

Symphony at Salk

ELIYAHU KELLER

1. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

2. Kant, *Critique*, 190-193, 199-200

3. *Ibid.*, 200

4. Herbert M. Schuller, "Immanuel Kant and the Aesthetics of Music" In *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 14, no. 2 (1955), 218

5. Herbert M. Schuller, "Immanuel Kant and the Aesthetics of Music" In *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 14, no. 2 (1955), 218

6. Kant points to this in section 51: "...the difference that the one or the other opinion would make to our judging of the basis of music would affect the definition only in this: we would declare music either, as we did above to be the *beautiful* play of sensations (of hearing) or to be the play of *agreeable* sensations. Only under the first kind of explication will music be presented wholly as fine art, while under the second it would be presented (at least in part) as *agreeable* art." Kant also equates the pleasure derived from music to that of a joke: "In music this play proceeds from bodily sensation to aesthetic ideas (of the objects of affects), and from these back again [to the body], but with the force exerted on the body concentrated. In jest (which, just as much as music, deserves to be considered more an agreeable than a fine art) the play starts from thoughts, all of which as far as they seek sensible expression, engage the body also." Kant, *Critique*, 194-5, 203

7. Samantha Matherne, "Kant's Expressive Theory of Music" In *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 72, no. 2 (2014): 129-145.

8. Matherne points to the constitutive notion of Kant's *sensus communis* only in a footnote, stating: "In this passage, Kant is discussing the *sensus communis*, which I cannot pursue further here." Matherne, *Ibid.* 144

9. Kant, *Critique*, 160

10. *Ibid.*

The connection between beauty and society is one of the core issues of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*.¹ Kant, articulating the question of judgement, divides the arts into two main categories—beautiful or agreeable—and claims, paradoxically, that within this formulation music can be judged as both. This, he suggests, is due to its supposedly detrimental, anti-social nature. Yet it is precisely music's socio-aesthetic ambiguity that establishes it as an instrument in social formation, making it, in fact, its greatest force.

Unlike poetry or oratory - arts that communicate through concepts—Kant views music as a "language of affects" creating only sensational pleasure.² In comparison to painting or sculpture, which "produce a lasting impression," music creates "transitory" sensations that proceed only "to indeterminate ideas."³

Nevertheless, the opinions regarding Kant's appreciation of music are conflicted, stretching from claims that "Kant knew little about music and was not interested in it,"⁴ to suggesting that "Kant did not love music because the music which he could have loved did not yet exist!"⁵ Yet while the source for these discrepancies is Kant's text itself,⁶ a reconciliation can be found in the interpretation of Samantha Matherne in what she defines as Kant's "expressive formalism."⁷ Suggesting a separation of music's structure and substance, Matherne reads judgement as depending on the manner of listening, on the audience's decision whether to judge's music mere content or form.

Both Kant and his interpreter suggest a type of behavior that enables judgment—namely, that it is not *what* one listens to, but rather *how*. Matherne's approach, however, though harmonizing the dissonance, does not point to the reconciliation's communal aspects.⁸ It neglects the idea of cultivating communities through aesthetic judgement, which is at the core of Kant's enlightenment project.

For Kant, judgement is the result of a *sensus communis*: a "sense *shared* by [all of us], i.e., a power to judge that in reflecting takes account (a priori), in our thought, of everyone else's way of presenting [something], in order as it were to compare our own judgment..."⁹ This cultivation of the 'common sense,' is formulated by three maxims—"(1) to think for oneself; (2) to think from the standpoint of everyone else; and (3) to think always consistently."¹⁰ Since "only in society is the beautiful of empirical interest", and since "the urge to society is natural to man,"¹¹ the practice of judgement, for Kant, is a social one.



Symphony at Salk, 2016. Photo courtesy of The Salk Institute for Biological Studies



The rigidity of architectural space—contrary to music’s malleability—makes this socio-aesthetic problem more audible, and suggests that providing an exclusively spatial answer to music’s lack of “urbanity” is a futile task.

11. Ibid., 163

12. This passage ends with a footnote elaborating on the issue of music as disturbance. Kant points to a situation in which music could be experienced as a disturbance by mentioning the signing of hymns. The footnote is itself footnoted by the translator to a William Wallace's biography of Kant and a specific occasion in which Kant was exposed to the "noisy devotional exercises of prisoners in the adjoining jail". Ibid., 200

13. Anthony Curtis Adler points to the above-mentioned quote from Kant's *Critique* and writes: "Kant's use of the terms, I would argue, in this passage and elsewhere in his writings, draws on this whole range of meanings to suggest not merely a certain mode of "behavior" narrowly conceived but a form of political community—a way of coexisting in a shared space with others." Anthony Curtis Adler, "The Biopolitics of Noise: "Kafka's Der Bau" in Sander van Maas, *Thresholds of Listening: Sound, Technics, Space*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015, 125–142, footnote appears in pages 266–7

14. Christian Donath claims that music poses a problem for this practice of freedom in Kant, since it is excessively free, that is, the practice of music, albeit cultivating one's own freedom, at the very same time, infringes upon other people's freedoms. Christian Donath, "Liberal Art: Art and Education for Citizenship in Kant's Critique of Judgment" in *The Review of Politics* 75, no. 1 (2013), 7

15. The verb *zu gehören*—To Belong, stems from *hören*—to hear or to listen to. Adler, *Biopolitics of Noise*, Ibid. 137

16. Reed also differentiates between the performer of music and a member of the audience, claiming the one's enjoyment of the performance is forced by the act of performance itself. Arden Reed, "The Debt of Disinterest: Kant's Critique of Music" in *MLN* 95, no. 3 (1980), 583

