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The production of taste: ecologies, intersections, implications

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the construction of taste and its implications for the socio-economic and aesthetic diversity of the theatre and performance landscape. It considers how tastes are produced and reproduced, both in relation to socio-political and cultural interpellation and in relation to embodied and personal experience. Beginning with Bourdieu's *Distinction*, the article explores how tastes are produced in relation to class and cultural capital. It goes on to propose an ecology of four arenas of taste production: authoritative instruction, performances of self, the comfort of familiarity and the influence of associations. Each works in relation to the others and acknowledge the complexity of taste production, moving beyond Bourdieu's generational model. These arenas of taste production are considered in relation to their implications in decision-making and judgements around the production, cultivation, resourcing and programming of arts practice. The article argues that taste is pervasive, infecting and inflecting judgements and decisions and, as such, needs to be acknowledged and used in the pursuit of greater diversity in the arts.

KEYWORDS

Taste; performance; diversity; Bourdieu

Introduction: the force of taste

Taste is a slippery term. It might refer to the sensory taste of eating, to our tastes in cultural and artistic events or artefacts, to tasteful behaviour or decorum or to an appetite, to have a taste for something. Our tastes are one of the most intimate and personal facets of our sense of self, caught up in what we desire, how we act and how we perform ourselves. According to the Latin proverb, *De gustibus non est disputandum*: there is no disputing taste; it is something that is inexplicably and simply true about us. But this is not the case. Our tastes are produced, reproduced, consolidated, shifted, reorganised and deployed; they are not simply true of us. And we are never free of our tastes; they are always already and continually at work in our encounters with the world, in our decisions, choices and judgements.

Taste is an important concern in terms of the theatre and performance ecology. While there are ways in which biases are both checked and countered, personal taste continues to have a force in the process of funding, making, advertising, encountering and evaluating artistic practice. In Luca Vercelloni's *The Invention of Taste*, he traces the figurative use of the term (our taste in things) to the Renaissance, where 'taste' was used interchangeably with 'judgement' (2016, 5–6). Our judgements are never free of our

tastes. Tastes are pervasive, often unacknowledged and the result of a complex process of production. They emerge from a mixture of socio-political and cultural interpellation and personal experience and they are never stable and fixed. As such, it is often difficult to appreciate how our tastes are at work in decision-making. Taste infects and inflects judgements and decision-making and, in the artistic and creative industries, judgements and decisions by those in positions of power – creative producers, funders, developers, programmers – include and are framed by their tastes, with ramifications for the socio-economic and aesthetic diversity of the arts sector.

In this article, I explore various ways in which taste is produced and reproduced, disseminated and experienced, in order to think about how the construction of taste(s) might influence the diversity of the arts ecology. I begin with Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Bourdieu [1979] 2010) where he outlines a theoretical approach to the production of taste with a particular focus on its relation to class and cultural capital. For Bourdieu, taste pervades one's social being and is manifested as a seemingly 'natural' facet of both the individual and class structures. Bourdieu's analysis continues to have power in unsettling the naturalisation of taste hierarchies and goes some way to expose their construction and deployment. Yet Bourdieu's model is limited and, in the second half of the article, I offer a different model of four arenas of taste production: authoritative instruction, performances of identity, the comfort of familiarity and the influence of associations. I argue that these work in relation to one another in a complex ecology of taste production, including thinking about the doubling of taste as both literal mouth taste and figurative cultural or artistic taste, in order to conceive of taste as both socio-political *and* embodied, intimate and personal. What is at stake for the arts ecology here is precisely the pervasiveness of taste, its unaccountability while it continues to have a considerable force in decisions around diversity and the support, funding and cultivation of new artistic practices.

