

## **GUSTUS SPIRITUALIS: REMARKS ON THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN AESTHETICS**

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The article considers the concept of *gustus spiritualis*, in particular its possible historical connection with (aesthetic) taste in the seventeenth century. By 'aesthetic', I mean a radically modern phenomenon, attitude, sensibility, and so forth, that is, a new type of experience. Its discourse has many keywords; one of them is taste, an inner faculty by which its possessor is able to make sharp and proper distinctions, and simultaneously to enjoy fine delights. Here, I am obliged to confine myself to the interpretation of some Jesuit authors within the wide tradition of *gustus spiritualis*: St Ignatius of Loyola, St Francis de Sales, Baltasar Gracián, and Dominique Bouhours in sequence. The latter two are usually treated in the historical narratives of aesthetics, which, however, usually take *gustus/gusto/goût* as if it were a purely secular (moral, political) notion in the seventeenth century, while its theological roots are ignored. Exploring the role of *gustus spiritualis* in the evolution of (aesthetic) taste can cast light, on the one hand, on the important fact that this entails volition, that is, the determination and enchantment of human desire and hope without constraint; and, on the other, on the historical process of the emergence of a new type of 'beholder' with a sensitive attitude to transcendence, and, in the same manner, to his or her worldly life as well; moreover, it is a process in which, simultaneously, the nature of transcendence is transformed into a tastable one.

'No se ha de discurrir a lo viejo, y se ha de gustar a lo moderno.'  
Baltasar Gracián, *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*, no. 120.

Amongst the different intellectual threads – from rhetoric through moral philosophy to the polite literature of the seventeenth century – which intertwined during the emergence of modern aesthetics, I have chosen to consider one here: theology.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, I am mostly going to discuss the concept of *gustus spiritualis*, that is, spiritual taste as one of the spiritual senses of the soul in Christian theology,<sup>2</sup> its possible historical connection with (aesthetic) taste. I hasten to add that by the word 'aesthetic' I mean a radically modern phenomenon, attitude, sensibility, that is, a new type of experience. So it is not something that has

<sup>1</sup> This article relies on, but is not a mere translation of, one of my earlier publications in Hungarian: '*Gustus spiritualis*: Megjegyzések a modern esztétika kialakulásához', *Holmi* 24 (2012): 1506–20.

<sup>2</sup> For its manifold theological traditions from Origen to the contemporary analytic philosophers of religion, see Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, eds., *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

ever existed in various forms, or has ever been treated in the various theories of the (fine) arts and literary criticism or in the metaphysics of beauty. In what follows, the aesthetic is understood as a special modern experience of the connection between the sensible and the transcendental, in which the former is not a disposable 'means' towards the latter, but an *indispensable* and constitutive 'frame' for it; and this new form of experience reconfigures and shapes both the 'nature' of transcendence and the self of the beholder. Its origins can be explored mostly in seventeenth-century texts, and its main streams have much less to do with the theories of fine arts and literature, or with the metaphysics of beauty, than is usually supposed.

This new attitude or discourse has many keywords, one of which is taste. Taste is – or was gradually becoming at that time – a faculty enabling its possessor to make sharp and proper distinctions, and simultaneously to enjoy fine delights. A man of good taste or fine genius is a sociable being who can always find the right mode of expression and action, even the proper way of living, who is capable of conducting amiable social intercourse with other refined gentlemen, and of enjoying the gaiety of conversation, the beauty of the natural world, including views of landscapes, which had previously not been esteemed at all, and, of course, the charms of works of art.<sup>3</sup>

In 1712, Joseph Addison – who was primarily a man of letters, neither a philosopher nor a theologian (though educated in both) – characterized and in a sense canonized a particular type of man whom we can retrospectively call *homo aestheticus*: 'A Man of a Polite Imagination' who is able to get 'many Pleasures, that the Vulgar are not capable of receiving', who 'meets with a secret Refreshment in a Description, and often feels a greater Satisfaction in the Prospect of Fields and Meadows, than another does in the Possession', who 'looks upon the World, as it were in another Light, and discovers in it a Multitude of Charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of Mankind'.<sup>4</sup>

There was, however, a long road to travel before this point was reached. Addison himself refers to Baltasar Gracián as the inventor of the modern fashion of taste.<sup>5</sup> Gracián, a Spaniard, was a member of the Society of Jesus, a fact sometimes mentioned in the histories of aesthetics, but without emphasis. Amongst others, Dominique Bouhours, a fellow Jesuit, elaborated the discourse

<sup>3</sup> New viewpoints and emphases appeared, however, in the assessment and reception of the fine arts and works of literature compared to those of humanist criticism.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Addison, 'No. 411: Saturday, June 21, 1712', in *The Spectator: A New Edition*, vol. 2, ed. Henry Morley (Glasgow: Routledge, 1891), 715.

<sup>5</sup> 'Gratian very often recommends *the Fine Taste*, as the utmost Perfection of an accomplished Man.' Joseph Addison, 'No. 409: Thursday, June 19, 1712', in Morley, *Spectator*, 707.

of *délicatesse*, perhaps the most important antecedent of 'the aesthetic.'<sup>6</sup> By this, I mean to say that the theological interest should not be excluded from their 'aesthetic' reflections. The concept of *gustus spiritualis* apparently offers itself for an inquiry into the theological 'burden' of modern (aesthetic) taste.

In the present article, I confine myself to the interpretation of some Jesuit authors:<sup>7</sup> St Ignatius of Loyola, St Francis de Sales, Baltasar Gracián, and Dominique Bouhours. Though the latter two are usually treated in the historical narratives of aesthetics, their theological background is largely ignored. I will thus omit my authors' Jansenist opponents (even though Pierre Nicole's and Blaise Pascal's contributions would be intriguing), Protestants such as the seventeenth-century preachers of *gustus spiritualis* (Thomas Goodwin, John Flavel,<sup>8</sup> and other predecessors of Jonathan Edwards<sup>9</sup>), as well as the Cambridge Neoplatonic theologians (especially Henry More<sup>10</sup>). And I am sure that a profound comparison of *gustus spiritualis* with the 'sensuality' of contemporary mystical language would also be interesting: I mean the Spanish Carmelites (St Teresa of Ávila and St John of the Cross<sup>11</sup>) and the Quietist movement (including Miguel de Molinos and Mme Guyon).

<sup>6</sup> Several other Jesuits of course played important roles in the history of aesthetics (in the wider sense of the term). For example, René Rapin and his *Réflexions sur la poétique d'Aristote* (Paris: Muguet, 1674), or Camillo Etti and his *Il buon gusto ne' componimenti rettorici* (Bologna: Santi, 1696), or Jean Desmarest de Saint-Sorlin, who was a Jesuit sympathizer and author of *Les délices de l'esprit: Dialogues* (Paris: Audinet, 1677), in which the faculty of taste is treated as a proof of the existence of God (pp. 40–48), and perhaps the last important Jesuit in the early history of aesthetics was Feijóo; see Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro, *Theatro critico universal*, 9 vols. (Madrid, 1726–40).

<sup>7</sup> Here, I am thinking of the role of the Jesuit theological attitude in the historical progress of inventing the aesthetic; it is different and more specific than acknowledging in general the enormous importance of the Jesuit Order in modern European culture, education, and scholarship.

<sup>8</sup> Both referred to, and partly based themselves on, Martin Luther, who can also reasonably be interpreted as important in the emerging modern aesthetic attitude. See Niklaus Largier, 'Mysticism, Modernity, and the Invention of Aesthetic Experience', *Representations* 105 (2009): 37–60.

<sup>9</sup> See William J. Wainwright, 'Jonathan Edwards and his Puritan Predecessors', in Gavriilyuk and Coakley, *Spiritual Senses*, 224–40.

