

THOUGHT, CRITIQUE, AND NOVELTY  
IN KANT'S CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY

GÜÇSAL PUSAR

BOGAZİÇİ UNIVERSITY

2009

THOUGHT, CRITIQUE, AND NOVELTY  
IN KANT'S CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Thesis submitted to the  
Institute for Graduate Studies in the Social Sciences  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Philosophy

by

Güçsal Pular

Boğaziçi University

2009

## Thesis Abstract

Güçsal Pular, “Thought, Critique, and Novelty in Kant’s Critical Philosophy”

The main concern of the thesis is to expose the specifically critical thrust of Kant’s conception of genius. The guiding thread of our investigation is Kant’s conceptualization of taste as the discipline of genius. We argue that this conception arises against the background of a larger context of themes and problematics that concern critical philosophy in general. To this aim we will first provide a preliminary account of Kant’s theory of genius in *Critique of Judgment* with a view to investigating the implications of this theory for the relationship between art and thought. In that part of the investigation we will try to identify a crucial moment in Kant’s account of artistic creativity, a moment at which we come across a complex relationship between the expansion and the gathering of thought in the presentation of aesthetic ideas. With this identification at hand, we pass on to the contribution of taste to genial creation in order to show how genius, within the dynamics of the critical text, becomes a figure which registers the question of creativity and novelty within the basic parameters of critical philosophy. We do this by showing that disciplining genius becomes necessary due to the contribution of the power of imagination in genial creation, which contribution, while constituting the properly genial element of such creation, jeopardizes it, since imagination, not only in artistic creativity but also in the traditional metaphysics which is a target of Kantian critique, is susceptible to becoming excessively productive and therefore to lending itself to illegitimate uses. The offences of such an excessive imagination, we will try to demonstrate, are correlated in Kant’s view with fanaticism and madness, and this raises the stakes of the disciplining of genius beyond the immediate context of the discussion on fine arts and artistic creativity, relating it to critical philosophy in general.

## Tez Özeti

Güçsal Pular, “Kant’ın Eleştirel Felsefesinde Düşünce, Eleştiri ve Yenilik”

Bu tezin esas amacı, Kant’ın deha anlayışının ne ölçüde eleştirel felsefesinin bir parçası olduğunu gözler önüne sermektir. Kant’ın beğeniye dehanın disiplini olarak kavramsallaştırması bu tezin temel hareket noktasını oluşturur. Bu kavramsallaştırmanın, eleştirel felsefenin genelini ilgilendiren birtakım izlekler ve sorunsallar bağlamında ortaya çıktığını iddia edeceğiz. Bunu yapmak için de öncelikle Kant’ın *Yargı Gücünün Eleştirisi*’nde ortaya attığı deha kuramının üzerinden, bu kuramın sanat ile düşünce arasındaki ilişkiye dair içerimlerini incelemek maksadıyla geçiyoruz. İncelemenin bu aşamasında Kant’ın yaratıcılık anlayışındaki can alıcı bir noktayı saptamaya çalışıyoruz; bu can alıcı noktada, estetik idelerin sunumunda düşüncenin genişlemesi ile derlenip toparlanması arasında karmaşık bir ilişki karşımıza çıkar. Bu saptamayı yaptıktan sonra, eleştirel metnin dinamikleri dâhilinde dehanın, yaratıcılık ve yenilik sorusunu eleştirel felsefenin temel parametrelerine kaydeden bir figür haline dönüştüğünü gösterebilmek için beğenin dehanın yaratımına olan katkısına eğiliyoruz. Bunu da, dehanın disipline edilmesi gereğinin, sadece sanatsal yaratım meselesi bağlamında değil, Kant’ın metafizik eleştirisini ilgilendiren daha genel bağlamlarda da yaratıcılıkta aşırıya kaçarak meşru kullanım sınırlarını aşmaya meyleden bir yeti olduğunu gördüğümüz hayalgücünün dehanın yaratımına yaptığı katkı yüzünden ortaya çıktığını göstererek yapıyoruz. Böylesi gayrimeşru bir aşırılıkla işlediği cürümler yüzünden hayalgücü, dehanın eserindeki yaratıcılığın kökeninde yer almasına rağmen, Kant’ın eleştirel felsefesi bağlamında dehayı bağnazlık ve deliliğe yakınlaştırarak dehanın yaratıcılığını tehlikeye atar. Bu durum, dehanın disipline edilmesi meselesinin önemini, güzel sanatlar ve sanatsal yaratımla ilgili tartışmanın ötesine taşıyıp eleştirel felsefenin geneliyle ilişkilendirir.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am at a loss for words when it comes to expressing my gratitude to Assist. Prof. Suna Ertuğrul. The undergraduate course on Heidegger that she offered years ago set me on a certain path of thinking, and the graduate course on Kant's *Critique of Judgment* that she offered in the last term of my graduate education at Boğaziçi University did all that a single course could have done to enlarge the horizon of my work on the present thesis. There is an indelible trace of her scholarship and friendship in everything that is promising in my way of thinking.

I would like to thank Prof. Stephen Voss for kindly agreeing to be my thesis advisor and also for his understanding during some of the hardest times of the writing of the thesis. His penetrating questions and comments have made me an admirer of his attitude to philosophical problems and of his "free use of reason".

I am also profoundly grateful to Assoc. Prof. Murat Baç not only for his thought-provoking questions and comments that touched on the core of Kant's critical philosophy but also for the equally thought-provoking courses which I had the pleasure of taking during both my undergraduate and graduate education. I owe a great deal of my eagerness to study philosophy to his example and the encouragement he has been giving me for many years now.

I regard myself as exceptionally lucky for being a student of Prof. Pınar Canevi for three wonderful terms during which she offered three formidable courses on each of Kant's *Critiques*. It would not be an exaggeration to say that I would have written a different thesis had she not introduced me to Kant's work in her own insightful and inspiring manner.

Being an assistant of Prof. Gürol Irzik for three years was an invaluable experience, both academically and personally. I am in deep gratitude to him for the example he set for me as a person and a philosopher with a keen socio-political sensibility and a laudable professional ethics.

I am grateful to Demet Yuncu, İlke Yiğit, Omca Korugan for the understanding colleagues and friends that they have been for the last three years. I cannot pass without expressing my special gratitude to Demet and İlke for all those long hours of discussion on issues that we were lucky enough to find to be our common concern.

Yasin Kaya needs a special mention for being an irreplaceable companion for the last three years. His influence on me, on what I written is not possible to determine, but the pain and pleasure of what we have shared in that peaceful space and time called "Anadoluhisari" is impossible to forget. The occasional presence of Çetin Gürer was a like blessing; our long, and most of the time blissfully inconclusive, discussions were, too, unforgettable. His name here allows me to acknowledge my gratitude to all those who were present in that exceptional reading group devoted to a close and deep reading of Heidegger, chief among them being Alptekin, Bahadır, Fırat, Kevser, and Mine—all precious friends in the presence of whom I literally grew up intellectually.

I would like to thank my family, my mother and my aunt above all, for the unconditional support they have given to what I have been doing, well, for the last twenty six years or so.

I would also like to thank TÜBİTAK for their financial support during my graduate education.

Lastly, I would like to take note of two significant others whose uncalculated and unforeseeable emergence in my life set the tone of that year I spent working on the present thesis. Without Ece Ekşi and Toto the cat, this essay most probably would still have been written but the writer would be a different, and less likeable, person. For such beautiful appearances as theirs, to whom or what I should thank, I simply do not know.

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: ARTISTIC CREATIVITY: GENIUS AND AESTHETIC IDEAS....	3
Fine Art as the Art of Genius.....	3
Spirit and Aesthetic Ideas.....	6
A Creative Imagination.....	9
The Symbolic Function of Aesthetic Ideas.....	11
CHAPTER 3: EXPANSION OF THE MIND—GATHERING OF THOUGHT....	13
Kant’s Semantics of Concepts: An Overview.....	13
The Free Play of Imagination and Understanding.....	16
The Exigency of Reason.....	19
The Question of Aesthetic Unity.....	22
CHAPTER 4: TASTE AS DISCIPLINE: GENIUS, FANATICISM, AND MADNESS.....	26
Disciplining Genius: Taste and Form.....	26
A Curbed Imagination.....	33
Enthusiasm and Fanaticism as Offences of Imagination.....	40
Madness, or Genius within the Bounds of Reason Alone.....	46
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....	51
REFERENCES.....	53

## ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Immanuel Kant:

Anth:	<i>Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View</i>
Blom. Logic:	<i>The Blomberg Logic</i>
CPR:	<i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>
CJ:	<i>Critique of Judgment</i>
DOSS:	<i>Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics</i>
Logic:	<i>The Jäshce Logic</i>
Prol:	<i>Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come As Science</i>
PW	<i>Political Writings</i>

When a reference is made to any of these works above, the abbreviation will be indicated after the quotation within parentheses followed by the appropriate page numbers (and sometimes by paragraph numbers, for convenience). When two page numbers are written, the first will refer to the so-called *Akademie Edition* of the text in question, the second to the English translation. When only one page number is given, then it indicates the English translation. One exception is *Critique of Pure Reason*; when a reference is made to that work, only the respective page numbers in the A and B editions are indicated.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In line with a dominant line of thought in the Western tradition of aesthetics, “genius” in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* stands for the ability for radical creativity in artistic production. Within the dynamics of the text, however, genius, as we will see, becomes a figure which registers the question of creativity within the basic parameters of critical philosophy—not without, however, exposing certain fault lines within this register as well. In what follows we will be concerned with laying bare and investigating the broader critical context within which the discussion on genius takes place. With an interpretative move which for the most part stays within critical philosophy, we hope to reveal the significance of Kant’s conception of genius for the entire critical project. The importance of such a move lies precisely in the fact that without it, that is, without extending the horizon of the investigation beyond the explicit discussion on fine arts and artistic creativity, that significance may not be noticed.

In order to do this, we will, first, try to explicate Kant’s account of aesthetic ideas in the arts of genius. In doing so, we hope to have some sense of Kant’s understanding of artistic creativity. Following this in the second chapter, we will investigate the implications of this account for the relationship between art and thought. More specifically, we will be concerned with the relation between the expansion and the gathering of thought in the presentation of aesthetic ideas. In the last chapter, our aim will be to show how the theme of taste as the discipline of

genius connects this discussion to the more basic and general themes and problematics of critical philosophy. In the end, we hope to have shown the specifically critical thrust of Kant's conception of genius.

## CHAPTER 2

### ARTISTIC CREATIVITY: GENIUS AND AESTHETIC IDEAS

“There are poets rather than rules for poetry”

—Immanuel Kant, *Dohna-Wundlacken Logic*

One can say, not without taking some risk in such a generalization, that the Analytic of the Beautiful in *Critique of Judgment* privileges, on the whole, natural beauty over artistic beauty. Against this background, it is no wonder that the explicit discussion on art starts rather late in the text, towards the end of the Analytic of Aesthetic Judgment, which constitutes the first division of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment. So, if there is anything like a “theory” of artistic creativity in Kant’s critical text, it is sure to be found within §§43-54, where Kant elaborates on his conception of art in general and fine art in particular. Of these paragraphs some will be of particular interest to us: those between §46 and §50 are reserved specifically for a dense—and at times obscure—discussion on genius.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, we will first note the textual context within which Kant’s conception of genius appears, and then move on to an elaboration of the faculties that constitute genius starting with spirit insofar it functions as the faculty of presenting aesthetic ideas.

