

Sensus communis or *sensus particularis*?

Immanuel Kant in Africa

9.1. Introduction

The point of departure¹ in Kant's theory of *sensus communis* as set out in his *Kritik der Urtheilskraft* (originally published 1790) is what he claims to be the subjective necessity of the individual's aesthetic judgement. Such necessity implies that the individual cannot afford to consider her or his judgement as merely idiosyncratic, but has to assume that it is shared by all others.

Let us try to think along with Kant on this point. Who are these others? They are the members of the community to which the judging individual belongs. The aesthetic judgement thus has a vital social implication beyond the use of individual rational faculties of articulating and justifying a sense of beauty. It is in the aesthetic judgement that the sense of community is imposed as a self-evident and necessary reality upon the individual. The sense of beauty is at the same time a sense of social belonging, of social identity. In the aesthetically judging and the identity-affirming individual consciousness, neither the aesthetic judgement nor the social belonging can be tolerated to appear in a relativist light. The individual cannot bear to see his aesthetic judgement reduced to a mere personal idiosyncrasy but has to be convinced that his beauty is necessarily everybody's beauty. In the same way the individual must experience his sense of social belonging (that, still according to Kant, is implied in his experience of beauty) not as the outcome of a strategic and contingent choice leaving open a whole range of possible other social identities and commitments that might be tried at some later stage – no, at the subjective level the sense of social belonging is as absolutely inescapable as, allegedly, the sense of beauty.

A present-day social scientist like myself looks with a mixture of profound admiration and intense bewilderment at Kant's views here.

¹ Kant 1983b.

9.2. Why the social sciences have difficulty appreciating Kant's theory of aesthetic judgement

Bewilderment in the first place. Kant's critical thought is not an explicit and recognised part of the social-science canon (however diverse) today. Any social-science perspective on Kant therefore would mean trying to bring Kant in from the outside – inventing ways of accommodating, isolating or annihilating the alien body of Kant's critical thought¹ within a more familiar disciplinary framework of social science. Although Kant's critical writings were unmistakably an influence on the founding fathers of the social sciences (Marx, Durkheim and Weber), yet for all three authors this influence was highly indirect – filtered through de Bonald and de Maistre (in the case of Durkheim), through Hegel (in the case of Marx), and through Marx and German *Kulturphilosophie* (c. 1900) in the case of Weber. There has been far greater continuity between Kant's pre-critical writings on anthropology, history, geography, etc., and the emergent social sciences of the nineteenth century; but these pre-critical writings have been largely ignored by twentieth-century philosophy as obsolete, occasionally racist, and essentially non-philosophical in the sense of falling short of the canon defined, for all of subsequent Western philosophy, by Kant himself in his critical writings. More in general, the process of intra-disciplinary professionalisation of the social sciences especially during the first half of the twentieth century has meant that these sciences have sought to create ever greater distance between themselves and older, possibly rival, disciplines in academia: *belles lettres*, the arts, history, philosophy. This applies especially to the Anglo-Saxon social-science tradition that has also prevailed in the Netherlands and Scandinavia, but also to the German and French national social-science traditions. For the social scientist it is difficult to conceive that Kant's critical investigation of pure knowledge, practical knowledge, and judgement does constitute the foundation and the touchstone of modern thought. For did not Kant write a hundred years before the social sciences really took wing? Had Kant therefore not inevitably to write in an idiom that favours a classical individual-centred rationality, virtually without any recognition of the ways in which social institutions and social processes structure and restrain individual consciousness, impose and warp judgement, contaminate it with collective representations (Durkheim), and with subconscious reference to groups and individuals the social actor would like to belong to or from which he seeks in vain to dissociate himself? What would remain of Kant if we tried to rewrite his work in the idiom of today's social science? Does not a neo-Marxist or functionalist sociology of knowledge, *à la* Mannheim² or Merton³, render the *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* as hopelessly obsolete as its date of original publication would suggest to any serious social scientist – who prefers not to cite work more than

¹ Kant 1983b, 1983c, 1983d.

² Mannheim however was greatly inspired by Kant: cf. Mannheim 1922.

³ Merton 1968.

twenty years old. The democratic and relativist Tylorian concept of culture that became standard in the social sciences,¹ although harking back to Herder, did not find a promising early exponent in Kant and was not adopted in *Kulturphilosophie*. Confronted with the title *Culture and Practical Reason* the contemporary anthropologist thinks not of Kant in Königsberg² but of Marshall Sahlins in Chicago.³ Are not the repeated allegations⁴ to the effect that racist elements are contained in Kant's pre-critical work sufficient reason for a social scientist today not to bother with him any more? Does not *La Distinction*, Bourdieu's⁵ sociological reading of *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, contain everything that could possibly still be worthwhile in Kant's critical assessment of aesthetic judgement? For the social scientist the sociologistic reduction inherent in Bourdieu's argument would not so much constitute a travesty of Kant (as it certainly is from a philosophical perspective), but a salvage operation of what little of Kant could still be used in the social science of taste today.