<sup>10</sup> His *boniform faculty* and its later versions in Thomas Burnet, Lord Shaftesbury, and Francis Hutcheson have been touched upon in secondary literature. See, for example, Ernst Lee Tuveson, *Imagination as a Means of Grace: Locke and the Aesthetics of Romanticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 42–55, and Jerome B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 202–5.

<sup>11</sup> See Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

## I

The tradition of the spiritual senses in Christian theology stemmed from Origen, whose intention might have been to introduce a faculty or experience called 'divine sense', which 'transcends the rational and discursive operations of our intellect'.<sup>12</sup> This 'divine sense'<sup>13</sup> is analogous, though distantly, to the bodily senses, and it seems to be able adequately to approach God. It therefore concerns not only vision – which is central in the tradition of Greek philosophy –, nor only audition – which is the most important divine sense in the Jewish (Old Testament) tradition – but all our bodily senses. Amongst them is taste. What concerns us here is the impact that Origen's doctrine of 'divine sense' had – probably through St Bonaventura's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*<sup>14</sup> – on the founder of the Jesuit Order, St Ignatius of Loyola.

Let us focus on his *Ejercicios espirituales* (*Spiritual Exercises*), published in Spanish in 1548 and then in Latin.<sup>15</sup> One of its famous examples is the imagining of Hell as the last meditative exercise of the first week:

The first prelude is here the forming of the place; which is to set before the eyes of the imagination the length, breadth, and depth of hell. The second consists in asking for an intimate perception of the punishments which the damned undergo; that, if at any time I should be forgetful of the love of God, at least the fear of punishment may restrain me from sins. The first point is, to see by the imagination [*vista de la imaginación*] the vast fires of hell, and the souls inclosed in certain fiery bodies, as [...] in dungeons.

<sup>12</sup> Niklaus Largier, 'Medieval Mysticism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 369.

<sup>13</sup> Origen uses the word *aisthēsis* in this context. For example, 'there is, as the scripture calls it, a certain generic divine sense [*theias tinos genikēs aisthēseōs*] which only the man who is blessed finds on this earth. Thus Solomon says: "Thou shalt find a divine sense [*hoti aisthēsīn theian heurēseis*]"' Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 1.48, 144. See also Origen, *De principiis*, trans. Frederick Crombie (1885; New Advent, 2009), 1.1.9, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04121.htm>, and Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R. P. Lawson (Westminster, MD: Paulist Press, 1957), 2.9, 162. For the question of 'divine sense', see, A. N. Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 83–85; Niklaus Largier, 'Praying by Numbers: An Essay on Medieval Aesthetics', *Representations* 104 (2008): 73–91, and Georgia Frank, "'Taste and See": The Eucharist and the Eyes of Faith in the Fourth Century', *Church History* 70 (2001): 619–43. Her remarks on Origen (pp. 626–27) are mostly based on Rahner's key essay on Origen's spiritual senses. See Karl Rahner, 'Le début d'une doctrine des cinq sens spirituels chez Origène', *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 13 (1932): 113–45.

<sup>14</sup> See Hugo Rahner, 'Die "Anwendung der Sinne" in der Betrachtungsmethode des hl. Ignatius von Loyola', in *Ignatius von Loyola als Mensch und Theologe* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964), 360–61.

<sup>15</sup> Actually, besides the autograph Spanish and the 'official Latin', there are four further versions of the 'original'. See Philip Deane, 'The Ignatian Prayer of the Senses', *Heythrop Journal* 31 (1990): 399. Bouhours would later write a biography of Ignatius and of the co-founder of the Order, the great missionary, St Francis Xavier.

The second, to hear in imagination [*oír con las orejas*] the lamentations, the howlings, the exclamations, and the blasphemies against Christ and His saints, thence breaking forth. The third, to perceive by the smell also of the imagination [*oler con el olfato*], the smoke, the brimstone, and the stench of a kind of sink or filth, and of putrefaction. The fourth, to taste [*gustar con el gusto*] in like manner those most bitter things, as the tears, the rottenness, and the worm of conscience.

The fifth, to touch [*tocar con el tacto*] in a manner those fires by the touch of which the souls themselves are burnt.<sup>16</sup>

Though the etymology of the word *imaginación* can refer us to the image and, consequently, to the eyes, the description lists and equally stresses all five senses. The point is to feel intensively and deeply the horrors of Hell by means of sensual perceptions through imagination. Here the general task is to taste (to feel) the bitterness, and not the divine sweetness, the abhorrence, not the felicity, the reprobation, not the salvation. Both experiences may be beneficial and meaningful for an exercitant – only the measure of intensity matters; consequently, all the senses have to be stimulated. Two points are traditionally discerned in Ignatian discourse: *compositio loci* – constructing the place in detail in a quasi-sensual image; and *applicatio sensuum* – stimulating all five senses to achieve an extraordinary experience which can produce a state of sensual and emotional deepness in the exercises of prayer and contemplation. Here Ignatius definitely belongs to – and at the same time also systematizes – the tradition of the application of the five senses and of raising the devotional emotions that stemmed from Origen's spiritual (divine) senses.<sup>17</sup> Contrary to Origen's conception, however, Ignatius does not make a sharp distinction between the sensual and the spiritual senses in his meditative exercises. Of course, it is quite different to burn the soul of exercitants with the flames of an imagined hell than to burn their bodies on a real fire. Yet both the characteristics of the excited feelings and the modes of operation of the senses involved are rather similar; at least the analogy between sensual and spiritual seems quite close. The exercitants have to feel pain, torment, and horror – it would thus be unreasonable to say that the bodily sensations do not play any role in this imaginative experience. To be sure, Ignatius also prescribes, for example, that light has to be excluded during meditation; a dark closet is recommended on these occasions. Yet he seems to suggest that the direction of the glance has to be turned inward from outside (that the concentration of inner perception is to be increased by ignoring secondary, external matters), but the nature of this sense ought not to be transformed (as in Origen).

<sup>16</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Nicholas Wiseman (London: Dolman, 1847), 36–38. For the Spanish text, see, for example, *Ejercicios espirituales* (Rome, 1615), <http://www.analitica.com/bitbliblioteca/loyola/ejercicios.asp>.

<sup>17</sup> Largier, 'Praying by Numbers', 78–79.

Moreover, this meditative experience is not modelled on – or not only on – visual experience. From the second week, Ignatius begins to speak about contemplation (instead of meditation,<sup>18</sup> which is capable of vitalizing the three mental faculties: memory, understanding and volition): the contemplative exercises rely on sight and hearing, but the final phase is always the application of the five senses,<sup>19</sup> in which the exercitants again have to contemplate all the previous tasks of the day. Concerning the fourth week, he says that the last exercise before dinner is

the office of the senses being applied [*traiendo los cinco sentidos sobre*], in order to impress the more strongly on the mind the three contemplations made the same day, those parts or places being marked in passing, and handled thoroughly, in which we have felt more efficacious movements of the mind, and a greater spiritual relish [*donde haya sentido mayores mociones y gustos espirituales*].<sup>20</sup>

The motion and the spiritual relish (*gustos espirituales*) are the contents and the aim of final experience. The taste or relish is therefore not only one of the senses (sometimes even a seemingly distinguished sense)<sup>21</sup> to be stimulated, but is rather the model of the whole experience, the entire inner perception in the application of the senses.

There seems to be an intriguing difference in wording if one compares Ignatius's *Exercises* to *De imitatione Christi*, an earlier work now unequivocally attributed to Thomas à Kempis. Since its first publication in 1418, it has always been very influential and popular among religious books, and highly recommended, regardless of the denomination of the faithful. Ignatius too suggests its frequent reading.<sup>22</sup> In this one can find the following passage in the context of the renunciation of the body and turning away from worldly life:

<sup>18</sup> Generally speaking, contemplation is always used by Ignatius with direct reference to the canonical narrative, while meditation 'generally denotes prayer on material not directly given in the Gospel. [...] Quite evidently it was not taken up, even by the early generations of Jesuits. [...] "meditation" is clearly being used to denote all forms of Ignatian imaginative prayer with the exception of the Application of the Senses.' Endean, 'Ignatian Prayer', 401–2.