Bourdieu's *Distinction*

Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* is a key theoretical and sociological study of taste, its production, dissemination and maintenance within a class-based social hierarchy. For Bourdieu, 'good taste' is invariably associated with, performed by and continued for the benefit of, the upper or privileged classes, the cultural elites. Those with high levels of 'cultural capital' (social rather than economic assets, such as education, access to 'high art' and possessing the appropriate means for its appreciation) are instrumental in determining, (re)producing and consolidating notions of good taste, in part as a means of preserving both their own privilege and the cultural status quo. This 'good taste' always operates by a process of distinction or difference from other tastes; those tastes associated with those with low cultural capital. And in a circular fashion, the categorisation of 'good taste' produces itself and, for Bourdieu, those with low cultural capital tend to accept the distinction between refined and coarse taste as both legitimate and natural, taking as simply true that which is produced. In Bourdieu's analysis, those with lower cultural capital lack access to high culture and the legitimate means for its appreciation (including a 'proper' terminology to describe and understand it and a 'respectable' approach to it). This process, then, denies the less privileged from self-defining their own good taste, particularly in relation to arts

and culture, subjecting them to a standard of taste that seeks to maintain the very division and distinction that marks off the ‘high’ from the ‘low’.

The political manoeuvre identified by Bourdieu, whereby privilege is maintained through the construction of a particular mode of ‘good taste’, is the result of a problem that emerged in the 1700s. Vercelloni writes that the twin problems that arose in the ‘Century of Taste’ were *political* and *theoretical*. The former, the political, was concerned with ‘making the pleasures of taste accessible to a wider sphere’, while the latter, the theoretical, ‘involved restoring a degree of certainty to aesthetic experience’ (2016, 40). These two problems were connected, both the result of increasing social enfranchisement (ibid): how to give greater access to arts and culture while maintaining authority over ‘good taste’? This tension seems to motivate Bourdieu’s analysis and remains a key problem in terms of the diversification and democratisation of the arts in a way that is officially recognised and, importantly, supported and cultivated. The two questions are connected, precisely because the democratisation of the arts and the cultural acceptance of, and support for, a diverse field of tastes and practices undermines and fragments critical and theoretical certainty of what constitutes art and aesthetic experience. And it is these claims to artistic certainty that legitimise the authority and work of arts institutions: those programming, funding, promoting and developing artistic practice. The problem of taste continues its urgency; it is not merely consigned to history. This is because the theoretical problem is not just a problem in or of ‘theory’; it speaks to our most ingrained sense of what constitutes (good) practice and artistic taste. In every aesthetic judgement, *including* judgements by those propagating new work, there is always an implicit sense of taste and discernment; the theoretical problem is inescapable and always already informs the political problem of diversification and democratisation.

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu unsettles the naturalisation of taste by examining a particular constellation of social practices that produce and reproduce tastes. Writing in relation to what he conceives as a strict class system, Bourdieu’s analysis of classes of taste identifies significant differences in the artistic tastes of the working, middle and upper classes. He outlines the various ways in which ‘good taste’ is produced, including both through ‘inherited’ and ‘acquired’ cultural capital (Bourdieu [1979] 2010, 73). At the intersection of the inherited and the acquired, he writes that

While variations in educational capital are always very closely related to variations in competence [...], the fact remains that, at equivalent levels of educational capital, differences in social origin (whose ‘effects’ are already expressed in difference in educational capital) are associated with important differences in competence. (Bourdieu [1979] 2010, 55-56)

Education goes some way to raising ‘tastes’, but it does not eradicate or level distinctions of class origin. Taste is not merely the result of training, in and through education (though this does play a significant part), but is also ‘the imposition of an art of living, that is, the transmutation of an arbitrary way of living into the legitimate way of life’ (Bourdieu [1979] 2010, 49). For Bourdieu, there is a generational (in its double meaning of generating and passing from one generation to the next) inculcation of taste that is manifested not just in stated preferences, but also in a manner of living. Taste infuses one’s being and is deeply internalised by means of the various structures and processes of hegemonic interpellation forming us as subjects. As Bourdieu observes, despite an equivalence of educational capital, social origins and class continue to hold sway in

determining taste and (access to and command of) cultural capital; and by extension, access to education is not enough to eradicate or level differences in participation in the arts, because that ‘art of living’, which includes various competencies, networks and connections, is produced through a broader life practice.

