

Aesthetics and gastronomy: The reflections of Kant's and Hegel's aesthetic theories on modern food presentation

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the aesthetic dimensions of food presentation in modern gastronomy within a philosophical framework, based on the aesthetic theories of Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Although aesthetics has historically been associated with art, it has become an important part of everyday life practices today; gastronomy, on the other hand, has moved beyond being merely an activity that satisfies nutritional needs and has positioned itself as a multi-sensory, experience-oriented, and artistic field. In this context, the study discusses Kant's concepts of "disinterested pleasure," "judgments of taste," and "subjective universality," as well as Hegel's approach to aesthetics as a historical and dialectical process, through the lens of contemporary food presentations. The Kantian aesthetic framework focuses on the potential of elements such as visual composition, plate arrangement, color, and texture in gastronomy to produce aesthetic pleasure independently of functional utility. This approach shows that food presentation offers an aesthetic evaluation space separate from, but interacting with, the taste experience. The Hegelian perspective, on the other hand, considers gastronomy not merely as individual pleasure, but as an expression of cultural identity, historical memory, and social meanings; modern plate presentations are interpreted as a product of the dialectical relationship between tradition and innovation. In particular, experimental culinary practices, narrative-based presentations, and technological advancements (e.g., digital gastronomy and 3D food printing) make visible the historical transformation of aesthetic experience.

Keywords: gastronomy, Kantian aesthetics, Hegelian aesthetics, food presentation

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Introduction

Throughout history, aesthetics has been a field that, beyond art, shapes the organization of sensory experience and the expression of the concept of beauty within a socio-cultural context. Kant and Hegel stand out as two key figures who addressed aesthetic problems at a philosophical level, attempting to determine the place of art and beauty in human life. Kant grounds aesthetics in “disinterested pleasure” and “judgments of taste,” arguing that these judgments possess disinterested qualities and claim universality; furthermore, in the *Critique of Judgment*, he indirectly addresses gastronomic experience by separating the experience of eating and drinking from purely aesthetic experience (Danaher 2013; Dobrowolski 2018; Ercoşkun 2017; Kuswanto & Karkono 2022). Hegel interprets aesthetics as the expression of absolute spirit and considers art a field that unfolds the historical and dialectical development of spirit, thereby demonstrating how aesthetic experience evolves within cultural and historical contexts (Klosse & Van der Sonderen 2020; Kuswanto & Karkono 2022). The question of how this theoretical framework can be applied to contemporary gastronomic practice opens up a discussion on the multifaceted meanings that aesthetic experience brings to everyday life. Gastronomy is no longer considered merely a practice that satisfies nutritional needs, but rather an art form that appeals to the senses through visual composition, color, texture variety, plate arrangement, and experience-oriented presentations; in this context, Kant’s and Hegel’s aesthetic theories allow for a rethinking of the meaning and value of food presentation (Sree & S. N. 2024; Sukmawan 2020).

This study examines the reflections of Kant’s and Hegel’s aesthetic theories on modern food presentation, drawing on conceptual discussions in the literature and current practices. It focuses on the relationship between the theoretical and practical dimensions of aesthetic experience, concentrating on the aesthetic and cultural value of gastronomy. Analyzing Kant’s concepts of “subjective universality” and “disinterested pleasure,” and the separation of the eating and drinking experience from purely aesthetic judgment helps in understanding how aesthetics have developed in social and historical contexts within a Hegelian reading. The study offers an internalized framework for how visual presentations, color and texture plays, plate arrangements, and digital-techno-gastronomic applications (e.g., 3D printing) enrich the aesthetic experience in modern gastronomy, and

relates the theoretical duality of Kant and Hegel to this practical field (Dhar 2022; Hafu 2021; Sree & S. N. 2024; Sutami & Kabul 2024; Türkoğlu & Kozak 2015). The findings highlight the multifaceted nature of aesthetic experience as reflected in daily life and cultural identity, and offer implications for how the aesthetic and cultural value of gastronomy can be established on a philosophical basis (Bulut 2019; Deroy et al. 2014; Dhar 2022; Hafu 2021; Klosse & Van der Sonderen 2020; Sukmawan 2020).