<sup>19</sup> The interpretation of *applicatio sensuum* was always a matter of uncertainty in Jesuit theology, from the first followers to the twentieth-century interpreters like Joseph Maréchal and Hugo Rahner. See Philip Endean, 'Aplicación de sentidos', in *Diccionario de espiritualidad ignaciana*, vol. 1, ed. Grupo de Espiritualidad Ignaciana (Bilbao: Mensajero, 2007), 184–92.

<sup>20</sup> Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, 97.

<sup>21</sup> '[T]o perceive by a certain inward taste and smell [*oler y gustar con el olfato y con el gusto*], how great is the sweetness and delightfulness [*infinita suavidad y dulzura*] of the [divinity of the soul, and of its virtues; and of all the other things], according to the nature of the person we are considering, adapting to ourselves those things which may bring us some fruit.' *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>22</sup> See *ibid.*, 199.

O sweet and delightful word [O *sapidum & dulce verbum*!] But to him only that loveth the word, not the world nor the things that are in the world. 'My God, and my all!' To him that understandeth, enough is said; and to repeat it again and again, is pleasant to him that loveth. For when Thou art present, all things are delightful [*jucunda sunt omnia*]; but when Thou art absent, every thing becomes irksome [*fastidiunt cuncta*]. Thou givest quietness of heart [*cor tranquillum*] and peace, and pleasant joy. Thou makest us to take delight in all things [*bene sentire de omnibus*], and in all to praise Thee; neither can any thing please long without Thee; but if it be pleasant [*gratum*], [and be well enjoyed (*bene sapere*)], Thy grace [*gratiam*] must needs be present, and it must be seasoned with the sweetness [*condimento*] of Thy wisdom [*sapientiae*]. What will not be pleasant to the taste unto him who hath a true relish for Thee [*Cui tu sapis, quid ei recte non sapiet*]? And to him that hath no relish for Thee, what can be pleasant [*Et cui tu non sapis, quid ei ad jucunditatem esse poterit*]? But the wise men of the world [*mundi sapientes*], and they also who relish the things of the flesh [*qui carnem sapiunt*], have not Thy wisdom [*deficiunt in sapientia tua*]; for in the former is found much vanity, and in the latter death.<sup>23</sup>

Conspicuously, following the long tradition evolved from Psalm 33:9,<sup>24</sup> amongst other passages in the Bible, Kempis also discusses the enjoyment of the sweetness of the word, the tasting of the delight of God's presence (and the distasting of, that is, the aversion to His absence), the flavour of Him in everything which is tasteful, and so forth. Yet the wording differs from Ignatius's: instead of (*de*)*gusto*, the verb *sapio* and its derivations occur. In Kempis, true taste or relish (*sapis / sapiet*) directly connects to true wisdom (*sapientia*) even through the common root of *sapio*, whereas Ignatius employs the word *gusto* and its derivations in similar contexts.<sup>25</sup> Kempis puts it clearly that there is nothing in common between spiritual joys and worldly delights, nor must there be. This is changed – or at this time at least is being changed – in Ignatius, and perhaps hence the altered phrasing, though I would not like to overemphasize this.

To be sure, both *gusto* and *sapio* have wide-ranging connotations; both are used in the intellectual or spiritual and in the bodily sense. Yet, on the one hand, *gusto* is not associated with *sapientia* and its traditional intellectual aura, and, on the other, amongst its meanings its sensual feature seems to be more characteristic, that is, to taste, to relish something with palate. So it has a somewhat closer connection to delicious food and drink. To eat – to taste and relish – something is a kind of internalization, a fusion of subject and object. Taste is the only sensual

<sup>23</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *Of the Imitation of Christ*, trans. anon. (London: Finch, 1901), 3.34.1–2, 165–66. For the Latin text, see *De imitatione Christi* (Leiden: Officina Elzeviriana, 1658).

<sup>24</sup> See Rachel Fulton, "Taste and See that the Lord Is Sweet" (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West, *Journal of Religion* 86 (2006): 169–204. This article demonstrates the astonishingly abundant use of the taste of sweetness in medieval mystical language.

<sup>25</sup> For example, here is the last clause of the previous citation from Ignatius in authorized Latin: 'in quibus motus animi efficaciores maioremque gustum spiritualem senserimus.' Ignatius of Loyola, *Exercitia spiritualia*, vol. 1 (Turin: Marietti, 1838), 217.

sense which can offer a model of direct synthesis with the thing grasped, and its immediate distinction and enjoyment. It is worth remarking, especially with regard to the process of inventing the aesthetic, that this kind of experience ('internalization', fusion or synthesis by means of fine distinction) is considerably different from the traditional mystical experience (and from *unio mystica*, its final goal) or from 'transportation into the beyond'. In other words, the movement of an Ignatian day of exercise with the climax of the application of the five senses 'is one from reflection *on* the scene to reflection *of* the scene, one of deepening imaginative involvement. [...] Retreatants are challenged to react to the events of Christ's life, and to imagine how their own lives might become responses to those events.'<sup>26</sup>

The increasing significance of *gusto* can be demonstrated with Ignatius's second annotation in which the retreat-giver is asked to deliver faithfully but briefly the story for daily meditation:

For the effect of this will be, that when [the exercitant] finds anything which may furnish something more of elucidation or of apprehension of the history, (whether this be effected by his own reasoning, or by divine illumination of the mind,) he will experience a more delightful taste and more abundant fruit [*gusto y fructo spiritual*], than if the matter itself had been more diffusely set forth and drawn out by another. For it is not the abundance of the knowledge, but the interior feeling and taste of the things, which is accustomed to satisfy the desire of the soul [*no el mucho saber harta y satisface al ánima, mas el sentir y gusta de las cosas internamente*].<sup>27</sup>

The Ignatian exercitant is not as passive as Origen's bride in his homily on the Song of Songs, since the spontaneity of 'his own reasoning' can be sufficient to achieve the experience (without the 'divine illumination of the mind') of more spiritual taste and spiritual fruit (*gusto y fructo spiritual*). Apprehension, reasoning, and eventually knowledge prove only a means to a spiritual end, to a superior experience, that is, to the inner sensation – the sense and taste (*sentir y gusta*) – of things, and it is simultaneously the utmost satisfaction of the soul.<sup>28</sup> So the Ignatian consummate spiritual involvement is formulated in terms of taste

<sup>26</sup> Endean, 'Ignatian Prayer', 404.

<sup>27</sup> Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, 1–2. The last sentence in the authorized Latin reads: 'Non enim abundantia scientiae, sed sensus et gustus rerum interior desiderium animae explere solet.' *Exercitia spiritualia*, 53.

<sup>28</sup> One of Ignatius's techniques of contemplation is a special kind of praying, in which the one praying slowly tastes and relishes the words of the prayer in succession, finding (and, in a sense, creating) a deeper, richer, and more extraordinary meaning of words in this way. We have to close our eyes or to fix them on one spot motionlessly, and 'to say the Lord's Prayer from the beginning, and on the first word, that is, on *Pater*, to fix the meditation [*consideración*] so long as [we find] various significations, likenesses, spiritual tastes, and other devout motions [*significaciones, comparaciones, gustos y consolación*] concerning that word; and in like manner we shall do successively with each word of the same or another prayer'. Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, 105–6.

and sensation, and not in those of sight or hearing or both, which are traditionally considered the more intellectual senses, and as intimately connected to *sapientia*.