Bourdieu identifies and analyses the material conditions, outside of education, that formalise and concretise tastes. In a section of *Distinction* entitled ‘The Correspondence between Goods Production and Taste Production’, Bourdieu explores how the production of goods (including cultural and artistic artefacts, which we might now extend to include the production of artistic events) appeals to already existing tastes, which are limited, given form and objectified in the cultural object or event. From unformulated or unconscious desires or drives, taste is formalised through its channeling and directing towards a cultural product: shaped, articulated and reinforced (Bourdieu [1979] 2010, 227–228). Taste is then expressed as a directional ‘taste-for’ a particular product, which itself draws on and concretises the motivating principle of taste. This is a circular process, whereby taste builds on products and products build on taste, continually solidifying and shoring up the tastes of a particular class through the artistic artefacts and cultural events to which they have access. Having access to cultural and artistic events is, for Bourdieu, explicitly connected to competence in the cultural arena and the formation of taste; part of the continual reproduction of taste, which vests power over taste formation in the hands of cultural producers.

In summary, Bourdieu’s analysis explicates how tastes and subjects are formed and consolidated in relation to class and background, reinforced by their material conditions. Bourdieu unsettles and disturbs the naturalisation of taste through the class analysis, exposing its construction. Our tastes are shaped and produced in such a way that they are successfully internalised and sometimes in ways that are an ‘unconscious acquisition’ (Bourdieu [1979] 2010, 59). There is a direct relationship between the production of, access to and familiarity with, cultural products and personal taste, which, for Bourdieu, continues the interpellation of the subject as being of a particular class. By implication, decisions about the funding, resourcing and support of artistic practice always bear the traces of this produced taste, even (and perhaps most especially) when the decision-maker is unaware of their own taste and believes they are adopting a ‘pure’ gaze of rational judgement. The class system shapes and produces tastes, which are always already at work in aesthetic judgements.

Bourdieu frames his analysis in terms of classes of taste. It is a hierarchical model of taste production, predicated on the passage of taste through various structures (from ‘top’ to ‘bottom’) including from the higher to lower classes, from one generation to the next, from institution to visitor or spectator, from tutor to student. While this is useful on a macro scale, it does not account for the individual or personal experience of taste. While taste always carries the markers and histories of political and cultural production, it is made manifest as a seemingly individual, personal, embodied and sometimes apparently spontaneous experience. Bourdieu acknowledges some of this in conceiving of the naturalisation of taste, but his model is limited given the strict hierarchical and generational thrust of his analysis. It also does not consider the embodied and lived experience of taste and the ways in which bodies negotiate competing discourses, cultures and identities in the formation and deployment of taste. If those involved in cultural production (artists, producers, funders, marketers, institutions) are to engage in the

checking of tastes in order to diversify the artistic ecology, then there needs to be an acknowledgement of the various ways taste is produced, reinforced and experienced. In the following half of this article, I propose a horizontal ecology of arenas of taste production, which includes, but also moves away from, the strict authoritative hierarchy of Bourdieu.

Four arenas of taste production

To expand the conceptualisation of how taste is produced and maintained is important for a number of reasons. To conceive of taste production only as an institutional authority is limited and does not give an account of the embodied and experiential; where taste is experienced as something intimately of the body and the self. These are key facets of the deployment of taste, where we experience it as something deeply personal and connected to our sense of self: who we are and what we like. It is clear that this sense of self is not fixed and static, it is produced, reproduced, consolidated, interrupted, configured and reconfigured. If arts producers are to diversify the arts ecology, then the checking of personal tastes is an important gesture to prevent the imposition not only of a personal but also political class of taste. The deployment of taste is, in some ways, performative: it is not merely an articulation of a taste that has been produced, but continues the process of producing and reproducing tastes, both for the individual and the cultural scene.