#### Fine Art as the Art of Genius

---

<sup>1</sup> In our investigation, we will also be referring to another work by Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Although we will be drawing from many other paragraphs from this work, it should be noted that §§54-59 are especially important for our discussion on genius.

The initial characterization of genius that will give a guiding thread for our investigation is spelled out in §46, where genius is defined as “the innate mental disposition (*ingenium*) through which nature gives rule to art” (CJ, §46, 307/174). There is a peculiarity in this definition: the origin of the rule given by genius, that is, the origin of the original rule of art leads back to nature which is sharply differentiated from art in general in §43. In that paragraph we learn, among other things, that art is different from nature as doing (*facere*) is from acting or operating (*agere*). The specificity of art lies in its being a “production through freedom, i.e., through a power of choice that bases its acts on reason” (CJ, §43, 303/170). Accordingly, the product of art, different from a natural effect, is properly called a work (*opus*) in that it presupposes a finality without which it would be “a mere product of chance” (CJ, §47, 310/178). Now, we should not fail to notice that the above mentioned definition of genius is given in the same paragraph in which fine art is defined as the art of genius, which is an indication that the figure of genius appears in response to a certain need to account for the possibility and status of fine art. Such a need is felt in the first place due to the combination of two conflicting tendencies in the characterization of fine art. On the one hand, as *art*, fine art presupposes determinate concepts and purposes that guide the process of artistic production; on the other hand, as *fine art* (*schöne Kunst*, that is, *beautiful art*) its rules cannot be based on determinate concepts intentionally put to use in the artistic production—there is, after all, no concept of beauty.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Here, as we shall have occasion to see, the “beauty” of art refers us to the “formal” element of mere reflection in pure judgments of taste, especially in its third moment of relation. There beauty is characterized as “an object’s form of *purposiveness* insofar as it is perceived in the object *without the representation of a purpose*” (CJ, 236/84). No wonder that the initial characterization of fine art in §44 refers us to a “pleasure of reflection” and the reflective power of judgment: “aesthetic art that is also fine art is one whose standard is the reflective power of judgment, rather than sensation proper” (CJ, 306/173). And not much later than this, in §45, we are reminded that with respect to both nature and art: “*beauty is what we like in merely judging it* (rather than either in sensation proper or through a concept)” (CJ, 306/174).

[E]very art supposes rules, which serve as the foundation on which a product, if it is to be called artistic, is thought of as possible in the first place. On the other hand, the concept of fine art does not permit a judgment about the beauty of its product to be derived from any rule whatsoever that has a *concept* as its determining basis, i.e., its judgment must not be based on a concept of the way in which the product is possible. Hence fine art cannot itself devise the rule by which it is to bring about its product. (CJ, §46, 307/175)

In other words, despite the necessary technical element in it, a work of fine art, in order to merit that name, should be able to warrant judgments which are “not determined by a concept serving as a rule” (Guyer, 316); and in order to be *judged* beautiful, it must likewise not be *produced* according to an antecedent concept. Only the rule originally given by genius as an inborn capacity “for producing something for which no determinate rule can be given” can respond to these two conflicting demands: the rules of production in the case of the original creation of genius are not known in advance and held in view during the production process; rather, being without precedent, they are indeterminate “concepts” only retrospectively discoverable from the finished work as its rules. In such cases the rule originates not *qua* art (which is a doing with a view to a definite purpose) but *qua* nature (which is an acting or operating that is indeterminate with respect to its purpose).<sup>3</sup> This original rule of art originates, according to Kant, from the “nature in

---

<sup>3</sup> In order to dispel a possible misunderstanding it should be noted that this in no way comes to mean that the creative process is a totally unconscious one in which the genius (here understood as the person who has the talent more properly called genius) is carried away by an ecstatic inspiration which leaves no room—and indeed, no need—for rational deliberation and intentional work to carry out a purpose; there is, as we shall see, an indispensable element of labor and discipline in the creation of works of fine art. Rather, what is meant here is that the source and the way of creativity is opaque to the genius itself; nature works its way through genius, as some sort of a principle of “transcendental opacity” that marks “the withdrawal of the origin” (Bernstein, 102). This indeed is an important axis of differentiation between art and science: “Genius itself cannot describe or indicate scientifically how it brings about its products, and it is rather as *nature* that it gives the rule” (CJ, §46, 308/175). This indescribability is the reason why the artist’s talent cannot be communicated and taught to others, and also why the proper way of transmission of genial ideas in art is through, not descriptions, but models—models which serve as exemplars to be followed rather than copied or merely imitated (§47).

the subject” through the “the attunement of his powers” in their free play which remains purposive without conforming to any definite purpose. Insofar as the creative element in a work of genius is concerned, then, we are referred to a certain relation of mental powers in the subject.

### Spirit and Aesthetic Ideas

The mental powers that constitute genius are discussed in the famous §49 of *Critique of Judgment*, to be finally enlisted in §50 as imagination, understanding, spirit, and taste. The newly introduced power here is spirit (*Geist*). Spirit, in the aesthetic sense, is a principle of life, of animation. Insofar as a work of art is concerned, spirit is what constitutes the element of genius in it, that is, what distinguishes such a work from one that merely accords with the established “formal” rules of taste: “Of certain products that are expected to reveal themselves at least in part to be fine art, we say that they have no *spirit*, even though we find nothing to censure in them as far as taste is concerned” (CJ, §49, 313/181). Spirit is that which animates a work of art, that is, that which provides the rich material and expressive power that endows the work with the predisposition to animate the mind of the spectator. It does this on account of its being a subjective principle or rather a power for artistic creation. So in a sense more proper to the discussion at hand, spirit should be called “the animating principle in the mind” (313/181-2).

Animation of the mind here means: setting the mental powers in a purposive swing, imparting “to them a play which is such that it sustains itself on its own and even strengthens the powers for such play” (ibid.).<sup>4</sup> This much, it can be argued, is

---

<sup>4</sup> The conception of life that remains operative throughout the entire *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* is of a life that is intimately tied to feeling, its feeling. The aestheticity of judgments of taste is first

already the case with the free play of the faculties in aesthetic judgments of taste; the gist is that animation here is one that is geared towards creativity.

The material (*Stoff*) that spirit uses for such animation is aesthetic ideas; in this sense, spirit can also be called as “the ability to present *aesthetic ideas*” (314/182). An aesthetic idea is a representation of “the imagination which prompts much thinking [*denken*], but to which no determinate thought [*Gedanke*] whatsoever, i.e., no [determinate] concept, can be adequate, so that no language can express it completely and allow us to grasp it” (ibid.; translation slightly modified). The mind, then, is animated, that is, its representational powers are stirred into a purposive play, when more than what can be comprehended under the concepts of the understanding is offered to it to think by the imagination. Thus Kant characterizes aesthetic ideas as “inner intuitions to which no concept can be completely adequate” (ibid.), and in this sense they can be regarded as counterparts to rational ideas which are, inversely, concepts to which no intuition can be adequate.

It may be a good idea to pause to reflect on the reasons for considering this kind of representations of the imagination ideas; after all, up until this point in the

---

introduced in terms of the subjectivity of their basis. That this basis is subjective here means that at this basis lies a feeling. Now, Kant in §3 makes a distinction between two kinds of sensation (*Empfindung*), between sensation as an objective representation of the senses, as the “matter” of appearance or perfection, and sensation in the subjective sense as the non-cognitive effect of certain representations on the mind yielding no cognition of an object but informing the mind of its state. It is the latter that in the text goes by the name “feeling” (*Gefühl*). So, in a pure judgment of taste, the representation of the object is referred solely and immediately to the subject in its feeling of life *qua* feeling of pleasure and displeasure: “here the subject feels himself, [namely] how he is affected by the representation” (CJ, §1, 204/44). This feeling of life through which the subject feels himself is a feeling of animation—a feeling of coming to life, not biologically, but mentally, which comes to mean the awakening or quickening of the representational powers as a whole: feeling of life here indicates a life of the mind *qua* the entirety of representational powers. Furthermore, just as is the case with the animation of the mind in the case of spirit, animation of the representational powers in judgments of taste can be furthered too: the aesthetic pleasure felt as an effect of the harmonious free play of imagination and understanding can also be instrumental in indefinitely reproducing that state of mind. This conception of life marks one of those points in which the beautiful and judgments of taste prove relevant for the present discussion on fine art and genius. This ongoing relevance is also why the initial association of spirit with animation is not an “abrupt recourse to vitalism”, as Lyotard seems to think (61). The above discussion clearly shows that a certain non-vitalist conception of life is accessible to a transcendental critique, though the metaphors at play (around notions like pleasure, life, vital forces, and so on) in the critical text at times seems to obscure this critical conception.

third *Critique*, the name “idea” was reserved in a very strict sense for a concept of reason.<sup>5</sup> An idea, in the transcendental sense, we read in *Critique of Pure Reason*, is “a necessary concept of reason to which no corresponding object can be given in sense-experience” (A327/B383). The necessity of such rational concepts means that, although they can have no objective reality, they are not for that reason arbitrarily invented, but rather “are imposed by the nature of reason itself” which is concerned with the absolute, i.e., unconditioned, totality of conditions for any given conditioned state. As such, they can be regulatively employed in relation, not immediately, but mediately through the understanding, to experience by approximating a highest systematic unity in the principles of the understanding with regard to “*the absolute totality of all possible experience*” (Prol, §40, 328/120).

Kant, in *Critique of Judgment*, reformulates, if not reframes, his conception of idea so as to make room for something like an aesthetic idea. In §57 he says of ideas in the broadest sense that they are “representations referred to an object according a certain principle (subjective or objective) but are such that they can still never become cognition of an object” (342/215). A rational idea cannot become a cognition because it “contains a *concept* (of the supersensible) for which no adequate intuition can be given”. On the other hand, if an aesthetic idea can never become cognition, it is because it is “an *intuition* (of the imagination) for which an adequate concept can never be found”; aesthetic ideas, in this sense, are “unexpoundable” (ibid.) representations that are totally unlike ordinary intuitions. If they are worthy of the name of “idea”, it is because, as inner intuitions that exceed

---

<sup>5</sup> Actually, there is one exception: the aesthetic standard idea that Kant mentions in §17, “On the Ideal of Beauty”. There Kant characterizes an aesthetic standard idea as an “individual intuition (of the imagination)” that serves as standard for judging a particular thing as belonging to a particular species (CJ, §17, 5:233). Although this is an important point insofar as the imagination’s ability to present ideas is concerned, still the discussion of aesthetic ideas is privileged in the text; only with it a general discussion on ideas is broached.

the discursive unities that *verständliche* concepts are, they “strive toward something that lies beyond the bounds of experience” (CJ, §49, 314/182), toward a completeness or fullness that is nowhere to be found in experience. At this point we are referred to the imagination as a productive cognitive power capable of originating such creative intuitive representations.