The influence and determination of the will of the faithful is involved by means of distasting the evil and tasting the bliss. As for Ignatius, experience that has a sensual character and emotional intensity can directly reach the heart, in other words, this experience can be internalized in the most efficient way to the heart. Intellectual insight (in a sense, knowledge) is less important; Ignatius is instead concerned with ways of convincing or conquering the heart. The theological interpretation of free will was linked to this question. Ignatius's followers would later face the Jansenist doctrine of 'efficacious grace', according to which nobody can do good without the direct and irresistible divine impulse of volition. As for the members of the Society, however, everybody is bestowed with the 'sufficient grace' as adequate divine aid for choosing and doing right. The intensive sensual-emotional experience in meditation or other devotional practice can make this volitional potentiality actual, and with this it can prompt the soul to find the right way to salvation.<sup>29</sup>

Slightly more than half a century later, a new kind of devotion emerged in St Francis de Sales. His *Philothea*, first published in 1609, was highly influential from the outset. Given that true devotion is rooted in the perfect love of God, he warns his readers against the prospective dangers of devotional exercises: the 'devotion does not always consist in that sweetness, delight, consolation, or sensible tenderness of heart [*la dévotion ne consiste pas en la douceur, suavité consolation et tendreté sensible du coeur*], which moves us to tears, and causes us to find satisfaction [*une certaine satisfaction agréable*] in some spiritual exercises'.<sup>30</sup>

In his book, the pious French Jesuit does not set out to invent an exact schedule and a series of prescriptions and rules for meditative, cure-like training in the spirit of military discipline for retreat-givers (and not primarily for exercitants). On the contrary, he offers a beneficial guide for his Christian readers to use in everyday life. It indicates an important shift in this tradition. Senses and emotions are tied to the devotional practice of ordinary life, and are thus connected to actions, manners, that is, they have to do with the social life of the world, not with solitary meditation or retreat from this world.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, they are not

<sup>29</sup> The Ignatian approach helps the exercitant make the right choice also concerning his or her life, so it implicitly entails the orientation towards the world which later becomes explicit in St Francis de Sales and especially Baltasar Gracián.

<sup>30</sup> Francis de Sales, *Introduction to a Devout Life*, trans. anon. (Regensburg: Pustet, n.d.), 315. For the French text, see *Introduction à la vie dévote* (Lyon: Perisse, 1832).

<sup>31</sup> As the Saint himself writes: 'Almost all that have hitherto treated of devotion have had in view the instruction of persons wholly retired from the world; or have taught a kind of devotion leading to this absolute retirement; whereas my intention is to instruct such as live in towns, in families, or at court, and who, by their condition, are obliged to lead, as to the exterior, a common life [*vie commune*]'! Sales, *Introduction to a Devout Life*, xv–xvi.

primarily treated as part of an exegetical project or a training programme aiming at individual spiritual purification and strengthening. The ordinary devotional exercises can be harmful if the intensive feelings or emotions experienced become merely pleasant satisfaction or even 'entertainment'. In such cases, the believer loses the real meaning of devotion, which is simply to do good fervently, firmly, and frequently. And yet

these tender and delightful affections [*ces tendretés et affectueuses douceurs*] are sometimes good and profitable, for they excite the affections of the soul [*l'appétit de l'âme*], strengthen the spirit [*l'esprit*], and add to the promptitude of devotion a holy cheerfulness [*une sainte gaîté*], which makes our actions lovely and agreeable [*belles et agréables*] even in the exterior. This relish [*goût*] which we find in the things of God [*choses divines*] is that which made David exclaim: 'O Lord, how sweet are thy words to my palate [*douces à mon palais*]! more than honey to my mouth.'<sup>32</sup> Doubtless the least consolation of devotion [*consolation de la dévotion*] that we receive is in every respect preferable to the most agreeable recreations of the world [*les plus excellentes récréations du monde*]. The breasts of the heavenly Spouse are sweeter to the soul than the wine of the most delicious pleasures on earth. He that has once tasted [*qui en a goûté*] this sweetness esteems all other consolations no better than gall and wormwood. [...] The heavenly consolations are little foretastes of those immortal delights [*avant-goût des suavités immortelles*] which God has in reserve for the souls that seek him; they are little delicacies which he gives to his children to allure them; they are the cordials with which he strengthens them, and they are also sometimes the earnest of eternal felicity.<sup>33</sup>

The tender and delightful affections arising during different devotional exercises are to be considered gifts, heavenly awards by which God attracts the faithful to Himself. To put it a bit blasphemously: He enchants (even seduces) them for the good. It is true, by the fine 'tastes' of tenderness and sweetness in themselves, nobody becomes good. Though the faithful could know that God has to be loved for His own sake alone, many of them, like children, require the help of the Father. This sweet aid manifests itself in the 'relish which we find in the things of God'. These consolations are actually the foretastes of heavenly delights; and, at the same time, this holy cheerfulness penetrates the action of the faithful in this world, thus it makes their deeds beautiful and agreeable (*belles et agréables*). In other words, though devotion depends on good actions, indeed, the way these deeds are done belongs to the realm of *goût*, in which the echo of *gustus spiritualis* can be clearly heard, since this taste is said to relish immortal sweetness (*suavités immortelles*). So the taste may have a significant function in connecting *vita contemplativa* with *vita activa*. Nevertheless, while one can find in Ignatius of Loyola the description of an astonishing experience of contemplation in which all of the senses are

<sup>32</sup> See Ps 119:103.

<sup>33</sup> Sales, *Introduction to a Devout Life*, 317–18.

stricken, Francis de Sales speaks about a softer devotional experience in terms of (fine) taste and delight; whereas St Ignatius wants to conquer the heart, St Francis prefers to enchant it. Historically extending it, this difference can be understood 'as little foretastes' of the difference between the sublime and the beautiful from the eighteenth century on.

In sum: though the exercises (*gymnasia, ejercicio*, and so forth) of the spiritual senses were always considered indispensable by our authors, since those – at least in their elevated forms – are not given by nature, in Origen the bodily senses have to be transformed into spiritual ones, in order to be transfigured into divine ones with the necessary precondition that the physical nature of senses has to be completely removed, while in Ignatius of Loyola and Francis de Sales the main question is rather how to render spirituality more sensual. The other shift concerns the priority of vision: the model of taste begins gradually to dominate over the descriptions of devotional experiences, though it is far from being exclusive. Yet around *gustus*, and with it, a new type of devotional experience appears (in spite of the notorious metaphor of 'sweetness of the word' in late medieval mysticism). In a passage of *Philothea* – though not using the term *goût* –, Francis de Sales seems to reflect on this shift in the tradition, that is, the dichotomy between (visible) divine beauty and (tastable) divine sweetness as the difference between *past* and *present*. Here is the intriguing formulation of this notable distinction: 'St Au[gu]stin[e], having been called at the age of thirty years, exclaimed, "O ancient beauty [*ancienne Beauté*]! whence is it that I have known thee so late? Alas! I saw thee before, but I considered thee not"; and you may well say, O ancient sweetness [*douceur ancienne*]! why did I not relish [*savourée*] thee before? Alas! you did not even then deserve it.'<sup>34</sup>

## II

As we have seen in St Francis de Sales, the Jesuits were open to the demands of the world (unlike the Jansenists, who preferred retirement from the world), even the 'mondain' courtly life was a worthy matter for them. Thus Gracián became famous for his *Oráculo manual*<sup>35</sup> written for Baroque courtiers in 1647, rather than for his spiritual exercises published under the title *El Comulgatorio*

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 5.2, 337. The place referred to in St Augustine is probably *Confessiones* 10.25, where all five (spiritual) senses, including taste, are mentioned: 'I tasted [*gustavi*], and do hunger and thirst [for Thee]: *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. J. G. Pilkington (New York: Liveright, 1943), 248. Conspicuously, it is also a reminiscence of Ps 33:9: 'Taste and See that the Lord is Sweet' (*geusasthe kai idete hoti chrēstos ho kurios* [Septuagint]; *gustate et videte quoniam bonus Dominus* [Vulgate]). For the complicated task of translating this sentence, see Fulton, "Taste and See", 181.