Of course I am deliberately exaggerating. One notable exception to the anthropological aloofness vis-à-vis Kant has been Mary Douglas, the grand old lady of British anthropology, who cites him repeatedly.⁶ Moreover, in the most recent decades the social sciences, having established themselves securely in academia, have opened up again for philosophical inspiration, and this is likely to lead to their renewed appreciation of Kant, as mediated through popular twentieth-century philosophers like J.-F. Lyotard, G. Deleuze, H. Arendt, and S. Žižek.⁷

Three elements in particular are missing from Kant's theory if, stripped of its project as a philosophical theory of transcendence, it were to be reformulated as a mere theory of the production of the social.

In the first place, as I have already indicated, the strictly rational consciousness of Kant's individual make that individual a sociological monster and even (as a whole range of philosophical critics has argued, from Scheler, Freud, Sartre right down to Robin Schott)⁸ a philosophical monster.

Secondly, the community that is implied in that individual's aesthetic judgement is supposed to extend infinitely so as to encompass the whole of humankind, without

¹ Cf. chapter 15.

² Kant's place of birth and work, which he hardly ever left in his life; later called Kaliningrad.

³ Sahlins 1976; cf. Drechsel 1984. Sahlins' title was a deliberate non-reference to Kant, to which I shall briefly come back below.

⁴ Cf. Rose 1990; Eze 1996, 1997b; Bernal 1987. For a partial refutation with emphasis on Kant's critical writings, cf. Palter 1996b; Blok 1997.

⁵ Bourdieu 1979.

⁶ E.g. Douglas 1984.

⁷ Lyotard 1986; Deleuze 1963; Žižek 1993; Arendt 1982; for further recent philosophical reflections on Arendt's and Lyotard's appropriations of Kant, cf. Dostal 1984; Flynn 1988; Ingram 1988.

⁸ Schott 1988.

subdivisions of a somatic, national, ethnic, regional, professional, class or gender nature. This is the only position Kant can take if he is not to make nonsense of his transcendental project. However, if we were to take Kant's philosophical exposé for an empirical description of the social processes of aesthetic production and aesthetic reception, such a view of social life would only apply in closed and homogeneous, totally autarkic, local communities. Under the designation of 'primitive isolates', such communities were for a long time paradigmatic in cultural anthropology, but their existence could only be postulated as a theoretical possibility. For the anthropologist's participating both in her original (usually North Atlantic) community and in a supposedly isolated local community under study, her very access to the latter, and her commuting between that community and academia, would already introduce a plurality of life-worlds (i.e. alternatives of experience, judgement and truth), into that local community. And of course, closer historical analysis would bring out the fact that, since such a local community clearly shares in *anatomically modern humanity's* genetic make-up, language capabilities, faculties of discursive thought, traditions of tool making and food production – in a whole range of human achievements, most of them less than 200,000 years old – it could never have been absolutely and totally isolated in the first place. Anyway, even marginally primitive isolates have long been supplanted by peasant communities that, however much inclined to a subjective perception of self-sufficiency, would meet the standard anthropological definition of being 'part societies with a part culture'. There is overwhelming empirical evidence that in virtually all situations today, humans identify with a community that they consciously and undeniably perceive as a subset of humanity, not as the whole of humanity.¹ In such a situation the subjective necessity of the individual's aesthetic judgement creates not one clearly delineated and unequivocal community, but a field of tension: on the one hand, in the abstract sense, the individual may have to abide by Kant and take his aesthetic judgement so absolutely seriously as to imply the whole of humankind in it; but, on the other hand,² the individual cannot always ignore the fact that others in his immediate or remote social environment would unavoidably disagree with his judgement; by virtue of this, some – or many – people opt out of the universal community which his judgement has implied, and they instead throw him back upon the awareness of a less than universal judgement backed up by a less than universal community. Whether this less than universal community turns out to be based on class, gender, regional ties, or whatever other selection and mobilisation criterion, the effect of its being less than universal is that

¹ Cf. Dunbar 1995, 1997; Hamilton 1964.

² As Kant himself was well aware:

'...since under these empirical conditions a Black person must have a different normative idea of the beauty of the human form from a White person – a Chinese a different from a European'

original: 'daher ein Neger notwendig unter diesen empirischen Bedingungen eine andere Normalidee der Schönheit der Gestalt haben muß, als ein Weißer, der Chinese eine andere, als der Europäer.'

Kant 1983b: §17; my translation.

the *sensus communis* implied in the abstract and absolute judgement, is confronted with a *sensus particularis*¹ implied by the contrastive, alternative judgement. In other words, Kant's notion of community is too monolithic, and does not take into account the complexity and plurality of communities, identities, reference groups, that are constantly being constructed and discarded in the social process. Under modern conditions of globalisation, such an argument would apply *a fortiori*.

