a paraphrase of Adorno, "It is only possible to bring this work into the medium of sense, first of all into the medium of an eventual 'sense of art' as such . . . by interrupting the hold of the discourse . . . through this 'hermeticism' whereby the work touches only itself" (*M* 35).

In the humanities in recent years, discourses on aesthetics have turned against the very concept of "the subject," as if it were too metaphysical in itself, too cognitive, too individualistic, too traditional, or too psychoanalytic, and as if aesthetic phenomena could be more fruitfully approached without any reference to "subjectivity." Indeed in the domain of "affect studies," a proliferation of work has suggested that the conceptual advantage of "affect," in contrast to "emotion," is that affect no longer requires any reference to "subjectivity," or indeed to language and signification, as though affect could be pursued as a presubjective or nonsubjective field of energetics that is "social" and "porous," or

that crosses intersubjective boundaries and provides an alternative to the philosophical tradition. Nancy clearly stands as an exception to this development: he suggests that the short-circuiting of the problem of the subject, or the claim that one can explain aesthetic phenomena without confronting their difference from social and historical forms of meaning, actually avoids the problem of “sense” that aesthetic experience presents, not as a cognitive experience that privileges consciousness, or as purely “subjective” experience that would safeguard a modern, Western conception of the autonomous, enlightened individual in his bourgeois privilege, but in its very material and physical character, as a “sense” that exceeds its own boundaries and opens on a “supersensuous” sense that in turn bears on language and meaning, but as a disruption of common sense. One might be quick to find a symptom or a residue of the transcendental tradition in such formulations, but, as he notes elsewhere, one does not escape from metaphysics by insisting on a “material” or “pathic” dimension that would reduce itself to sensation as commonly understood, eliminating the peculiarity of aesthetic sense and operating without any reference to the subject. On the contrary, such efforts belong squarely to metaphysics and have a long history, which acquires particular importance in the debates between German (“idealist”) and British (“materialist”) aesthetic traditions, which contemporary debates have clearly inherited and which one hopes they will not simply repeat.

VI

Let us now shift from the question of sense in its sensuous dimension to the question of language and community. In order to see the connection with Kant on this point, including Kant’s debate with British empiricism, let us recall Kant’s famous elaboration, in the *Critique of Judgement*, of the unique features of aesthetic judgment, as distinct from both moral and cognitive judgment. In the process of distinguishing reflective judgment from the determinate judgment that appears in the first and second critiques, he defines aesthetic feeling, not as “sensation” or “sense” (sensibility or mere perception), but as a “feeling in the mind,” a sort of auto-affection in which the subjective accord (or discord) of the faculties “makes itself felt.” Nancy of course refuses this “subjectivizing” of aesthetics in favor of an account that would rupture this auto-affection. He insists on the sensuous exteriority that gives aesthetic experience its character, and he situates the subject of that experience in a relation of primordial openness and exposure that cannot be grasped by the idealist tradition that runs from Descartes to Kant. Nancy thus

elaborates aesthetic experience in a philosophical horizon that is closer to Heidegger's account of *Dasein* as ecstatic being-in-the-world, against the self-enclosed subject of the tradition. Nevertheless, that very "sense" of the world cannot be reduced to a material sensation in which the peculiarity of aesthetic "sense" might be eliminated. And here, Kant serves as a continuing resource. For Kant, the peculiar feeling that is given in aesthetic experience reveals a dimension of subjectivity that would otherwise be hidden, and that cannot be discovered by ethical or scientific (epistemological) judgment: "It brings to light a property of our cognitive faculties which, without this analysis, would have remained unknown" (*CJ* §8, 213). This "feeling" (*Gefühl*), which is a "feeling of pleasure" (*Wohlgefallen*), is further complicated by the fact that, in addition to being distinguished from sensory "feeling," it is at the same time defined as something shared, something universal, something we have in common, and further, something that is consequently "communicable." Aesthetic "sense" is thus ineradicably grounded in feeling rather than in concepts, but at the same time detached from mere sensibility and already configured as belonging to the horizon of language and communicability ("sense"). This argument is crucial to what Kant defines as the "*sensus communis*," a common feeling or common sense that takes me beyond myself and exposes me to something that is "mine," but that does not belong to the circuit of my narcissism or self-interest, my appetites or even my knowledge, something that exposes me and detaches me from myself. Kant therefore proposes a link between this feeling (beyond ordinary "sense") and communicability (beyond determinate judgment and predication) that is very close to what Nancy explores in his work on the sense of "sense," the bond between sensuous experience and language, particularly as this bond appears in aesthetic experience.