17. Mark Jarzombek imagines what a Kantian city would have looked like, and notes that in Kant's city we are not likely to find any "ballrooms or circuses [...] nor would there be any major public buildings," pointing to the idea that Kant would not be interested in the type of institutionality that is cultivated through such functions. Mark Jarzombek, "Kant, Modernity and the Absent Public" in Nadir Lahiji, *The Missed Encounter of Radical Philosophy with Architecture*. London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014, 76

Music, in this paradigm, presents a social, aesthetic and spatial problem. Lacking "urbanity," as Kant strangely notes, music "extends its influence (on the neighborhood) farther than people wish [...] imposes itself on others and hence impairs the freedom of those outside of the musical party."¹²

"Urbanity," translated from the German *Urbanität*, pertains here both to "city life" and "the refinement or elegance of manners."¹³ If so, music presents a dual problem. Since it can be judged as agreeable and beautiful, judgment itself is tampered with by music's nature. Music then becomes an aesthetic and a political problem unlike other arts, which "communicate determinate concepts that serve to ground a community." Holding a political capacity to traverse physical borders, and to "infringe upon others" through the "improper use of freedom,"¹⁴ music infringes upon the community that it attempts to cultivate.

Yet the act of listening, etymologically at the core of the German verb *zu gehören*, meaning "to belong," suggests music has an intrinsic communal aspect.¹⁵ It requires, in a specific moment, a compromise from all members of society; it urges the crowd it fosters to negotiate. Both social lubricant and a tool for agitation, its infringement requires audiences to nurture "urbanity" around it; to be enlightened not only after its fleeting sounding but also during it; to be civil and civic, since it, autonomously, is not.

Here, the issue of *how* one listens to music is raised again, along with the question of where. For Kant, the question of taste in relation to music is telling, as Arden Reed claims, since it "may be determined by where one sits in the concert hall."¹⁶ Kant, who found institutions problematic, would likely disagree with this spatially deterministic perspective.¹⁷ In an established hall, the organized audience would not engage in a conversation about the art presented, since the institution would have already marked music as beautiful, while denying its judgement as obtrusive noise. The rigidity of architectural space—contrary to music's malleability—makes this socio-aesthetic problem more audible, and suggests that providing an exclusively spatial answer to music's lack of "urbanity" is a futile task. This, however, should not mean that architecture cannot play a role in the event of judgement, and the transformation of a passive audience into an active crowd.

Described as "the most sublime landscape" to be created by an American architect,¹⁸ Louis Kahn's Salk Institute, was built on the idea of a community pursuing a common goal, and conceived as "a facility that would both support scientific research and foster the exchange of ideas between scientists and cultural leaders."¹⁹

Symphony at Salk

18. Herbert Muschamp, architectural critic for the New York Times, quoted in Thomas Leslie, *Louis I. Kahn: Building Art, Building Science*. New York: George Braziller, 2005, 169

19. In his historical account of the Salk Institute, Marc Treib brings several documented conversations of Jonas Salk and Louis I. Kahn. Marc Treib, "To End a Continent: The Courtyard of the Salk Institute" In *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 65, no. 3 (2006), 403

20. symphony.salk.edu/about-salk/

21. Coincidentally, ten is the maximum number suggested by Kant in his *Anthropology* for the event of hosting a dinner party. Kant would observe this rule. In his dinners the numbers of guests, "himself included, should not fall below the number of the Graces, nor exceed that of the Muses." Thomas De Quincey, *The Works of Thomas De Quincey: Including All His Contributions to Periodical Literature*. Edinburgh: A & CBlack, 1863. Vol. 3, 108; Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 179.

22. www.salk.edu/tickers, my emphasis

These exchanges, Salk had hoped, would take place in the institute's yard. Yet the famed, silent space, daily hit by the Californian sun, albeit designed for interaction, has become a place of passing, rather than dialogue. A vehicle for sublime nature, aligning the line of water with that of the ocean and the setting sun between its walls, it fails, ironically and against the ambition of its creators, precisely because of its sublimity; a beauty that cannot be negotiated or discussed. Enter the orchestra.

The website "*Symphony at Salk*,"²⁰ is decorated with the following quote: "Jonas Salk created this incredible building to inspire us with the beauty of our surroundings, and to focus us on the power of science to improve our lives." For three-hundred dollars, guests are invited to gather around dinner tables in groups of ten,²¹ while listening to the San Diego Orchestra and a selected artist.

Kant, one might speculate, would be pleased. The number of guests is small enough to have a meaningful conversation, the spectacle music urges judgement, and the courtyard, fulfilling its purpose, transforms the still architecture into an event-space, reflecting nature's beauty while echoing its sounds.

Unlike Kant's enlightenment project, at Salk, it is science which advances humanity, while art—in this case music—is that which makes this progress possible. As one Salk professor stated: "Symphony at Salk *allows* Salk scientists to pursue the most challenging scientific questions, leading to discoveries that will enhance and impact the human condition."²² Her words point to the need for the infusion of communal spaces with a content and an activity which could trigger crowds.

In Salk, the most silent of spaces is filled with the most paradoxical of arts. Brought together, Kant's philosophy and Kahn's architecture suggest that neither architecture, music nor any art, is beautiful alone. The audience, through the practice of its own freedom, situates the music and its resonating architecture as beautiful. Art only becomes beautiful through initiation, through audiences that witness and judge it actively, transforming themselves into socio-political crowds. Programmed into the lingering space, music demands a society to be constantly formed around it, as it demonstrates not only what the beautiful is, but how.



Symphony at Salk, 2016. Photo courtesy of The Salk Institute for Biological Studies

Music infringes upon the community that it attempts to cultivate.