### A Creative Imagination

Kant’s *Anthropology* offers a concise, and most of the time critically informed, account of imagination as a respectable cognitive faculty. There in §15 we learn that the power of imagination, like sense, is a part of sensibility as a cognitive faculty. While the latter is the faculty of intuition in the presence of an object, the former is the faculty of intuition even without the presence of an object.<sup>6</sup> Imagination is either productive or reproductive. When, as in its empirical use, it is reproductive, it is capable only of a derivative presentation of the object (*exhibitio derivativa*), “which brings back to the mind an empirical intuition it had previously” (§28, 167/60). In its productive mode imagination is a faculty of original presentation (*exhibitio originaria*)—a presentation that precedes experience. In a move that clearly anticipates his critical transcendental idealism Kant gives pure intuitions of space and time as examples of such original presentations. In addition to these, we see in CPR in “Axioms of Intuition”, for example, the productive imagination at work in the generation of geometrical figures. All in all, the text of CPR names imagination “productive” whenever it acts, without being subject to

---

<sup>6</sup> This definition is preserved in CPR as well. See B151: “*Imagination* is the faculty of representing in intuition an object that is *not itself present*”.

empirical laws of association, spontaneously, as in the figurative synthesis (introduced in §24 in the B edition) or transcendental schematism.

What kind of a creative activity does imagination display in the presentation of aesthetic ideas? We are told in §49 of CJ that imagination can surpass nature in creating, as it were, another nature. Here the imagination clearly is not reproductive, since it breaks free of the empirical laws of association. But there is a limit to the creativity to the imagination, “for it is not capable of producing a sense representation that was *never* given to our faculty of sense. . . . So, no matter how great an artist, even a sorceress, the power of imagination may be, it is still not [radically] creative, but must get the *material* for its images from the senses” (Ant, §28, 168/61). In artistic creation, imagination, though still receiving its material from empirical nature in accordance with laws of association, breaks free of these laws and processes “that material into something quite different, namely into something that surpasses nature” (CJ, §49, 314/182). Here such processing takes place by following “principles which reside higher up, namely, in reason”. Indeed, whenever we talk of an idea, regardless of its source, there is inevitably a reference to principles and hence to reason: “both kinds of ideas, rational as well as aesthetic, must have their principles, and both must have them in reason” (§57, 343-4/217). The higher principles of reason here are those of its regulative employment. The faculty of imagination, in breaking free of the laws that determine its empirical employment, feels its freedom also from the roles determined for it by the understanding in matters of cognition. Here, instead, it “emulates the example of reason in reaching [for] a maximum” (§49, 314/183) that goes beyond the bounds of possible experience. That it tries to follow the example of reason means that productive imagination “transcends nature as it is given to us, by reflecting on it in

a manner analogous to the way reason reflects on the manifold empirical laws”  
(Gasché , 111).

### The Symbolic Function of Aesthetic Ideas

This is the reason why an aesthetic idea can serve the rational idea as a symbolic presentation of it. As we have seen, transcendental ideas of reason are unrepresentable concepts; that is, they essentially lack objective reality (insofar as theoretical cognition is concerned) in that they cannot be made directly sensible like the pure concepts of the understanding which gain objective reality through transcendental schematism which secures their applicability to intuition. However, these ideas can be made sensible *indirectly* (that is, by analogy) through *symbolic* presentation when it is supplied with “an intuition that judgment treats in a way merely analogous to the procedure it follows in schematizing; i.e., the treatment agrees with this procedure merely in the rule followed rather than in terms of the intuition itself, and hence merely in terms of the form of reflection rather than its content” (§59, 351/226). Through aesthetic ideas, Kant says, a poet may venture, for example, “to give sensible expression to rational ideas of invisible beings, the realm of the blessed, the realm of hell, eternity, creation, and so on” (§49, 314/183).<sup>7</sup>

This symbolization is achieved by way of what Kant calls “aesthetic attributes”. Aesthetic attributes are those “supplementary representations” (*Nebenvorstellungen*), which, without constituting the presentation of a given concept, are imaginatively conjoined with that concept in such a way that by expressing its “implications and its kinship with other concepts” (315/183) they

---

<sup>7</sup> The other thing that the poet can do is to express things found in experience (like death, envy, love, fame,...) with “completeness for which no example can be found in nature” (§49, 314/183).

aesthetically expand the concept in an indefinite manner. Aesthetic attributes, Kant says, yield an aesthetic idea, and as such an indeterminate unity of aesthetic attributes, an aesthetic idea, then, can be seen as “a representation of the object such that there is no corresponding property in the *concept* of this object” (Lyotard, 65). Kant’s example is Jupiter’s eagle with the lightning in its claws: although it does not inhere in the rational concept of the sublimity of creation, it animates the idea by arousing “a multitude of sensations and supplementary representations for which no definite expression can be found” (5:316).<sup>8</sup> In this way aesthetic attributes serve to enliven the otherwise abstract ideas of reason, “making them meaningful in relation to experience” (Makkreel, 121).

This symbolizing function of aesthetic ideas is crucial for the critical enterprise in that, in implementing indirect, symbolic presentations of rational ideas, they help in forming a “bridge between pure and practical reason, a bridge between nature and freedom” (Helfer, 26). However, this, in no way, should be seen as their essential function. An aesthetic idea may serve a rational idea “as a substitute for a logical exhibition, but its proper function is to quicken [*beleben*] the mind by opening for it a view into an immense realm of kindred representations” (315/183-4). It is now high time to dig more into what truly is at stake in this quickening and expansion of the mind.

---

<sup>8</sup> Symbolization, Kant’s examples suggest, can proceed in the opposite direction as well; a rational idea can be used to animate a sensible representation: “even an intellectual concept may serve, conversely, as an attribute of a representation of sense and thus animate the representation by the idea of the supersensible; but [we] may use for this only the aesthetic [element] that attaches subjectively to our consciousness of the supersensible” (CJ, §49, 316/184).

## CHAPTER 3

### EXPANSION OF THE MIND—GATHERING OF THOUGHT

Let us continue with a lengthy quotation from Kant, one that sums up most of the discussion up until now and indicates the possible ways through which it can be furthered.

In a word, an aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination which is conjoined with a given concept and is connected, when we use imagination in its freedom, with such a multiplicity of partial representations that no expression that stands for a determinate concept can be found for it. Hence it is a representation that makes us add to a concept the thoughts of much that is ineffable, but the feeling of which quickens our cognitive powers and connects language, which otherwise would be mere letters, with spirit. (CJ, §49, 316/185)

We have seen that the additional representations that aesthetic attributes are give an indefinite aesthetic expansion to the concept to whose presentation they belong in an excessive way. As such, aesthetic attributes should not be confused with what Kant calls the “logical attributes” of a concept. Logical attributes represent what lies in our concept of something; they are those predicates or “subconcepts”, if you will, thought as contained in the concept. In order to understand what is at stake in this aesthetic expansion of the concept, we need to take a look, no matter how quick, at Kant’s cognitive semantics of concepts.

Kant’s Semantics of Concepts: An Overview

A concept, according to Kant, is a “universal representation, or a representation of what is common to several objects” (Logic, 91/589). Or as the text of CPR reads: a concept is a representation that “relates mediately [to the object] by means of a feature which several things may have in common” (A320/B377). As such it is a set of marks or characteristics contained in it under a discursive unity (a unity of the one that applies to many). According to Kant, when we think of a concept, even when we are not aware of all the constituent concepts that make up the “logical content” of the concept in question, i.e., even when the concept in question is not distinct, those constituent concepts or predicates are still actually thought as contained in it. Analysis, indeed, is the process of “explanation or elucidation of what has already been thought in our concepts, though in a confused manner” (CPR, A5-6/B9). An analytic judgment, in this vein, can be seen as the result of such a process of analysis (which need not be exhaustive).<sup>9</sup> This is the reason why Kant thinks that in order to see whether a judgement is analytic or not, “I have merely to analyse the concept, that is, to become conscious to myself of the manifold which I always think in that concept in order to encounter this predicate therein” (CPR, A7/B11). This is the reason why Kant calls analytic judgments *explicative* as opposed to synthetic judgments which deserve the name *ampliative* in that, something that is not thought in the concept of the subject is connected as predicate to the subject. All this is summed up with schematic clarity in *Jäsche Logic*:

An example of an *analytic* proposition is, To everything  $x$ , to which the concept of body ( $a + b$ ) belongs, belongs also *extension* ( $b$ ).

---

<sup>9</sup> Having said that, one should not fail to add that there are other, distinct formulations of analyticity in Kant that depend on identity and contradiction. For a systematic discussion of these different versions, see Hanna’s *Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy*, 125-154.

An example of a *synthetic* proposition is, To everything  $x$ , to which the concept of body ( $a + b$ ) belongs, belongs also *attraction* ( $c$ ). Synthetic propositions increase cognition *materialiter*, analytic ones merely *formaliter*. The former contain *determinations* (*determinationes*), the latter only *logical predicates*. (111/606-7)

An important reminder that needs to be made at this point is that the above account applies primarily to the concepts of the understanding (whether empirical or pure) and not directly to the concepts of reason that ideas are. Transcendental ideas of reason, as articulated in the first *Critique*, bring systematic unity to the concepts and principles of the understanding; for this reason, they can be seen as “metaconcepts, in the sense of providing rules for the organization of concepts into systems of thought” (Zammito, 164). Indeed, the difference between concept and idea, since it reflects the critical difference between understanding and reason, is very important to maintain for a critique of pure reason. (Indeed, it is one of those things Kant prides himself for coming up with.) However, in the context of aesthetic ideas, the talk of rational ideas relaxes so as to also include—other than the strictly transcendental ideas of immortality, freedom, and God—those concepts without any assignable intuition like “invisible beings, the realm of the blessed, the realm of hell, eternity, creation”.<sup>10</sup> These, although still concepts of reason proper, do not necessarily function as sources of systematic unity. So, insofar as they belong to the genus *concept* (CPR, A320/B377), the above account concerning analysis and logical content of a concept is applicable to them as well.

Continuing from where we left before the reminder: the aesthetic expansion of the concept, strictly speaking, is neither a formal nor a material expansion.

Through an aesthetic expansion we neither increase our awareness of what lies in

---

<sup>10</sup> As a matter of fact, when read carefully, the text of §49 will be seen to be betraying this relaxation in Kant’s confusing usage of “concept” to mean first an idea and then a concept (of the understanding) even within the same paragraph—like the one quoted at the beginning of this chapter. I owe this realization to Pillow, 100.

the concept, of its “logical essence”, nor “pass beyond it to properties which are not contained in the concept, but yet belong to it” (CPR, A718/B746) as in the synthetic a priori truths of mathematics. In the case of the presentation of aesthetic ideas, the constituent logical predicates of a concept are supplemented, as it were, by aesthetic predicates or attributes which render the concept indeterminate without enlarging its content logically. In such in-determination, however, the concept is expressed more fully because its “implications and its kinship with other concepts” are revealed—implications which are not logically derivable from the thought expressed in the concept. These “implications”, then, are not of a logical order, neither general nor transcendental, but they should not be labeled as mere associations (that belong to a merely psychological or emotional reserve) for that reason either. When rendered aesthetically indeterminate in this way, possible but unthought modes of relationality between concepts are laid out in an indefinite but suggestive manner so that the imagination is prompted “to spread over a multitude of kindred representations that arouse more thought than can be expressed in a concept determined by words” (CJ, §49, 315/183). Beyond that which is actually thought in the concept or as necessarily connected with it, that which is possible to think with it can make its appearance within the enlarged horizon of thinking.