What kind of language is appropriate to this experience? In the experience of the beautiful, Kant says, we are concerned with something that is not cognitive: aesthetic judgment is "reflective," and as such distinct from determinate judgment, which uses concepts to determine something *as* something, according to the formula "S is P," which binds a subject to a predicate and governs most forms of language. In addition to being "reflective" rather than determinate, and therefore distinct from both moral and scientific knowledge, aesthetic judgment is merely subjective, Kant says, in the sense that it bears on our subjective feeling (*Gefühl*) and not on any attributes of the object itself. And yet, this very feeling is distinctive, being somehow more than merely individual, more than a matter of private "liking" or "distaste": aesthetic judgment, based on my subjective feeling of pleasure or displeasure, is at the same time impersonal—as the concept of "disinterestedness" implies—and accordingly

Kant argues that this judgment, which has nothing to do with my own individual taste or interests, consequently claims universality, which is why, in the face of the beautiful, we do not simply say "I like it," as if the judgment were merely personal to me, but rather "It is beautiful," as if we were speaking of the object, when in fact we are speaking about the subjective feeling of pleasure that arises in the face of the beautiful and that calls out for communicative elaboration.

We thus say "It is beautiful," as if we expected others to share this same view, which means that *our very experience*, in this distinctive feeling of pleasure, is at the same time *intrinsically linked to the other* and to the *communicability of that feeling*. This is why, according to Kant, aesthetic experience is bound to "sense"—to a distinctive sensuous apprehension and a feeling of pleasure—while being simultaneously impersonal or disinterested in a way that claims universality, leading Kant to elaborate a "*sensus communis*," understood as a domain of communicable sense in which that distinctive pleasure goes beyond me and is shared and communicated to others.

This is Kant's version of the double sense of aesthetic "sense." For in these formulations, as in Nancy, a complex and mysterious relation is established between the body and language, on behalf of a "common sense" that calls for elaboration. When contemporary thinkers such as Rancière speak of aesthetics as a "distribution of the sensible," and consider this to be at the same time a kind of "politics" that bears on community, they remain in the shadow of Kant; but insofar as this domain of "the sensible," for Rancière, remains equivalent to mere sensibility or sensation, as in the tradition of British aesthetics, the question of sense that we have posed can only disappear. In Rancière, the "distribution" of the sensible concerns the order of the visible and audible in general, an ordering of perception understood in its social formation. One may therefore wonder whether "the sensible" is ever detached from "sensation" in its common usage, and whether the dimension of sense that Kant and Nancy are approaching in their different ways, but which both regard as crucial to the very concept of "aesthetic" judgment, is ever able to arise in Rancière's analysis, which could thus be said to establish a "politics of aesthetics" only at the cost of the aesthetic as such.