Situating the individual in this kaleidoscopic social process of incessant construction and dissolution of multiple communities, immediately brings to mind the third objection: not only Kant's community but also Kant's *individual* is too monolithic, too much integrated and consistent, that is, in full accordance with the consistent rationality attributed to that individual. In social practice, many people have totally committed themselves to one community but beyond that one community happen to be aware of a plurality of communities of others. What is more, most people turn out to have committed themselves to more than one community, cherishing several identities in that connection, in such a way that each identity is either activated or latent depending on the social expectations and pressures to which the person is subjected in a particular place and at a particular time. The recognition of shifting and plural social identities united in one and the same person, and alternately activated according to the different specific roles that this individual plays serially in the context of specific communities, in the course of a life, a year, even a day, would render the step between aesthetic judgement and community rather less compelling and unequivocal than Kant suggests. Constantly aware of alternatives in oneself because of the non-monolithic nature of the self with its many social roles within the many communities in which to play these roles, the sense of community generated by implication on the basis of aesthetic judgement is likely to be less than total. Admittedly, to some extent the awareness of multiple, incompletely integrated identities united in the same person is typically an achievement of postmodern social science and philosophy reflecting on postmodern society. However, multiplicity of roles and social contexts, and the awareness of alternatives, is demonstrably a feature that all societies display, albeit in varying degrees; postmodernity may have helped us to perceive this feature, but has not created it.

9.3. What Kant has yet to offer to the social sciences

If I had stopped here, I would never have made the grade from social scientist to philosopher. But in addition to bewilderment, there is profound admiration for Kant's position. Anglophone-orientated social scientists of my generation were, early in their careers, exposed to Popper's *Logic of Scientific Discovery* as the paroxysm of epistemological sophistication that it was then;² we were scarcely

¹ Cf. Wiredu 1996, cf. 1998.

² Popper 1959.

aware that the book was rooted in continental German-language philosophy, let alone of its major indebtedness to Kant despite Popper's shift from synthetic to analytic *a priori*. Reading Kant after Popper is an overwhelming intellectual and aesthetic experience, like steering a reliable small ship out from the river and onto the open sea. Admittedly, Kant's world is that of the conscious rational individual, and he can scarcely make the concept of the social and the meta-individual, the super-organic, work for him (or the subconscious, for that matter, as a force frequently overriding conscious rational thought). But whereas the discovery and scientific articulation of the social can be said to have been the fundamental project and merit of the social sciences, this has usually led to a reductionist reification best exemplified with Durkheim's undeservedly famous adage

'Social facts are things'.¹

Well, we know that social facts, i.e. institutions and the institutional facts (Searle)² they create, are not things of the same order of tangible reality as a rock, a petal, a baby, a farmhouse, a microcomputer. On the contrary, social facts are merely invisible, largely language-based networks of social relationships, that have an impact on our lives because they weave for us the social illusion as taken for granted, as inescapable even, suggesting at the level of our subjective consciousness a distinct plane of institutional reality hovering over us, *one elusive quantum leap away* from what is very much the world of Kant's critical project: our *individual* forms of knowledge, evaluations, motivations and actions. Methodological individualism³ has repeatedly reminded us that the social sciences, despite their voluminous output of social description, theory and method over more than a hundred years, have far from solved the fundamental problem of how precisely to account for the forms and transformations of the social on the basis of its being generated in the context of individual consciousness and action. Parsons⁴ has made us understand that the fundamental and unsolved problem of the social sciences has always been: *how is society possible?* On this point Kant's suggestion in *Kritik der Urtheilskraft* deserves to make a fresh impact on the social sciences. In addition to Marx's relations of production, Durkheim's collective representations,⁵ and Weber's subtle analyses of rationality, authority, power, class as lifestyle, and above all the social circulation of meaning⁶ – *Kant's view of the social as necessarily implied in aesthetic judgement* looks for the social in a direction hitherto largely ignored by the social sciences. For in their professionalising entrenchment the social sciences have

¹ 'Les faits sociaux sont des choses', Durkheim 1897.

² Searle 1969.

³ Agassi 1960; Lukes 1970.

⁴ Parsons 1937.

⁵ Which concept, not without indebtedness to Kant, does for the religious field what Kant proposes to do for the aesthetic field; cf. Durkheim 1912.

⁶ Weber 1947; Gerth & Mills 1968.

all but lost, among other things, the capability of a sophisticated, non-reductionist discourse on art.

What if it were true that not production (Marx), the sacred (Durkheim) or meaning (Weber), but *beauty* could be argued to be the prime mover of social life? But no, that would be another reductionism. Let us instead be content if a perspective on aesthetic judgement could at least suggest some additional insight into the social, which, along with truth, death, love, birth, and God, ranks among the central mysteries of human life.