### The Free Play of Imagination and Understanding

Within the parameters of a critique of aesthetic judgment, this broadening of the horizon of thought, a broadening that allows the unthought to announce itself, refers us again to a certain relation between imagination and understanding. The relation

at issue here is different from the determinate relation that is manifest in matters of cognition.

When the imagination is used for cognition, then it is under the constraint of the understanding's concept. But when the aim is aesthetic, then the imagination is free, so that, over and above that harmony with the concept, it may supply, in an unstudied way, a wealth of undeveloped material for the understanding which the latter disregarded in its concept. But the understanding employs this material not so much objectively, for cognition, as subjectively, namely, to quicken the cognitive powers, though indirectly this does serve cognition too. (CJ, §49, 316-7/185)

This passage is a clear indication of the extent to which Kant's account of artistic creativity presupposes and builds upon his analytic of the beautiful. As we have seen, a pure judgment of taste is an aesthetic, rather than a cognitive judgment; in other words, no determinate concept, as a representation of a purpose, lies at its basis. Rather, "it involves merely the relation of the representational powers to each other, insofar as they are determined by a representation" (§11, 221/66). This relation, which is connected with a feeling of pleasure, is one in which the imagination and the understanding relate to each other purposively, yet without a determinate purpose, in free play. Though not geared towards any determinate cognition, this purposive harmony of the representational powers has some crucial cognitive import in that it makes up a state of mind favorable to cognition in general. As Kant on many occasions makes sufficiently clear, the active representational powers the contribution of which is required in order for a representation to be cognitive are imagination and understanding—the former insofar as it brings together the manifold of intuition, and the latter insofar as it unites representations under its concepts. With a view to cognition in general, however, these faculties no longer take part in this drama in which they play their

determined roles but rather relate to each other in free play: imagination in its freedom and understanding in its lawfulness strike a purposive harmony without a rule, a harmony that is conducive to cognition in general. As such, the free play of imagination and understanding appears as “the subjective condition of [the process of] cognition”, a condition, that is, without which determinate cognition “[as] an effect could not arise” (§21, 238/88). An important detail to see here is the obvious one that it is *not* the free play of imagination or understanding per se but rather the free play of imagination *and* understanding which implies a mutual relation of faculties in their free play. Understanding, to be able to engage in free play undisturbed by any of its concepts, needs to be stirred, as it were, by the imagination, and imagination, in its turn, needs understanding itself to be able to maintain its freedom. In a crucial passage in his general comment on the first division of his *Analytic of the Beautiful* where he explicates the conception of “taste as an ability to judge an object in reference to the *free lawfulness* of the imagination” Kant says:

[W]hen the imagination is compelled to proceed according to a determinate law, then what its product is determined by concepts (as far as its form is concerned); but, in that case, the liking . . . is not a liking for the beautiful but for the good (of perfection, at any rate, formal perfection), and the judgement is not a judgment made by taste. It seems, therefore, that only a lawfulness without a law, and a subjective harmony of the imagination with the understanding without an objective harmony—where the representation is referred to a determinate concept of the object—is compatible with the lawfulness of the understanding (which has also been called purposiveness without a purpose) and with the peculiarity of a judgement of taste. (CJ, 241/91-2)

Imaginative relating of the representation of a contingent particular to a concept in general may help to secure cognition in general but conversely this indeterminate concept of the understanding helps to secure imagination’s freedom. Understanding,

while being stirred into a free play by imagination, calls the latter towards a minimal, unimposing unity that its indefinite concept as a concept in general provides. Imagination needs the understanding which offers itself as a faculty, not of determinate cognition, but of concepts in general so that it can exercise its freedom lawfully yet without a definite law restricting its free play. Understanding in this way makes it possible for imagination to conform to law without a law: without this minimal lawfulness that the undetermined unity of a concept in general provides, the free exercise of imagination cannot maintain itself as such, i.e, in its freedom. Understanding itself, in other words, is the minimal guarantee that imagination in its freedom will not interrupt or worse annihilate (itself in) its freedom. To put it in other words, only the relationship in which imagination becomes the presentation of understanding as the power of concepts in general can attain the formal subjective purposiveness that is self-maintaining (as it is required by a pure judgment of taste).

### The Exigency of Reason

Admittedly, the free play of imagination at stake in apprehending the form of the object in judgments of taste is not the same free play that it has in artistic creation, e.g., “in poetry” (CJ, 240/91), which, though still concerned with form in some sense, is for the most part about a creative proliferation of forms in the guise of aesthetic attributes. Still, the concern with the beautiful form in fine art as the art of genius is the reason why the mental powers whose relation is necessary for artistic creation are imagination and understanding. (And taste, as we shall see, is the faculty responsible for adjusting imagination’s free play to understanding’s

lawfulness.) However, in the case of genius, in addition to the general purposive harmony between imagination and understanding that is beneficial for cognition in general (which, as will become clear later, is necessary to respond to the demands of intelligibility and communicability), the mental powers display a special configuration through which the talent of genius can be put to work. In a footnote to that paragraph in §17 about the standard idea, Kant characterizes genius in terms of a deviation from the standard or the regular: “if none of the mental predispositions stands out beyond the proportion that is required for someone to constitute merely a person free from defects, then we must not expect in him any degree of what we call *genius*; in the case of genius nature seems to depart from the proportions it usually imparts to our mental powers, instead favoring just one” (CJ, 235/83 fn.). Although it is not clear from the text alone whether by saying “just one” Kant has a specific faculty in mind, it can be more or less safely argued that in genial creation, imagination in its free play tends to display an extraordinary productivity. Although, as we shall see, imagination, since it is susceptible to various dangerous offences, should be subject to the discipline of taste, in order not to lose the original element of genius in a work, imagination should also venture a prodigality in its creation of ideas.<sup>11</sup> After all, the “proper field of genius is that of the power of imagination, because this is creative and, being less under the constraint of rules than other faculties, it is thus all the more capable of originality” (Anth, §57, 224-5/120).

---

<sup>11</sup> For Kant, in a work of genius even deformities are allowed. The reason is that if the “wings” of imagination are clipped to the extent that it is not allowed any range of experimentation that may nevertheless result in deformities, then there is the danger that “the force of the idea” in the work may be diminished: “the inimitable in the momentum of . . . spirit would be impaired by timorous caution”. Insofar as such deformities are manifestations of a boldness of expression and a deviation from the common rule, it “is entirely fitting for a genius” (CJ, §49, 318/187). However, this element of deformity is not worthy of imitation at all; Kant calls the act of copying everything from the work of genius, including its deformities, “aping”.

In presenting aesthetic ideas in this way, imagination tends to overwhelm the power of concepts that understanding is: “in the case of an aesthetic idea the understanding with its concepts never reaches the entire inner intuition that the imagination has and connects with a given representation” (CJ, 343/216-7). However, imagination’s free play in its creative moments is such that it “can bring movement” among the concepts of the understanding; “it stirs up the calcified pathways of established habits of thought, as it were, thus allowing for novelty” (Sassen, 177). This is especially important for the kind of aesthetic experience and response that the work of genius makes room for: a work of art, insofar as in and through it is presented a wealth of ideas that is not semantically exhaustible by discursive thematization, can become “a focal site of unbounded meanings and possible interpretative elaborations” (Pillow, 5) and as such can disturb unquestioned patterns of judgment in ways that can introduce novel possibilities of making sense of ourselves, the world, and our place in it.

Another, more ambitious way of saying this would be: through imagination’s creation of aesthetic ideas in its striving to attain to the rational idea of a maximum, another exigency of thinking makes itself heard. Rudolphe Gasché puts it well when he says that “. . . in art, the imagination confronts the understanding with the need to open itself up to the exigencies of reason”, since “in addition to the demands of discursive language, another exigency bears on the mind: the exigency of thinking, that is, of reason and its ideas” (Gasché, 116 and 196). Indeed, the artwork exists as a response to such an exigency—and the uniqueness of the art of genius lies in the fact that in and through it that which provokes thinking comes to resonate unimposingly, yet unmistakably, in the work. In this sense, an aesthetic idea can be regarded first and foremost as a

“symbolization” not of this or that rational idea, but of reason itself, of reason in general as the highest faculty of thought, as the faculty of ideas (Gasché, 112). In its attempt to present a rational idea, as we have seen, imagination emulates “the example of reason [*Vernunft-Vorspiele*] in reaching [for] a maximum”. Isn’t it the case that productive imagination *qua* spirit, in surpassing the given nature, strives to surpass its own nature as a sensible power and attempts to respond to the rational demand for totality on the level of the sensible? What, at the end of the day, gets to be exhibited is not, strictly speaking, the maximum of reason, but rather a quest for such a maximum...<sup>12</sup>

### The Question of Aesthetic Unity

The thinking that emerges and takes place as a response to this exigency of reason is a thinking that is disposed to think beyond the concept. This is a thinking that is not containable under any discursive or systematic unity, a thinking without (definite) thought, as it were—a thinking in excess, or rather, a thinking as its own excess. However, in order to maintain its intelligibility, it must sustain some relation to the concept—though, of course, to an indeterminate one. Corresponding, then, to the exigency of reason to think beyond the concept lies an exigency of critique (which may be nothing other than simply another exigency of reason) to be intelligible and communicable.<sup>13</sup> What is at stake in this figure of thinking is

---

<sup>12</sup> This argument is supported by Kant’s consistent emphasis on this motif of quest without accomplishment throughout the §49. Without citing the full sentences (which we already referred to), one can give the following examples: “. . . at least strive toward something that lies beyond the bounds of experience”, “. . . ventures to give sensible expression to rational ideas . . .”, “. . . emulates the example of reason in reaching a maximum” . . .

<sup>13</sup> That there is such a critical demand on thinking is clear from this passage from “What is Orientation in Thinking?”: “We do admittedly say that, whereas a higher authority may deprive us of freedom of *speech* or *writing*, it cannot deprive us of freedom of *thought*. But how much and how accurately would we think if we did not think, so to speak, in community with others to whom we

thinking's capability to come back to itself from the "aesthetic" expansion of its horizon or from the dissemination that this expansion can be and gather itself under, what Kant will call, an "original concept".

With respect to the question of aesthetic unity,<sup>14</sup> one should remember that the free play of imagination in its creation of aesthetic ideas does not constitute creativity proper; creativity pertains to the expression of ideas at least as much as it pertains to coming up with ideas. Against this background it should be noted that if imagination brings movement among the concepts of the understanding by presenting more food for thought than can be comprehended under any one of these concepts, understanding, for its part, helps to maintain the purposivity, and hence intelligibility, of the imaginative creation of ideas. Let us dwell more on this last point: in the creative process, understanding in general is called on, firstly because, as art, art of genius still presupposes a purpose to be actualized (§49), and secondly because, without it there is no guarantee that the wealth of ideas that originate from the imagination will be intelligible and communicable, which certainly is a requirement for the art of genius. The understanding, as it were, responds to a demand on the part of the idea to be expressed; there is no point in conjuring up ideas if they are doomed to the privacy of a self-enclosed mental life. The abundant material that sets into motion reason towards an expansion of the mind in attempting to think more than what can be contained within the bounds of a concept of the understanding—that excessive material must still be recognizable by the

---

communicate our thoughts and who communicate their to us! We may therefore conclude that the same external constraint which deprives people of the freedom to *communicate* their thoughts in public also removes their freedom of *thought*, the one treasure which remains to us amidst all the burdens of civil life, and which alone offers us a means of overcoming all the evils of this condition" (246-7). Here Kant clearly addresses a political question that illuminates some of the political implications of critical thought. But even here, it is clearly visible that from a properly critical perspective, thinking cannot be reduced to a private exercise of a psychic faculty, but depends upon its communicability.

