

ART AND GASTRONOMY:

An analysis of the significance of new cultural spaces that blur the boundary between art and the food and wine experience

One of the features of postmodern culture has been the increasing occurrence of art outside of the museum context. Thus, for instance, a growing number of artists have eschewed the creation of self-contained works of art for museum display, seeking instead to work outside of its confines. Their practices have taken many forms such as land art, site-specific installations, multi-media projections, street art, ephemeral works and ‘happenings’ in which no permanent work results. ¹

It is frequently assumed that this has resulted in an undermining of the notion of art-for-art’s sake by its assimilation into everyday life. Thus, Russell Berman, for instance, identifies the ‘desublimation of art’ as a central feature of postmodern culture. As he writes:

While the avant-garde defined itself through the attack on the autonomous work, it still maintained for its own works a claim to objectivity and enclosure, at least as a negative moment.... This receding totality finally disappears in the hegemonic forms of contemporary aesthetic production: the negative space of video art and the ephemerality of performances. Installations similarly radicalize the avant-garde critique of self-enclosed objectivity and tend toward a multidimensional aestheticization of the environment...(1984/5: 42)

Similarly, Scott Lash characterises postmodern culture as marked by an ‘eclipse of the aura’ of art. He writes that:

...if cultural modernity is to be understood in terms of the separation and even the transcendence or ‘aura’ of aesthetic realism, then *post-modernity* would be a matter of transgression of the boundaries that separate the aesthetic from other cultural practices and from the social itself. (1990:157)

While Lash responds much more positively to this process than does Berman, both agree that in postmodern culture, art has lost its aura. ²

As I shall argue in this paper, however, the increasing occurrence of art outside of the museum context, far from resulting in a de-sacralization of art, has in some cases, led to a heightening of the autonomy of the aesthetic, as the auratic power of art has been transferred to non-art activities, elevating them to the realm of art. One of the paradoxes of postmodern culture is that while, on the one hand, artists have sought to strip art of its aura by producing works which transcend the confines of the museum, on the other hand, art is increasingly being displayed in non-museum contexts such as government and corporate buildings, banks, restaurants and hotels as well as in public urban spaces such as plazas, parks and the exterior of buildings as a means of auraticizing the environment within which it occurs. That is, art is increasingly being used as a means of elevating the environment within which it is placed above the ordinary, transforming it into a space which is distinguished from the everyday. Rather than art becoming more prosaic, the everyday is being absorbed into the realm of art. It is precisely because art has not totally lost its aura, but still possesses cultural authority, that it is able to serve this function of elevating the environment within which it occurs, above the mundane.

A case in point is the confluence of wining and dining with the appreciation of art. This is a feature of a growing number of wineries, hotels and restaurants that incorporate art displays and exhibition spaces and/or host art-related events. In this context, where gastronomic and aesthetic experience are closely associated with each other, what results is not an integration of art with everyday life, but rather, the assimilation of a non-art activity—the appreciation of fine wine and food—into the aesthetic realm. The conjunction of these two activities serves to augment the aesthetic features of the gastronomic experience rather than undermining art's autonomy from life. Instead of art being de-auraticized, the close proximity of the display of art with the activities of wining and dining has resulted in a transfer of art's auratic power to these other arenas of social life, reinforcing their elevation above the level of mere satisfaction of appetite to that of aesthetic appreciation for its own sake.

The convergence between gastronomic and aesthetic experience

Since the time of Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, until relatively recently, the realms of art appreciation and the consumption of food and wine have been conceived of by philosophers as two discrete spheres involving the exercise of quite different forms of discernment. As Kant defined it, aesthetic judgement involved the disinterested contemplation of form, unsullied by external desires or imperatives such as those related to sensual pleasure or morality. While judgements of sense evaluated an object from the point of view of its utility and judgments of the good evaluated objects according to the degree to which they corresponded to a moral ideal of perfection, aesthetic judgements appreciated the beauty of an object for its own sake. To quote him: 'Taste is the ability to judge an object, or a way of presenting it, by

means of a liking or disliking *devoid of all interest*. The object of such liking is called *beautiful*' (Kant, 1987[1790]: 53). Consequently, aesthetic judgements were contemplative, not practical, since they were unconcerned with the satisfaction of pragmatic needs. What was of primary interest to the viewer making an aesthetic judgement was the form of the object rather than its sensuous content, since it was this aspect which was most removed from particular desires.

For Kant, this detachment of aesthetic judgment from sensual gratification was crucial since it was only on this basis that such judgements could have a claim to universality (1987: 53-6). While judgements of sense were purely subjective and not amenable to rational deliberation, what distinguished aesthetic judgements was that they were based on a set of criteria which transcended the personal likes and dislikes of individuals. Although judgements of particular works of art may not meet with universal assent, nevertheless there was general agreement about the criteria that governed such judgements, and these formed the basis for reasoned arguments about aesthetic value.