If I have suggested in this section what the social sciences might yet derive from Kant, in the previous, critical sociological section I suggested three specific points in which present-day social-science insights would have something to contribute to an attempt to take Kant's theory of *sensus communis* into the third millennium: the non-rational dimensions of the individual consciousness; the plurality of communities; and the plural and situational nature of personal identity.

Let us try to bring these general considerations to life in the course of an excursion to western Zambia, where we are going to examine a social context for the production, experience and judgement of art, specifically music and dance.¹

9.4. The Nkoya people and their Kazanga festival: Symbolic production and *sensus communis* in western central Zambia

My case study concerns an ethnic association in modern Zambia, and its annual festival. The African people whom I vicariously present as the subjects of my argument in majority identify as belonging to a nation called 'Nkoya'. They are invariably non-academicians; many are semi-literate or even illiterate, and any rendering of their ideas in terms of contemporary global academic discourse would have to be largely based on an externalising anthropological hermeneutics to be applied to their forms of social and political action, organisation, and symbolic production. In over a quarter of a century of close association and participation I believe I have understood something of how they construct their life-world on the basis of notions of community that have both artistic and political aspects.

In the villages in the early 1970s, I was at first deeply impressed, and sought successfully to engage myself, in the Nkoya *sensus communis*. By that time Nkoyaland was ethnically and culturally highly homogeneous. The chief, his council and the village headmen had a tight grip on day-to-day village life, which further revolved on the succession of the agricultural, hunting and fishing seasons. Kinship festivals (girl's initiation ceremonies, weddings, name-inheritance ceremonies, funerals) and healing cults offered frequent opportunities for all villagers to engage in musical and dancing activities within a circle of equals who were long-time

¹ Cf. Brown 1984; van Binsbergen 1992a = 1994c, 1999b. On the Nkoya also: van Binsbergen 1977, 1979a, 1985a, 1986, 1992b, 1993c, 1994b, 1996f, 1999b, 2003c.

associates, speaking the same language and liking the same songs and drum rhythms. Every Nkoya adult and child was a competent and frequent musical performer. What is more, administrators, educationalists and development workers in the district entertained, not without grounds, the stereotype of Nkoya children staying away from school in order to dance and make music. And in fact musical expertise was such that throughout western Zambia royal orchestras were staffed by Nkoya musicians singing Nkoya praise-songs their royal audience could not even understand. At the collective musical and dancing events, improvised jesting songs were the idiom to exercise social control and to articulate competition between kin groups. Nkoya peasant society was by no means a primitive isolate, but the sense of community celebrated in these expressions was inner-directed, neither addressing strangers nor being challenged by strangers. In the villages, being Nkoya was virtually synonymous with being human, and the very great emphasis on music and dance made Nkoya society, in retrospect, appear as a textbook illustration (duly simplified for social-science consumption) of Kant's theory of *sensus communis*.

By the end of the 1980s however this situation had considerably changed and I became aware that my earlier appreciation of Nkoya life in terms of an aesthetically underpinned *sensus communis* had given way to one in which *sensus particularis* had become far more conspicuous. Class formation, the local emergence of commercial farming and the opening up of the region for modern political relations, had pushed the traditional ways of generating *sensus communis* through music and dance to the background. Instead of being taken for granted, in other words being lived, at the many festive moments of village life, music and dance were now predominantly *performed* at a brand-new annual festival, before an audience largely consisting of ethnic and cultural strangers. Aesthetics were still involved, but it now combined much more clearly *sensus communis* with *sensus particularis*, where Nkoya specificity was explicitly mediated, as a minority expression of great aesthetic value, to the outside worlds recognised to be committed to other identities than the Nkoya one, and to have other aesthetic judgements than those prevailing in the time-honoured thatched men's shelters, kitchens, hunter's camps and royal councils of the Nkoya.

What had happened? In western Zambia a large number of ethnic identities circulate, among which that of the Lozi (Barotse, Luyi) is dominant because of its association with the Luyana state. The latter had its pre-colonial claims confirmed and even expanded with the establishment of colonial rule in 1900, resulting in the Barotseland Protectorate, which initially coincided with North-western Rhodesia, and after Zambia's independence (1964) became that country's Western Province. Lozi arrogance, the local people's limited access to education and to markets, and the influence of a fundamentalist Christian mission, stimulated a process of ethnic awakening. As from the middle of the twentieth century more and more people in eastern Barotseland and adjacent areas came to identify as 'Nkoya'. In addition to the Nkoya language, and to a few cultural traits recognised as proper to the Nkoya (even if these traits have a much wider distribution in the region), royal 'chiefs',

