

### Three Aspects of Being Aesthetic in Kant's *CPJ*: Becoming Aesthetically Conscious, Aesthetic Estimation of Magnitude, and Aesthetic Ideas\*

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Kant's third *Critique*, namely the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) (in the following abbreviated as *CPJ*), especially the first part, "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment," is and has generally been acknowledged as the milestone that founded modern aesthetics. To address aesthetics after Kant's *CPJ* was already accepted among his adherents, e.g., Daniel Jenisch's *Über Grund und Wert der Entdeckungen des Herrn Professor Kant in der Metaphysik, Moral und Ästhetik* (Berlin 1796) and Christian Friedrich Michaelis's *Entwurf der Ästhetik als Leitfaden bei akademischen Vorlesungen über Kants Kritik der ästhetischen Urteilskraft* (Augsburg 1796).

Kant argues, however, that "there is not a science of the beautiful, only a critique" (5: 304).<sup>1</sup> Alexander Baumgarten explained aesthetics as the "science of the beautiful [*Wissenschaft des Schönen*]" in his *Metaphysics* § 533 (4th edition, 1757). It follows, therefore, that Kant substituted aesthetics as a science with his critique of the aesthetic power of judgment. In the First Introduction to the *CPJ* Kant calls the first part of the *CPJ* not "aesthetics (as if it were a doctrine of sense [*Sinnenlehre*]), but a critique of the aesthetic power of judgment" (20: 247—emphasis in original), using the adjective "aesthetic" with the power of judgment, and avoiding the noun "aesthetics."<sup>2</sup> Kant did not conceive his theory of taste as aesthetics, but his adherents did not understand this. Nay, even most of us who mention "Kant's aesthetics" deviate from his original intention. It is not the noun "aesthetics," but the adjective "aesthetic" or the adverb "aesthetically"—the German word "ästhetisch" is used as an adjective and as an adverb—that dominates the first part of the *CPJ*.

The question is what Kant meant by the word "aesthetic(ally)." The examples of the noun "aesthetic" are already found in the first *Critique* (1781), but those of the adjective "aesthetic" date back only to the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) (in the following abbreviated as *CPR*), in which he uses this word five times, always negatively, to refer to volition being passively determined by the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, as the most typical example "aesthetic and pathological" (5: 117) shows. According to the distinction introduced in the *CPJ*, what Kant characterizes as aesthetic in the *CPR* pertains only to the "agreeable" (that has individual validity), and not to the "beautiful" (that can

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<sup>1</sup> Kant's works are cited in the body of the text according to the volume and page number in *Immanuel Kants Schriften*, Ausgabe der königlichen preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1902–), with the exceptions that citations to the *Critique of Pure Reason* use the standard pagination of its first (A) and second (B) editions. Unless noted otherwise, translations are from the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, series editors Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992–).

<sup>2</sup> The noun "aesthetic" is used in the first *Critique* in the sense of the theory of sensibility as a capacity for intuition (A 21, B 35) and in the second *Critique* in the sense of the theory of feeling (5: 90). This double meaning of the word depends on the fact that the German word "sensation [*Empfindung*]" has a double meaning; it signifies both a "representation of the senses" and "feeling" (5: 206).

lay claim to universal validity) (5: 205-7).<sup>3</sup> In the *CPJ*, on the contrary, the adjective “aesthetic” has no negative connotation. An “aesthetic judgment,” i.e., a judgment by means of the “feeling of pleasure and displeasure” (5: 204), concerns the “agreeable,” the “beautiful,” and the “sublime” (5: 266-7). Furthermore, Kant uses the word “aesthetic” other than as an epithet of the power of judgment, in which cases the word acquires remarkable meanings that have not yet received enough attention. In the following I will address three issues concerning the word “aesthetic” to show the often overlooked characteristics of Kant’s aesthetic theory.

### 1. To Become Aesthetically Conscious of Our Own Being or Life

First, I consider section 9 of the “Analytic of the beautiful” (§§ 1–22), which Kant maintains is “the key to the critique of taste” (5: 216) and, thus, one of the most important sections in the first part of the *CPJ*. Here, Kant poses the following alternative question: “in what way do we become conscious of a mutual subjective correspondence of the powers of cognition with each other in the judgment of taste—aesthetically, through mere inner sense and sensation [in the sense of feeling], or intellectually, through the consciousness of our intentional activity through which we set them in play?” (5: 218).