According to Kant, the only senses capable of aesthetic judgement were those of sight and hearing since it was only these senses that could achieve the requisite degree of objectivity insofar as they involved the perception of the qualities of an object from a distance. By contrast, the senses of taste and smell were highly subjective since they operated only through the body being in direct proximity to the perceived object. For example, the sense of taste could only be exercised through the direct ingestion of food or drink. Because of their close connection to the body, the senses of smell and taste could not operate independently of some practical purpose such as the

satisfaction of hunger or thirst and therefore, could not be the object of aesthetic contemplation unlike the senses of sight and hearing, which allowed for the exercise of the more reflective capacities of thought and the imagination. Operating at a further remove from the body than the senses of taste and smell, the senses of sight and hearing enabled the perceiving subject to focus on the external object of perception rather than on the bodily sensations which it provoked. Sight and hearing, as Kant writes: are 'more objective than subjective, that is, ... they rather contribute to our *knowledge* of the external object than arouse our consciousness of the organ affected.' Smell and taste however, 'are more subjective than objective--that is, the idea they give us is more an idea of our *enjoyment* of the object than knowledge of the external object' (Kant, 1974[1797]: 33).

It was on this basis then, that Kant distinguished between the 'fine' arts and the 'agreeable arts', the latter of which encompassed such things as the delights of the dinner table, table music and sociability (Gronow, 1997:147). Whereas judgements concerning the former were governed by a generally agreed set of standards, in the case of the latter, such judgements were not capable of universal communicability since they were related to purely subjective sensory pleasures (Kant, 1987[1790]: 172-3). It is clear from this that not only was the aesthetic realm clearly separated from the realm of everyday pleasures, but also the latter were ranked more lowly since they were more closely associated with 'base' bodily needs and desires and, as such, were not amenable to rational debate or discussion.

However, as a number of theorists, for example, Gronow(1997), Korsmeyer (1999 and 2004), and Brady(2005), have recently argued, the distinction between the realms

of aesthetic and gastronomic experience is not as clear-cut as Kant has suggested. As they point out, Kant's dichotomy reflects the deeply entrenched mind-body dualism in Western culture which seeks to dissociate the so-called higher pleasures connected with the intellect such as the appreciation of art, from the 'lower pleasures' associated with the body such as eating. On closer examination however, it becomes evident that these two realms of experience are not so easily separable and that Kant's assumption that the 'agreeable arts' are outside of the purview of aesthetic judgement is highly problematic. While Kant did not believe the senses of taste and smell were capable of transcending the realm of subjective desire, each of these theorists demonstrate how the activities of wining and dining often involve forms of aesthetic discernment not governed solely by the mere satisfaction of immediate bodily needs or desires.

The most obvious example of this is the activity of wine-tasting where the various qualities of the wine are judged without actually ingesting the wine. Here, the primary concern is not with the enjoyment to be had from its consumption, but rather, with the aesthetic appreciation of its particular characteristics. As Brady writes:

Eating and drinking in obvious ways are connected to consumption, and we often want more of whatever smell and taste we enjoy. But smells and tastes...are not necessarily connected to consumption. The aroma of a very ripe stilton cheese can be appreciated without wishing to consume it.... The same is true in the most sophisticated kinds of olfactory and gustatory appreciation, like wine-tasting, in which only a sip of wine is savored... it is possible to appreciate a smell or taste for its own sake where we value it for its distinctive qualities. (2005:181)

Furthermore, while Kant dismisses the possibility that judgements involving the senses of taste and smell can be aesthetic because the sensations they provoke lack form, this is clearly not the case. One only has to examine the writings of wine connoisseurs to find evidence of the complexity and structure of smells and tastes. Wine tastings proceed through a set of carefully designed stages that have been devised to enable the identification of the various features of the wine in a systematic fashion.

Just as in the case of the judgement of works of art, so the evaluation of wine draws on a generally agreed upon language of description and analysis which goes beyond a purely subjective response to the object being appraised. Food and wine writers use commonly agreed upon criteria by which to judge the aesthetic qualities of that which they are assessing. As Amerine and Roessler comment: 'Our first reaction to an aesthetic object such as wine is apt to be purely subjective: we like it or dislike it. For a more lasting judgement however, we apply certain objective criteria... Our enjoyment of wine is thus essentially a learned response and is a complex mixture of intellectual and sensory pleasures' (quoted in Gronow, 1997: 131-2).