although incorporated into the Lozi aristocracy, have constituted major condensation points of this identity. The usual pattern of migrant labour and urban–rural migration endowed this identity with an urban component, whose most successful representatives distinguished themselves from their rural Nkoya nationals in terms of education, income and active participation in national politics. While the Lozi continued to be considered as the ethnic enemies, a second major theme in Nkoya ethnicity was to emerge: *the quest for political and economic articulation with the national centre*, bypassing the Lozi whose dominance at the district and provincial level dwindled only slowly. In this articulation process the chiefs (lacking education, economic and political power, and being the prisoners of court protocol) could only fulfil a symbolic function. The main task fell to the urban Nkoya ‘elite’ (in fact, mainly lower- and middle-range civil servants and other salaried workers), and with this task in mind the most prominent among them formed the Kazanga Cultural Association in the early 1980s. In subsequent years, this association has provided an urban reception structure for prospective migrants, has contributed to Nkoya Bible translation and to the publication of ethno-historical texts, has assumed a considerable role at the royal courts next to the traditional royal councils, and within various political parties and publicity media has campaigned against the Lozi and for the Nkoya cause. The association’s main achievement, however, has been the annual organisation (since 1988) of the Kazanga festival, in the course of which a large audience (including Zambian national dignitaries, the four Nkoya royal chiefs, Nkoya nationals and outsiders) for two days is treated to a fairly complete overview of current Nkoya songs, dances and staged rituals. Of course what we have here is a form of bricolage and an invention of tradition. Today’s wider socio-political and economic context is dominated by intercontinental financial institutions (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) via the post-colonial state; and by global conventions of commodity style in clothing, music, etc. as mediated by radio, television, books and magazines. As a result there is merely the *illusion* of continuity vis-à-vis nineteenth-century *Kazanga*. It would even have been impossible to revive the nineteenth-century Kazanga harvest festival completely, which comprised not several but only one royal, and not just the pouring of sacrificial libations in the form of home-made beer, but also the immolation of slaves.

Although present-day Kazanga is not a faithful copy of the original model, few local people notice the difference because the festival had not been held for close to a century. It is not exactly an academic notion of authenticity that bothers the closely packed crowds of local spectators, the great majority of them native speakers of the Nkoya language, identifying with the Nkoya ethnic identity – people whose National Registration Card lists one of the Nkoya traditional rulers as their chief, and the area of his jurisdiction as their rural home. When one mingles with these crowds, there cannot be the slightest doubt that many of these spectators experience great beauty when, in accordance with the Kazanga festival’s programme, item after item of ‘Nkoya traditional culture’, i.e. originally ritual and ceremonial music and dance in a new performative format, is being presented. People cry out in excitement, point out

nice details to each other, and shed tears. Many rock their bodies inadvertently to the familiar music that the local musicians (most of them mere boys) play on their village-made xylophones and drums. Many appear to be uncomfortable with the role of passive, incompetent spectator to which the tight orchestration by the festival's leadership reduces them, and they occasionally join in the singing and the dancing as if this were not an annual festival recorded by the media, but simply a village ceremony like the scores of such ceremonies in which I participated during local fieldwork a few decades ago.

It is the interplay between *sensus communis* and *sensus particularis* that constitutes the Kazanga festival's most striking characteristic.

Certainly the newly revived festival does operate on the basis of an unbounded inclusiveness: not only members of the Nkoya ethnic group, but all other locals are welcome, as well as ethnic strangers residing at the district capital, officers and soldiers from the nearby army barracks (who at other times are considered a public nuisance because of their unquenchable sexual appetites which they tend to direct at local women), regional entrepreneurs and petty politicians, civil servants, medical personnel, missionaries, and perhaps a few tourists; some of the obvious outsiders stand out not only because of their expensive attire but also because of their exotic, White somatic features. Two kinds of outsiders are especially welcome. There are, in the first place, representatives of the national media who (after many decades when the Nkoya identity and its language were totally excluded from national media and from educational institutions) since the festival's inception in 1988 have given it a broad media coverage, and thus have greatly boosted ethnic pride and national recognition. And secondly, national-level politicians, including a handful of cabinet ministers and junior ministers, have from the inception formed the guests of honour at the Kazanga festival. They are groomed and pampered during every minute of their visit, and the obvious goal is to trade the immaterial expressive production of the festival (music, dance, art, beauty) for more tangible tokens of special attention from the national political centre: development projects enhancing the local villagers' access to income, markets, commodities; ethnic recognition to make up for a century of humiliation at the hands of the Lozi who were privileged by the colonial state; and individual patronage of politicians to be extended to the Kazanga leadership themselves.