The second alternative means that the mutual subjective correspondence of the powers of cognition—i.e., the imagination (as the faculty of sensibility or intuitions) and the understanding (as the faculty of concepts) (cf. 5: 257, 287, 292)—is made possible by the “objective schematism of the power of judgment, which was,” as Kant himself pointed out, “dealt with in the [first] critique” (5: 218), namely in the chapter “On the schematism of the pure concepts of the understanding” (A 137-147, B 176-187). That is, the relationship between the imagination and the understanding is directed by the intentional activity of the understanding, i.e., the synthesis of apperception, which takes the form of *I think*.<sup>4</sup> Such an intellectual consciousness that underlies objective cognition, however, cannot accompany the judgment of taste, because the judgment of taste does not presuppose any determinate concept of the understanding.

The first alternative is, therefore, the only possible answer. The question is what it means to become aesthetically conscious of the correspondence of the imagination and the understanding. Kant explains that “an objective relation [of the cognitive faculties in the case of objective cognition] can only be thought [by understanding in terms of the object], but insofar as it is subjective as far as its conditions are concerned, it can still be sensed in its effect on the mind; and further, in the case of a relation that is not grounded in any concept [i.e., in the case of the judgment of taste] [...], no other consciousness of it is possible except through sensation of the effect that consists in the facilitated play of both powers of the mind (imagination and understanding), enlivened [*belebt*] through mutual agreement” (5: 219).

Here Kant first reconsiders the objective judgment he already addressed in the first *Critique*. For objective cognition, the relation between imagination and understanding is possible through the

<sup>3</sup> The word “pathological(ly)” is used in regard to the agreeable in the *CPJ* (5: 209; 5: 222).

<sup>4</sup> In the first *Critique* Kant argues that “The *I think* must *be able* to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all” (B 131-2—emphasis in original).

apperception in the form of *I think*, determining the object via concepts of the understanding. At the same time, insofar as this relation constitutes a “subjective condition” for enabling an objective judgment, it can be “sensed [i.e., felt] in its effect on the mind.” That is, on the one hand, the activity of imagination and understanding is thought via understanding, insofar as it is related to the object through apperception. On the other hand, it is felt in our mind via inner sense insofar as it is related to the cognizing subject as a subjective condition for objective cognition. The objective cognition is, therefore, always accompanied—even though implicitly—by a subjective feeling as a kind of inner lining. This second subjective aspect that remains in the background against the first objective aspect was, however, not addressed in the first *Critique*, which aimed to clarify the possibility of an objective cognition. Kant did not illuminate this second subjective aspect until the *CPJ*.

Kant then considers judgment of taste that is not grounded in any concept. In the judgment of taste where a concept of understanding never determines the operation of imagination and the object is never brought into focus, the activity of both powers does not remain in the background, as is the situation with the objective judgment, but, being enlivened through mutual agreement of both powers and “maintaining” itself (5: 222), comes into the foreground. Kant thus concludes that “in the judgment of taste we become aesthetically conscious [*ästhetisch bewusst werden*] of a mutual subjective correspondence of the powers of cognition with each other, through mere inner sense and sensation [in the sense of feeling]” (5: 218). In this context, to “become aesthetically conscious” means, therefore, to become conscious via a feeling as an effect on the mind caused by the activity of cognitive powers. This aesthetic consciousness accompanies not only the judgment of taste, but also all sorts of cognitive activity in the broad sense; for cognitive judgment that focuses on the object, however, the activity of cognitive powers almost escapes our consciousness. In the judgment of taste we become explicitly conscious of the activity in the feeling through our inner sense.

In section 1 of the *CPJ*, Kant straightforwardly claims that in the judgment of taste “the subject feels itself [*sich selbst fühlen*],” which is nothing other than the “feeling of life [*Lebensgefühl*]” (5: 204), understanding by “life” a “consciousness of one’s being” (5: 277-8). That is, it is our own being or life that we are aesthetically conscious of in the judgment of taste. Kant’s primary concern in the *CPJ* is a fundamental aesthetic dimension of our being in the form of *I feel myself*, namely a dimension that remains latent in our objective cognition directed by the synthesis of apperception in the form of *I think*.

## 2. The Aesthetic Estimation of Magnitude and the Position of Sensibility

Kant introduces a new aspect of being aesthetic in the “Analytic of the Sublime” (§§ 23–29), namely the “aesthetic estimation of magnitude” (5: 251). Here the word “aesthetic” has nothing to do with the feeling of pleasure, as is the case with the “Analytic of the Beautiful,” but with sensibility.<sup>5</sup> That is, the aesthetic estimation of magnitude that is opposed to the logical or mathematical estimation of

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<sup>5</sup> This double meaning of the adjective “aesthetic” corresponds to the double meaning of the noun “aesthetic.” See note 2.

magnitude denotes the measuring “by eye” “by means of the imagination” (5: 251).<sup>6</sup>