Theoretical framework: A brief reflection on Kant and Hegel

Kantian aesthetics addresses both the subjectivity and universal validity of aesthetic judgment. The concept of “the beautiful” is associated with a disinterested aspect of experience; this aspect implies necessary universal validity while also being dependent on individual sensory exceptionality. Kant's aesthetic judgment carries a “claim to universality” for the judgment itself; this is a mechanism that enables the formation of a shared aesthetic standard beyond subjective liking. This fundamental assumption is frequently addressed in modern aesthetic discussions, and contemporary critical literature examines how Kant's aesthetic judgment carries a claim to subjective universality and how it can change contextually (Danaher 2013; Dobrowolski 2018; Ercoşkun 2017). Furthermore, the tension between the objective consequences of “taste judgment” and “subjective universality” is seen as central to Kantian aesthetics in the literature. This framework offers a useful conceptual basis for evaluating the audiovisual and sensory components of modern food presentation (Dobrowolski 2018; Ercoşkun 2017). Particularly in the context of food-aesthetics, the Kantian distinction is emphasized in various discussions, showing that pure aesthetic judgment and the eating-drinking experience can be considered as separate categories; this facilitates the understanding of gastronomy as an aesthetic field, transcending traditional eating-drinking experience and treating visual-sensory presentation and pleasure as an independent aesthetic field (Dhar 2022; Sree & S. N. 2024; Sutami & Kabul 2024). Furthermore, Kant's conceptual framework of “subjective universality” is linked in contemporary gastronomic literature to discussions emphasizing that presentation should be seen as a universally shared aesthetic value; in this context, visual communication, textural diversity, and the overall aesthetic impact of presentation are considered together with the

journalistic and cultural dimensions of “life experience” (Bulut 2019; Hafu, 2021; Özdemir, 2021).

Hegel’s theory of aesthetics views aesthetics not merely as an expression of beauty and pleasure, but also as a process by which the absolute spirit produces itself in the historical process and contributes to the formation of social, moral, and aesthetic values (Klosse & Van der Sonderen 2020). This perspective positions aesthetics as intertwined with social practices and historical transformations, and places are not merely as individual pleasure, but as a cultural-historical construct. Contemporary gastronomic literature reflects this dialectical approach in studies discussing how food presentation gains dynamism in the tension between modernity and tradition; issues such as visuality, plate arrangement, and the reinterpretation of presentation according to cultural context make it possible to read food practice as an expression of socio-cultural life (Dhar 2022; Hafu 2021; Klosse & Van der Sonderen 2020; Sukmawan 2020). In particular, the transformation of plate presentation from merely “an object to be eaten” to an object carrying aesthetic and cultural meaning can be considered one of the extensions of Hegel’s aesthetic approach in modern gastronomy (Hafu 2021; Sukmawan 2020).

Kant and gastronomy: Subjective universality, disinterested pleasure, and pure aesthetic judgment

Contemporary gastronomic literature utilizes the Kantian aesthetic framework to understand how food presentation structures visual-sensory integrity and the pleasure of the experience. The concept of “disinterested pleasure” allows the eating experience to be perceived solely as aesthetic pleasure, independent of functional utility; this perspective is based on the idea that all visual elements of plate arrangement, color, texture, and presentation create a harmonious aesthetic experience (Dobrowolski 2018; Kuswantoro & Karkono 2022). The contribution of visual composition and presentation in gastronomy to the experience of food as a “good” independent of its taste points to the applicability of Kantian aesthetics to everyday life (Hafu 2021; Özdemir 2021; Sree & S. N. 2024). Furthermore, the concept of “subjective universality” emphasizes the power of food presentation to guide individual experiences toward a shared aesthetic standard. This situation provides a basis for discussion on how food presentation can create a shared aesthetic experience even in different social and cultural contexts (Dhar 2022; Dobrowolski 2018; Ercoşkun