Even the assumption that the appreciation of wine and food lacks the intellectual dimension characteristic of aesthetic judgements can be questioned since food and drink are not just items of consumption but are imbued with complex cultural meanings, which can reveal much about the values and social relations of the people who consume them.³ The activity of wining and dining is not just about the satisfaction of appetite but is an inherently social event governed by a set of 'rituals' or conventions endowed with a range of culturally specific meanings. The type of

food and beverages consumed and the manner of their consumption is as much a culturally symbolic act as it is about the satisfaction of hunger or thirst.

Georg Simmel was one of the first to draw attention to this aspect of the gastronomic experience in his essay 'The Sociology of the Meal' (1997[1911]). He observes here that while eating and drinking may appear to be the most egotistical of activities in the sense that what one individual ingests, another cannot consume, at the same time, it is a pre-eminently social activity whose collective nature arises from the fact that the need to eat and drink is common to all humans. Most commonly, mealtimes are a social event in which one dines in the company of others at certain specified times and places. The shared meal, as he writes, 'elevates an event of physiological primitiveness... into the sphere of social interaction, and hence of supra-personal significance...' (1997[1911]: 131) He continues that:

.... in so far as the meal becomes a sociological matter, it arranges itself in a more aesthetic, stylized and supra-individually regulated form. Now all the regulations concerning eating and drinking emerge, not with regard to the unessential standpoint of food as matter, but specifically with regard to the *form* of its consumption. (1997:131) (my emphasis)

Thus, the immediate satisfaction of appetite is subordinated to norms of behaviour that transcend purely selfish desires. For instance, the rules of etiquette demand that no one starts eating until everyone has been served. These rules can be seen to be essentially aesthetic in nature insofar as they serve no particular pragmatic purpose but are ends in themselves, concerned primarily with the *form* of the activity of dining rather than with its content.

The more detached the activity of dining is from the immediate satisfaction of physiological needs, the more the aesthetic element comes to dominate. This is particularly the case with dining out where the partaking of a meal is more about the social occasion than the mere ingestion of food and drink. As Joanne Finkelstein points out in her book *Dining Out*:

...the restaurant's overwhelming popularity throughout its modern history cannot be adequately explained by recourse to the sensory pleasures of eating... By dining out individuals show a willingness to cultivate and transpose the act of eating into a more complex and meaningful activity... in a restaurant, eating is not a simple matter of survival; dining out transforms the act into a social event rich in the character of its setting. (1989: 2)

This is reinforced by the great amount of attention given to creating the appropriate ambience within a restaurant in order to distinguish it from the mundane and transform it into a realm that transcends the satisfaction of basic bodily needs such as hunger and thirst. Generally speaking, the more exclusive the restaurant, the greater the emphasis placed on the aesthetic elements of the experience of dining out including the interior décor, the table settings, the design of the cutlery and crockery, the table service and the arrangement and presentation of the food.

Typically, one finds, for instance, that the more aestheticized the dining experience, the smaller the sizes of the servings as the emphasis is placed on the appreciation of the artistic presentation of the food and drink rather than on its capacity to satisfy one's appetite. Large platefuls of food, inelegantly presented, are associated with coarseness and vulgarity because they too overtly declare the baser bodily desires

behind our enjoyment of food. Roland Barthes makes a similar observation in his essay on 'Ornamental Cookery' (1983[1957]) where he comments that the glazing of food serves to elevate it to the level of culture by disguising the natural ingredients from which it is derived. In his analysis of the presentation of food in the women's magazine *Elle* he writes that:

...there is an obvious endeavour to glaze surfaces, to round them off, to bury the food under the even sediment of sauces, creams, icing and jellies. This of course comes from the very finality of the coating, which belongs to a visual category, and cooking according to *Elle* is meant for the eye alone, since sight is a genteel sense. For there is, in this persistence of glazing, a need for gentility. *Elle* is a highly valuable journal, from the point of view of legend at least, since its role is to present to its vast public which (market-research tells us) is working-class, the very dream of smartness. Hence a cookery which is based on coatings and alibis, and is forever trying to extenuate and even disguise the primary nature of foodstuffs, the brutality of meat or the abruptness of sea-food...coatings prepare and support one of the major developments of genteel cookery: ornamentation. (1983[1957]: 78) (my emphasis)

The more artistic is the presentation of food, the less inclined we are to want to consume it since this will destroy the visual spectacle. In this way, the association of food with survival needs is subordinated to its appreciation as an object of beauty.