For the logical or mathematical estimation of magnitude, which is concerned only with “relative magnitude through comparison,” there is certainly “no greatest,” for the sequence of numbers continues to infinity. For the aesthetic estimation of magnitude, however, there is “a greatest” (5: 251). The reason is that the aesthetic estimation of magnitude of the imagination as the faculty of sensibility has “two actions:” i.e., “apprehension and comprehension” (5: 251). The imagination has no difficulty apprehending each part of a manifold representation; apprehension continues to infinity. But comprehension becomes “ever more difficult the further apprehension advances, and soon reaches its maximum” (5: 251-2). When apprehension has reached the point where the already apprehended parts are beyond the capacity of comprehension, the parts that were first apprehended begin to fade from the imagination, as the imagination proceeds to apprehend the additional. The imagination cannot comprehend the totality in a single image.

The difference between apprehension and comprehension can be explained in regard to the relationship between the imagination and time: “The measurement of a space (as apprehension) is at the same time the description of it, thus an objective movement in the imagination and a progression; by contrast, the comprehension of multiplicity in the unity not of thought but of intuition, hence the comprehension in one moment of that which is successively apprehended, is a regression, which in turn cancels the time-condition in the progression of the imagination and makes *simultaneity* intuitable. It is thus (since temporal succession is a condition of inner sense and of an intuition) a subjective movement of the imagination, by which it does violence to the inner sense, which must be all the more marked the greater the quantum is which the imagination comprehends in one intuition” (5: 258-9—emphasis in original). That is, a space comes into existence objectively in proportion as the imagination progressively apprehends it, while the imagination should subjectively regress to comprehend it as a simultaneous whole. Thus, apprehension pertains to temporal succession, while comprehension sublates it. Comprehension, therefore, is opposed to the inner sense whose nature consists of temporal succession.

Subjective regression is always necessary for the imagination to comprehend a representation. That is also the case with the judgment of taste for the beautiful. In the judgment of taste, however, the subjective regression of the imagination does not explicitly do violence to the inner sense, because the judgment of taste is based on the “facilitated play of both powers of the mind (imagination and understanding) enlivened through mutual agreement” (5: 219), and the feeling of pleasure of which we are conscious in the judgment of taste is “the feeling (of inner sense) of that unison in the play of the powers of the mind” (5: 228). The inner sense feels the animated play of imagination and understanding as pleasure, and the violence, which the regression of the imagination does to the inner sense, remains in the background of the pleasure of which we are explicitly conscious.

On the contrary, the regression of the imagination and thus the violence, which the regression of the imagination does to the inner sense, come into the foreground in the judgment of the sublime, because comprehension of the sublime is beyond the capacity of the imagination, which provides us

<sup>6</sup> According to Kant, the logical or mathematical estimation of magnitude, which is concerned only with “relative magnitude through comparison,” cannot provide “a primary or basic fundamental measure.” Thus, “the estimation of the magnitude of the basic measure” must be “aesthetic” (5: 251).

with a “feeling of displeasure” (5: 257). Here, the imagination or the faculty of sensibility is faced with its own limitations. At the same time, we reach a new plateau: “The feeling of the sublime is a feeling of displeasure from the inadequacy of the imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude for the estimation by means of reason, and a pleasure that is thereby aroused at the same time from the correspondence of this very judgment of the inadequacy of the greatest sensible faculty in comparison with ideas of reason, insofar as striving for them is nevertheless a law for us” (5: 257). That is, the imagination proves in the judgment of the sublime, from one perspective, “its own limits and inadequacy” (5: 257) with regard to the sensible comprehension of a given sublime object in a whole of intuition. From another perspective, the “enlargement of the imagination” (5: 249) that is caused by the effort of comprehending a given sublime object hints the existence of the supersensible in us. In other words, the “inner perception” of the inadequacy of the imagination for comprehending a sublime object is a “displeasure” that, at the same time, arouses a pleasure as the “feeling of the supersensible vocation in us” (5: 258).

In the judgment of the sublime, therefore, the aesthetic estimation of magnitude provides a clue to clarifying the position or situs of sensibility in the sensible-supersensible human being.

### 3. The Aesthetic Ideas and the Copious Sensibility

We now address Kant's theory of fine art (§§ 43–53), in which the word “aesthetic(ally)” gains a new perspective. Kant defines fine art, or to use his term, beautiful art, as a species of art (in the broad sense of the word). Beautiful art ought to satisfy the conditions art in general meets. “As a talent for art, genius presupposes a determinate concept of the product, as an end, hence understanding, but also a representation [...] of the intuition for the presentation of this concept, hence a relation of the imagination to the understanding” (5: 317—slightly modified). First, the artist should have a determinate concept of the understanding for a product to be produced, to then make it sensible in a representation of the imagination. This necessarily follows from the fact that an artist needs art, in the broad sense of the term. A “relation of the imagination to the understanding” is, thus, requisite for beautiful art and for art in general. Further, being directed by a determinate concept of the understanding, this relation is precisely what Kant addressed in the first *Critique* to explain how objective cognition is possible.

