

Sensus communis
**Clarifications of a Kantian Concept on the Way to an Intercultural Dialogue
Between Western and Indian Thought**

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When a group of persons listens to a piece of reggae music, sees a painting by Cézanne or enters a Japanese garden they sometimes share the same feeling. How is such an agreement possible, even if it is awakened by artefacts stemming from another culture? How is such an agreement possible, even among members belonging to different cultures? Such a possible agreement is all the more spectacular, because our aesthetic experiences are supposed to be subjective. At least, we know that they have no objective validity whatsoever; we cannot prove them empirically nor demonstrate them logically.

1. Kant on *sensus communis*

Nevertheless, so Kant argues, human beings are inclined to make statements like: 'This is beautiful'. We (in the most general sense of human beings) talk about the beautiful as if it is a property of the object or something which is logically necessary. In our judgment of taste, so goes the argument, we do not take for granted that the agreement will actually take place. We only expect others to have a similar experience, a similar feeling, a similar judgement. Because our judgement is without interest or not dependent on private conditions we feel justified in requiring a similar liking from everyone. We believe that others ought to have the same judgement.

So, according to Kant, our judgment of taste is subjective and nevertheless involves at the same time a claim to being valid for everyone. Our judgment of taste is subjective and at the same time universal. This subjective universality, as it cannot be based on an objective principle, is rooted in 'a subjective principle, which determines only by feeling rather than concepts, though nonetheless with universal validity, what is liked or disliked'¹. And this principle is called by Kant *sensus communis*.

This argument of Kant is the locus classicus of the idea of *sensus communis*. For Kant it is an a priori principle of every judgment of taste; it explains why we assume that our aesthetic judgments will be shared by others, why they are transcendently necessary.

In order to avoid misunderstandings a number of things must be emphasized right from the start. First of all, the original Latin expression being ambiguous, it must be clear that *sensus communis* does not mean 'community spirit' or 'communal spirit'. This is indeed a possible translation of the Latin expression and even of the German word Kant sometimes uses himself, namely 'Gemeinsinn'. It is thus not a feeling of solidarity with the community, not even in the universal sense. It is not a 'general will' in the sense of Rousseau. As such *sensus communis* has nothing to do with such a metaphysics, such an inherent telos, which subordinates subjective judgements to the universal logic of community. It is rather the other way round. Moreover, it has nothing to do with social consensus, not even with the consensus of taste, exemplified by empirical

individuals partaking in a specific art world at a certain moment. It is much more universal and at the same time less determinate, because it is neither empirical nor objective, neither anthropological nor historical. It is just a transcendental a priori principle, something which we have to presuppose, if we are to make sense of our judgments of taste.

Secondly, *sensus communis* is not what is commonly called 'common sense'. *Sensus communis* is neither *intellectio communis* nor *communis opinio*, it is neither 'ordinary good sense' nor 'common belief', it is no '*gemeine Menschenverstand*', no 'common human understanding'. Common belief is despised by Kant because it is guided by obscure principles. Here Kant clearly identifies common sense with mere opinion, uncultivated and vulgar, a kind of Platonic *doxa*, which is badly in need of clarification and a kind of *maieutics*, which liberates it from prejudices.

Thirdly, *sensus communis* can likewise not be identified with *sensus communis logicus*. Indeed, in a long digression Kant tries to construct *sensus communis* as an operation of reflection which enables us to free ourselves from our own prejudices by comparing 'our own judgment with human reason in general (...)'² Here Kant, clearly, is making a stance for a kind of *maieutics*, a sort of thought experiment, in which we compare our judgments not with the actual but rather with the merely possible ones of others in order to put ourselves in the position of everyone else. This really looks like a Kantian device *avant la lettre* for a successful intercultural dialogue.

Kant emphatically suggests that we must arrive at a broadened way of thinking, to reflect on our own judgment from a universal standpoint. According to Kant this is what enlightenment is all about: to liberate ourselves from prejudice and even superstition. In a way we cannot avoid this problem in intercultural philosophy, because the latter always involves the use of concepts or reasoning and the challenge to meet the Other, how questionable any universal standpoint may sound in terms of the postmodern critique of universalism and rational consensus. Indeed, *sensus communis logicus* is still a way of thinking and understanding, however sound it may be. It is a conceptual and logical way of proceeding. It demands not only that we transfer ourselves to the standpoint of the Other, but also, and this is very telling, that we make abstraction as much as possible from charm, emotion and sensation and concentrate ourselves solely on the formal features of our presentation. The universality aimed at is thus a logical one. As such it is thus far removed from the 'subjective universality' Kant referred to, when he introduced, as we have seen, *sensus communis* as an idea, which is presupposed by our judgment of taste. So fourthly, *sensus communis*, being neither community spirit nor social consensus, neither common human understanding nor sound understanding, has to be identified with *sensus communis aestheticus*. Kant maintains that it is taste or the aesthetic power of judgement which deserves to be called a shared sense more than the intellectual one, because *sensus* means above all that what is sensed or felt, i.e. the feeling of pleasure.