Kant speaks of a "communicability" of the feeling of aesthetic pleasure and claims that this feeling, being detached from my personal interests or liking, intrinsically claims universality. This universality claimed in a judgment of taste is peculiar because it cannot be guaranteed by concepts, or even by the empirical agreement of others. In a judgment of taste, there is no rule or law that can guide me or secure the truth of my judgment. Each case, Kant says, is *singular* (*CJ* §8, 215). Each case

serves as an example for something that has no rule or norm, an example of a *judgment* that cannot be guaranteed or determined in advance by any concept or rule. My judgment is not grounded by concepts but is purely subjective and furthermore based only on pleasure or displeasure; and yet, because this judgment is disinterested, because it is based on a pleasure that has no relation to my own personal inclination or taste or interest, my judgment is not personal to me, which means that it carries within itself a "disinterested" character, a kind of exposure and desubjectification of myself, which is what allows this judgment to entail the expectation of the other's agreement. In a judgment of taste, it is as if I were saying "This is beautiful, don't you agree?"—reaching out to the other, expecting the other's agreement, but unable to secure that agreement by any reasoning. What community is implied by this analysis? What commonality or common "sense" or universality is generated or revealed by Kant's analysis? In Kant's account, I may be wrong in any particular case: what I take to be a judgment of taste may in fact be a case of merely personal liking, and I cannot be sure by appeal to any conceptual or logical argument, but only by this reaching out toward the other, a reaching out that is not really something I do (a subjective act or potency), but rather something that happens to me in the very experience of aesthetic pleasure. And even if the other agrees, this is no guarantee of the universality of my judgment, since this may be an instance in which I simply share with the other a common taste, a socially acquired habit of liking—a taste common to a certain region or nation or class consciousness, or some other historically contingent geopolitical formation of taste—that is not at all universal.

It is therefore not the agreement (or disagreement) of the other, but the *mere possibility* of the other's agreement, the mere fact that the feeling I have, being independent of all personal inclinations or interests (and free of any interests tied to moral or cognitive purposes), carries within itself the claim (or the "sense") that others will also share this feeling—a claim that has no guarantee. This is what characterizes the universality of the judgment of taste, as an insecure, open-ended possibility that cannot be secured by concepts or norms, or even by empirical consensus. It is perhaps not so far from what Alphonso Lingis calls "the community of those who have nothing in common"—with all the ambiguity of this phrase: "having nothing in common," or, as Nancy might put it, "having nothing-in-common in common." For Kant, the judgment of taste entails, "consequently, only the *possibility* of an aesthetic judgment capable of being at the same time deemed valid for everyone. The judgment of taste itself does not postulate the agreement of everyone (for it is only competent for a logically universal judgment to do this . . .);

it only *imputes* this agreement to everyone, as an instance of the rule in respect of which it *looks for confirmation*, not from concepts, but *from the concurrence of others*" (*CJ* §8, 216). The other's agreement cannot be secured by argument, and it is entirely distinct from any agreement based on local inclinations or taste—the sort of community standards and norms of taste that sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu consider in their approach to aesthetic judgment. Even the other's empirical agreement, therefore, cannot guarantee that my judgment is in fact a judgment of taste.

It is this obscure and strange universality that explains why my subjective feeling of pleasure is at the same time linked to communicability and language, not the discourse of predication, but what Kant elaborates in terms of "the voice": "There can, therefore, be no rule according to which anyone is to be compelled to recognize anything as beautiful. Whether a dress, a house, or a flower is beautiful is a matter upon which one declines to allow one's judgement to be swayed by any reasons or principles. We want to get a look at the object with our own eyes, just as if our delight depended on sensation. And yet, if upon so doing, we call the object beautiful, we believe ourselves to be speaking with a universal voice" (*CJ* §8, 215-16). Kant's analysis of universality comes to rest on this remarkable and enigmatic claim: "Here, now, we may perceive," Kant writes, "that nothing is postulated in the judgement of taste but such a *universal voice*" (*CJ* §8, 216), a voice that communicates no knowledge, but only the feeling within me, a feeling that I take to be universal, and which is thus itself a feeling destined for the voice, destined for communicability and language. Kant adds, "The universal voice is, therefore, only an idea—resting upon grounds the investigation of which is here postponed" (*CJ* §8, 216). Such, then, is the peculiar character of the voice that communicates the strangely open and indeterminate universality of the feeling that is expressed in the judgment of taste. "It may be a matter of uncertainly whether a person who thinks he is laying down a judgement of taste is, in fact, judging in conformity with that idea; but that this idea is what is contemplated in his judgement . . . is proclaimed by his use of the expression 'beauty.' . . . He can be certain on the point [not from the agreement of others, but] from his mere consciousness of the separation of everything belonging to the agreeable and the good from the delight remaining to him; and this is all for which he promises himself the agreement of everyone" (*CJ* §8, 216).