2017; Kuswanto & Karkono 2022). In this context, it is seen that the aesthetic value of menu design and presentation is based not only on individual tastes but also on social and cultural sharing; Desjardins' work demonstrates this point with a concrete example (Dhar 2022). The Kantian perspective, in modern gastronomy, strengthens the aesthetic value of presentation through the "dialectical link between visibility and taste," while also enriching the cultural meanings of presentation (Bulut 2019; Dhar 2022; Özdemir 2021).

In the context of gastronomy, discussions regarding how Kantian aesthetics, with its purely aesthetic judgment, treats the eating and drinking experience as a distinct parameter are of significant importance. Within this framework, the production of "pleasure" through audiovisual presentation is established as an aesthetic evaluation beyond mere eating habits; this approach is clearly evident in plating manifestos and literature emphasizing the aesthetic value of visual presentation. Deroy and colleagues' manifesto on plating argues that plate arrangement cannot be considered merely a functional organization, but rather an aesthetic experience in which audiovisual senses are integrated; this provides an important example of how Kantian aesthetics can be functionalized in everyday and concrete gastronomic practices (Hafu 2021). Furthermore, Bulut's aesthetic evaluations address how the aesthetic dimension of gastronomy is constructed through visual images and photography, emphasizing the central role of visual presentation in the production of aesthetic value (Özdemir 2021). Finally, Desjardins' work, which examines the role of menu design in the production of aesthetics and identity, serves as a key example in demonstrating how Kant's concept of "subjective universality" functions within social and cultural contexts (Dhar 2022).

The Hegelian school and the historical-dialectical dimension of aesthetics: A reading through gastronomy

Hegel's aesthetic approach is based on the view of art as an expression of absolute spirit and aesthetics as a process that develops within historicity: art expresses itself within the social and cultural contexts from which spirit inherits its own consciousness, and this expression becomes meaningful as part of the dialectical progress in history (Klosse & Van der Sonderen 2020). Considering modern gastronomic practices within this framework allows food presentation to be seen not merely as an art form, but as an expression of social, cultural, and historical processes: elements such as visibility, color, texture, and

plate arrangement are not only tools of aesthetic pleasure, they are also expressions of cultural identity, historical memory, and social change. In contemporary literature, studies demonstrating the adoption of this perspective highlight analyses that restructure food presentation within the dialectical tension between tradition and innovation. For example, the fact that plating is rooted in a multisensory art form and produces an aesthetic expression through the interaction of form, content, and technical knowledge offers a framework suitable for a Hegelian reading (Hafu 2021). Examining menus as a tool representing cultural identities can be read as an aesthetic dialectic where traditional and contemporary elements come together; this is concretized in Desjardins' work, where the menu functions as a representation of identity (Dhar 2022). Furthermore, the presentations of modern gastronomy, reshaped by technological advancements such as digitalization and 3D printing, reflect a dialectical combination of traditional and innovative elements; this can be considered an example that concretely reveals the dynamics of the historical development process of aesthetics within a Hegelian framework (Sree & S. N. 2024; Sutami & Kabul 2024). In this context, it can be concluded that visual presentations and taste-smell-integrated experiences are not limited solely to the production of individual pleasure but are also an aesthetic activity that enables the production and reproduction of cultural memory and social practices (Klosse & Van der Sonderen 2020; Shetty et al. 2024; Sukmawan 2020).