In linking it with the feeling of pleasure, we are confronted with a host of presuppositions of Kant's own analysis, which goes along with the idea of *sensus communis*. It drags along what is at stake in the whole *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*. So, to fill in these presuppositions gives us a pretty good idea of what *sensus communis* is all about. Before engaging in an intercultural dialogue, it may be wise to highlight some of these presuppositions, so that we dispose at least of some units of comparison, which are relatively stable and which render such a dialogue possible and meaningful. So *sensus communis* presupposes:

(1) the centrality of aesthetic experience and judgments of taste as a legitimate object of transcendental analysis or philosophical speculation; that is the reason why the *sensus* has to do with the feeling of pleasure, that is to say with the way we react to aesthetic objects;

(2) the disinterestedness of aesthetic experience, because it is, as we have seen, thanks to our judgment being without interest or not dependent on private conditions that we feel justified in requiring that others should have a similar feeling; this explains why the *sensus* is presupposed to be *communis*, a sense common to all;

(3) the subjective universality of aesthetic experience, our judgments of taste being at the same time singular and universal. This implies, as we have seen, that they belong to the sphere of the ought: as a consequence of this, *sensus communis* cannot be empirically demonstrated; it cannot be based on objective principles;

(4) the subjective purposiveness of the aesthetic object. What is presupposed is only this: that I am affected, as a subject, by the pure form of the aesthetic object, not by its function, its content, not even by its sense or meaning. The *sensus* has neither to do with the sense or meaning of the object, nor with its objective purposiveness, but only with pure pleasure, with our senses in the plural, with pure sensibility, pure feeling, which only involves the pure form of an aesthetic object, as I am subjectively affected by it. That is the reason why Kant speaks about 'purposiveness without purpose';

(5) the impossibility to grasp *sensus communis* intellectually. *Sensus communis* is understood by Kant as the mere effect arising from the free play of our cognitive powers, i.e. imagination and understanding. This explains why Kant speaks of *sensus communis* as an 'indeterminate standard' (*unbestimmte Norm*)³. It conveys us towards the unsayable, the unnamable, a kind of negative theology without theology, a kind of teleology without teleology, a kind of negative analytics, It can thus not be determined conceptually. It is, as Lyotard says, 'The concept's other'. It transcends rational thinking in terms of clear concepts. Or as Lyotard testifies: 'Let's make no mistake about it; if thought, in so far as it is philosophical, consists in thinking by concepts, then with the *sensus communis*, philosophy touches on that thought which is not philosophical'⁴;

(6) the universal communicability of the feeling of pleasure. Though the feeling of pleasure is strictly subjective and concerns the feeling of pleasure as such, before any desire, before any mediation by concepts, though it is the effect of mere reflection upon the mind, it is nevertheless universally communicable. The argument of Kant, which is pretty circular, goes as follows: If the attuning of the cognitive powers is required for cognition in general, and assuming that cognitions can be communicated, then, the free play of imagination and understanding, which makes any presentation possible and turns it into a judgment, must be likewise universally communicable. This universal communicability of the feeling of pleasure presupposes a common sense⁵. So *communis* has more to do with communicability of the *sensus* than with the sense of community. It has to do with the communicability of the *sensatio* which accompanies every act of knowledge; it concerns as such the mood, the state of mind (the *Stimmung*), the inner voice (*innere Stimme*), the interior music within the subject, which precedes any act of cognition (and even of volition) and makes it possible;

(7) that the *sensus communis* is only an idea and henceforth nothing more than a regulative principle of reason. Though we actually presuppose in our judgements of taste a *sensus communis*, we do not

know, so Kant argues, if there really exists such common sense as a constitutive principle of the possibility of experience. It is likely that there is '(...) still a higher principle of reason that makes it only a regulative principle for us, [in order] to bring forth in us, for higher purposes, a common sense in the first place'⁶. This would explain why a judgment of taste is conditional, why it is a demand of reason which only presupposes the possibility of reaching such an agreement in the way we sense. Kant does not, so he says, want to investigate that problem and only maintains that we apparently presuppose the idea of a common sense.