Sense—the sense of beauty and the subjective feeling that characterizes it—is therefore intrinsically tied to this peculiar mode of communicability or communicable "sense," in Kant's analysis, which communicates no knowledge, no proposition or normative content about which we could

all reach "consensus," but rather the possibility of a feeling that takes me beyond myself, beyond my own personal pleasures and interests, and that, as such, is carried beyond me in the form of a voice that, in turn, expresses no knowledge or normative content, but rather the sense that this pleasure is a shared or common one that is also possible for others.

VII

But if this universal voice and this communicability is clearly part of aesthetic judgment, intrinsically tied to the feeling of pleasure that we find in aesthetic experience, how are we to understand its sensuous dimension? The so-called "feeling of pleasure" is not simply sensuous perception. Kant emphatically distinguishes aesthetic feeling from any empirical sensory perception, thereby rejecting the entire approach of British empiricism (see *CJ* §45, §46, §47, and all of §14, "Exemplification"). But he continues to use the word "sense" (*Empfindung*), and not only "feeling" (*Gefühl*) or "pleasure" (*Wohlgefallen*): "When a modification of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure is termed sensation (*Empfindung*), this expression is given a quite different meaning to that which it bears when I call the representation of a thing (through sense as a receptivity pertaining to the faculty of knowledge) sensation" (*CJ* §3, 206). When sensation is understood as a sensory receptivity that allows an object to be represented and made available for cognition, this is not at all what Kant means by aesthetic sensation. Kant explains: "*the word sensation is used to denote an objective representation of the senses; and, to avoid continually running the risk of misinterpretation, we shall call that which must always remain purely subjective . . . by the familiar name of feeling [Gefühls]*" (*CJ* §3, 206, italics added). Aesthetic feeling, and the "sense" of aesthetic pleasure, is therefore distinct from the *pleasure of sensation*, whether this means mere sensory gratification (what Kant elsewhere calls "appetite"), or that sensation which is the source of a representation that leads to the perception of an object, and thence to cognition and intellectual pleasure. If the word "sensation" meant the same in every case, *there would be no such thing as aesthetic experience.*

This is of course the reason for Kant's condemnation of the British empirical tradition, which is not only dominant in Hume and in British aesthetics generally, but which remains dominant in most contemporary discussions of "affect." Kant explains: "This at once affords a convenient opportunity for condemning . . . a prevalent confusion [about] the double meaning of which the word 'sensation' (*Empfindung*) is capable. All delight [*Gefühl*] (as is said or thought) is itself sensation [*Empfind-*

ung] (of a pleasure [*Lust*]). Consequently everything that pleases . . . is agreeable . . . *attractive, charming, delicious, enjoyable*, etc. But if this is conceded, then impressions of the senses, which determine inclination, or principles of reason, which determine the will, or mere contemplated forms of intuition, which determine judgement, are all on a par" (*CJ*§3, 206). There would be no difference between the pleasure of sensation, that of cognition, that of moral feeling, and that of aesthetic experience: each of these distinctive domains would be collapsed, reduced to the same horizon of gratification, a single pleasure principle made famous by Jeremy Bentham and British utilitarianism. There would only be one sense of "sense," according to Kant. "This would be agreeableness in the sensation of one's state," Kant says, and "we could credit our faculties with no other appreciation of things and the worth of things, than that consisting in the gratification which they promise" (*CJ*§3, 206). In this empirical and British orientation, Nancy says, "one remains at the material and 'pathic' pole of the senses . . . following the example of a modern physiology" (*M* 14)—a flaw that Nancy appears to attribute to Deleuze, and that we would attribute to the vast majority of contemporary discourse on affect, understood as a bodily intensity that has no need of any subjective elucidation, but on the contrary that eliminates the subject as a purportedly metaphysical and obsolete category (along with the discourse of psychoanalysis, and the entire problematic of sexuality).