<sup>35</sup> Baltasar Gracián [Lorenzo Gracián, pseud.], *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia* (Huesca: Nogués, 1647).

in 1655.<sup>36</sup> In the *Oráculo manual*, *gusto* is a keyword, perhaps the most important, and clearly the most characteristic, feature of the *discreto*, the Baroque courtier and social sage:

*Know how to choose [buena elección]. Most things in life depend on it. You need good taste and an upright judgment [el buen gusto y el rectísimo dictamen]; intelligence [estudio] and application [ingenio] are not enough. There is no perfection without discernment and selection. Two talents are involved: choosing and choosing the best [poder escoger, y lo mejor]. [...] Knowing how to choose is one of heaven's greatest gifts [y así este es uno de los dones máximos de arriba].<sup>37</sup>*

In his well-known commentary on Gracián, Hans-Georg Gadamer writes that 'the concept of taste was originally more a moral than an aesthetic idea'.<sup>38</sup> To this one might add that the moral-social content of taste seems already to have a theological background. The phrase 'one of heaven's greatest gifts' in the end of the above aphorism is far from being a flower of speech. The word *gusto* occurs here neither in an exegetical context, nor in spiritual exercises, prayers, and so forth. It is quite telling that Gracián accurately omits biblical references in the *Oráculo manual*. This taste is primarily *buen gusto* – that is, at first glance, a social skill applying to many functions: it is a self-defensive weapon in the hostile social (courtly) world, it is a quick insight into complex, obscure, or embarrassing situations of everyday life, an aristocratic feature by which the one who possess it is able to differentiate himself from the vulgar, a necessary means to become an independent individual (*persona*), so to gain perfection.<sup>39</sup> In what follows, I shall concentrate on the heavenly aspects – stemming possibly from the *gustus spiritualis* tradition – which can be discerned in forming the world of good taste, that is, in the emerging cultural sphere of perfection.

<sup>36</sup> Baltasar Gracián, *El Comulgatorio* (1655; Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1977), Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/el-comulgatorio—0/html/>. Nicolas-Abraham Amelot de la Houssaye was the first French translator of *El Comulgatorio*, and it has been available in French since 1693 as *Modèle d'une sainte et parfaite communion* (Paris: Boudot, 1693). Earlier, he had also translated and annotated Gracián's *Oráculo manual* as *L'homme de cour* (Paris: Martin et Boudot, 1684). For its early Italian translations (1675, 1713) and their comparison, see Felice Gambin, "Le delizie della sacra mensa", ovvero una ritrovata traduzione seicentesca de *El Comulgatorio* di Gracián', in *Scrittura e riscrittura: Traduzioni, refundiciones, parodie e plagis*, ed. Associazione Ispanisti Italiani (Rome: Bulzoni, 1995), 115–30.

<sup>37</sup> Baltasar Gracián, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom: A Pocket Oracle*, trans. Christopher Maurer (New York: Currency; Doubleday, 1992), no. 51.

<sup>38</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2004), 31.

<sup>39</sup> To harmonize these different demands is not without tensions and contradictions, which result in obscure points in *Oráculo manual* (but these are insignificant for the present argumentation). See Anthony J. Cascardi, 'Gracián and the Authority of Taste', in *Rhetoric and Politics: Baltasar Gracián and the New World Order*, ed. Nicholas Spadaccini and Jenaro Talens (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 255–83.

Gadamer continues: 'The mark of good taste is being able to stand back from ourselves and our private preferences. Thus taste, in its essential nature, is not private but a social phenomenon of the first order.'<sup>40</sup> I would argue that, conceived in terms of *gustus spiritualis*, this inherent sociability can find its pre-figuration in the *communio* with God (or at least in striving to gain this *communio*). And spiritual purification as a precondition of this *communio* can then be conceived as framing the pattern for getting rid of our 'private preferences', and the demand of indispensable *gymnasia* and spiritual exercises (*ejercicios*) can be conceived as a model for the unceasing refinement of *buen gusto*. I am speaking of patterns and models which naturally require proper application to the new context.

For Gadamer, Gracián proceeds from 'the sense of taste', which is 'the most animal and most inward of our senses, [and] still contains the beginnings of the intellectual differentiation we make in judging things'.<sup>41</sup>

[The] sensory differentiation of taste [argues Gadamer], which accepts or rejects in the most immediate way, is in fact not merely an instinct, but strikes a balance between sensory instinct and intellectual freedom. [...] Thus Gracian already sees in taste a 'spiritualization of animality' [*Vergeistigung der Animalität*] and rightly points out that there is cultivation (*cultura*) not only of the mind (*ingenio*) but also of taste (*gusto*).<sup>42</sup>

Albeit the exact reference is lacking, Gadamer is probably referring to Aphorism 65, which can, however, also be read from another point of view: not as an explication of the spiritualization<sup>43</sup> of animality in taste,<sup>44</sup> but as the worldly application of *gustus*, well known from Origen's tradition of the divine senses:

<sup>40</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 32.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Geist* (spirit) in Gadamer's *Vergeistigung* goes back to Hegel, so, roughly speaking, it has to do with a kind of 'intellectualization' and not with the spirit taken in theological sense. The point here is not to offer a criticism of Gadamer's interpretation, but simply to call attention to another possible branch of the tradition of taste, which concentrates on the connection between taste and volition, and not (as has been done, especially by the Germans beginning with Johann Christoph Gottsched and Alexander Baumgarten) on the intellectuality or rationality of this faculty.

<sup>44</sup> For example, in Meditation 49 of his *El Comulgatorio*, Gracián illustrates the hunger of a baby, its urgent desire for a breast, the vehement voices and gestures of appetite mostly as the instinctive behaviours of different animals, and, at the same time, he offers them as examples to be imitated for a soul desiring *communio* with God: the soul has to increase its animal-like or instinctive yearnings (here it is also *gusto*) to make the desired *communio* really fruitful for itself, to be able to 'enjoy, taste, eat, and be delighted [*goza, gusta, come y saboréate*] with this bread of heaven [*pan del cielo*], joining delight with possession, experiencing celestial joys [*celestiales gustos*], and deriving a multiplied profit'. Baltasar Gracián, *Sanctuary Meditations for Priests and Frequent Communicants*, trans. Mariana Monteiro (London: Washbourne, 1876), 253–54.

*Elevated taste [Gusto relevante]. You can cultivate it [cultura], as you can the intellect [ingenio]. Full understanding whets the appetite and desire [apetito del desear], and, later, sharpens the enjoyment of possession [frucción del poseer]. You can judge the height of someone's talent by what he aspires to [elevación del afecto]. Only a great thing can satisfy a great talent [gran capacidad]. Large bites are for large palates [grandes paladares], lofty matters [materias sublimes] for lofty characters [sublimes genios]. Even the greatest excellences tremble before the person of refined taste, and the most perfect [seguras perfecciones] lose their confidence. Few things have perfection of the first magnitude: let your appreciation [aprecio] be sparing. Taste is acquired through contact with others. You make it your own through continual exercise [Péganse los gustos con el trato y se heredan con la continuidad]. You are lucky if you can associate with someone with perfectly developed taste. But don't profess to be satisfied with nothing; it is a foolish extreme, more odious if from affectation [afectación] than if from character [destemplanza]. Some wish God had created another world and other perfections just to satisfy their own extravagant imagination [extravagante fantasía].<sup>45</sup>*

Thus, taste can indeed be cultivated and, as such, it is therefore concerned with intellect (they seem somewhat compatible with each other, running collaterally, so to speak). But this means neither that it must be achieved in the same way in both cases nor that elevated taste would be 'closer' or more 'similar' to understanding (or 'further' from instinct) than a still uncultivated taste already is. Instead, the aphorism states that a man with higher understanding has more requirements and finer ones in the fields of taste, too: more appetites, desires, and, consequently, enjoyments. By means of this elevation, the man of taste can withdraw from the average, the mean, the natural (in terms of harshness and grossness) and thus from the barbarous state, in order to form a new, artificial world, that of *buen gusto*, as his proper abode.