Art as a means of aestheticizing the gastronomic experience

It is in this context that the display of art in close proximity to, or within venues of, fine wining and dining becomes significant. Increasingly, venues such as vineyards, high-class restaurants and exclusive hotels, have incorporated the exhibition of art as an important element of the environment that they construct for their clientele. Such venues lend themselves readily to an association with art since the consumption of gourmet food and wine is already aestheticized to a high degree. Thus, for instance, one is much more likely to find an alliance between wine and art than beer and art given that the consumption of wine has been aestheticized to a much greater extent than occurs with beer which is seen as a much more ‘low brow’ drink not requiring a highly cultivated sense of discernment. While it is not uncommon for wine to be associated with fine art, beer is much more likely to be associated with sport as evidenced by the large numbers of sporting figures used to promote beer in its advertising. The conjunction of the appreciation of art with wine and fine dining then is not fortuitous since in both cases, aesthetic experience is an important element.

The presence of art in venues such as wineries and restaurants enhances the aesthetic aspects of wining and dining by creating an ambience where aesthetic appreciation is uppermost. Through its close proximity to the activities of wining and dining, art heightens and reinforces the aesthetic aspects of the former. Thus, the association of art with *haute cuisine*, rather than serving to make art less esoteric by its conjunction with activities outside of its realm, on the contrary, serves to make the dining experience more exclusive by elevating it to the status of art.

Some local examples in Tasmania where this close association of art with wining and dining has been fostered include Moorilla vineyard, which is currently constructing a major museum to be known as the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) to house its collection of art in close proximity to its restaurant and wine tasting area. In the wine tasting area itself, there is a large ceiling mural titled *The Source*, by prominent Australian artist John Olsen (creator of the famous mural in the Sydney Opera House). Moorilla's association of its wine with its art collection is also encouraged by its adoption of a new logo that references elements from art themes and art within the MONA collection. According to the designer Leigh Carmichael, the new logo, which will appear on their wine labels, connotes roman mosaics with subtle links to Greek mythology--in particular, the myths and cult of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine. He writes that:

The Moorilla wine labels are concerned with the history of ritualistic wine consumption and how this relates to our current experience. They look beyond the traditional trends in wine labelling, which tend to focus heavily on the region and variety of a product. The labels deal with universal themes and represent not only the intoxicating power of wine, but also its social and beneficial influences. (<http://www.moorilla.com.au>)

Elsewhere on its website, Moorilla states that its 'philosophy' is that 'wine is not just for drinking. The experience of wine is an experience of controlled licentiousness. Every bottle of Moorilla recapitulates the history of ritualistic indulgence.' (my emphasis).

These statements clearly indicate their desire to distinguish the appreciation of wine from that of the mere satisfaction of thirst, elevating it to a higher plane of experience.

By associating the experience of art with that of wine, the suggestion is that the latter, like the former, has the capacity to transport the individual into a world beyond that of ordinary, mundane existence.

Similarly, with the Henry Jones Art Hotel in Hobart, the exhibition of artworks is not just incidental but integral to the identity that the hotel seeks to construct for itself, as clearly indicated by its designation as an ‘art hotel’. Art is employed in this hotel not simply as décor, but as part of a deliberate strategy to promote itself as offering ‘a cultural experience’ which goes beyond the satisfaction of the basic needs of sustenance and shelter. To this end, the hotel owners invited local artists to make works reflecting on the nature of the site itself, including its present functions, its locale and its historical origins as a former jam factory. The central role accorded to art within this hotel is manifested in the fact that over three hundred original artworks by contemporary Tasmanian artists are located throughout the hotel including the Art Installation Room, guest suites, foyer, IXL Long Bar, Henry’s Harbourside Restaurant and Function area and these are documented in an art catalogue which is available to the public. In addition, the Hotel also hosts special exhibitions in its Art Installation room and Atrium.⁴

As with the Moorilla vineyard, there is also a conscious effort to associate wining and dining with the appreciation of art. As a recent advertisement for the Harbourside restaurant at the Henry Jones Hotel declares: ‘With an innovative menu featuring European and contemporary Australian cuisine, the meals at Henry’s are true works of art. Chef Andre Kropp and our talented team of artists invite you to enjoy sensational food and wine in a magnificent setting’ (my emphasis) (*The Mercury*,

June, 2009). A photograph of a dish of Pan Roasted Magret Duck Breast is included, together with an accompanying label which names and describes it, mimicking the titles that typically accompany works of art in a gallery. There is also a red spot attached to the accompanying label, reminiscent of those that occur in galleries to indicate that a work of art has been sold. This comparison of the gourmet dish with a work of art suggests that the appreciation of the cuisine at the Art Hotel is similar in nature to the appreciation of art in a gallery. Both are highly desired items but at the same time, require a carefully cultivated sense of discernment to fully apprehend their value.