Kant and Nancy represent two moments or instances in a much broader history of aesthetics that runs from Romanticism through phenomenology and psychoanalysis (in various heterogeneous ways), and that rejects such a "pathic" view of affect. This question concerning the status of "feeling" or "sense," especially as it appears in aesthetic experience, was central to debates between German (idealist) and British (empiricist) traditions in the late Enlightenment. And one can see that this late Enlightenment debate is being replayed today in discussions of aesthetics and affect. As Kevin McLaughlin has recently noted: "There is a powerful tendency today to reduce experience to the neurophysiological processes of cognition based on a heightened fascination with the brain. Resistance to this neurocentric tendency often consists in asserting the power of the human mind—for example, the creative capacity of the imagination—to transcend the limitations of empirical experience. This debate renews the question posed by aesthetics in eighteenth-century philosophy in a way that calls for another return to Kant, and in particular to his insistence on the communicability of an empirically unaccountable feeling as the ground of human community."¹² As we have suggested, however, the strong affinity between Kant and Nancy does not eliminate all differences, especially given the systematic interests of the Kantian

account, in which the unity of the faculties served as a central horizon of his exposition. To anticipate a larger argument, then, we might say that, for Nancy, aesthetic experience cannot be turned into an analogy for experience as such: aesthetic sense is bound to sensuous experience, but the unity of the senses, the way they touch on each other and give rise to something like "lived experience," on the model of organic life—a point that is central not only to phenomenology and other forms of contemporary vitalism, but also to Kant's account of aesthetic feeling as a "feeling of life," a sort of subjective, vitalist auto-affection—all this is quite distinct from the aesthetic feeling in Nancy, who writes: "One quickly realizes that *perceptive integration and its lived experience would be more correctly located at the opposite extreme from artistic experience*" (M 12, italics added).

In the end, this reveals an important difference between Kant and Nancy, a difference that merits further discussion, but that I will not pursue further here, namely, that Kant's account of aesthetic feeling clearly maintains the distinctive character of aesthetic feeling and aesthetic judgment, rigorously separating it from both cognitive (moral or scientific) and affective forms of experience and judgment; but it nevertheless at the same time develops an account in which that very distinctiveness of aesthetic pleasure goes on to disclose the unity of the faculties as a whole, and thus the unity of the subject as such, insofar as aesthetic pleasure brings into relationship the imagination and understanding (in the case of the beautiful) or the imagination and reason (in the case of the sublime). Kant's treatise can be designated as concerning judgment *in general*, and not just aesthetic judgment, because it reveals this harmony of the faculties, a relation of free play (*harmony or disharmony*) that allows the faculties to touch on each other, *to resonate* with each other (music and voice, then, and the "sense" of these, rather than discourse and its modes of meaning). In reflective judgment, aesthetic pleasure thus reveals the unity between two faculties—reason and understanding—that otherwise would have remained separate.¹³ Nancy likewise argues that aesthetic experience must be given its own peculiar and distinctive character, as a kind of "sixth sense," while at the same time claiming that this aesthetic sense also opens a "supersensible" dimension that amounts to an "assumption" or "dissolution" or "sublimation" of the senses in the ordinary sense.