A man with great capacity needs great things – the large palate of sensual taste longs for large bites, just as sublime genius longs for sublime things. There is an intimate connection between sensual taste and sublime genius in the sense of longing, appetite, and affection. The man of refined taste belongs to an informal (cultural) élite, has great authority over others in his choices and judgements. This authority is based on a superior quality unavailable to many (indeed, unlearnable), and cannot be codified in rules or any system of doctrine. To acquire and refine taste, one needs to be in contact with other members of the élite of taste. Here, the exercises consist of social intercourse and public conversations. Whereas with *gustus spiritualis*, the exercitant has to withdraw into a solitary state of meditation or contemplation or into an intimate dialogue with his retreat-giver, with *buen gusto*, the courtier has to engage in social intercourse. During the exercises, the former wants to meet God for bliss and salvation, the latter wants to meet his

<sup>45</sup> Gracián, *Art of Worldly Wisdom*, no. 65.

fellows (of his élite, at least) for perfection. Gracián's formulation in Aphorism 93 may show the courtier's tendency to go beyond worldly (social) practice, and, with this, its divine connotation: 'since Nature made man a compendium of the whole natural world, let art make him a universe by training his taste and intellect [*ejercicio y cultura del gusto y del entendimiento*]:'<sup>46</sup>

One also finds a direct 'heavenly' reference in Aphorism 65 on *gusto relevante*. Even if only from the criticism of affectation, it is clear that elevated taste longs for perfections which are the most sublime creatures of God, and obtain their dignity from the order of the universe He created. One adapts oneself to what exists in society, but that does not mean that one wisely accepts the opinions of others, that is, the 'public taste' – as Aphorism 133 seems to claim: 'What matters is to follow the current;' or Aphorism 270: 'What everyone says either *is* or wants to be' –, but taste, though it has to respect and consider the judgements of others, accepts and confirms the divine order, too. The latter seems to serve as the interpretative frame for the former.

As we have seen, St Francis de Sales talked about the child-like mentality of many of the faithful, who need the allure of God's sweetness to be able to choose the devotional life. It is undoubtedly a compromise, facing the facts of human nature (or psychology). With his aphorism 'Live practically [*Vivir a lo práctico*]', Gracián is also facing the limits of the present state of the human mind, but in the social sphere: 'The wise should adapt themselves to the present, even when the past seems more attractive, both in the clothes of the soul and in those of the body.' This 'rule for living holds for everything but goodness [*bondad*], for one must always practice virtue [*virtud*]:'. At the same time, the present social state of the human mind does not help one to obey this rule. 'What a sad [*infelicidad*] age this is, when virtue is rare and malice is common. The prudent [*discreto*] must live as best they can, though not as they would like to. May they prefer what luck granted them to what it withheld!' We have to adapt ourselves to the present, to the circumstances in which we have to live – and to do our best in those adverse conditions. Compared to the practice of virtue, taste stands on the pragmatic side; it can bring the person who possesses it closer to the unchangeable, eternal ideal,

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., no. 93. To attain the state of universal man, of completed personality, of autonomous individuality, the cultivation and exercise of taste *and* of understanding are indispensable, yet taste and manners are somewhat more essential, since 'wisdom herself is coarse when polish is lacking [*aun la misma sabiduría fue grosera, si desaliñada*]. Not only must understanding be refined [*aliñado*], but also our desires and especially our conversation [*y más el conversar*]. Some people show a natural refinement both in their inner and outer gifts, their concepts and words, in their bodily adornment (which is like the bark) and their spiritual gifts (the fruit). Others are so gross that they tarnish everything, even their fine qualities [*eminencias*], with an unbearable barbaric sloppiness [*intolerable bárbaro desaseo*]: Ibid., no. 87.

to virtue, to a life of devotion. Apart from the pragmatic, even occasionally cynical, tone, there is also a nostalgic bitterness when Gracián speaks about the ‘good old days’ when ‘good people’ were not rare, and were always imitated. Nevertheless, taste can be the one true aid at present: ‘Don’t *think* [*discurrir*] like an ancient; *taste* [*gustar*] like a modern;’<sup>47</sup> for taste can discern and enjoy the good and perfection even in bad circumstances:

*Go straight to the good [lo bueno] in everything. It is the happy lot of those with good taste [buen gusto]. The bee goes straight for sweetness, and the viper for the bitterness it needs for its poison. So with tastes [gustos]: some go for the best, others for the worst. There is nothing that doesn’t have something good, especially books, where good is imagined [pensado]. [...] Others have a happier sort of taste [gusto]: among a thousand defects they discover some perfection [perfección] that good luck happened to let drop.*<sup>48</sup>

The operation of good taste in discovering the good is similar to the activity of a bee in finding sweetness or of a viper in finding bitterness.<sup>49</sup> The analogy drawn between good taste and sensual taste is still strong; and the goodness in *buen gusto* can be understood as its capacity of grasping the best, the perfection ‘among a thousand defects’. The emphasis here has also remarkably changed in the function of taste. While in St Francis de Sales the consolations of benevolent God render the ways to devotional life sweet to taste, in Gracián *gusto* is presumably the only faculty – from heaven – that can discern or relish the good in a corrupted world.

The one who possesses *buen gusto*, the social sage, appears in different figures in the *Oráculo manual*: the *discreto* (the prudent), the *hombre en su punto* (the consummate person), the *persona la cultura* (the true person), the *hombre universal* (the universal man), the *prodigio* (the marvel), and the *sabio* (the wise).<sup>50</sup> The last is particularly intriguing:

*The wise are sufficient unto themselves. One of them carried all of his belongings with him. [...] Why should you need anyone else if no taste [mayor gusto] and no understanding [mayor concepto] is superior to yours? You will depend only on yourself; the greatest happiness is to resemble the Supreme Entity. The person who can live by himself is in*

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., no. 120, my emphasis. The latter distinction can be seen as a worldly version of St Francis de Sales’s distinction between visible (eventually intellectual) beauty and the tastable sweetness of divinity (see above).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> The metaphor of sweetness and bitterness is more complicated; for example, ‘Those who feel nothing are not really people. They don’t always act that way out of insensitivity but often out of stupidity. To feel strongly [*sentimiento*], when circumstances call for it, makes you a person [*acto personal*]. [...] To alternate the bitter with the sweet [*lo agrio con lo dulce*] shows good taste [*buen gusto*]: sweetness alone is for children and fools.’ Ibid., no. 266.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., nos. 6, 87, 93, 298, and 137.

no way a brute; in many ways he is a wise man, in every way a god [*El que puede pasar así a solas, nada tendrá de bruto, sino mucho de sabio y todo de Dios*].<sup>51</sup>

The autarchic figure of the *sabio*, on the one hand, exists outside society; since he no longer needs the company of others, he should not exercise, cultivate, or refine himself more, because he is perfectly consummated. On the other hand, having achieved his aim, he has become entirely ‘a god [*todo de Dios*]’. The question whether this is an unattainable ideal, but never attainable condition in the present age, or is merely rarely attainable, is secondary. This aphorism suggests that the great cultural exercising organized by and around social good taste does have an ideal goal – namely, the apotheosis of the individual: perfect *communio* with God.