I map out here four arenas of taste production that work in tandem with one another – authoritative instruction, the performance of identity, the comfort of familiarity and the influence of associations – to expose the complexity of taste production and to start to give an account of its embodied, felt, emotive and personal force. To do this, I draw on work on taste and the senses, in order to make use of, and make connections between, figurative taste (what one appreciates) and literal taste (the experience of taste in eating). I attempt to explore how these two broad categories of taste might speak more directly to and about one another, especially in how the cognitive-reflective figurative taste is shaped and framed by perceptive-embodied literal taste and vice versa. The importance of taking account of the multifaceted production of taste is to draw attention to the simultaneity of the personal and political; to be aware of the various pressures that are at work in decision-making grounded (even indirectly) in taste; and to avoid a too-simple binary choice between the collective taste of the class group and seemingly pure, transcendental and absolute free choice in taste; between absolute (class) determination and absolute agency and freedom.

Authoritative instruction

Bourdieu's model of taste is authoritative, mapping how various institutional authorities indoctrinate each individual with an appropriate taste relative to their position in the class social hierarchy. Authoritative instruction in taste can take a number of forms: the educational system, exposure and learning within the institution of the family, through the figure of the 'expert' giving guidance (for instance, in cultural radio or television programmes, in print media and in theatre criticism and reviews) and even less directly through institutional support of particular practices. In the latter, the amount of funding

an artist or show receives and how that translates into ‘production values’, the institutional stamp on a poster, the inclusion in an institutional programme, the scale of a show and size of space in which it is hosted or housed all contribute to instruction in taste by providing markers of the worthiness of a given cultural product or event.¹ And as with Bourdieu’s relation between goods and taste production, the expertise and authority of the institution is maintained by its endorsement of ‘good taste’, just as it produces the good taste on which its authority rests, perpetuating and refining taste in a way that maintains a classification of privilege and (cultural) capital. There are two kinds of authority at work here; what we might call ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ authority, which marks a difference between direct authoritative instruction (‘here’s what you should like and why’) and softer manipulation (‘look at how good this is, the support and acclaim it receives proves how good it is’). In both cases, there is a form of authority (institutional or apparent expertise) that produces and perpetuates ‘good taste’; authority as both a controlling power and as a power of influence (to be an authority on).

The work of ‘soft authority’ is in the realm of ‘cultural intermediaries’, an idea from Bourdieu’s *Distinction* and elaborated by Keith Negus as a ‘knowledge class’, ‘those workers who come *in-between* creative artists and consumers’, involved in ‘symbolic production’ frequently through ‘advertising imagery, marketing and promotional techniques’ (2002, 502–504). Cultural intermediaries are those who shape artistic work and its conditions of production, including funders, development agencies and creative producers. Cultural intermediaries play a key role in determining a framework of understanding for artistic activity and in deciding to whom it should be directed and promoted. And that mediation itself always already carries with it the tastes of the mediator; mediation is not a neutral conduit, a form of administrative or bureaucratic work that merely facilitates, but the work of taste production, in how artistic practice is resourced, to whom it is marketed and in terms of the artistic practice that is chosen.

Within the authoritative model of taste is the notion of the ‘gatekeeper’. For Negus, the idea of the gatekeeper stresses ‘how key personnel control access to cultural production’ (ibid, 510). The gatekeeper controls access for artists to the institution, its support and who is deemed worthy of the taste profile the institution favours. However, Negus notes the limitations of this model, that it is ‘limited by the assumption that cultural items simply appear at the “gates” of the media or culture producing corporation where they are either admitted or excluded’ (ibid). The gatekeeper is not just an appraising figure, deciding whether an artist or work is worthy of institutional support (though this is part of it, and the individual tastes of the gatekeeper come into play alongside those valued by the represented institution). The process of crossing the threshold and being given material, financial or institutional support can potentially transform the tastes and activities of the artist, given the authority of institutions to shape work through its support and to inculcate principles of taste.

The authoritative model of taste is that offered by Bourdieu, where inclusion in institutions and within established fields of expertise produces, reproduces, frames and changes taste and artistic activity. In this model, particular tastes are enforced by those with cultural power and sometimes willingly pursued by those seeking to gain recognition and support. The ‘gatekeeper’ is a powerful position and, if those cultural intermediaries become aware of, or trouble, their own (intuitive) tastes or pursue artistic practice that runs counter to tastes sanctioned by an institution, there is an avenue for

diversification of the arts ecology. Authoritative instruction in taste is a key facet of taste production, but it is rather deterministic and the very ability of cultural workers to pursue other tastes demonstrates that taste is not entirely determined or produced in this way.