2. Indian rasa-theory and sensus communis

Towards a comparison with Kant

To compare Kant's aesthetics and his notion of sensus communis with Indian aesthetics is not an easy task. Indeed, Indian aesthetics, of which Abhinavagupta (11th century) is the most important spokesman, is embedded in a kind of philosophical idealism, which is more akin to Hegel than to Kant. So we may expect important and fundamental differences, when we compare both aesthetic theories. Nevertheless we find Indian reflections on aesthetic experience, which are similar though not identical to those put forward by Kant. In spite of the differences in background and approach, we can trace back a number of presuppositions about aesthetic experience, which can be put into a comparative perspective, sometimes even with regard to transcendental validity. As we go along we will gradually emphasize the crucial differences. Finally, in our Post-scriptum, we will rethink both, the similarities and the differences in terms of an intercultural dialogue about sensus communis.

The central doctrine in Indian aesthetics is undoubtedly rasa-theory. This theory underwent a rich internal development. It originated in the work of Bharata (4th century) and was subsequently refined by Bhatta Lollata and Sri Sankuka (8th century), and by Bhatta Nayaka (10th century) to reach its classical and outstanding climax in the work of Abhinavagupta (11th century) (Pandey, 1959). Though this theory is much older than Kant's aesthetics, it anticipates many problems treated by Kant: it even offers us an Indian version of the notion of sensus communis.

a. Similarities with Kant's aesthetics

(1) This theory is, similar to Kant's aesthetics, mainly about aesthetic experience. The original meaning of 'rasa' is 'juice', but it has acquired in Indian aesthetics the connotation of 'flavour', 'desire', 'relish', 'beauty' or that which is 'tasted' in art.⁷ So it is in its main points a theory about aesthetic experience and judgments of taste. That means, that the spectator's point of view is decisive.⁸ Moreover, the spectator's experience is likewise identified with a feeling of pleasure or an experience of aesthetic delight.⁹ So it concerns also the sensus.

(2) Indian rasa-theory likewise presupposes that aesthetic experience is disinterested. It is presupposed that aesthetic experience is free from external perceptions and involves a 'distance' or

'detachment' from our immediate egoistic interests. Aesthetic experience does not depend on private conditions: the work of art is held to have a unique ontological status, which has as a consequence that our perception of it is sui generis. Or as Moham Thampi writes: 'The poem exists only for our perception; hence our response to it is called *alaulika*, non-ordinary'¹⁰. When experiencing a work of art our attitudes of attraction, repulsion etc. are put aside or transcended. This transcendent or extraordinary (*alaulika*) dimension of *rasa* is almost ubiquitous in Indian aesthetics.

(3) So instances of an 'objective or functional purposiveness' in the Kantian sense are seen as imperfect intelligibility and obscuring the purity of aesthetic experience! This is very close to Kant's 'purposiveness without purpose', especially when the experience of *rasa* is held to consist of 'joy and thought, of thought because the objects of poetic experience are apprehended intuitively as intelligible objects rather than felt emotions or perceived particulars, of joy because such intelligible experiences are intrinsically harmonious with the human mind which naturally experiences joy in a world of natural intelligibility'¹¹.

(4) As a result of their idealized character, 'art objects lose their appeal to egoistic or practical self and appear the same to all... They become impersonal in their appeal, and therefore enjoyable in and for themselves'¹². This reminds us of Kant's presupposition of 'subjective universality'. And it directly anticipates and refers to *sensus communis*, just as Kant's notion of 'subjective universality' does. This idea of the impersonality or trans-personality (*sadharanikarana*) presupposed in aesthetic experience is a real leitmotiv in Indian theory of *rasa*. It is this impersonal nature of aesthetic experience which explains 'the sense in which the same poem is common to many readers. Viewed in its intelligibility and in abstraction from the different personal situations of different readers, the poetic world is common to all'¹³. It is this transpersonality which explains why aesthetic experience presupposes a shared experience. And, so Eliot Deutsch affirms, 'this sharing is achieved in art only when there is an intense impersonality which, paradoxically because of its intensity, is at the same time highly individual. This is the case for aesthetic experience because aesthetic interest, in contrast to mere practical interest, is not given to the individual qua individual, but to the individual as it embodies, becomes, represents, expresses - whatever you will - a universal, inter-personal - and thereby - transcendent quality'¹⁴.