<sup>14</sup> I borrow the term "aesthetic unity" from Pillow.

understanding, at least, and at most, under its indeterminate concept. That is to say, for the critical analysis, the ideas that the imagination freely originates from itself should not be so excessive as to defy any form (Lyotard, 73-4). The critical notion of form addresses this delicate problematic of gathering this wealth of thought under an aesthetic unity—a unity that is different from both the discursive unity of the concept and the systematic unity of the idea (Pillow, 3). This particular sort of “formal” aesthetic unity is such that it maintains a minimal, unimposing unity in gathering the indefinite expansion of thought without reducing the represented content which resists discursive fixity to a mere conceptual representation.

Spirit, against this background, gains its proper meaning. It now refers to the ability “to hit upon a way of *expressing* these ideas that enables us to communicate to others, as accompanying a concept, the mental attunement that those ideas produce” (§49, 317/186). Here, expression is nothing like a description or an explication of aesthetic ideas; this would inevitably reduce their disposition to evoke a richness in thought. Rather, what gets communicated in the expression of the aesthetic idea is the state of mind that these ideas give birth to, or more properly, what in that state of mind would remain ineffable without the genius. Only in this way can a work of art be capable of provoking aesthetic ideas, that is, occasioning much thinking that does not admit of being conceptually pinned down and being articulated in determinate linguistic expressions. So spirit can also be regarded as that ability “to apprehend the imagination’s rapidly passing play and to unite it in a concept that can be communicated without the constraint of rules (a concept that on that very account is original, while at the same time it reveals a new rule that could not have been inferred from any earlier principles or examples)” (ibid.). Although Kant uses the word “concept”, this “original” concept cannot be a

determinate concept of the understanding—especially if, after all, it is to be universally communicated without the constraint of rules. This “original concept” is such that it gathers together the wealth of material that yields an aesthetic idea without imposing on it a conceptual unity while at the same maintaining some degree of determinateness, a loose, unimposing unity so as to preserve the intelligibility of the unprecedented “new rule” that it reveals (so that the work, beside being original, can be exemplary as well). Against this background, a more complete definition of genius emerges: “Genius is the exemplary originality of a subject’s natural endowment in the free use of his cognitive powers” (§49).

We shall see in the next chapter that given the parameters of the critique of aesthetic judgment and critical philosophy in general, such a characterization calls for the intervention of another faculty, one whose “contribution” to artistic creation we have been mostly ignoring up to this point: taste.

## CHAPTER 4

### TASTE AS DISCIPLINE: GENIUS, FANATICISM, AND MADNESS

“. . . for nothing—not even the greatest absurdity—can continue to operate for long  
without some kind of law.”

—Immanuel Kant, “What is Orientation in Thinking?”

#### Disciplining Genius: Taste and Form

Taste, as we learn in §50, is the fourth faculty that constitutes genius. However, we read earlier in §48 that there is an important difference between taste and genius: while taste is required for “*judging* beautiful objects”, genius is required for “fine art itself, i.e., *production* of such objects” (CJ, 311/179). In line with this difference, taste here is not really presented as simply one power of the mind among others; rather, it is what unites the other three abilities (§50, 320/189 fn.). More specifically, it adjusts the “poetic” free play of the imagination to the lawfulness in general of the understanding. Such an adjustment is required because even an artwork which is rich in spirit does not deserve to be called fine art for that reason alone; “it deserves to be called *fine* art only insofar as it shows taste” (319/188). If we remember that he started §49 with the statement, “Of certain products that are expected to reveal themselves at least in part to be fine art, we say that they have no

*spirit*, even though we find nothing to censure in them as far as taste is concerned” (313/181), we will see that here Kant shows the other side of the relation between taste and spirit. There is another reason for the necessity of the intervention of taste: the originality associated with the creation of genius may very well be nonsense. “For if the imagination is left in lawless freedom, all its riches [in ideas] produce nothing but nonsense, and it is judgment that adapts the imagination to understanding” (§50, 319/188).<sup>15</sup> Taste prepares, as it were, the legitimate “playground” of the imagination—a critical “spacing” of imagination, if you will, one that specifies the range of the free play of imagination in coming up with ideas while at same time staying in harmony with the lawfulness of the understanding in general.

Here what manifests itself in the adaptive operation of taste is the mediative function of the power of judgment in general. As an intermediary cognitive faculty between understanding and reason, the power of judgment in judgments of taste achieves the harmonious mediation between the imagination in its freedom and the understanding with its lawfulness; indeed, in one sense, that power exists simply as such a function of mediation between representational powers: “since a judgment of taste is not based on a concept of the object (in the case of a representation by which an object is given), it can consist only in the subsumption of the very imagination under the condition [which must be met] for the understanding to proceed in general from intuition to concepts” (CJ, §35, 287/151). (And as such a power, it enjoys a peculiar kind of autonomy without legislative authority which Kant calls “heautonomy” [CJ, Introduction §V, 185/25] in which judgement “is, subjectively, object to itself as well as law to itself” [§36, 288/153].) But even more

---

<sup>15</sup> The requirement that the products of genius be exemplary—a requirement to which taste can respond to—arises partly because nonsense too can be original (§46).

generally still, a certain conception of judgment that pervades Kant's philosophy manifests itself here as well. This is the conception that associates judgment with limitation—or more appropriately put, what is at stake here is a certain conception of negative judgment that in its limiting or correcting function, takes up a prominent role in the critical enterprise, a conception we will have ample opportunity to investigate when we discuss the discipline of pure reason.<sup>16</sup>

Not a distant relative of this limiting aspect of judgment is the disciplining function of taste.

Taste, like the power of judgment in general, consists in disciplining (or training [*Zucht*]) genius. It severely clips its wings, and makes it civilized, or polished; but at the same time it gives it guidance as to how far and over what it may spread while still remaining purposive. It introduces clarity and order into a wealth of thought, and hence makes the ideas durable, fit for approval that is both lasting and universal, and [hence] fit for being followed by others and fit for an ever advancing culture. (CJ, §50, 319/188)

At this point, we should pause to make an observation on the senses of “discipline” in the critical text. In CPR, Kant is very clear and insistent that “discipline” at all times must be taken in a strictly negative sense and not be confused with culture. While discipline is “the compulsion, by which the constant tendency to disobey certain rules is restrained and finally extirpated”, culture “is intended solely to give a certain kind of skill, and not to cancel any habitual mode of action already present” (A709/B737). Therefore, towards “the development of a talent, which has already in itself an impulse to manifest itself, discipline will therefore contribute in a *negative*, culture and doctrine in a positive, fashion” (ibid., emphasis mine). In this negative sense discipline, Kant says, means “training by constraint” (*Zucht*).

---

<sup>16</sup> As another example of this “limiting” conception we give an example from *Anthropology*: comparing it to wit, Kant says of judgment that “it limits concepts and contributes more to correcting than enlarging them” (§55, 116/221).

There is no doubt that the discussion in CJ is terminologically consistent with that in CPR. However, in the passage quoted above, Kant, in his characterization of the disciplining of genius by taste, goes beyond a merely negative sense by including in it references to guidance and culture. Such an extension, or a small deviation, of the sense of “discipline” is also visible at another point in the text: in §83 Kant talks about “the culture of discipline” (*Kultur der Zucht*) (432/319). In what follows, we will stick to the negative sense of discipline without at the same time failing to include the formative aspects of it insofar as included in it is the requirement that genius be guided with a view to making it more civilized.

Taste, in this sense, comprises the “formal” element in fine artistic creation; this is what Kant at times calls the element of mechanism or of labor. Kant makes a clear distinction between mechanical art and aesthetic art—fine art properly only falls under the latter. While the purpose of aesthetic art is solely the direct arousal of the feeling of pleasure, mechanical art is geared towards “acts that are required to make a possible object actual, adequately to our *cognition* of that object” (§44, 305/172). So mechanical art is based merely on diligence and learning, and not on genius as in the case of fine art. However, in spite of the difference between mechanical and fine art, Kant does not fail to add a crucial point: “there is no fine art that does not have as its essential condition something mechanical, which can be encompassed by rules and complied with, and hence has an element of *academic correctness*” (§47, 310/178). Academic training with its constraining rules, according to Kant, is necessary in order to be able to give *form* to the rich *material* that genius can provide for products of fine art. In order to understand what goes on in the disciplining of genius by taste we need to dig more into this notion of form. But before doing that we should not pass without noting that when talking about the

need of academic training, Kant targets a certain shallowness of mind that associates the true sign of genius with the renouncement of all rules of academic constraint. The embodiment of such a state of mind is what Kant calls a “man of genius” who, “declaring that difficult study and research are dilettantish” (Anth, §58, 226/121), tends to “speak and decide like a genius even in matters that require the most careful rational investigation” (CJ, §47, 310/178). Kant considers such people “very disadvantageous to progress in scientific and moral education” (Anth, §58, 226/121).<sup>17</sup> Here, indeed, lies a thread that ties genius to the more general moral and political issues, but we shall have to wait a bit more to trace it properly.<sup>18</sup>

The emphasis on academic correctness might lead one to think that the form that taste is expected to bring to works of fine art is nothing more than “the form of the schools”, that is, a set of determinate rules abstracted from the works of genius and codified in order to be copied. That this is not the case, in spite of some remarks by Kant to the contrary, can be seen from Kant’s brief remarks on education in fine art. §60 bears the title, “On Methodology Concerning Taste”. This paragraph occupies the place of methodology that belongs to the architectonic structure of all *Critiques*. However, since there is no concept and no science of the beautiful, there cannot be a methodology for the judgment of taste. Similarly for fine art—but specifically in this case, fine art can have a manner. Regarding the difference between manner and method Kant says: “Whenever we convey our thoughts, there are two ways (*modi*) of arranging them, and one of these is called manner (*modus aestheticus*), the other method (*modus logicus*); the difference between these two is

---

<sup>17</sup> Reading these, one should keep in mind that “genius”, in the text of *Anthropology*, as in many other texts of Kant’s, refers not just to the artistic genius of CJ, and signifies more generally “an inventive mind” or “the originality of the cognitive faculty”. Newton, for example, who is not seen as a genius in CJ, is considered to be one in *Anthropology*.

<sup>18</sup> It would be interesting to contextualize these covertly polemical remarks by showing who Kant had in mind while ridiculing this attitude. Zammito, for example, notes that “Herder and the *Sturm und Drang* were the main targets of Kant’s theory of art and genius” (10).

that the first has no standard other than the *feeling* that there is unity in the exhibition [of the thoughts], whereas the second follows in [all of] this *determinate principles*; hence only the first applies to fine art” (§49, 318-19/187). What is proper to fine art is not the teaching of canonical rules of art abstracted from the exemplary works to be merely copied; rather, “the master must show by his example what the student is to produce, and how” (§60, 355/230). In so doing he must “stimulate the student’s imagination until it becomes commensurate with a given concept” (355/231). But above all, “he must provide the student with sharp criticism”. That means: the student should be able to sharpen his taste to use it in an independent fashion to judge the works of art, even those that are presented to him as models, so that he does not commit the fallacy of mistaking a mere example for an archetype. Without this spirit of “sharp criticism”, which makes it possible for the artist to judge the so-called models with respect to higher standards and finally to subject them to the test of his own judgment, even the freedom of imagination in genial creativity would be stifled (ibid.).