Like Kant, Nancy speaks of a distinctive domain of aesthetic experience that at the same time discloses the truth of experience in general and as such. The difference, however, is that Kant characterizes this link between aesthetic experience and the whole of experience as such in terms of *life*, the "*feeling of life*" that animates the subject as such, revealing

our supersensible destiny. Kant's account thus joins hands with a vitalist perspective that continues (not without differences of course, but nevertheless in a fundamental continuity) with the work of Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenology of lived experience, and other traditions such as the new vitalist forms of thought that derive from Henri Bergson and continue through Michel Henry, and perhaps even in the new forms of "affect theory" that derive from Deleuze. For Nancy, by contrast, aesthetic experience maintains its distinctness while subsuming or comprehending the totality of the sense as such, but in a manner that leads directly away from any vitalism: "One quickly realizes," Nancy tells us, "that *perceptive integration and its lived experience would be more correctly located at the opposite extreme from artistic experience*" (M 12, italics added).

This issue merits elaboration, but for lack of space let me conclude by simply indicating two directions in which Nancy's work might point us. The first goes in the direction of psychoanalysis. Nancy is by no means a psychoanalytic thinker, and it would be a mistake to translate his concerns into a Freudian or Lacanian register, even if the question of affect in Freud—and in particular the separation of affect and signifier that he announces in his essay "The Unconscious," and in some writings on anxiety—points to a similar problematic regarding the status of "feeling" (see note 5). Nevertheless, Nancy observes that the peculiar character of aesthetic "sense" and aesthetic "pleasure" can be clarified by Freud's account of *Vorlust*, the "preliminary pleasure" in which the sexual drive *finds satisfaction without reaching its aim* (understood as the biological aim of reproduction, which includes attainment of the "proper object"). This point, elaborated at length in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, is further developed in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," where Freud claims that the sexual drive (*Trieb*, translated by James Strachey as "instinct")¹⁴ is distinct from biological instinct in that the latter follows an ebb and flow, a rise and fall, as with hunger, for example, which can be satisfied for a time and later arise again. The drives by contrast, according to Freud, maintain a constant force (*konstante Kraft*). In addition, in the *Three Essays* Freud notes that the so-called "erotogenic zones" are in some way located *in association with* biological functions (eating, defecation, hearing, sight, touch, etc.), while noting that, nevertheless, these zones can be displaced (any part of the body, Freud says, can be taken as an erotogenic zone) and, even more important, that these zones remain dispersed, plural, multiple in a way that cannot be synthesized in terms of "life," or in terms of the organic unity of the body as a biological entity (unified and directed toward the single aim of "mature" and "phallic" sexual reproduction). Freud detaches sexuality from the model of organic life, but he does not provide an alternative

to vitalism by abruptly and reactively announcing its opposite, the kind of deathbound orientation that one finds in some thinkers. He simply elaborates *another order of pleasure and sexuality*, belonging to what we might call *homo aestheticus*. Indicating this direction, Nancy writes: "The *Vorlust* has two connected characteristics: that of tension and incompleteness, on the one hand, and that of zonal diversity on the other," and adds, "Erotic and aesthetic sensualities take place right at a diversity that sets itself apart from integration or unity" (M 15).