Other local examples of venues which seek to make a close association between wining and dining and the appreciation of art include the Meadowbank vineyard in Cambridge, Tasmania which has a specially dedicated exhibition space featuring regular exhibitions of contemporary Tasmanian artists. There is also a room that features a specially commissioned wood panel by local artist Tom Samek on the theme of the history of wine making in Tasmania as well as a regular chamber music programme.⁵

McLaren Vale vineyard in South Australia is another venue that fosters close links between the fine arts and the appreciation of wine through its sponsorship of a number of art competitions including the major landscape prize--the Fleurieu Biennale-- for contemporary Australian artists, exhibiting the works within their premises. In its promotional advertising, it describes the process of wine-making as an 'art-form' which implies it requires the same type of skill and discernment as that exercised in the creation of works of art.⁶

Peter Lehmann's wines in the Barossa valley of South Australia also sponsor art and music festivals and exhibit the work of contemporary South Australian artists. They have a significant private art collection. In 1995 they commissioned young Australian artists to do a series of paintings re-interpreting the Queen of Clubs, which is the firm's logo, 'in the context of the variety of tastes, flavours, bouquets and defining characters of each of Peter Lehmann's wines', describing this as a 'wonderfully innovative concept, bridging the art of winemaking and the art of painting' (<http://www.peterlehmannwines.com>). The original works are on display at the vineyard and have been used on the wine labels which adorn their Art Series wines. The aim of this series is to promote each of the Peter Lehmann wines as having its own unique characteristics, being as singular as a work of fine art. In one of the advertisements for this series, three bottles of Peter Lehmann's wine are displayed with the focus on these wine labels, in a set up reminiscent of works in an art gallery. Placed against a white wall in a space that has been cordoned off from the spectator who gazes intently at them, they appear as venerated masterpieces. The copy for this ad furthers the association between art and wine. It reads: Discover the art of Barossa winemaking... The Queen [of Clubs] now has many faces; each one uniquely modelled to represent the individual style of the wine within. Once you discover the consistent quality and flavours of our Art Series wines, you will see that we have Barossa winemaking down to a fine art' (my emphasis) (*Selector*, Winter, 2009, 15). Once again, wine has been elevated above the ordinary into the rarefied atmosphere of the revered work of art.⁷

It is clear from these examples then, that art is playing an increasingly important role in ‘auraticizing’ the environments within which it is placed. Because of the cultural authority that art is still seen to possess, it serves the purpose of elevating that with which it is associated out of the realm of the mundane to a ‘higher’ plane of existence.

The contradictory function of art in venues of wining and dining

In its aestheticization of the activities of wining and dining, art confers on these practices a cultural authority that they would otherwise not possess. John Berger makes a similar point in relation to the use of artworks in publicity images to lend allure or authority to their own message. As he writes:

Any work of art ‘quoted’ by publicity serves two purposes. Art is a sign of affluence; it belongs to the good life; it is part of the furnishing which the world gives to the rich and the beautiful. But a work of art also suggests a cultural authority, a form of dignity, even of wisdom, which is superior to any vulgar material interest; an oil painting belongs to the cultural heritage; it is a reminder of what it means to be a cultivated European. And so the quoted work of art (and this is why it is so useful to publicity) says almost two contradictory things at the same time: it denotes wealth and spirituality: it implies that the purchase being proposed is both a luxury and a cultural value.
(1984: 135) (my emphasis)

As the above quote makes clear, it is because art is not just a luxury item, which symbolizes an affluent lifestyle, but because of the respect it commands as an embodiment of aesthetic and spiritual value, that makes it an especially appropriate vehicle for lending prestige to that with which it is associated. Unlike other luxury

items such as cars, yachts or *haute couture*, the status accorded to art rests not just in its monetary value but in its worth as a source of cultural value.

Thus, when vineyards, restaurants and hotels associate themselves with art, they are not just seeking to promote an image of themselves as representing the ‘good life’ based on the consumption of luxury items, but are appealing to those with a sense of cultural sophistication. In contrast with the extravagant gaudiness typical of casino décor in places such as Las Vegas for instance, which are unashamedly symbols of wealth and prosperity, these new culturally hybrid venues are designed to appeal to those who are capable of appreciating the ‘higher’ things of life which transcend pecuniary interests.

In this respect, it is significant to note that the type of art favoured by these new culturally hybrid spaces is becoming more ‘cutting edge’ and less associated with that which is ‘safe’ and ‘conservative’. This is particularly clear in the case of the art collection being amassed by Moorilla vineyard for its new museum which is designed to be controversial and provocative, being based around the themes of sex and death. The owner of the collection--David Walsh--has openly indicated his desire for people to be challenged by the art they encounter in the collection and, far from shying away from controversy, actively seeks to encourage it.⁸ His collection includes some of the most provocative contemporary art of recent years including pieces by Young British Artists such as Damien Hirst, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Jenny Saville and Chris Ofili.