At issue, therefore, is what the peculiarity of beautiful art is, i.e., what distinguishes the beautiful art from the mechanical one. Kant argues that “[...] in the use of the imagination for cognition, the imagination is under the constraint of the understanding and is subject to the limitation of being adequate to its concepts; in an aesthetic respect, however, the imagination is free to provide, beyond that concord with the concept, unsought extensive undeveloped material for the understanding, of which the latter took no regard in its concept, but which it applied, not so much objectively, for cognition, as subjectively, for the animation of the cognitive powers” (5: 316-7).

By definition, beautiful art should satisfy the conditions that the beautiful meets. Beautiful art should enable “freedom of the imagination” (5: 287). If the imagination of an artist is not free, but is constrained by understanding, art is not beautiful, only mechanical. It follows that, although a determinate concept of the understanding marks a starting point for artistic creation, the concept should

not dominate the whole process. Being freed from the constraints of the understanding, the artist's imagination can provide a copious representation, which the understanding disregarded in its concept. Such copious representation provided by the artistic imagination certainly "belongs to the sensible presentation of a concept." That is, the representation does not deviate from a given concept, and, at the same time, "stimulates so much thinking that it can never be grasped in a determinate concept," so that the representation "aesthetically enlarges the concept in an unbounded way" (5: 315). For the imagination of an artist associates a given concept of the understanding with "a multitude of sensations and supplementary [sensible] representations" (5: 316), which conceptual language cannot attain. The word "aesthetic(ally)" in this context is not used in regard to the feeling of pleasure, as is the case with the "Analytic of the Beautiful," but to sensibility, as is the case with the "Analytic of the Sublime." In contrast to the "Analytic of the Sublime," the word "aesthetic" is unrelated to the "limits of sensibility" (5: 255), but rather to its richness by means of which the imagination, escaping from the constraints of understanding, can enlarge a given concept of the understanding.<sup>7</sup>

Kant calls such a copious representation of the imagination an "aesthetic idea" (5: 314). The first *Critique* posits that an "idea" is by definition a "concept of reason" (A 320, B 377). It follows that Kant introduces a new meaning or dimension of an idea in the *CPJ*. He explains the reason a copious representation of the imagination is called an idea: "By an aesthetic idea I mean that representation of the imagination which occasions much thinking, but to which no determinate thought whatsoever, i.e., no [determinate] *concept* [of the understanding], can be adequate. – One readily sees that it is the counterpart (pendant) of an *idea of reason*, which is, conversely, a concept to which no *intuition* (representation of the imagination) can be adequate" (5: 314—emphasis in original, slightly modified). For cognition to be possible, a representation of the imagination should be determined by (or subsumed under) a concept that is adequate for the representation. There are, however, two cases in which such an adequateness does not hold, for which Kant applies the word "idea." Either a representation of the imagination is inadequate for a concept of the understanding, or, conversely, a concept of the understanding is inadequate for a representation of the imagination. A concept to which no representation of the understanding can be adequate is an idea of reason, which was addressed in detail in the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique*. Kant's focus in the *CPJ* is another sort of an inadequateness, i.e., an inadequateness of a concept of the understanding to a representation of the imagination, in which case a representation of the imagination is called an aesthetic idea. From one perspective, the imagination that was freed from the constraints of the understanding "elevates" its representation "aesthetically to ideas" (5: 326—slightly modified) and, thus, "enlarges the field of intuition" (5: 330—slightly modified). From another perspective, the imagination "enlarges" a given "concept" of the understanding by means of its copious representation called an aesthetic idea. That is, an aesthetic idea gives more to think about than can be subsumed under a determinate concept (5: 315). At issue is the copious and heightened or strengthened sensibility that can unrestrainedly animate the understanding.

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<sup>7</sup> Enlarging a concept aesthetically is contrasted to enlarging a concept logically, using "logical attributes" (5: 315).

We, therefore, conclude that Kant's primary concern in the *CPJ* is not to establish aesthetics as a discipline; his concern is a fundamental aesthetic dimension of our being that can be seen in the form of *I feel myself*, and a status of our aisthêsis (or sensibility) in the sensible-intellectual or sensible-supersensible being. These three aspects, becoming aesthetically conscious, aesthetic estimation of magnitude and aesthetic ideas, lead to the reevaluation of the often overlooked meaning and significance of sensibility in Kant's aesthetic theory.