(5) This kind of 'subjective universality' implies, much in the sense of the Kantian analysis, the impossibility to grasp *rasa* intellectually. Our judgments of taste can be based neither on objective principles nor on concepts. So Abhinavagupta clearly states that *rasa* consists solely of the state of gustation and is therefore not an objective thing.¹⁵ But still more emphatically *rasa* theory emphasizes the inaptitude of the intellect and any other ordinary categories to grasp aesthetic experience. Indeed, *rasa* theory mainly looks upon art as the embodiment of human feeling, aesthetic experience as a form of sensitive understanding, the emotional tone being an essential condition of *rasa*. So *rasa* is not only transpersonal, and thus *communis*, but it basically concerns human sentiment or emotion, and pertains to *sensus* as well.

However, the human sentiments at stake cannot be expressed directly. So Sri Sankuka already stated that sentiments can only be conveyed indirectly, without the explicit mention of it. The art of verbal or bodily gesticulation has nothing to do with expression, as it is commonly conceived, or with direct connotation. It is nothing but the power of suggestion. And even when *rasa*

is associated with cognition it is not cognition in the ordinary sense: 'Plainly speaking, the cognition of the spectator defies all possible modes of worldly experience through appropriate percepts and concepts. It is peculiar, extraordinary, unique. It is neither doubt nor similarity, nor dissimilarity, nor is it fullfledged conviction of identity, though it is knowledge of identity. The apprehension that the spectator gets, is one unified, coherent experience, and it cannot be challenged by any canons of logic'¹⁶. So Visvanatha (14th century) is likewise very clear when he writes that rasa is the principle of unity and that it is as such indivisible and unanalysable.¹⁷ Thus the kind of intelligibility, which is presupposed in aesthetic experience, is an intuitive intelligibility: it transcends any thinking in terms of clear concepts. It is a unity which we could characterize in Kantian terms as a non-denotative synthesis, a kind of reflective judgment which is still unmediated by concepts. In a similar vein Abhinava writes: 'The tasting of Rasa ... differs from both memory, inference and any ordinary self-consciousness'¹⁸.

Thus far the similarities between Kant's transcendental analysis of aesthetic judgments and Indian rasa-theory are quite extraordinary. Not only is Indian rasa essentially a theory about aesthetic experience, but it likewise presupposes the disinterestedness of it. Moreover it presupposes that the aesthetic object is purposeful on its own terms, and that aesthetic experience is highly individual and at the same time transpersonal and universal and that it cannot be grasped intellectually.

b. Differences to Kant's aesthetics

But there are also important differences. The strength of Kant's account is surely its purely transcendental, subjective and formal point of view. At the same time it is its weakness. Well-known in that respect is Hegel's objection that in Kant's analysis the judgement of taste is anchored too much and too exclusively in the subjective and formal side. But while Hegel tends to identify the work of art ultimately in terms of its content, its idea, thus balancing to the other extreme, Indian rasa theory seems to remedy this Western duality between form and content, between subject and object.

First of all, the Indian rasa-theory does not imply, as Kant does, that in aesthetic experience it is presupposed that others ought to have the same feeling or the same judgment. On the contrary, it is presupposed that the agreement actually takes place. Secondly, experience of rasa is not taken to presuppose that only pure form is responsible for it: the content is likewise important. Thirdly, experience of rasa is not entirely subjective but is 'controlled' by the work of art as an object. Fourthly, the intellectually ungraspable character and, at the same time, the universal communicability of rasa is grounded neither in the free play of understanding and imagination, nor in the noumenal (das Noumenale as the other side of das Phänomenale) as a higher regulative principle but in the actual experience of the noumenal, be it in a peculiar way.

That rasa presupposes that agreement actually takes place, is quite obvious. The way this is argued for removes us far from Kant. In fact it involves a psychology and even an ontology of aesthetic experience, which explains why and how rasa as a generalized emotion actually transforms

our experience. According to Indian aesthetics, rasa radically transforms the permanent feelings or innate states (bhavas), which are characteristic for ordinary life-experience. This is mainly due to the fact that the work of art exists in the mode of the general rather than in that of the particular. In actual life the permanent feelings are not only linked to particular causes and effects, but also to innumerable transit feelings and moods, which accompany the former in any experience. Rasa, however, has nothing to do with these accompanying moods, because these are still embedded in particular circumstances. In the experience of rasa the permanent feelings are radically changed and all the objects represented - the character of the hero, his emotions, his situation, etc. - are subject to another form of causation, because what is seen or heard is no longer identified with particular feelings of that hero or this spectator.