Examples of modern gastronomy in light of Kant's and Hegel's aesthetic theories

The aesthetic theories of Kant and Hegel offer different approaches to the modern art of gastronomy, both in terms of form and content. While Kant emphasizes that beauty is associated with "disinterested pleasure" and the simplicity of nature, Hegel interprets aesthetics as the outward expression of meaning and the spiritual world. The aesthetic understandings of these two thinkers are two fundamental sources that nourish different approaches in contemporary gastronomy. Examples of gastronomy that conform to Kant's aesthetic theory generally embody simplicity, naturalness, and a minimalist understanding of beauty. For instance, René Redzepi's nature-inspired presentations at his Noma Restaurant embody Kant's concept of the pleasure derived from nature's aesthetic order. The use of natural elements such as twigs, moss, or stones on the plate presents the

viewer with the inherent beauty of nature's simplicity and forms. Similarly, Grant Achatz's Alinea, with its dishes created using liquid nitrogen or smoke effects, alludes to Kant's concept of the "sublime"; the grandeur and boundlessness of nature are represented on the plate with a dramatic effect. Massimo Bottura's "Broken Glass" dessert or Daniel Humm's minimalist presentations offer a selfless sense of pleasure in line with Kant's principles of order and simplicity. These examples, reflecting the aesthetic superiority of simplicity of form and naturalness, bring the viewer not only visual but also mental comfort and contentment.

On the other hand, Hegelian aesthetics manifest themselves in gastronomy in examples where form and content form an inseparable whole, and aesthetics merge with meaning and narrative. Massimo Bottura's "Oops! I Dropped the Lemon Tart" presentation transforms the chef's personal narrative into an artistic expression of a dessert that appears to be broken. This directly aligns with Hegel's understanding that in a work of art, form and meaning, individual story and aesthetics are intertwined.

Alinea's "Soy Sauce Painting" presentations, where ingredients are sprinkled on the table like paint, transform art and gastronomy into a stage performance.

The collaborations of Dom Pérignon and Ferran Adrià reinforce the transformation of gastronomy into an art form, while Gaggan Anand's Emoji Menu brings individual humor and the chef's character to the aesthetic in its presentation. According to Hegel, art is a realm where individual spirit and universal meaning meet; therefore, in these examples, gastronomy refers both to the chef's narrative and to universal artistic values.

Rasmus Kofoed's (Geranium) "Narrative of Dreams and Nature" dish, Andoni Luis Aduriz's (Mugaritz) experimental presentations, and Central's (Virgilio Martínez) dishes representing different geographical regions of Peru, bring Hegel's idea that art has meaning within a historical and cultural context to gastronomy. These dishes are not merely about flavor and form, but also about expressing nature, culture, and individual narratives. El Celler de Can Roca's "Family Stories" dish embodies Hegel's dialogue between the individual and the universal in art, transforming the chefs' personal memories and childhood stories into an aesthetic form.

A dual reading of aesthetic experience in contemporary gastronomy: An integrated analysis of Kant and Hegel

The prominent dynamics in the current literature demonstrate how Kant's and Hegel's aesthetic conceptual frameworks can be applied to modern food presentation. Firstly, visual presentations and plating praxis (visuals, color, texture, and plate arrangement) enrich the aesthetic experience; works such as the plating manifesto argue that aesthetic experience is not limited to taste alone, but transforms into a multisensory art through the combination of visual and tactile senses (Hafu 2021). In this context, Kant's concepts of "disinterested pleasure" and "subjective universality" show that presentation not only fulfills a functional need but also transforms fundamental aesthetic value into a shared Standard, and this standard facilitates the construction of universality as an aesthetic criterion in modern plate design (Dhar 2022; Dobrowolski 2018; Ercoşkun 2017).

Another approach to considering gastronomy within a Hegelian framework requires taking into account the historical-dialectical development of aesthetics; this perspective reveals that food presentation is intertwined with cultural memory and social practices. This can be read as an aesthetic dialectic where traditional and contemporary elements coexist, and in this process, gastronomy can be understood as an expression of the spirit's self-expression (Dhar 2022; Klosse & Van der Sonderen 2020; Shetty et al. 2024). Furthermore, the transformation created in aesthetic experience by technological developments such as 3D printing and digital gastronomy can be considered as an example that updates the aesthetic-reality relationship between Kant and Hegel; the tension between digital production and traditional presentation can be read as part of the historical development of aesthetic experience (Bulut 2019; Shetty et al. 2024; Sree & S. N. 2024; Sutami & Kabul 2024).