Performance of identity

Taste is often experienced as something individual, intimately connected to one's sense of self, even as it operates as a marker of enculturation. The external presenting or performance of taste acts as a way of signalling a mode of identity, or outwardly making claims of one's tastefulness as a demonstration of self. The announcement or pronouncement of my tastes in the public-social sphere showcases my priorities, interests, cultural allegiances and sense of self. And this public performance is not unidirectional, moving outwards from within me, but also works in the opposite direction: performing my tastes refines, reproduces and consolidates them. It is not artifice, *merely* a public show, but has a performative dimension whereby it produces that which it names: I profess a taste for a particular kind of work or attend a particular kind of cultural event, which then continues the construction of my sense of self and my tastes (including through the comfort of familiarity through repeated exposure). Indeed, the pleasures of our tastes are re-doubled. As Paul Bloom writes in *How Pleasure Works: The New Science of Why We Like What We Like*, 'there is a self-consciousness to our pleasures. Humans can observe the pleasure or pain that we experience, and can get further pleasure or pain from this observation.' (2010, 50) This circular process shores up our tastes, through the pleasure of pleasure or the distaste of pain, refining and consolidating (dis)taste through self-reflection, self-consciousness and discrete categorisation. This, of course, then has an effect on future behaviours: what we decide to encounter in terms of artistic practice, what decision-makers feel is worthy of support, and the categorisation of works being related in our mental schemas to whatever it maps onto our taste(s).²

There is a clear intersection here with Bourdieu's work, given that our identities are constructed by and performed within social structures, including class. We align ourselves with particular identity groups (in terms of class, race, gender, sexuality, belief, politics etc.). Each of these has its own cultural constellation of tastes and practices and our tastes are performed according to both the context within which they are proclaimed and as an individual amalgamation of multiple identity cultures. Indeed, we can think of the political drive to build a 'brand' of oneself through conspicuous consumption, using that material support (what one owns or what one chooses to do) to consolidate and demonstrate one's identity. That material support furnishes us with continuity in our tastes; encouraging a sense of mastery over them; giving the sense that we appreciate complexity, subtlety and nuance because of increased understanding; and asserting a grip on our tastes from outside because of our continual and routine involvement in and with those materials.

The performance or articulation of taste within culture demonstrates one's belonging to a particular social group or cultural history, and to operate within those culturally sanctioned coordinates is often a key facet of appearing to have expertise. In some ways, it is easier to adopt the tastes associated within a particular culture than to go 'against the grain', especially if the tastes one espouses can garner personal, cultural or material

success. But those rewards continue a ‘tasteful’ conditioning, which maintains divisions between tastes and continues to explicitly acknowledge some tastes as better or more worthwhile than others.

Comfort of familiarity

Our tastes are often grounded in that with which we are familiar and with which we feel comfortable. In this, our tastes are the result of our quotidian experience, forged through repeated exposure to particular experiences to the point where we have a degree of mastery over them; that we feel able to easily identify and understand the objects of our taste. In their writings on the process of tasting food, scientist Tony Blake and chef Heston Blumenthal discuss how connections formed by the simultaneous firing of neurons in the same event ‘develop lasting interconnections’ (2009, 263). Simultaneous experiences, whether or not they are intentionally connected, form lasting bonds. To extrapolate from this, connections between, say, an emotion and a sensory experience become entangled in the brain’s operations, so a feeling of pleasure at one kind of experience becomes associated with that experience. By virtue of previous exposure, our tastes are formed and produce certain expectations in advance of future experiences. To have repeated exposure to a particular kind of artistic or cultural event can produce, via an accumulative process, a solidification of our tastes and determine in advance how we might receive a new work depending on its correspondence with our pre-existing mental schemas.