In fact rasa leads to the experience of art as a self-contained world or reality, because it apprehends the universal through the particular and at the same time radically transforms ordinary causation. The sort of causation involved - determinants, inferences, and transitory feelings - acquires an intrinsic harmony of its own, which is far removed both from the physicality of the world and the passions of the ego. This intrinsic harmony of the aesthetic object only exists in the mind of the spectator and is mostly called 'perfect intelligibility' or sattva. Thanks to sattva everything on the stage is abstracted from all the particularities of person, time, place and situation, and is solely experienced in its generality. It is free from the obstacles of everyday life, of normal causation. That is why the work of art is held to have a unique ontological status and why the perception of it is sui generis. It is thanks to sattva and the unique ontological status of the work of art that sensus communis is possible and actually takes place.

The ontological overtones notwithstanding, it is tempting to compare sattva with Kant's notion of 'purposiveness without purpose', as I suggested above. At face value sattva really looks like a 'subjective purposiveness' in the sense of Kant. But, and this is my second point, Indian rasa does not presuppose that it is only the pure form of the aesthetic object, which is at stake here. On the contrary. As Eliot Deutsch affirms: 'Art is at once bound to life and is for itself. A work of art that occasions rasa is closely related to common experience, drawing as it does its own vitality, its aesthetic content, from those basic life emotions and situations that persons everywhere endure. Form in art has meaning only in relation to content; in fact, there is a form, the rasa theory suggests, only when for both the artist and the "spectator" there is a lived, deeply felt content'¹⁹. So the 'purposiveness' and 'purity' of the aesthetic object is not only a formal one.

The 'purposiveness' and 'purity' of the aesthetic object is, moreover - and this is my third remark - not only a purely subjective one. Rasa is neither wholly subjective nor wholly objective. It presupposes both. On the one hand rasa must already exist in the potentialities of the art object; it must be constitutive for the work of art itself. In that sense it really 'determines' aesthetic experience. On the other hand it is only thanks to the actualization by the spectator of the properties of the art object that rasa actually takes place. The spectator is thus seen as an active participant in the work. He or she must be prepared for it. He or she must be a sahrdaya, 'one of a similar heart', to be capable of identifying him-/herself with the subject matter. The role of the artist is likewise extremely important: it is through his or her creative energy that finally a special ecstatic unity is achieved between the self and the object. But still this cannot be achieved without the mediation of the art object itself.

This experience of 'ecstatic unity' leads me to a final and fourth remark, namely that the intellectually ungraspable character and the universal communicability of *rasa* is grounded in the actual experience of the noumenal. Thanks to *alaukika*, *rasa* or aesthetic experience marks a definite break with the phenomenal order of things (*samsara*): it exists autonomously on a different level which is in fact more real than 'reality', because it reveals the inner and universal essence of things. This experience is called by *Abhinava santarasa* or the transcendent realization of unity, that is always joyful and peaceful, even when the work of art portrays sorrow or pain. It is grounded in the noumenal experience of the Self and is experienced as a kind of self-liberation, which entails a knowledge of the Truth accompanied by the highest happiness.²⁰

Knowledge and enjoyment are thus not contradictory at all. What is at stake here is not the tension between feeling and knowledge, but between lower and higher knowledge. The latter necessitates a peculiar state of mind: it asks for silence (*santa*). The work of art asks for an inner serenity, which is beyond any desire or thought. *Santarasa* refers to silence as 'the profoundest truth of being, the silence which is a dynamic harmony of all being and becoming'²¹. It is not a mere absence of sound or voice: '*Santarasa* is a plenitude; it is surcharged with creative energy. The silence calls us out of ourselves to the concentrated being of the work itself'²². The silence refers to a supramundane bliss, which is akin to the spiritual perfection attained by a *Yogin*.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between aesthetic experience as such and pure spiritual experience: the work of art, though it transforms Reality is still connected with it, and it controls as an object of attention our experience. The experience is in a way orchestrated by the properties of the aesthetic object and thus provoked by our particular and temporal sensitivity for them. A pure spiritual experience, on the contrary, points to the Real, without division of object or time.²³