The second direction points us toward a certain theory of language, or a theory in which sense—the peculiar sense that emerges in aesthetic experience, irreducible to ordinary sensation—elaborates its own language. Following Aristotle's remarks on the reflexivity or double nature of "sense" in *On the Soul*, Nancy speaks of sense as "belonging to the order of the *logos*, but of a *logos* which . . . is but the 'feeling itself' of 'feeling' or its 'pronouncing itself' on feeling as such" (CJ 14). This encounter with Aristotle is more than we can elaborate here, but the direction of this thought can be clarified by remarks on "metaphor" that Nancy makes somewhat later in this text. The heterogeneity of the arts, he says, "divides very distinct, *incommunicable* qualities (visual, sonorous, etc.), and it shares out among these qualities other qualities (or the same ones), *which one might name* with 'metaphors' (such as the *dark*, the *brilliant*, the *thick*, the *soft*, the *strident*, etc.)" (M 24, italics added). The order of the "visual" or "sonorous" belongs to the senses in the ordinary sense, while that of "dark" and "brilliant" opens on a naming that cuts across the arts (one speaks of color, but also of musical tones, as "dark" or "brilliant," and of tone in poetry as "strident" or "soft"). In this way, the senses appear to reach for their own language, passing from "incommunicable" qualities to a kind of naming. We are thus led to "a generalized metaphorical circulation, *taste or flavor, odor, tone, color, flesh* etc," Nancy suggests, "which are in the final analysis meta-phors in the proper sense, effective transports or communication across the incommunicable itself" (M 24). Perhaps these hints are sufficient to provide an exploratory sketch of the peculiar status of "sense" in Nancy's work, and its link to Kant's decisive account of aesthetic pleasure, as well as the continuing importance of this account for current debates about aesthetics in Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty, Rancière, and other contemporary theorists of aesthetics and affect.

NOTES

1 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1952) (hereafter cited as *CJ*; page numbers are consistent with the original German edition).

2 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1996), 28 (hereafter cited as *M*). Our remarks here will focus on the remarkable first essay in this book, "Why Are There Several Arts and Not Just One?" 1–39.

3 For a representative survey of recent affect theory, see *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2010).

4 There are many accounts of Hegel's philosophical appropriation of art, but for one especially interesting and pertinent account, see Jacques Taminiaux, *Poetics, Speculation, and Judgment: The Shadow of the Work of Art from Kant to Phenomenology*, trans. Micheal Gendreau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), esp. "Speculation and Judgment" (1–19) and "Between the Aesthetic Attitude and the Death of Art" (55–72).

5 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward S. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962). See in particular §16.

6 A longer examination is warranted here of the relation between the form of community implied in Kant's *sensus communis*, and the conception of community outlined in Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney, foreword by Christopher Fynsk (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1991), which should in turn be compared with Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993); Maurice Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, 2006); and more recent work such as Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2010).

7 In the fourth moment of the judgment of taste, where Kant takes up the "modality" of the judgment and claims it is "necessary," meaning that others must necessarily share this judgment, this "must" or "ought" is quite different from the "ought" of a moral demand: "A person who describes something as beautiful insists that every one *ought* to give the object in question his approval," but "the *ought* in aesthetic judgement . . . is still only pronounced conditionally. We are suitors for agreement from everyone" (*CJ* §19, 237). "Further," he adds, "we would be able to count on this agreement, provided we were always assured of the correct . . . rule of approval," which is, of course, lacking in the case of the beautiful.

8 "From a *subjective universal validity*, i.e. aesthetic, that does not rest on any concept, no conclusion can be drawn to the logical," Kant writes. "But for this very reason," he adds, "the *aesthetic universality* attributed to a judgement [of taste] *must also be of a special kind* [italics added], seeing that it does not join the predicate of beauty to the concept of the object taken in its entire logical sphere" (*CJ* §8, 215). One sees here again the vast difference separating Kant's notion of universality in aesthetic judgment not only from any normative universality, but also from universality established by the language of predication.

9 See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," trans. Carleton Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964), 159–90. A revised translation by Michael M. Smith appears in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1993), 121–49. The text was originally published as *L'Œil et l'Esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

10 Derrida is quoting Kant's Preface to the 1790 edition of the Third Critique. See Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), 169.

11 See Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*.

12 McLaughlin, *Poetic Force: Poetry After Kant* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2014), xix.

13 For further exposition of this point, see Charles Shepherdson, "Awakening Negativity: The Genesis of Aesthetics in the Critique of Judgment," in *Maps and Mirrors: Topologies of Art and Politics*, ed. Steve Martinot (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2001), 130–51.

14 James Strachey, introduction to Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 7, trans. Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74).