

# On taste

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How unlike to this the expression, which is used of Sorrow by Hesiod [...]: 'Rheum from her nostrils was trickling.'

(Longinus, On the sublime [IX, 5]<sup>1</sup>)

Although opinions on drama have changed in the past 1900 years, at least to some extent, the laws of current taste are still inexorable in proscribing appropriateness.

Longinus wouldn't even have dipped his reed in ink to describe what some of the modern Hesiodi dare bring on stage without fearing summery execution: scaffolded horse corpses, excrements, puke and other Dionysian pleasures. Sacral, catholicised bestiality? The new heroes do not even know their victims, the producers as always the good judges of instant emotion, the actors prepared to die from within their armour of played perversion... Reality On Stage. Real Live Action. Forget about Sir John Gielgud: senses must be shaken, not stirred, let alone tickled... For wherever remote controls exist, you may well just perish...

Altogether, tumidity seems particularly hard to avoid. The explanation is that all who aim at elevation are so anxious to escape the reproach of being weak and dry that they are carried, as by some strange law of nature, into the opposite extreme. They put their trust in the maxim that 'failure in a great attempt is at least a noble error'.

(Longinus, On the sublime [III, 3]<sup>2</sup>)

The imagination of reality. The reality of imagination. Taboos, or at least matters which are to be considered with some reserve, no longer seem to exist. Our needs must be satisfied in more and more domains and ever more directly, and at an ever-lower Maslov-level – and at that, some people even think they're actually growing. The cultural weight attributed to the gewgaws of Neanderthals is smarting.

Where the cultural aristocracy used to make a 'safe' distinction between art – if necessary further divided into upper and lower case 'A' – and kitsch, and everyone knew what was what, does the contemporary cultural nouveau riche swear by what is perceived as the pinnacle of sublimation: 'artkitsch' a.k.a. 'camp'. Anything goes, the more extreme the better. Any form of civilization is secondary to the ultimate in attainability: Maximum Exposure. The victory of bad taste, often still in need of a little cultural varnish though – by way of excuse? "This guy Marcel Duchamp, he was very camp in his days, wasn't he? Marcel Du-camp! Ha, ha..."

The cultural elite is no longer formed by people who can glory in at least some degree of cultural sophistication, how ever basic, but by people who consider *The Phantom of the opera* – or whatever they witnessed during their tax deductible corporate outing – as the measure of things.

In satisfying our needs, we've descended Maslov's pyramid. Reality is rapidly being perverted, and with that, so is our imagination of it. Directly appealing the abdomen, our imagination can only steer reality towards an ever more perverted version of it, as society eventually will be divided into just voyeurs and exhibitionists, living in perfect symbiosis – everyone simultaneously satisfying the needs of every other and of himself in an ultimate, hermaphrodite masturbation. Worms do the same, don't they...

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<sup>1</sup> Trans. W. Rhys Roberts (1899). Longinus on the Sublime, Cambridge University Press, 1935. Retrieved from: <http://www.classicpersuasion.org/pw/longinus/desub002.htm#ix5>.

<sup>2</sup> Trans. W. Rhys Roberts (1899). Longinus on the Sublime, Cambridge University Press, 1935. Retrieved from: <http://www.classicpersuasion.org/pw/longinus/desub001.htm#iii3>.