This inclusiveness carries a hidden message that may well be explicitised in terms of *sensus communis*. For, if the Nkoya performers, producers and spectators of the Kazanga festival programme would not be convinced that what was a powerful source of artful beauty to them (Nkoya music and dance) could also be communicated across the boundaries of Nkoya ethnic identity and be admired by ethnic and cultural strangers, then the whole idea of the Kazanga festival as an exchange of performance for development benefits would be defeated. Clearly, if the Nkoya experience their music and ceremonies as beautiful, this implies to some extent that they take these to be beautiful for all of humankind. Nor is this for them merely a contemporary notion imposed by peripheral globalisation; it is commonly

held among the Nkoya that in the early nineteenth century the Lozi king humbly requested Nkoya court music to be put at his disposal as most powerful sign of his royal status. This tradition (recorded in the standard collection of Nkoya ethnohistory, *Likota lya Bankoya*)¹ implies that in the past the Lozi considered the Nkoya equal if not superior to themselves; all the more reason for the Nkoya today to resent it that the Lozi have come to consider the Nkoya as less than human – as slaves, as dogs.

Now for the *sensus particularis* aspect. In terms of admission to the festival and enjoyment of its performances, there is a formal all-inclusiveness – provided the strangers remain strangers, and by their very presence enable the Nkoya to articulate themselves in their particular ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity. There is an emphatic particularism when it comes to the production of beauty in this context. The strangers are welcome as strangers only. There is not the slightest invitation to them to cross the boundary between Nkoya and non-Nkoya: they are not jokingly drawn into the dancing groups, are not presented with honorary Nkoyahood; there is even no attempt to introduce them to the specific local background knowledge needed in order to understand and appreciate the rich performative repertoire. Among the performers and producers only those are allowed who are socially recognised as Nkoya, who speak the Nkoya language (though not necessarily as a first language), who can claim descent (socially recognised descent, at least, not necessarily biological) from at least one Nkoya parent, and who are conversant with the details of Nkoya life at the level of family relations, productive activities, chieftainship and its history, puberty ceremonies, hunting and healing ritual. Contrary to the Kazanga festival in the nineteenth century (when it was an exclusive celebration of one royal incumbent's power among his or her subjects) the present-day festival is outward-looking in that it would be pointless if exclusively performed among ethnic insiders – hence it implies the generation of *sensus communis* among a set of people comprising both locals and outsiders. At the same time, the festival hinges on the creation of a boundary between ethnic and cultural insiders and outsiders, it presents performances whose *raison d'être* for the performers is not only that they are beautiful but also that they are 'ours' (of the performers) and not 'theirs' (not of the outsider spectators). In the Kazanga festival the dissociation between the Nkoya insiders and their outsider guests is emphatically constructed. Kazanga articulates *sensus communis* in emphatic tension with *sensus particularis*.

9.5. The Kazanga festival and constraints of artistic production: Identity, commodification, and embodiment

Another thing becomes clear when we consider the Kazanga festival as a focus of artistic production. The music and dance the performers produce, and the image of the traditional ruler that is at the centre of the festival performances (for Kazanga is a

¹ Nkoya text and English translation in: van Binsbergen 1992b.

transformed *royal* festival, which may have derived originally from the Ancient Egyptian *sed* festival),¹ are in its present form modern constructs and not time-honoured givens of a local cultural repertoire of the *longue durée*. Nor could they very well be, since the ethnonym Nkoya itself is less than a century old. Kazanga is part of the construction of an ethnic identity – *sensus particularis* is at its very heart.

9.5.1. Production of identity in the Kazanga festival

The Kazanga festival revolves around the mediation of the local Nkoya identity towards the national, and, by implication, worldwide space – a mediation that is to transmute the local symbolic production (one has hardly any other local products eligible for exchange with the outside world) into a measure of political and economic power via access to the national centre. Besides the selection and *presentation* of culture, this involves the *transformation* of culture: the Kazanga festival has the appearance of presenting items of traditional Nkoya culture, but in fact all these elements have been largely transformed towards a performative format, orchestrated, directed, rehearsed, subjected to the streamlined ordering by an organising elite and its mobilising and mediating ambitions. The models for this performative format derive from radio, television, the world of Christian missions, agricultural shows, state intervention in national ethnic artistic production through music and dance, and intercontinental pop media culture.

The Nkoya identity that is thus put on display is not only recent and situational, but also ‘virtual’,² in the sense that it does not coincide at all any more with what the participating and performing villagers in fact experience as the self-evident ordering (in terms of space, time and social relations) of village life, in whose context truly historic forms of symbolic production are pursued (superficially similar to the forms produced at the festival, but on closer scrutiny fundamentally different) that might be more properly termed ‘Nkoya traditional culture’. The artistic production during the *Kazanga* festival is somehow suspended in the air. Yet (or perhaps precisely because of these features) it is passionately acclaimed among the very villagers. Kazanga goes through the motions of *sensus communis* in order to bring about *both sensus communis* and its opposite, *sensus particularis*.