All this refers us to taste, “this strange ability we have” (§31, 281), in terms of its peculiar autonomy. Here this autonomy has to do, firstly, with the fact that judgments of taste do not rest on and cannot be derived from concepts. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, taste comes with a certain demand to “judge for oneself” without imitating the judgment of others: “Taste lays claim merely to autonomy; but to make other people’s judgments the basis determining one’s own would be heteronomy” (CJ, §32, 282/146). Or as Kant puts it elsewhere: “Taste is quite ruined by imitation, a fertile source of all prejudices, since one borrows everything, thinks nothing of a beauty that one might be able to invent and come up with oneself, as [compared to] what others have already thought up and have

previously cognized, and what is considered beauty by these people” (Blom. Logic, 136). However, since the judgment of taste “cannot be determined by concepts and precepts”, taste is the ability that “stands most in need of examples regarding what has enjoyed the longest-lasting approval in the course of cultural progress” (§32, 283/147). This, however, does not run counter to the autonomy of taste, because if taste needs models, it is not in order to imitate them, but rather to follow them—where “following” comes to mean “no more than drawing on the same sources from which the predecessor himself drew, and learning from him only how to go about doing so” (ibid.). In this regard, taste, as an original faculty, displays a second function: beside judging the forms under which objects are given, it shows itself as “a capacity to judge them with respect to some standard” (Gasché, 100), that is, a capacity to judge which forms are exemplary and to judge and compare the exemplars themselves. So, taste as the discipline of genius, other than adapting imagination to understanding, sharpens the judgment of genius with respect to the exemplary models of art. Firstly, a genius must be able to study a classical work of art with a view to what is worthy of following in it; that is to say, genius must be able to retrieve the animating principle of a work, a principle that may have become dead in time through the formalization of the rules of art by the schools—retrieving, in other words, its spirit, not its letter. And secondly, and closely related with the first, genius should have a judgment concerning what kind of a work can become an exemplary model worthy to be followed.

The discussion so far serves to support our conviction that the form that taste gives to a work of fine art is not the established rules of taste of an age or the canonical artistic rules of the schools. Rather, insofar as taste is taken as an original faculty, form here refers us to the mere form of the purely beautiful. Discipline, to

be sure, is not the same as giving form; but basically, what is aimed at with the disciplining of genius by taste is that the products of genius take the predicate *beautiful* and warrant pure aesthetic judgments of taste—which, incidentally, is one of the things Kant has in mind when he says that works of fine art should also have the look of nature. In this sense, the sort of discipline that critique wants to see at work in the creations of genius is not, strictly speaking, an institutional/academic discipline, but rather a peculiar kind of self-discipline—one that refers to the peculiar autonomy that taste is supposed to have. In other words, although the daring and extravagant creations of imagination cannot be given up entirely in order not to destroy the element of genius in a work, from the point of view of critique, the creations of genius must be those of an *already* disciplined imagination. In order to appreciate more adequately the stakes of this tension in the critical theorization of genius, we first need to understand why the need for discipline emerges in the first place and what functions it has within the context of critical philosophy at large.

### A Curbed Imagination

Taste is not an evenhanded faculty when it comes to adjusting the relationship between imagination and understanding. If there is a conflict, it is the imaginative element in a work that is to be sacrificed; in such a case of conflict “judgment, which in matters of fine art bases its pronouncements on principles of its own, will sooner permit the imagination’s freedom and wealth to be impaired than that the understanding be impaired” (§50, 320/188). Without the contribution of the understanding, imagination’s ideas will lack clarity, order and fitness for durability;

this, from the point of view of taste, is the *sine qua non* of an artwork and as such indispensable.

The above remark brings to mind another from *Prolegomena*, one that compares imagination and understanding in terms of their susceptibility to raving:

The imagination may perhaps be excused if it daydreams [*schwärmt*] every now and then, i.e., if it does not cautiously hold itself inside the limits of experience; for it will at least be enlivened and strengthened through such free flight, and it will always be easier to moderate its boldness than to remedy its languor. That the understanding, however, which is supposed *to think*, should, instead of that, *daydream*—for this it can never be forgiven; for all assistance in setting bounds, where needed, to the revelry of the imagination depends on it alone. (§35, 317/109)

Discipline is necessary because imagination has an almost natural tendency towards taking “free flights” beyond the limits of experience, because it is “naturally inclined to heighten to extremes” (Anth, §30, 173/66); in any case, imagination is one of those talents which “incline to allow themselves a free and unlimited activity” (CPR A710/B738). Discipline, or rather self-discipline, does not belong to the nature of the power of imagination. Yet Kant goes as far as saying that if imagination cannot contain itself within the bounds of a possible experience, it can even be excused for that—but not without the important proviso that its “daydreaming” occur “every now and then”, that is, provided that its daydreams do not become chronic and pervert the objective employment of the principles of the understanding whose thoughts must be protected from the infiltration of daydreams at all costs since they are the chief aid in containing the flights of the imagination.

But associations do not end here. Once more, following the same motif, we are reminded of a certain passage from *Anthropology*. This passage is to be found in §4 where Kant voices his warnings against self-observation, that is, against any sort

of “methodical compilation of the perceptions formed in us” (132/20) or “affected composition of an inner history of the *involuntary* course of one’s thoughts and feelings” (133/22). If Kant resolutely warns against such self-observation, it is because in it the normal order of the relation between the imagination and the understanding in ordinary experience is easily thwarted: “to wish to eavesdrop on oneself when they [various acts of the representative power] come into the mind *unbidden* and on their own (this happens through the play of the power of imagination when it is unintentionally meditating) constitutes a reversal of the natural order in the faculty of knowledge, because the principles of thought do not lead the way (as they should), but rather follow behind” (133-134/22).

This passage (together with the one we have taken from *Prolegomena*) is important for us not only in its revealing a pervasive “counter-imaginative” tendency in Kant’s thought with respect to the nature of imagination and its relation to understanding (a tendency that characterizes the disciplining of genius too), but also in its intimation of a certain “direct path” from imagination to fanaticism and madness (a path we will be investigating in the following two sections).<sup>19</sup> This connection with fanaticism and madness raises the stakes of the disciplining of genius by taste. But since this will be our main concern for the rest of the chapter, let us at this point follow another thread—a thread that is woven through the entire complex texture of Kant’s critical philosophy: critique of metaphysics. In order to describe in what the disciplining of genius consists Kant, as we have already mentioned, says taste “severely clips its wings” (§50, 319/188). Metaphors closely related to this are not rarities in Kant’s texts, as can be seen in the above passage from *Prolegomena* that speaks of the “free flight” of the imagination. This

---

<sup>19</sup> One should not fail to add that this is not the only tendency concerning imagination in Kant’s thought. There is a radically new and positive horizon for imagination that opens up in the first *Critique*, most visible in the crucial function it has in bringing together intuition and concept.

metaphorics suggests an affinity between Kant's suspicion, if not hostility, towards imagination and his critique of metaphysics. In a well-known passage from CPR, in diagnosing a certain fateful misconception, attributable to the tendency inherent in reason itself to reach beyond the limits of possible experience, that philosophy of pure reason could accomplish an extension of a priori knowledge, Kant speaks of the inauguration of metaphysics in the following terms:

The light dove, cleaving the air in her free flight, and feeling its resistance, might imagine that its flight would be still easier in empty space. It was thus that Plato left the world of the senses, as setting too narrow limits to the understanding, and ventured out beyond it on the wings of the ideas, in the empty space of the pure understanding. (CPR A5/B9)

Kant would stick to his reading of Plato in that remarkable chapter on "The Ideas in General", where this time he would, in addition, attempt to retrieve that element in Plato's "spiritual flight" that is worthy of "respect and imitation" (CPR A318/B375). All in all, what is important to see here in the intertwining of themes through a certain metaphorics is that the "clipping" of wings in both cases has to do with discipline: in the case of genius, it is the disciplining of imagination; in the case of the hapless dove, the discipline of pure reason. As we have seen discipline is "the compulsion, by which the constant tendency to disobey certain rules is restrained and finally extirpated" (A709/B737). So discipline as discipline of pure reason points to the element of negativity in critique: limiting the use of speculative reason to the field of possible experience. As is well known, for Kant, (re)grounding metaphysics which, once the queen of all sciences, had turned into a devastated battlefield of endless controversies, was possible only through a critique of pure reason which he intended to be a tribunal instituted by reason itself to

decide on the legitimacy and limits of its own claims to knowledge. As such, critical philosophy has a disciplinary edge that concerns “the limitation of pure reason, and, instead of discovering truth, has only the modest merit of guarding against error” (CPR A795/B824). Kant says in this regard:

That temperament and our various talents (such as imagination and wit) which incline to allow themselves a free and unlimited activity are in many respects in need of a discipline, everyone will readily admit. But that reason, whose proper duty is to prescribe a discipline for all other endeavours, should itself stand in need of such discipline may indeed seem strange. . . . But where neither empirical nor pure intuition keeps reason to a visible track, when, that is to say, reason is being considered in its transcendental employment, in accordance with mere concepts, it stands so greatly in need of a discipline, to restrain its tendency towards extension beyond the narrow limits of possible experience and to guard it against extravagance and error, that the whole philosophy of pure reason has no other than this strictly negative utility. (CPR A711/B739)

The metaphors at play in the critical text indicates an affinity between two disciplines. However, it can also be argued that there is indeed a more than metaphorical affinity at stake. At some notable points in Kant’s critique of earlier metaphysics we have implicit references to a possible complicity of imagination. Although a discussion that will be adequate to the gravity and complexity of the issue at hand is beyond the intentions of the present essay, we can nevertheless benefit from recalling a couple of such instances since these may be of help in shedding light on the connection between the offences of the imagination, and fanaticism and madness.

Curiously enough, the first instance we will point to is from a precritical text: *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*. In this well-known text from 1766, Kant takes the case of the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, whose visionary ravings included claims to be in communication with

the dead and the spirit-world, in order to investigate the question of the possibility and limits of metaphysical cognition. In trying to explain the causes of such a “fanatical intuition” (DOSS 360/347), Kant seems to have awakened to a realization that the traditional metaphysics, insofar it was concerned with the theoretical knowledge of an intelligible realm of beings, could be suffering from similar ravings. While offering an explanation of how such ravings could have become possible in the first place, Kant conjectures that in both the images of the imagination and ordinary sensation, there occur certain movements in nerve-tissue of the brain. The difference consists “in the fact that the lines indicating the direction of the motion [of the nerves] intersect in the former case inside the brain, whereas in the latter case they intersect outside it” (DOSS, 345/333). In other words, in the latter case, “the *focus imaginarius*, at which the object is represented, is placed outside me, whereas, in the case of the images of imagination . . . the *focus imaginarius* is located within me” (ibid.). What happens in the case of fanatical intuition, which Kant says is a type of mental derangement he calls madness (*Wahnsinn*), is that the objects of imagination are located outside the subject, mistaken for things that are actually present. Although “focus imaginarius” is a term borrowed from Newtonian optics, here it also serves to intimate imagination’s complicity in the confusion of the inside and the outside that leaves the door open to visionary ravings: imagination takes part in this illegitimate projecting to outside of what properly and solely belongs to the inside.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, with his warnings against self-observation Kant had a similar danger in mind. The inner experiences, which, as belonging to inner sense, are determinable only in time, “hence in flux” (Ant, §4,

---

<sup>20</sup> One can locate another illegitimate confusion along the axis of presence-absence. One needs only to remember that imagination is “the faculty of intuition even without the presence of an object”. Here imagination takes part in a making-present that is essentially illegitimate and hence fanatical because it is a making-present of something that is not presentable.