Likewise, in its invitation to artists, the Henry Jones Art Hotel solicited works which reflected critically on the nature of tourism and hospitality and on the history of the

site. The Fleurieu landscape prize sponsored by the McLaren Vale vineyard has also become increasingly adventurous in its selection of works, moving away from traditional representations of the landscape to embrace works which adopt a more unconventional approach. As the chair of the last Fleurieu Biennale in 2008 Nicola Downer commented: 'This year's exhibition really highlights the diversity of landscape painting and how it can go beyond the traditional forms'

(<http://www.news.com.au/adelaidenow/story>, Nov 8th, 2008).

These venues then, are appealing to a clientele that has a high degree of cultural sophistication rather than those who have little or no knowledge of the visual arts and have a naïve respect for the authority of tradition. While this clientele is most likely to be economically well off, more importantly, they also possess taste and refinement. Their pre-eminent social position rests just as much, if not more, on their possession of 'cultural capital' (to use Pierre Bourdieu's term) than it does on their possession of 'economic capital' (1986: 53).

Because of their high level of cultural knowledge and their relative freedom from material concerns, it is this group which is most likely to adopt an 'aesthetic' approach to life. As Bourdieu writes:

The aesthetic disposition, a generalized capacity to neutralize ordinary urgencies and to bracket off practical ends, a durable inclination and aptitude for practice without a practical function, can only be constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency and through the practice of activities which are an end in themselves...In other words, it presupposes the

distance from the world... which is the basis of the bourgeois experience of the world. (1986: 54)

This 'aesthetic disposition' is not just confined to the appreciation of works of art, but is also applied to many other areas of life including the food that one eats, the clothes that one wears and one's leisure activities. To quote him once more:

Although art obviously offers the greatest scope to the aesthetic disposition, there is no area of practice in which the aim of purifying, refining and sublimating primary needs and impulses cannot assert itself, no area in which the stylization of life, that is, the primacy of forms over function, of manner over matter, does not produce the same effects. And nothing is more distinctive, more distinguished, than the capacity to confer aesthetic status on objects that are banal or even 'common' ... or the ability to apply the principles of a 'pure' aesthetic to the most everyday choices of everyday life, e.g., in cooking, clothing or decoration... (1986: 5)

As this quote indicates, the capacity to adopt an aesthetic attitude not just in the realm of art appreciation but also in relation to everyday activities such as eating and cooking serves as mark of distinction, signalling the supposed 'superiority' of those who are in a position to do so. The person with the capacity for aesthetic appreciation of even the seemingly most mundane things of life, is admired for his/her possession of refinement and taste while, at the same time, the fact that such a capacity depends on certain material preconditions (namely freedom from concern about the basic necessities for life) is not recognized. The capacity to transcend the world of base bodily needs and desires to engage in the disinterested contemplation of higher values, serves to distinguish one from the vulgar and the coarse.

Bourdieu demonstrates in his study on taste that the aesthetic attitude to the preparation and consumption of food is most clearly evident amongst the bourgeoisie while the working classes are much more likely to have a utilitarian attitude towards the activities of cooking and eating. The bourgeois attitude to dining, as characterized by Bourdieu, is based on a denial of the primary function of consumption--namely the satisfaction of basic animal needs. As he writes:

The manner of presenting and consuming the food, the organization of the meal and setting of the places, strictly differentiated according to the sequence of dishes and arranged to please the eye, the presentation of the dishes, considered as much in terms of shape and colour (like works of art) as of their consumable substance, the etiquette governing posture and gesture, ways of serving oneself and others, of using the different utensils, the seating plan, strictly but discreetly hierarchical, the censorship of all bodily manifestations of the act or pleasure of eating (such as noise or haste), the very refinement of the things consumed, with quality more important than quantity—this whole commitment to stylization tends to shift the emphasis from substance and function to form and manner, and so to deny the crudely material reality of the act of eating and of the things consumed, or, which amounts to the same thing, the basely material vulgarity of those who indulge in the immediate satisfactions of food and drink. (1986:196)

In this context, the highly aestheticized environments of the winery or exclusive restaurant or hotel can be seen as reinforcing class hierarchies by emphasizing those features which serve to distinguish the bourgeois mode of wining and dining from that

typical of the lower classes. Finkelstein draws attention to this in her analysis of the practice of dining out. As she argues (1989: 13-14), while the growth in the popularity of restaurants since the time of the French Revolution has been associated with the emancipation of the masses and the democratization of luxury, at the same time, it has led to a new series of hierarchies as the old class distinctions between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie have been replaced by new ones between the middle and working classes.