9.5.2. Commodification in the Kazanga festival

Artistic presentation in the context of the Kazanga festival has become a form of commodification. The performative format anticipates on the expectations of the visiting non-Nkoya elite, and has to produce goodwill and rapprochement, some sort

¹ From the first dynasty onwards, the Sed festival (*Hb Sd*) was the major royal festival to celebrate the Ancient Egyptian king’s thirtieth year on the throne. For a recent treatment in context, cf. Gohary 1992; Kemp 1995; Wilkinson 2001. Older sources include: Murnane 1981; Murray 1932; Spencer 1978; Bonnet 1971; Brovarski 1984; Martin 1984; Hornung & Staehelin, 1974. Van Binsbergen, forthcoming (a) discusses the Egyptian/Nkoya parallel in detail. Elsewhere I note a close Tanzanian parallel (van Binsbergen 2003c).

² Cf. van Binsbergen 1997f, 1998b.

of symbolic ready cash, to be effective within the wider world of political and economic power that is represented by these dignitaries. There is also more tangible cash involved: the performers are paid a little for their services. Moreover the performances take place in a context that is increasingly dominated by characteristic commodities from the global consumerist culture of reference: supported – and this is absolutely unheard of in the villages – by public address systems, while all royal protocol has to give in to the desire, among those possessing tape recorders, photo cameras, and video cameras, to ‘record’ the event – an act most characteristic of our electronic age and of the possibilities of individually reproduced and consumed, virtual and vicarious experience it entails. The standardisation of a commodified artistic production is also borne out, by the emphasis (which is in absolute contradiction with historic village patterns) on identical bodily movements according to neat geometrical patterns, by the avoidance of ‘offensive’ bodily movements particularly in the body zones singled out by Christian prudery, and in the identical uniforms of the members of the main dancing troupes. Among the various, mainly village-derived troupes performing at Kazanga, the members of the one *urban* Kazanga troupe moreover advertise themselves through exceptional commodities such as shoes (that are not only expensive, but offensive and impractical in village dancing), expensive coiffures, sun glasses and identical T-shirts imprinted for the occasion. The commodification element is finally manifest in the separation – extremely unusual in this rural society – between

- passive, culture-consuming spectators, who explicitly are not supposed to join in the singing and dancing,
- the producers (who clearly act not by their own initiative – as in the village – but do as they have been told), and
- the supervising elite (who in their turn single themselves out through such commodities as formal jackets and ties).

9.5.3. Embodiment in the Kazanga festival

Even under the performative format, Kazanga has no choice but to present the Nkoya identity (recently constructed as it clearly is, and even reduced to virtuality in the commodified and invented context of the festival) as inscribed onto the very bodies of those who define themselves socially as the bearers of that identity, and who express it through their bodily manifestations in music, song and attire. The performance embodies the identity and renders it communicable in an appropriate format, communicable even to an outside world where, before the creation of Kazanga in its present form, the Nkoya identity did not mean anything of positive value. The stress on uniformity of the performers and their actions paradoxically creates both

- an illusion of being identical – which dissimulates actual class differences, and

- makes each dance troupe represent the entire Nkoya nation as a whole, and a sense of distinction – for very visibly, the urban elite’s troupe is ‘more equal’ than the other performers, and than the spectators.¹

In this incorporative context one also borrows from a repertoire that has certainly not been commodified even though it is performative. Dressed in leopard skins, around the temples a royal ornament of Conus shells from the distant Indian Ocean, and brandishing an antique executioner’s axe (all these attributes – regalia, in fact – have now become non-commodities, pertaining to a royal circuit that in the present time no longer engages in long-distance trade as it did during the nineteenth century), Mwene Kahare Kabambi, an aged royal chief, with virtuoso accompaniment from a hereditary honorary drummer of the same age (he has always been far above performing with the state-subsidised royal orchestra in the routine court contexts), performs the old Royal Dance that since the end of the nineteenth century was rarely if at all seen any more in this region. At the climax the *king* (for that is what he shows himself to be at this point: he now seems no longer a ‘chief’ incorporated in the colonial or post-colonial state) kneels down and drinks directly from a hole² in the ground where beer has been poured for his royal ancestors – the patrons of at least his part of the Nkoya nation the Mashasha and, implied to receive the deeply emotional cheers from the audience. And young women who have long been through girls’ puberty initiation themselves,³ perform that ritual’s final dance, without any signs of the usual stage fright and modesty, and with their too mature breasts against all tradition not bare but tucked into conspicuous white bras. Yet despite this performative artificiality their sublime bodily movements, that in this case are far from prudish or censored, approach the village-based original format of their dance sufficiently closely to bring the spectators, men as well as women, to ecstatic expressions of a recognised and shared identity. Thus, in the midst of *sensus particularis* as derived from the performance of reified and commodified music and dance before strangers (non-locals, non-peasants, non-Nkoya), outbursts of *sensus communis* confirm and restore a sense of identity that one feared had been lost with the advent of development, class and modern politics in the course of the last few decades.

Clearly, such concepts as ‘commodification’ and ‘transformative selection’ (from the traditional lived culture into today’s performative culture), however

¹ Cf. Orwell 1949.