134/23), lack the stability of the external experiences of objects located in space; therefore, they can “easily lead to fanaticism [*Schwärmerei*] and madness [*Wahnsinn*] . . . by way of a confusion in the mind of supposed higher inspirations and powers flowing into us, without our help, who knows from where” (§22, 132/20, 133/22). Indeed, the “anthropological” determination of inner sense identifies a certain susceptibility to illusions; one of those is that of fanaticism, i.e., “taking the appearances of inner sense for external appearances, that is, imaginings for sensations” (§24, 162/54).

This confusion of inside and outside can be related to another confusion that concerns the subjective and the objective—a confusion for which imagination, once more, may be held responsible, at least in part. Here we are reminded of a well-known passage from *Prolegomena*, in which Kant talks about Hume’s skeptical attack on the concept of causality:

From this he concluded that reason completely and fully deceives herself with this concept, falsely taking it for her own child, when it is really nothing but a *bastard of the imagination*, which, impregnated by experience, and having brought certain representations under the law of association, passes off the resulting subjective necessity (i.e., habit) for an objective necessity (from insight). (*Prolegomena*, 258/55; emphasis mine)

Once again an illegitimate (“bastard”) dislocation, once again imagination’s complicity. The gravity of this complicity can be better appreciated if we remember that with this attack on the concept of causality Hume aimed to attack metaphysics as such. Indeed, this confusion of subjective necessity with objective necessity lies, for Kant, at the origin of what he calls transcendental, or dialectical, illusion: “We . . . take the subjective necessity of a connection of our concepts, which is to the advantage of the understanding, for an objective necessity in the determination of

things in themselves” (CPR A297/B353). At this point we will have to be content with mere indications, without specifying the extent to which imagination may be found to be lying at the origin of dialectical illusion.<sup>21</sup> By pointing to the negative element in critique as discipline and also to a general suspicion towards imagination within a larger critique of metaphysics, we hope to have made clear the broader context within which the theme of the discipline of genius gains its specifically critical thrust. But there are things to indicate still.

### Enthusiasm and Fanaticism as Offences of Imagination

One of the first definitions that we have of genius in the text of *Anthropology* is found in §30, where it is juxtaposed, in one sense unexpectedly, to a definition of fanaticism: “Originality of the power of imagination (not imitative production), when it harmonizes with concepts, is called *genius*; when it does not harmonize with them, it is called *fanaticism*”. If genius is marked here by an uncanny proximity to fanaticism, it is because of the lack of something like a discipline. The question of the disciplining of genius is thematized properly only in the third *Critique*, taking its lead from an analytic of the judgment of taste. Still, there are some notable hints towards such a thematization in *Anthropology*; in §67, for example, Kant says that the “passionate vitality” of genius “often needs to be moderated and limited by the propriety of taste”. The condition of harmony with concepts, similarly, intimates a discipline of genius, without, however, specifying the nature of the concepts imagination needs to be in harmony with—this specification, too, occurs properly only in CJ, where the process of rendering

---

<sup>21</sup> For a formidable discussion of this question, see Sallis, 152-155.

concepts indeterminate, in both the presentation and the expression of aesthetic ideas, becomes one of the distinguishing traits of genius.

If *Anthropology* suffers from a lack of proper thematization of the question of discipline with regard to genius, conversely, there is no explicit mentioning of the perverse kinship between the genius and the fanatic in the text of CJ. We know, however, that Kant's discontent with some contemporary trends and figures in philosophy and literature constitutes the general historical backdrop of his theory of art and genius, adding an implicit polemical thrust to his otherwise abstract theorization. In what follows, we will try to re-articulate these connections in the productive space between these two texts. It is our contention that, even without exclusively attending to that historical background, this "kinship" is discoverable from within the critical text since it informs, and is informed by, the critical framework within which genius is conceptualized in the third *Critique*. This we will try to show with a close reading of those passages from CJ in which enthusiasm and fanaticism receive brief yet explicit discussions.

From early on, Kant distinguishes between enthusiasm and fanaticism. In his precritical *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, he says that while fanaticism "believes itself to feel an immediate and extraordinary communion with a higher nature", enthusiasm "means the state of the mind in which it has become inflamed by any principle above the proper degree . . . without the illusion of a supernatural communion having anything to do with it" (108 fn.). In CJ, these definitions take on critical aspects, not without a taint of vitalism, especially in the case of enthusiasm. Most concisely put, enthusiasm for Kant comes to mean an affect arising as an effect of the idea of the good. As such, enthusiasm is aesthetically sublime according to Kant, "because it is a straining of

our forces by ideas that impart to the mind a momentum whose effects are mightier and more permanent than are those of an impulse produced by representations of sense” (CJ, §29, 272/ 132). Enthusiasm, in this sense, can be regarded as a feeling of elevation above the finitude of the imagination that is laid bare in the experience of the sublime. Though as an affect it is “blind” and does not deserve the liking of reason, it is potent to inspire great, ground-breaking actions (like the French Revolution, according to Kant).

Fanaticism is the more dangerous of the two. Kant defines it as “the delusion of wanting to SEE something beyond all bounds of sensibility, i.e., of dreaming according to principles (raving with reason)” (CJ, §29, 271/131). It is worth noting that this remark is found in that section entitled “General Comment on the Exposition of Aesthetic Reflective Judgments” where, in the context of a discussion on the sublime, the very limits of presentation are at stake. Fanaticism, as Kant himself emphasizes, is what is “least of all compatible with the sublime”, because what is at stake in the judgments on the sublime is not a positive, but only a negative presentation (*Darstellung*) of the infinite—in and through them, the supersensible idea cannot be made present, but can only be represented in its unrepresentability. Fanaticism, against this background, can be seen as a delusion of stepping beyond the limits of presentation and wanting to make the supersensible present directly or positively.<sup>22</sup>

Interesting for our purposes is the way in which Kant associates enthusiasm and fanaticism with various offenses of the imagination and with various kinds of mental derangement. Telling in this regard is the following passage from CJ:

---

<sup>22</sup> And conversely, negative presentation can be seen a “control mechanism” which safeguards “against fanaticism and keeps reason from running amok by not letting it disregard the limits of sensibility” (Helfer, 45-46).

If enthusiasm is comparable to madness [*Wahnsinn*], fanaticism is comparable to mania [*Wahnwitz*]. . . . [I]n enthusiasm, an affect, the imagination is unbridled, but in fanaticism, a deep-seated and brooding passion, it is ruleless. Madness is a passing accident that presumably strikes even the soundest understanding on occasion; mania is a disease that deranges it.<sup>23</sup> (CJ, §29, 276, 136)

Leaving aside the issue of mental illness for the time being, let us note that these two uses of imagination mentioned above (unbridled and lawless) are what Kant refers to as “the offences (*vitia*) of the power of imagination” in *Anthropology* (§33, 181/74). The unbridled inventions of the imagination, although rich in ideas to the point of being excessively luxurious, “still find their place in a possible world (the world of fable)” —they can, after all, always be moderated. The ruleless inventions of the imagination, however, defy any law or principle, including the supreme principle of all thought, that is, that of non-contradiction: they “have no place in any world at all, because they are self-contradictory” (*ibid.*). According to him, in line with his condemnation of fanaticism, the worst kind is the latter which, he says, “approaches madness, where fantasy plays completely with the human being and the unfortunate victim has no control at all over the course of his representations” (181/75).

Genius, insofar as imagination constitutes its “proper field”, is haunted by the ever-present possibility of these offences and stands in need of discipline. Indeed, as one passage from *Anthropology* makes clear, the danger of original nonsense which impairs the work’s capability to become exemplary and against which the need for the discipline of taste is first felt is related with these offences of

---

<sup>23</sup> This passage may seem to be suggesting that enthusiasm and fanaticism are categorically different things. However, this simply is not the case: if unchecked, enthusiasm can easily lead to fanaticism. A passage from a later point in the text can be cited as evidence. There in §62 Kant talks about Plato (what a surprise!) saying that what lifted him above empirical concepts to ideas was an enthusiasm, which, “as the result of a misunderstanding . . . gradually increased to the point of fanaticism” (363, 241). A footnote that Werner Pluhar, the translator of the text, adds cites a remark from *On [The] Dignified Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy*: “Plato . . . was . . . the father of all fanaticism [aroused] by means of philosophy” (363, 241 fn. 16).

imagination, most importantly with the second of these: “to free the power of imagination even from this constraint [of school rigor] and allow the talent proper to it to proceed without rules and *swoon* [schwärmen], even against nature, might deliver original folly; but it would certainly not be exemplary and thus also would not be counted as genius” (§57, 225, 120). So disciplining genius, other than allowing its works to be predicated of the beautiful form and merit the title *fine art*, has to do with containing its potential excesses that may give way to fanaticism and madness.

As in *Anthropology*, in his some of his other texts, especially those on political matters, Kant uses “genius” in a wider, and more often than not, a derogatory sense. Among his critical writings, exemplary in this regard is his ironic usage of “genius” within a discussion on the proper implications of freedom of thought in “What is Orientation in Thinking?”. For Kant, freedom of thought signifies (other than its intimate connection with freedom of expression that we mentioned in a footnote above) “the subjection of reason to no laws other than those *which it imposes on itself*; and its opposite is the maxim of the *lawless use* of reason (in order that it may, as the genius imagines, see further than it does when restricted by laws)” (PW, 247-48). According to Kant, then, even the free use of reason is law-bound, but in this case, it is the law of a reason that is self-legislating. When freedom of thought is taken to mean emancipation from all law whatsoever, including that of reason, the inevitable result will be the loss of such freedom, because such “*self-confessed* lawlessness in thinking” leads eventually to thinking’s submission to externally imposed laws—and this amounts to a passive, rather than an active use of reason, whereby thinking is subject to prejudice. After all, “nothing—not even the greatest absurdity—can continue to operate for long

without some kind of law” (PW, 248). In this way, the discussion of genius is made relevant for another problem that concerns critical philosophy in general: *bringing freedom into union with constraint or determination*—a problem that manifests itself not only in ethics, but also in judgments of taste (attuning imagination’s free play to the understanding’s lawfulness in general), in the disciplining of (artistic) genius, and as we have seen, in the free and public use of reason.