The figure of the *sabio* can also be illuminated by the figure of the *politico*, who is ever bound in the apparently relativistic sphere of society, is always obliged to ‘go with the current’, and has no chance of ascending to the (solitary) state of the *sabio*: ‘To live by yourself, you must be very godly [*mucho de Dios*] or a complete savage [*todo de bestia*].’<sup>52</sup> From this perspective, it is fair to see Gracián’s enterprise as the secular application of Ignatius’s spiritual exercises: the *Oráculo manual* is a compendium of witty maxims for courtiers, concerning how to live and survive in society; *Ejercicios espirituales* is a compendium of strict rules for retreat-givers (and, indirectly, for exercitants), concerning how to enter and live in the Society (of Jesus);<sup>53</sup> the former sets the ideal of perfection in the *sabio*; the goal of the latter is perfect *communio*; the former identifies the finest faculty necessary to achieve perfection with *buen gusto*; the latter models the supreme inner experience of *communio* (or the internalization of divinity) after *gustus spiritualis*.

For Gracián, *buen gusto* remains sensual or instinctive by nature and it is a gift from heaven.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the progress from the level of animality – the condition of the beast (*bestia*) – truly means ascension, by means of cultural exercises, to the state of the social sage, then to the state of the consummate personality who is eventually outside society, that is, toward the ideal of apotheosis. A side-effect, so to speak, of this process is that the same cultivation forms a new society of *buen gusto* and a new set of social skills and qualities in which *gusto* is in harmony

<sup>51</sup> Gracián, *Art of Worldly Wisdom*, no. 137.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 133. The politicians are characterized by the terms sanity (*cordura*), madness (*locura*), and pretence (*afectar*), not by *buen gusto* or *prudence*.

<sup>53</sup> For this aspect of the Ignatian enterprise, see Philip Edean, ‘The Spiritual Exercises’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits*, ed. Thomas Worcester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 52–53.

<sup>54</sup> Similarly to some connected faculties such as upright judgement (*rectísimo dictamen*), or even, at least since it is a ‘natural propensity’ (*connatural propensión*), great discretion (*gran sindéresis*). See Gracián, *Art of Worldly Wisdom*, nos. 51 and 96.

with *prudence*. The relationship between the divine (spiritual) and the prudential 'function' of *buen gusto* in Gracián's project may be similar to that between divine and human means, just as his famous sentence inspired by Ignatius says: 'Use human means [*medios humanos*] as though divine [*divinos*] ones didn't exist, and divine means as though there were no human ones.'<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, for the divine project the sensual or instinctive element of taste must be judiciously increased, and its inherent heavenly 'contents' must be perfectly exploited, instead of transcending its instinctive nature.

This inherent connection between instinctive and divine can be better demonstrated using *El Comulgatorio*, which directly imitates Ignatius's exercises a hundred years later. This work has usually been considered a failure, so is rarely discussed; as far as I know it is mentioned in no histories of modern aesthetics. Its effective imagery is also intended to stimulate the senses and to increase the effects to the extreme. Its style is more sophisticated than Ignatius's, but it clearly manifests Ignatian inspiration and the influence of the composition of the *Ejercicios espirituales*.<sup>56</sup> The sixteenth meditation of *El Comulgatorio* merits particular attention for the purposes of our discussion. In this exercise, *communio* with God is imagined as participation in a heavenly banquet. In the second step of the meditation, Gracián offers the familiar sensual image of a worldly banquet with an abundance of food prepared in a great variety of dishes, from which each guest can choose according to his or her taste (*su gusto*), and eat anything that delights the palate (*comiendo al sabor de su paladar*). At that very point, the text changes to the subject of a heavenly feast: 'you who to-day are seated at the infinitely dainty Banquet which the power of Father celebrates [*celebra el poder del Padre*], arranged by the wisdom of the Son [*traza la sabiduría del Hijo*], and prepared with the fire of the Holy Ghost [*sazona el fuego del Espíritu Santo*].'<sup>57</sup> There follows a series of striking sensual images demonstrating the possibility of *communio* by means of the experience of taste. The immediacy with which Gracián connects the bodily taste to transcendental contents is almost embarrassing. *Horribile dictu*, a kind of meditative cannibalism is offered:

Here, is served a Lamb [*cordero*] nourished at a Virginal breast and prepared at the fire of His love [*sazonado al fuego de su amor*]. O! what delicious [*gustosa*] food! there, a Heart enamoured of souls, O! what a savoury repast! A Tongue which though distilling milk and honey was once embittered with gall and vinegar; see that you eat with enjoyment [*buen gusto*], for those Hands and those Feet pierced with nails are not to be left.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., no. 251.

<sup>56</sup> For a detailed comparison, see Frédéric Conrod, *Loyola's Greater Narrative: The Architecture of the 'Spiritual Exercises' in Golden Age and Enlightenment Literature* (New York: Lang, 2008), 163–64.

<sup>57</sup> Gracián, *Sanctuary Meditations*, 16.2, 81.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 82.

The meditative task is the enjoyable consuming of different dishes made from the parts of Christ's body. Gracián does not intend to differentiate the sensual from the spiritual with neither subtle nor sharp contrasts. Instead, the striking emotional effects are achieved by immediacy. In exactly the same way as is customary at a worldly banquet, here too each guest may choose from the table according to his or her palate or fancy (*espíritu*) to eat from the body of the Saviour – which comprises the parts of His body and also the physically experienced or suffered episodes of His life in a human body:

Where tastes differ, there is no disputing [*De gustos, ni hay admiración ni disputa*] – some appreciating [*apetecen*] one thing, others another; this guest relishing best the sweetness of the Childhood of Jesus [*apetece lo dulce de la niñez de Jesús*], another the bitterness of His Passion; this one the sharpness [*picante*] of His reproaches, that one the marvelous points of His expression [*finezas*]; each one according to his fancy [*espíritu*] preferring what seems to him best. Moreover in the same manner as those who partake of material food [*manjar material*], linger on the morsel which we relish [*gustando*] best, saying, let us enjoy this food leisurely that we may derive from it profit [*provecho*]; so does it happen in this Sacramental Banquet. [...] Approach, O! my soul, to this Feast and enjoy what most delights [*gustares*] you, though everything is good and well arranged if partaken of with a wholesome appetite [*con bien dispuesto paladar*]; but eat, like an Angel, the Bread of Angels; eat like a rational being [*persona*], not as a beast, unthankfully, for where the Body of the Lord [*Cuerpo del Señor*] is there are congregated the veritable eagles.<sup>59</sup>

The fourth section is for thanksgiving. The guests, satisfied with gustatory pleasures (*gustosos convidados*), remain at the table of the Lord, converse with Him, praise the meal, and give thanks to Him. One commends one dish, another praises another, 'each guest according to the delight he experienced [*según el gusto que percibió*]' Partaking of God (*comiste a Dios*), the soul renders eternal gratitude (*eternas gracias*) to the host of the feast, and fervently prays to Him in the future, thus she or he is able to converse (*conversando*) with Him after the banquet (or actually between two banquets, since the guests have been promised another). Moreover, the soul shows good taste (*buen gusto*) in knowing how to partake of God, and how to be able to praise Him. And the guest is coming to the next banquet with one of these considerations: 'to-day feeding on the dainty Heart of the Lamb of God [*sabroso corazón del Corderito de Dios*], another day upon His feet and wounded Hands', for although the soul receives 'Him each time all entire, nevertheless to-day feast with special appetite on that Head crowned with thorns [*especial apetito aquella cabeza espinada*]; to-morrow on that open side and that embittered tongue [*aquel costado abierto, aquella*

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 16.3, 82–83.