² In the nineteenth century the hole was still formed by a dug-in human occiput (top of a skull); nowadays a semi-spherical earthenware or enamel bowl is used instead. There are strong indications from oral tradition that the beer replaces the blood of slaves immolated over the hole. If so, the entire makeup is very similar to, and (in the light of more comprehensive evidence linking Nkoya kingship to Ancient Egyptian kingship; cf. van Binsbergen, forthcoming (a)) probably derives from, royal human sacrifice dating back, in Africa, to the earliest dynastic times of Ancient Egypt (Wilkinson 2001: 266f). Also see van Binsbergen, forthcoming (e), on the *imiut* shrine in Ancient Egypt.

³ Cf. above, chapter 3.

important, do not tell the whole story, and even after the recreation of Nkoya culture in the Kazanga format enough reason for enthusiasm and identification is left for us not to be too cynical about the levels of virtuality, unauthenticity and performativity that are attained in Kazanga, and in many comparable situations of globalising symbolic production in Africa today. Lost certainly is the taken-for-granted sense of authenticity of the celebrations of music and dance that only a few decades ago were incorporated into the rhythm of village life and in which all villagers freely joined as competent fellow-performers, instead of being reduced to passive and inhibited spectators. *Sensus communis* is now offset much more noticeably against a performative and ethnically divisive *sensus particularis*. But perhaps this contrast between then and now is partly an optical illusion; perhaps I was so enchanted, a few decades ago, by the collectivist overtones of village life (many anthropologists have been, throughout the history of that discipline) that I did not search closely enough, then, for manifestations of *sensus particularis*.

Nor are the peregrinations of *sensus communis* and *sensus particularis* fully predictable. They still escape a reductionist automatism, as my closing vignette may well indicate:

One moonlit night in the mid-1990s, I returned to the land of Nkoya after a few months' absence. The last part of the journey had, as usual, to be completed on foot. The pale sandy paths across the forested savannah gleamed up under the full moon as if purposely illuminated, and – in a time-honoured Nkoya form of festive anticipation – we (the then chairman of the Kazanga Society, Revd Kambita, his cousin and my adoptive elder brother, Mr Dennis Shiyowe, and myself) allowed ourselves to follow these paths to where distant xylophone music attracted our attention. We finally found a score of ten-year-olds having a nocturnal party. As usually they passed the night without any parental supervision, and without any food or drink. But they frantically and expertly played their musical instruments, and danced ecstatically to the tune, not of time-honoured village songs, but of the purposely composed and orchestrated, politically and ethnically inspired songs that half a year earlier had blasted from the loudspeakers at the Kazanga festival – in other words they were dancing to the manifestations of commodification and *sensus particularis* introduced above. What we were witnessing that night was a form of reappropriation of a local product that had previously undergone the transformations of a global reformatting, and which, in the process, had shifted its emphasis from predominantly *sensus communis* to a mixture of the latter with *sensus particularis* and hence had lost all chances of retaining authenticity. And yet the Kazanga songs were regaining, in the eminently graceful and competent dancing, singing and xylophone playing acts of these children, a new authenticity as no truly 'traditional' unchanged item of local culture could ever aspire to. The children were negotiating the tension between *sensus communis* and *sensus particularis* in their own effective way.

9.6. Envoi

The plurality of communities and identities as perceived and lived by individuals in society is the point of departure of intercultural philosophy. Is this plurality a mere surface illusion, under which the fundamental unity of humankind lurks as a truer reality? Or is, on the contrary, the thought of boundless community, in the face of the empirical fact of the incessant social construction of boundaries and distinctions, a mere escape from social reality into the ivory tower (or shall we say, towards the Königsberg) of philosophical abstraction? More likely, it is the development of tools to think and negotiate the field of tension between plurality and unity, between boundaries and their dissolution, that constitutes the true task of intercultural philosophy. This tension is analogous to the tension between philosophy and empirical social science. I have argued that greater insight in these central questions of the human condition may be gained if we let ourselves be guided both by Kant's theory of *sensus communis* and by such corrections and additions as present-day social sciences would suggest in this connection: stressing non-rational aspects of the person, the plurality of identities and groups and the shifting nature of identity – in short, offsetting *sensus communis* against its Manichaeic counterpart, *sensus particularis*. We stand to gain, not if we deny the tension, ignore the difference between a present-day social science perspective and Kant's philosophy, but admit their complementarity, and seek to position ourselves within the tension they generate between them.

As someone who, for most of his adult life, has combined the detached investigation of Nkoya society with my own committed participation in it as a member, I detect another analogy here: the tension between analytical distancing and participant engagement may be peculiar to the anthropologist's exceptional professional role, yet, at the same time, it is only another manifestation of the same field of tension. Acknowledging the tension amounts to an admission of the legitimacy of both the polar positions between which the tension is generated; that surely is a more promising strategy than seeking to resolve the tension by privileging one of the constituent poles by the application of rigid binary oppositions.