With the increasing popularity in the practice of dining out, restaurants have paid more and more attention to developing those features not connected with the consumption of food and drink as a way of differentiating themselves from their competitors. The construction of a special ambience has become crucial in this regard. During the nineteenth century this reached a pinnacle with *grand cuisine* in which the theatricality of gastronomy was fostered through the creation of elaborately designed dishes, which looked more like sculptures to be gazed at rather than consumed (Finkelstein, 1989: 37-8). The incorporation of art as an integral feature in vineyards, restaurants and hotels is another manifestation of this in contemporary culture. Thus, 'in the modern era, the restaurant has become a venue for the vivid display of shifting social arrangements and class boundaries', as Finkelstein writes (1989: 43).

At the same time as the use of art to auraticize the activity of wining and dining reinforces class distinctions, does this exhaust the functions it performs in these new culturally hybrid venues? Should the occurrence of art in such contexts be dismissed simply as 'visual muzak' in the service of class interests?

Wolfgang Welsch, in his article 'Contemporary Art in Public Space: A Feast for the Eyes or an Annoyance?' is quite scathing of the ways in which art functions in public spaces outside of the museum in contemporary culture. He argues that in an environment that is already over-saturated with visual stimuli designed primarily to incite consumer desire that the inclusion of art in such spaces, as a means of beautification, only exacerbates the experience of visual over-load. As he writes: 'Public space today...is...already hyperaesthetic, even before art comes into it. Think, for example, of the aesthetic staging of our inner cities. For years they have been subjected to a pseudo-postmodern face-lift. Shopping areas are being fashioned to be elegant, chic and animating. The urban environment on the whole is being highly polished, embellished and beautified' (1997: 118). He concludes that 'If art in public spaces is still to have any sense, then it cannot be that of a continual aesthetic beautification. It will have to lie elsewhere' (1997: 121).

According to him, the only worthwhile role left for art in public spaces is that of disrupting the processes of aestheticization by adopting a deliberately anti-aesthetic stance. That is, art should aim to challenge and disturb the viewer rather than seeking to enhance the appearance of the environment within which it is placed. To quote him once more:

...art should offer no feast for the eyes, as everyday aestheticization already does do successfully; rather it must be prepared to be an annoyance and to cause offence. If works today cause no stir, then this is mostly an indication that they are superfluous. Even when works behave unspectacularly, the element of the unusual and of resistiveness must be strong. Only in this way

can they set themselves against the danger of being requisitioned by everyday aestheticization' (1997: 121-2).

This has been the motivation behind many artists who have sought to make works outside of the museum context in the last few decades. In some cases, they have created works that minimize the aesthetic content to such an extent that they are almost unrecognizable as art. Their 'artness' has been so reduced that it is almost impossible to tell them apart from ordinary, everyday objects, particularly when they are placed outside of the museum context. Take, for instance, Michael Asher's installation of a caravan in Münster in 1997 that was moved to fourteen different locations in and around the city, and was identifiable as art only on the basis of leaflets available at the museum's front desk or Joseph Beuys' *7,000 Oaks* project, 1982-7 in which 7,000 trees were planted at various locations in Kassel.⁹ These practices are seen to have provoked a 'de-definition' of art, to use American art critic Harold Rosenberg's term, where art becomes almost indistinguishable from the environment within which it occurs. The 'post art' artist produces a de-aestheticized art that becomes 'a fragment of the real within the real' (1983: 29).

However, is it the case that aestheticized art outside of the museum is irredeemably conservative? I suggest that to simply dismiss the display of art in the new culturally hybrid spaces discussed in this paper as commodified spectacle misses an important dimension. While it is undeniable that art in these contexts does reinforce class inequalities, at the same time it also offers an experience that goes beyond that of status seeking.

More specifically, art in these contexts serves as a way of humanizing the environment within which it occurs, reminding us of the value of those realms of experience not driven solely by practical necessities. By lending its auratic power to the activities of wining and dining, art testifies to the potency of the aesthetic by demonstrating that even with an activity so fundamental to our survival such as eating, we are capable of sublimating these pragmatic needs in the pursuit of a realm of experience that transcends that of mere necessity. As Friedrich Schiller pointed out in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1982[1795]), it is this very capacity which defines us as human. The ‘play’ element, as he terms it, which involves the free exercise of the imagination, is what distinguishes us from other animals. As he writes: ‘...man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays’ (1982[1795]: 107). Though we can never totally escape the realm of necessity, at the same time, we do not need to remain totally bound by it and it is our striving to go beyond it that confers on us our humanity.¹⁰

In this respect, art enables us to experience this world of free play much more effectively than advertising images. This is due to the fact that while the design of advertisements is determined primarily by the commercial purposes that they serve, in most cases, this is not true of art in the new culturally hybrid spaces such as vineyards and restaurants. Although art in these venues is used to promote commercial interests, at the same time, its creation is not determined primarily by this purpose. Consequently, its function generally exceeds the commercial uses to which it may be put. Thus, it is not simply affirmative of the status quo but is also a testament to our capacity to imagine possible worlds not constrained by material interests.