Our perception of an event is not neutral: it will always be shaped and framed by our tastes, our previous experience and what we *believe* we like. Blake and Blumenthal write that ‘As a rough guide, seven to ten eating experiences can lead from dislike to at least acceptance.’ (2009, 465) It clearly takes a concerted effort to develop one’s tastes, yet how often do we persevere with those cultural or artistic events that do not immediately appeal to our tastes? Diversification requires a sometimes distasteful personal process to widen one’s tastes, to appreciate and support ‘other’ arts practice, in the same way that authoritative education can produce a particular spectrum of taste through enforced repeated exposure. Importantly, this model gives scope for self-consciously developing and diversifying our tastes, as by means of repeated exposure, we can learn to appreciate new flavours, and by extension new experiences of cultural or artistic forms (Blake and Blumenthal 2009, 465). This offers the means of conceptual escape from the potential determinism of Bourdieu’s model, as tastes can and do change, sometimes through a concerted effort. It offers the opportunity to work towards undermining hierarchies of taste and is particularly important for cultural producers in their role as taste-makers.

The process of producing and reproducing taste is cumulative. In Bloom’s *How Pleasure Works*, he proposes that our pleasure in things arises as enjoyment as an extension of what we already like (2010, 7–8). In an economy of experiences seemingly grounded in novelty and encountering the new, Bloom’s analysis seems initially out of joint with the dominant consumerist political system. In Danielle Gallegos and Alec McHoul’s article, ‘It’s not about good taste. It’s about tastes good’, they write of the ‘neophilic consumer [...] who is on an endless quest for novelty. The quest is either, for Bourdieu, to reinforce class divides and find novelty as social distinction or, for [Colin] Campbell, to supply experiences not yet encountered [...]’ (2006, 169) In both cases, the

'quest for novelty' is perhaps a misnomer, as they both have (either social or personal) continuities at their core. Seeking new experience is a search for something 'a little bit different', slightly new, but not radically so. Bloom goes on to discuss this process of acquiring new tastes, that the 'rule of pleasure is an inverted U', where initial encounters with the new are not pleasurable because they are hard to process and prolonged exposure becomes repetitive and boring, with the pinnacle of taste and enjoyment residing between the two, where we are in a position to process and understand the work (2010, 127). This is highly personal and brings together individual and cultural experience in a model of taste that is not stable for the individual. What may seem outdated and dull to one spectator might be radically new and inventive to another. The challenge offered here is to explore and discover new tastes and practices through a concerted effort to move beyond the comforts of the familiar.

Influence of associations

This final arena of taste production begins to take account of the broader horizon of experience within which our tastes operate; that they do not operate as separate, discrete tastes for particular objects or experiences. The performance of our tastes, as a dynamic, continually shifting and intentional practice, is not only about the object or event to which our tastes are apparently directed. Our tastes for things are decentred through the connections and associations we have with the object of our taste. Even small associations or connections can influence whether something appeals to our taste. The journey to an artistic event, whether we are kept at a comfortable temperature, a distraction or an argument just before the event takes place or even the lingering of a smell in a space that we do not like can all produce in us a feeling or mood that can alter our enjoyment or appreciation of the work. We can form lasting connections between close events, which can profoundly influence our tastes, and apparently unconnected, extraneous conditions, by virtue of spatial or temporal proximity, condition our tastes. Taste is complex, always at work and influenced by associations with external or extraneous conditions from the work being considered. And even if we believe we know our own tastes, it is difficult, if not impossible, to state with clarity what they are and what caused them.

Our tastes exist within a broad horizon of experience and an encounter with an artistic event or object can be clouded by those other elements. Indeed, rather than thinking of clouded judgements, we might instead consider that all tastes and judgements are *bound in* the particular circumstances and conditions of their production and enacting. In David Howes and Constance Classen's *Ways of Sensing*, they discuss the irrationality of the 'lower' senses of smell, taste and touch that, because of their irrationality, are the 'most susceptible to persuasion' (2014, 146). These aspects of our embodiment may influence us, even without our realising, in part through the relations between the senses in experience. In other words, we are often not consciously aware of how our experience, and by extension tastes and pleasures, are influenced by these other factors outside of the rationality associated with sight and sound (the privileged, distanced senses in the history of aesthetics). To attempt to locate our tastes in either rational contemplation or intuitive sensory embodiment is a false distinction, because they are intimately intertwined with one another (embodiment influencing thinking, thinking directing, shaping and framing embodied experience). These kinds of connections and associations are always at work