The way Kant summarizes the sequence of events leading to the destruction of the freedom of thought is interesting for our purposes—a summary that we beg to be pardoned for quoting at length since it includes many of the themes we have investigating so far:

The *genius* is at first delighted with its daring flights, having cast aside the thread by which reason formerly guided it. It soon captivates others in turn with its authoritative pronouncements and great expectations, and now appears to have set itself up on a throne on which slow and ponderous reason looked so out of place; nevertheless, it still continues to use the language of reason. It then adopts the maxim that the supreme legislation of reason is invalid, a maxim which we ordinary mortals describe as *zealotry* [or fanaticism], but which those favorites of benevolent nature describe as *illumination*. Meanwhile, a confusion of tongues must soon arise among them, for while reason alone can issue instructions which are valid for everyone, each individual now follows his own inspiration. The ultimate consequence of all this is that inner inspirations are inevitably transformed into facts confirmed by external evidence, and traditions which were originally freely chosen eventually become *binding* documents; in a word, the complete subjugation of reason to facts—i.e. superstition—must ensue, for this at least can be reduced to a *legal form* so that peace can then be restored. (PW, 248)

As we can see from this passage, “genius” in this context turns into an index of a potentially lawless use of reason, and as such, differs, both in tone and in intention, from the discussion in CJ. In CJ, we read that “a genius is nature’s favorite and so must be regarded as a rarity” (§49, 318/187); with these words, Kant tries to indicate the exceptionality and exemplarity of genius—one can even dare to say: its

exceptional exemplarity and exemplary exceptionality. But here, in referring to “those favorites of benevolent nature” the tone is unmistakably ironic and the intent is to mark the “kinship” between genius and fanaticism. This latter tone and intent, I am tempted to add, must be borne in mind while reading those passage from §47 of CJ in which Kant rejects the attribution of genius to Newton. That is to say, containing genius only within fine art, and especially poetry, is, in some sense, to the credit of science and the great scientific minds.

### Madness, Or Genius within the Bounds of Reason Alone

Let us conclude this chapter by explicitly discussing one last issue that has been implicitly one of our concerns for some time now. This issue concerns the relationship between genius and madness. The conception of such a relationship has a history that dates way back from Kant, a history that sure has an effect on Kant himself. Similarly, the question of this relation would be of huge importance to many philosophers after Kant; indeed, madness as such would become a more explicit philosophical problem than ever. These connections all deserve their due treatment, but what we will attempt to do here is, once again, to delineate the contours of the problem from within critical philosophy.

As we have seen, the two offenses of the power of imagination are directly related, first, with enthusiasm and fanaticism, and second, with madness and mania. But at this point we should note a discrepancy in Kant’s text that we have left untouched. In CJ, as we have seen, Kant associates enthusiasm and fanaticism with madness (*Wahnsinn*) and mania (*Wahnwitz*), respectively. In *Anthropology*, however, although there is not an explicit discussion of such a relationship, the

characterizations given for various kinds of mental derangement suggest that the reverse is the case: while enthusiasm more readily fits into mania (which is designated as *insania*), fanaticism is outright a type of madness (which in the text goes by the name *dementia*). Discussing the possible reasons for such a discrepancy is beyond the intentions of the present essay. Similarly, our study is not sufficiently comprehensive (it does not include many precritical texts, to say the least) to determine decisively which texts to take as authoritative in this regard. But we think that in an important sense, the mere designation is unimportant in comparison to the idea—which we see most clearly elaborated in the text of *Anthropology* rather than in CJ, where no explicit discussion on mental illness takes place. This is the reason why we will follow the designations in CJ (“madness” and “mania”) while taking up the connections hinted at *Anthropology*. Following this lead, we can see that the kind of mental illness that characterizes fanaticism, viz., madness (*Wahnsinn*), is “that disturbance of the mind in which everything that the insane person relates is to be sure in conformity with the formal laws of thought that make an experience possible; but, owing to the falsely inventive power of imagination, self-made representations are regarded as perceptions” (Anth, §52, 215/109).<sup>24</sup> It is noteworthy that this characterization fits very well with the way fanaticism, as we have tried to show above, is understood by Kant.

Insofar as madness is concerned, we would like to point to a general feature that has special importance for our discussion. Kant says that the “only universal characteristic of madness is the loss of *common sense* (*sensus communis*) and its

---

<sup>24</sup> Now, this characterization seems to be contradicting the characterization of ruleless employment of imagination that was said to belong to fanaticism and “approach madness”, since in that case the inventions of the imagination belong to no possible world, whereas in the case of madness, Kant says that it is in conformity with the formal rules of an experience in general. There is no indication, as far as we can see, for a resolution of this discrepancy, except that in the case of the ruleless employment of imagination it is said that it “spproaches” madness, whose proper characterization is given in the passage we have given above.

replacement with *logical private sense (sensus privatus)*” (Anth, §53, 219/113).

Common sense, as articulated in §40 of CJ, is not used in the sense of common human understanding, but rather a public sense shared by all, a sense that makes it possible to judge universally without the mediation of a concept. Of this common sense Kant says that it refers to

the idea of a sense shared [by all of us], i.e., a power to judge that in reflecting takes account (a priori) in our thought, of everyone else’s way of representing [something], in order as it were to compare our own judgment with human reason in general and thus escape the illusion that arises from the ease of mistaking subjective and private conditions for objective ones, an illusion that would have a prejudicial influence on the judgment. (§40, 293/160)

*Sensus communis*, then, as a public sense, is what judgment in its reflective mode appeals to in order to endow its singular judgments with universality—though only subjectively. Significantly, in this co-articulation of singularity and universality a question of alterity emerges: it is only through an appeal to the judgment of others that the illusion of taking as objective what is merely subjective and private can be avoided. It is of vital importance to note at this point that the issue here is not about taking the standpoint of the others in their actuality (it is not mere empathy that this maxim demands) but considering their *possible* judgement. What is equally important but less explicit is the idea that even the others whose possible judgements are to be taken into account are not necessarily those actual others who are with us here and now. The question of the other in *sensus communis* is tied in Kant’s thought to a certain question of the humanity of man: “Whereas vulgar or common understanding designates those beliefs that are actually found to be held in common, the *sensus communis* is an a priori sense that relates us to all of humanity” (Makkreel, 158). Humanity, as implied in the reference to the collective reason of

mankind, here is not defined substantially as including certain characterizations that determine the essence of man, nor is it taken simply as the aggregate of all those currently living on earth: it is a regulative idea for the use of reflective judgement. Herein one can glimpse Kant's cosmopolitanism: the regulative use of the idea of being a world citizen, being a member of a world-civil-society, as a principle for judgement. So the "common" sense that *sensus communis* is cannot be reduced to any communitarian reading (for Kant, the difference between universality and generality as comparative universality is unmistakable); *sensus communis* is what is in common, not as consensus, but as a sense of community, of being-in-common as such.

*Sensus communis*, then, is a sense that, being common to all, makes us part of a shared public world and ties us to humanity. Insofar as madness in general can be characterized as the loss of this common sense, it also functions strangely as a principle or sense of sanity; no wonder, then, that with such a sense, comparing our judgments with "human reason in general" becomes possible. What is significant for our purposes is to remember that for Kant, insofar as taste means "the ability to judge something that makes our feeling in a given representation universally communicable without the mediation by a concept" (§40, 295/162), it deserves, more than sound understanding, to be called a *sensus communis*. So in taste's disciplining of genius is at stake the maintenance of this common sense as what guides the universal communicability of ideas and in doing so, that is, in wresting thought from the potentially fanatical or mad preserve of a self-enclosed private mental life and opening it to a common public world, what ties it to a sense of humanity and of being-in-common. (One should also remember that, of all the faculties that constitutes genius, taste is what is properly common to both the

creator and the spectator.) The hovering of the works of genius between sense and non-sense attests precisely to the fact that, although for communicability and sanity common sense is required at all costs, in such works that very sense is put at stake with a view to refigure it, refigure, that is, the sense of being-in-common and the in-common of sense.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

“... the training (discipline) that a human being practices on himself can become meritorious and exemplary only through the cheerfulness that accompanies it.”

—Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*

The general aim of this thesis has been to show the specifically critical thrust of Kant's conception of genius. This we tried to do by connecting the theme of disciplining of genius by taste to broader critical issues. Now, the idea that genius (*ingenium*) and taste (*gusto*) point to conflicting tendencies in artistic creativity is not a new one. Nor is the idea that genius must somehow be tempered, or that the daring flight of genius can easily give way to fanaticism or madness. Even in Kant, these ideas can be traced back to texts written much earlier than the third *Critique*. Rather, what is significant in Kant's articulation of the problem is the way in which these terms (genius, taste, fanaticism, madness as well as imagination, discipline, idea,...) gain new meanings in new relations according to the basic parameters of critical philosophy. The discipline of genius by taste, to begin with, finds its analogue in the discipline of pure reason which, in its merely negative function, occupies a crucial place in the methodology of critical philosophy. We have also seen that the need for discipline arises in the first place because of the contribution of the power of imagination in genial creation, which contribution constitutes the properly genial element in such creation. Since the productivity of imagination, not

only in artistic production, but also in many other cases, tends to overflow itself, as it were, the door is left open for imagination to commit various “offenses”. These offences, as we have tried to show, are correlated in Kant’s text with fanaticism and madness, raising the stakes of the disciplining of genius.

## REFERENCES

- Bernstein, J. M. (1992). *The fate of art: Aesthetic alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gasché, R. (2003). *The idea of form: Rethinking Kant's aesthetics*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Guyer, P. (2006). Freedom of imagination. From beauty to expression. In K. Ameriks & J. Stolzenberg (Eds.), *Internationales Jahrbuch des deutschen Idealismus/International yearbook of German Idealism* (Vol. 4, pp. 151-168). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Hanna, R. (2001). *Kant and the foundations of analytic philosophy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Helfer, M. (1996). *The retreat of representation: The concept of darstellung in German critical discourse*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Kant, I. (2006). *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view* (R. B. Louden, Trans.). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- - -. (1987). *Critique of judgement* (W. Pluhar, Trans.). Indiana: Hackett.
- - -. ([1929] 2003). *Critique of pure reason* (N. K. Smith, Trans.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- - -. (2003). *Dreams of a spirit-seer elucidated by dreams of metaphysics*. In D. Walford (Ed. and Trans.), *Theoretical philosophy 1755-1770*, (pp. 301-359). Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- - -. (2003) *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and the sublime*. (J. T. Goldthwait, Trans.). Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press,.
- - -. (1991). What is orientation in thinking?. In H. Reis (Ed.), *Kant: Political writings* (H. B. Nisbet, Trans.). Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- - -. (2002) *Prolegomena to any future metaphysics that will be able to come as science* (G. Hatfield, Trans.). In H. Allison and P. Heath (Eds.), *Theoretical philosophy after 1781* (pp. 49-169). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- - -. (1992). *The Blomberg logic*. In J. M. Young (Ed. and Trans.), *Lectures on logic* (pp. 5-246). Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

- - -. (1992). *The Jäsche logic*. In J. M. Young (Ed. and Trans.), *Lectures on logic* (pp. 521-640). Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- - -. (1999) *The metaphysics of morals*. In M. J. Gregor (Ed. And Trans.), *Practical philosophy* (pp. 353-603). Cambridge, U.K.; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Lyotard, J. F. (1994). *Lessons on the analytic of the sublime: Kant's critique of judgment, [sections] 23-29* (E. Rottenberg, Trans.). Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Makkreel, R. A. (1994) *Imagination and interpretation in Kant: The hermeneutical import of the critique of judgment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pillow, K. (2000). *Sublime understanding: aesthetic reflection in Kant and Hegel*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Sallis, J. (2005). *The gathering of reason*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Sassen, Brigitte. (2003). Artistic genius and the question of creativity. In. P. Guyer (Ed.). *Kant's critique of the power of judgment: Critical essays*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Zammito, J. (1992). *The genesis of Kant's critique of judgment*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.