The role of art in venues where the appreciation of art is associated with the activities of wining and dining is thus a contradictory one. On the one hand, by elevating the consumption of food and drink to the realm of 'art', such venues draw attention to the aesthetic as a realm distinct from that of ordinary, mundane existence. But at the same time as they promote the belief in the power of the aesthetic, they remain bound to the realm of purposive desires, insofar as their use of the aesthetic reinforces class distinctions and furthers commercial interests. These culturally hybrid spaces thus simultaneously preserve the belief in the value of the aesthetic while at the same time perpetuating the myth that the aesthetic can totally divorce itself from more prosaic interests.

The realization of the contradictory role that art plays in this context problematizes the stark alternatives presented by theorists such as Welsch between a de-aestheticized art that challenges the status quo and an aestheticized art that is affirmative of it. Just as it is too simplistic to dismiss aestheticized art as irredeemably conservative, so one can question whether an anti-aesthetic art is necessarily radical. Indeed, it could be argued that despite its attempt to de-auraticize itself in order to avoid becoming an item of consumption, 'anti-art' art has not totally escaped the process of commodification. As Rosenberg points out, 'for all its nostalgia for reality, de-aestheticized art has never been anything but an art movement. The uncollectible art object serves as an advertisement for the showman-artist, whose processes are indeed more interesting than his product and who markets his signature appended to commonplace relics' (1983: 38). Conversely, despite its association with commercial

interests, auratic art serves other non-utilitarian purposes, which exceed these economic functions.

Conclusion

In conclusion then, the association of art with dining, rather than serving to make art less esoteric by its close proximity to activities outside of its realm, on the contrary serves to reinforce the notion of art for art's sake by assimilating more and more of the non-aesthetic into its realm. The more aspects of the everyday are incorporated into the realm of art, the greater the power of the aesthetic is seen to be. Far from being undermined, the importance of the aesthetic as an independent realm of experience has become heightened. This has had both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, it expresses the desire to transcend material interests, giving recognition to the fact that what defines us as human is that which takes us beyond the realm of necessity. On the other hand, however, it occludes the role that aesthetics plays in reinforcing class hierarchies, perpetuating the illusion that such inequalities can be left behind once one enters the 'disinterested' realm of aesthetic contemplation.

¹ See Rosenberg (1983: 28-38) for a further discussion of 'de-aestheticized' art outside of the museum.

² Berman's view is that the de-auraticization of art has resulted in a dissipation of its critical energies. With the demise of autonomous art as a credible source of values, the culture industry steps into the breach, manufacturing visual spectacle for the purposes of ideological manipulation. As he writes: 'The end of autonomous art as a vehicle of truth, which is the substance of postmodernism, engenders the violence of the desublimated collective held together only by myth' (1984/5: 50). By contrast, Lash, drawing on Benjamin (1979[1936]), appraises this de-auraticized art in a largely positive light, seeing it as an antidote to the 'shrinkage of experience', which occurred with art's sequestration from life during the period of modernism. For him, it represents a democratization of art.

³ See Korsmeyer (1999) for a further discussion of the cognitive aspects of taste, especially chapter 4.

⁴ See <http://www.thehenryjones.com> for more detail.

⁵ See <http://www.meadowbankwines.com.au> for more detail.

⁶ See <http://www.mclarenvale.info> for more detail.

⁷ Other examples of vineyards incorporating significant displays of art include the TarraWarra Estate in Victoria's Yarra Valley which established the TarraWarra Museum of Art on its premises in 2003. Another manifestation of the close association between the appreciation of art and wining and dining in Australia are the increasing number of high-class restaurants which host special dinners at which

contemporary artists are invited to speak about their work. In a recent issue of *Vogue Living Australia*, June/July, 2009 for instance, two such events are advertised—one at Perth’s 1907 Restaurant and another at Melbourne’s *Verge* restaurant. Furthermore, in lifestyle magazines such as this, one frequently finds the inclusion of articles about dining out and *haute cuisine* in close conjunction with articles about current exhibitions of contemporary art.

⁸ See the three articles in *The Mercury* published on September 6th, 7th and 8th, 2008 where David Walsh outlines his views about the Museum of Old and New Art.

⁹ See Buskirk (2005: 203-8) for a further discussion of Asher’s work and <http://www.walker.org/archive/> for more about Beuys’ 7,000 Oaks project.

¹⁰ As Schiller argues (1982 [1795]: 215-17), the aesthetic or ‘play’ drive performs an important socializing function insofar as it orders or imposes form on the chaotic world of biological drives. As an intermediary stage between the stage of nature and that of culture, the aesthetic sphere has the important task of moderating our instincts.

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