and may be personal (a work reminding one of a feeling of contentment, for example, or a lingering smell in the room associated with a loved one, which then becomes connected with the experience of the artwork) or they might be cultural (for instance, others laughing encouraging one's own laughter as part of a collective experience and somatically encouraging humour and enjoyment). Nevertheless, they not only influence our tastes but have a considerable role in generating them, in ways unconnected with the 'quality' of the work itself.

Conclusion: implications of taste for diversification of the arts ecology

Taste is personalised, individualised and inescapable. It is the result of a complex process of construction, which mixes our class position, background and personal experiences. It includes that with which we are familiar, which of course comes in large part from our material circumstances; our access to (cultural) capital. Taste is internalised as an intimate trait of oneself and it is pervasive: what we like, what we desire, what we want to see, do and encounter. Our tastes are influenced by (sometimes unintentional) associations and connections, which may be personal, cultural, political or, more often, a combination of them all. Aspects of taste can be unconscious and affected by extraneous details and conditions. Importantly, our tastes cannot be put aside, as they are always already at work in any kind of decision or judgement. The importance of this for the cultural arena and arts ecology is that decisions are made, artists chosen for development and resources allocated by those whose tastes are always at work in those decisions and those tastes are hardly ever (if at all) *purely* about the work to which they are directed.

Negus draws attention to the problems of an imaginary divide between 'personal taste and professional judgement (or leisure and work)' (2002, 503). This is particularly problematic in the arts, where the lines between work, leisure and pleasure are especially blurred (if not non-existent). The tastes of those making decisions about the support and programming of arts practice inevitably play a role in those decisions, even when they are taken with the best of intentions. And there is a circularity to the production of taste: the tastes of the decision-maker produce the arts ecology, which in turn plays a role in determining (future) tastes. The political implications of this spread further than the diversity of the arts sector. As Howes and Classen argue,

The social control of perceptibility – who is seen, who is heard, whose pain is recognized – plays an essential role in establishing positions of power within society. Such control is exercised both officially and unofficially, and determines not only *who* is perceived, but also *how* they are perceived. (2014, 65-66)

For this reason, it is important to be aware of the complexity of how tastes are formed in order to begin to mitigate their hold over decisions on arts resourcing.

We cannot put our tastes aside and our tastes inform, indeed are wrapped up with, our decisions and judgements. In seeking to diversify the arts ecology, to make space for and to resource practices that do not operate within the realm of established good taste, it is imperative that cultural intermediaries, arts producers and funders engage in processes of the diversification of taste. There are two clear strategies for this: the diversification of the tastes of 'taste-makers' (funders, programmers, developers, producers) and, through diversification of programming and arts education, widening cultural tastes. As noted

by Gallegos and McHoul, taste can be understood as a ‘practical ethics’, a ‘technique of the self’ (2006, 171). To diversify the arts ecology, as an ethico-political drive towards inclusion and equality, requires substantial work in terms of the individual practical ethics of taste-makers and cultural workers; to pursue the broadening of their own tastes and, by extension, cultures of taste. This ethical work of the diversification of taste would produce a richer arts ecology, destabilise the structures of power that maintain cultural, artistic and, by extension, economic hierarchies and is, at its core, an ethical duty of enfranchisement and empowerment.

Notes

1. This institutional model of taste is exemplified by Paul Bloom when he recounts the story of an experiment by the *Washington Post*: Joshua Bell, a renowned violinist, went to play in a subway in Washington. He played six classical pieces on a \$3.5 million violin, but was not recognised for his mastery. For the *Post*, this was an ‘unblinking assessment of public taste’ (Bloom 2010, 117). Clearly the institutional frame plays a significant role in the cultivation of ‘good taste’.
2. I draw here on the opening of Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, where he argues that categorisation of the world determines how we understand and engage with it (2002, xvii-xxiii).

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