Post-Scriptum

A post-scriptum may be well advised as *sensus communis* is something which cannot be put into words or clear concepts. In retrospect, writing or even speaking about *sensus communis* or *rasa* is always questionable: it is above all an experience, which is beyond (or beneath) any discursive or rational argument. And yet, philosophy cannot avoid writing or speaking about it, because it concerns the deeper layers of any human and even transcultural challenge to communicate in a sense, which is not dictated by explicit reasoning or doctrinal commitments. The latter have indeed the tendency to divide people all over the world.

The deeper layers concern, as we have seen, an aesthetic feeling or a state of mind, which is supposed to bridge the gap between subjective emotion and a universal, transpersonal, common and shared experience or at least the possibility of such a shared experience. In that sense *sensus communis* or *rasa* refers to a *con-sensus* in the literal meaning of the word: a shared feeling, a consent, an agreement or '*Einstimmung*', whether it is postulated as a transcendental presupposition (Kant) or a transcendent realization of unity (*Abhinava*). In Kant's approach it is about the universal voice (*die allgemeine Stimme*), about attuning, about unison of the voices, a chorus. It is about *logos*,

in its original meaning of speech or even proportion, a logos which always precedes conceptual thinking and is therefore identified by Kant with reflective judgment.

As such, however, it is a 'voice without voice', a 'voiceless voice' or 'la voix blanche', as Derrida characterized negative theology.²⁴ It is profoundly apophantic: the artful mentioning of something by denying that it will be mentioned. This explains, perhaps, why Indian philosophers refer to silence, which seems anyhow more akin to the unspeakable, the unnamable, the ineffable, the unexpressable. But here again silence is extremely apophantic: it is held to embody or reveal the profoundest truth of being. Also in Japanese aesthetics the concept of yugen (sometimes translated as profundity) refers to silence. It is that being of a work of work which, like *santarasa*, is, and participates in the truth of being.

Speaking in terms of the truth of being seems miles away from Kant. One important difference between Kant and *rasa* theory certainly pertains to the cleavage between, on the one hand, a purely transcendental, and, on the other hand, a straightforward ontological or even metaphysical approach. Kant is much more cautious though he also suggests an intimate link between subjective feeling or sensation and the noumenal or suprasensible, between the visible and the invisible. But he always remains within a transcendental framework, far removed from plain metaphysics. In Kant's eyes Indian *rasa*-theory would have looked suspiciously dogmatic.

In view of the recent deconstruction of Western metaphysics by Derrida and many others *rasa*-theory may be deemed logocentric, a metaphysics of truth or presence. In fact *rasa*-theory is indeed a kind of logocentrism, but it is no metaphysics of presence. In Buddhist tradition, language is seen as empty of reality or truth: so it must be transcended for reality or truth to be realized. This kind of logocentrism explains why so many Buddhist thinkers and practitioners distrust language altogether. Much like Kant in his Third Critique, they emphasize a pre-conceptual mode of consciousness, an immediacy of experience, which is always distorted by language. But it is not a metaphysics of presence. This is mainly due to the fact that in Buddhist philosophy truth is considered as something which cannot be differentiated nor objectified: it is a kind of wisdom which is so elusive that it transcends all the common dichotomic categories, which were and still are so characteristic of Western metaphysics of presence. Truth refers to a nameless and formless reality, which is not only beyond conceptual thinking but also beyond the categories of presence or even absence, as it is identified with pure emptiness (*sunyata*).

Maybe more than in Indian philosophy this peculiar metaphysical stance of Buddhist thinking has been highlighted by Japanese Zen-Buddhism and aesthetics. So the pre-conceptual mode of experience, as it emerges in Zen meditation, is characterized by the 13th century Japanese philosopher Dôgen as 'without thinking' (*hishiryô*), which he distinguishes from both 'thinking' and 'not-thinking'. Or as Michael Marra describes it: 'The peculiarity of "without thinking" is its non-conceptual and pre-reflective mode of consciousness, which makes the individual perceive reality as it is, without letting consciousness and the construction of categories intervene in the modification and distortion of reality. Experience then precedes the conceptual categorization of reality... Pre-reflective experience avoids the distortion operated by the reflection of reality on the mirror of the mind. Reality is then perceived in its phenomenological aspect of constant transformation (*mujo*), which resists reduction to the grammatical rules of logic and rejects the grammaticalization of conceptual categories'²⁵.