*lengua aheleada*], since each part merits an entire day's consideration, nay, even the whole of eternity'.<sup>60</sup>

Here *communio* seems directly experienced by means of taste; transcendence can be perfectly internalized 'in the same manner as' eating material food. The 'individuality' (*persona*) of the exercitant is preserved (and formed), since he or she can choose from amongst the dishes of the presented feast according to his or her own appetite, sensibility, or fancy. At the same time, only a *persona* – the opposite of the beast – is worthy of partaking in such a spiritual event. Later, owing to this experience, he can show his refined and 'individual' attitude or manner (*buen gusto*) to heaven in ordinary life, too. During the feast every choice the guest makes is perfect, here the question 'What is best?' is meaningless, because every morsel contains the whole. Consequently, the more intellectual faculties like judgement or understanding (otherwise, in the prudential or social usage, compatible to, and cooperating with, *buen gusto*) cannot play a role in finding the best. Here, everything is instinctively and perfectly tastable.

Sixteen years later, in 1671, two friends of *bel esprit* are talking to each other in the fifth conversation of Bouhours's *Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Eugène*, entitled 'Le je ne sais quoi'; their topic is the part of the human soul which is capable of grasping the subtlest things by means of sensation and taste, but without *claire et distincte* concepts.<sup>61</sup> Beyond a doubt, this work should be required reading amongst the narratives of modern aesthetics.<sup>62</sup> For the purposes of our discussion, Bouhours's biography of St Francis Xavier (published in 1682), otherwise unnoticed in the histories of aesthetics, is also noteworthy since some phrases used in it point towards the 'aestheticizing' of *gustus spiritualis*. For example, Bouhours quotes (in French) passages from a letter by Francis to Ignatius about the pains, miseries, and mortal fears a missionary is obliged to suffer, but he says that these are inexhaustible sources of spiritual joys (*joies spirituelles*); nowhere else 'could I taste such internal delicacies [*goûté tant de délices intérieures*]. These consolations of the soul are so pure, so perfect, so untiring that they can cease all sentiments of physical suffering'.<sup>63</sup>

Back to Ariste and Eugène: they are, in its name, talking about fine, almost aesthetic, taste, the faculty that enables us to recognize, and properly react to, the experience of the *je ne sais quoi* – that mysterious certain something that is simultaneously inner and outer, sensual and spiritual, of the earth and of heaven.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 16.4, 84.

<sup>61</sup> Dominique Bouhours, *Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Eugène* (Paris: Mabre-Cramoisy, 1671), 237–57.

<sup>62</sup> Besides or instead of the *Entretiens*, it is customary to mention Bouhours's *La manière*, especially its passages about *délicatesse*. See Dominique Bouhours, *La manière de bien penser dans les ouvrages d'esprit: Dialogues* (Paris: Mabre-Cramoisy, 1687), 158–218 and 393–99.

<sup>63</sup> Dominique Bouhours, *Vie de St. François Xavier* (1682; Brussels: Wagneer, 1852), 155–56.

Though the whole dialogue merits detailed analysis, here I shall only briefly discuss the end, where it becomes absolutely clear that this discourse is also, perhaps even primarily, theological, an implicit polemic with the Jansenists. The two friends agree that everything worth admiring in this world contains a *je ne sais quoi* which 'surprises us,' 'dazzles us,' 'charms us.' And this mysterious quality is 'the focal point of most of our passions:' especially desire and hope – occupying the whole of human life – 'have practically no other foundation'. Because 'beyond the goal we have set for ourselves there is always something else to which we unceasingly aspire and which we never attain'. At this point, the initially worldly (occasionally frivolous) dialogue explicitly takes a theological turn:

[T]o speak in a Christian fashion of the *je ne sais quoi*, is there not a mysterious something in us which makes us feel [*nous fait sentir*], despite all the weakness and disorders of corrupt nature, that our souls are immortal, that the grandeurs of the earth cannot satisfy us, that there is something beyond ourselves which is the goal of our desires [*le terme de nos desires*] and the centre of that felicity which we everywhere seek and never find? Do not really faithful souls recognize, as one of the Fathers of Church says, that we were made Christians not for the goods of this life but for something on an entirely different order [*pour je ne sais quoi d'un autre ordre*], which God promises to us in this life but which man cannot yet imagine [*concevoir*]? Then [...] this mysterious quality partakes of the essence of grace [*le je ne sais quoi est de la grâce*] as well as of nature and art.<sup>64</sup>

This passage, including the statement on the corruption of human nature, the reference to St Augustine,<sup>65</sup> and the last sentence on divine grace, evidently connects this excursus to the Jesuit-Jansenist debate, in other words, it convincingly demonstrates that this theological dispute is the final interpretative frame for the dialogue. Bouhours – by means of the two characters in his dialogue – distinctly claims that the most important experiences determining or enchanting our hopes and desires – that is, our volition – are, without constraint, to be felt, tasted (or foretasted, as in St Francis de Sales), and sensed, but cannot be grasped or comprehended by reason or conceived by means of rational concepts. Divine grace as a *je ne sais quoi* is tastable – and all human desires and passions can properly be understood from this 'aesthetic' point of view.

In the history of aesthetics it has been a commonplace to say that Gracián's concept of *gusto* (in association with other related keywords) is the beginning of

<sup>64</sup> Dominique Bouhours, 'The Je Ne Sais Quoi from *The Conversations of Aristo and Eugene*', trans. Donald Schier, in *The Continental Model: Selected French Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Scott Elledge and Donald Schier (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960), 237.

<sup>65</sup> Here Bouhours cites from St Augustine's *127th Sermon* in a marginal note. The following passages are intentionally formulated in Augustinian language, and contain further explicit references to Augustine's other works in marginal notes.

modern aesthetic thinking,<sup>66</sup> and this *gusto* was followed and interpreted by Blaise Pascal, François de La Rochefoucauld, Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, Dominique Bouhours, and others in the seventeenth century; its 'aesthetic' form later appears in the writings of Lord Shaftesbury, Addison, Jean-Baptiste Dubos, J. J. Breitinger, and J. J. Bodmer in the early decades of the eighteenth century. At the same time, the determining theological foundations of taste are hardly discussed, especially not the possible differences amongst the several theological views of this matter (including Jesuit, Jansenist, and Protestant).<sup>67</sup> The great narratives of modern aesthetics usually take *gustus/gusto/goût* as if it were a purely secular (moral, political) concept in the seventeenth century. My essay, I hope, has cast some light on the historical process by which a new type of 'beholder' emerges with a sensitive attitude both to transcendence and to life on earth, an attitude whereby the nature of transcendence becomes tastable.

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<sup>66</sup> At least – taking the most influential narratives into consideration – since Benedetto Croce's seminal history published in 1902 (*Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale. Teoria e storia*, 3rd ed. [Bari: Laterza, 1908]). Already Croce – as later Alfred Baeumler, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and others – refers to Karl Borinski, *Baltasar Gracian und die Hoflitteratur in Deutschland* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1894), especially the chapter 'Gracian und der Geschmack', when he argues for Gracián's importance in the history of aesthetics. Gracián's name, however, does not appear in the fundamental and paradigmatic history of modern aesthetics, Heinrich von Stein, *Die Entstehung der neuen Aesthetik* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1886), perhaps because it was published a few years before Borinski's work. (He appears once as 'Gratian', in the subtitle of one of Christian Thomasius's works in the overview of sources at the end of Stein's book [p. 421]).

<sup>67</sup> Quite surprisingly, for example, Jesuits and Jansenists are sometimes considered under the same title, for example, Pascal and Bouhours under '*Le goût et le sentiment*' in Baeumler's seminal history of aesthetics. See Alfred Baeumler, *Das Irrationalitätsproblem in der Ästhetik und Logik des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zur 'Kritik der Urteilskraft'* (1923; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), chaps. 1.A.1.b–c.

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