Discussion: The multilayered nature of aesthetic experience and its practical contributions

In the context of audiovisual presentation and aesthetic experience, high-quality visual presentations and harmony of color and texture strengthen both the conceptual and practical dimensions of aesthetic experience. The intersection of plating manifestos and aesthetic approaches reveals that presentation is not merely about food; rather, aesthetic experience presents a multi-layered structure integrated into the social context (Bulut 2019; Deroy et al. 2014; Hafu 2021).

Treating the menu as a tool representing cultural identity demonstrates how gastronomic practice acquires meaning within social and cultural contexts, through a combination of Kant's concept of "subjective universality" and the Hegelian historical-dialectical aesthetic narrative. In this approach, the menu is read not only as a functional informational element but also as an aesthetic representational tool that constructs identity; Desjardins' work illustrates this point with a concrete example (Dhar 2022).

In the context of digital and technological transformation, 3D printing, digital gastronomy, and new technological applications are expanding the traditional boundaries of aesthetic experience. These developments demonstrate how aesthetics evolve within the dialectical interaction of tradition and innovation, allowing for the creation of a new bridge between the Kantian approach of disinterestedness and the Hegelian historical-dialectical perspective. The combined use of audiovisual elements and technical innovations makes both the universal and cultural dimensions of aesthetics more visible (Dobrowolski 2018; Hafu 2021; Klosse & Van der Sonderen 2020; Shetty et al. 2024; Sree & S. N. 2024; Sutami & Kabul 2024).

From an ethical and cultural perspective, gastronomy can be considered not only as the production of what is "beautiful" and "delicious," but also as a field where cultural narratives and identities are constructed. Within this framework, the socio-cultural meaning of aesthetic experience makes it possible to read gastronomy as a "cultural performance"; the expansion of aesthetic perception, particularly through media (e.g., television programs and digital content), makes this process even more visible (Sukmawan 2020).

Conclusion

This study provides a framework for understanding how Kantian and Hegelian aesthetic theories are reflected in modern food presentation designs. Kant's concepts of "subjective universality" and "aimless pleasure" enable the aesthetic value of food presentation to be transformed into a shared standard, and the resulting visual-sensory experience to be related to pure aesthetic judgment; it also shows that the eating and drinking experience is not limited to taste and function, but that visual-auditory and cultural dimensions are also decisive (Bulut 2019; Danaher 2013; Dhar 2022; Dobrowolski 2018; Ercoşkun 2017; Kuswantoro & Karkono 2022). The Hegelian framework, on the other hand, emphasizes that aesthetics is an expression shaped by

social practices within a historical and dialectical development; in modern gastronomy, the dialectical fusion of tradition and innovation establishes the historical context of aesthetic experience and makes it possible to consider plate presentations as a reproduction of cultural memory (Hafu 2021; Klosse & Van der Sonderen 2020; Shetty et al. 2024). This dual framework allows for a rethinking of the aesthetic and cultural value of contemporary gastronomic practice and offers enriching contributions at both theoretical and practical levels.

Thus, Kant's concepts of "aesthetic universality" and "disinterested pleasure", along with Hegel's aesthetic-dialectical interpretation, reveal the multifaceted nature of aesthetic experience in everyday life and cultural identity, while grasping the meaning and value of modern food presentation. Since aesthetic practices in contemporary gastronomy encompass not only taste but also visual appeal, presentation, and technological innovations, Kant's and Hegel's aesthetic theories offer a complementary perspective; this theoretical framework allows for a clearer understanding of the driving force behind the aesthetic and cultural value of gastronomy.

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Aesthetics and gastronomy: The reflections of Kant's and Hegel's aesthetic theories on modern food presentation

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