So the immediacy of experience is preserved in such a way that there can be no truth in representation, because what we consider as reality is nothing but the product of a 'worldly logic' (zokutai), while Buddhist truth cannot become an object of representation. So in spite of the cleavage between a transcendental and a transcendent point of view, the immediacy of experience advocated by Buddhist thinking is akin to Kant's notion of reflective judgment, which likewise wants to protect aesthetic experience from any retrospective fixation and distortion by language and concepts. So Buddhist 'pre-reflective experience' is in a specific way akin to Kant's 'reflective judgment', which is in Kant's terms not even 'experience' in the full sense of the word.

In spite of this comparability with respect to the non-conceptual nature of 'immediate experience', we are still confronted by an almost ineradicable incommensurability between Kant's transcendental procedure and Abhinava's transcendent approach. This problem cannot be settled simply by a broadened way of thinking, a universal standpoint which includes both a transcendental and a transcendent point of view at the same time. At least not on the level of a *sensus communis logicus*. Logically speaking both points of view are mutually exclusive. This gap is a real challenge for an intercultural philosophical dialogue.

Logically speaking, the Kantian approach as an approach seems superior, because it seems to avoid any metaphysical or any essentialist or empirical pitfall. It seems to me impossible to arrive at a cross-cultural *sensus communis*, which is based on empirical generalizations about a fundamental core of values, shared by the whole of humanity. As such a transcendental approach seems better equipped to bridge the gap between different points of view by laying bare their respective presuppositions. In principle the transcendental approach even can highlight the a priori conditions of Indian discourse on art and indeed of any discourse on art and *sensus communis* for that matter.

On the other hand, we may presume that Kant's a prioris are grounded in a specific world view, which drags along a metaphysics of its own, be it only in an indirect way. Granted that Kant's a prioris are at least partly conditioned by their historical context, it is not wholly absurd to question their universal validity, especially when our *sensus communis* of aesthetic experience seems to demand some kind of amendment. So, in spite of or even thanks to the transcendental procedure, we can sense, thanks to a more basic pre-conceptual experience, in what respect Indian *rasa*-theory can contribute to a better and critical understanding of aesthetical experience. Because of the eminent way in which Indian philosophers emphasize the mutual relation between form and content, object and subject, the particular and the universal, they clarify the way in which the work of art radically transforms our experience, how and why it leads to a 'transfiguration of the commonplace', to speak with Arthur Danto. So Indian *rasa*-theory gives us the hint in what sense aesthetic experience actually changes our ordinary way of perceiving the world and in what sense the experience of art may connect people from very different origins or cultures.

Still, we cannot, even in a post-scriptum, avoid misunderstanding, dissensus, discord, dissonance, a lack of harmony, even when we associate *sensus communis* with interior music or the silence of the noumenal. But in order to have a productive dissensus we must, I presume, still have a common ground, a common agon or agora, may be a common battlefield, something agonistic which allows the antagonistic, a sort of (dis)sensus communis. Here again aesthetic experience and the experience of *sensus communis* seems to install such a common ground, which does not exclude but

even includes possible disagreement. In that respect (dis)sensus communis refers to a politics of disagreement, a politics of politics.

Kant points in such a direction, when he contrasts 'disputing' with 'quarrelling'. Disputing, 'disputatio' always strives at mutual agreement by means of arguments, by objective concepts and proof, and in cases where we think that this cannot be done, we simply close the argument. There is no disputing about taste, because concepts and proofs do not allow us to decide anything about aesthetic judgments. But, we can surely quarrel about it; one is in a battle, a debate, a fight and there is always some hope to arrive at an agreement as long as the fight continues endlessly, not by sheer resistance, but while it is animated by a 'higher purpose', by an 'indeterminate concept', which is at the same time an idea, which fuels our hope to arrive at a possible concert of voices or an attuning of silence.

Notes

1. I. Kant: *The Critique of Judgement*. Translated, with an Introduction by W. S. Pluhar. Indianapolis 1987, § 20.
2. Idem, § 40
3. Idem, § 22
4. J.-F. Lyotard: 'Sensus Communis'. In: A. Benjamin (ed.), *Judging Lyotard*, London and New York 1992, p. 2
5. Kant, loc. cit. (note 1), § 21
6. Idem, § 22
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