

# On the Intuitive Value of Aesthetic Ideas: Pleasure and Cognition in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*

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## Abstract

While in the “Analytic of the Beautiful” of the third *Critique* Kant establishes an unequivocal distinction between aesthetic and cognitive judgments, in the context of the theory of Genius we find new elements that will enable us to discuss such antagonism between both type of judgments. As a matter of fact, Kant defines genius as the one possessing the “vivifying principle in the mind” which—by setting our cognitive faculties in motion—succeeds in exhibiting certain intuitive representations called “aesthetic ideas”. The latter are intuitions of the imagination that give much to think about, but against which no *particular* thought seems adequate. In this sense, after analyzing the four moments of the pure judgment of taste, we will develop the notion of “aesthetic idea” within the framework of the Kantian theory of genius, drawing on the most recent interpretations of the subject. Ultimately, we will attempt to show that—although judgments of taste are *not* cognitive judgments—the third *Critique* presents important elements in order to evaluate to what extent aesthetic judgments contribute to cognition.

**Keywords:** Kant, aesthetic judgment, aesthetic idea, genius, intuition.

## Placer y conocimiento en la *Crítica de la facultad de juzgar*: El alcance intuitivo de las ideas estéticas

## Resumen

Si en la “Análisis de lo bello” de la tercera *Crítica* Kant establece una distinción tajante entre los juicios estéticos y los juicios de conocimiento, en el marco de la teoría del genio encontramos nuevos elementos que nos permitirán discutir tal antagonismo entre ambos tipos de juicio. En efecto, Kant define al genio como aquel que posee el ‘principio vivificante del ánimo’ que —al movilizar nuestras facultades de conocimiento— exhibe ciertas representaciones de tipo intuitivo denominadas ‘ideas estéticas’. Estas últimas son intuiciones de la imaginación que dan lugar a mucho pensar, pero para las cuales ningún pensamiento *particular* resulta adecuado. En este sentido, luego de analizar los cuatro momentos del juicio de gusto puro, desarrollaremos la noción de ‘idea estética’ en el marco de la teoría kantiana,

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apoyándonos en algunas de las interpretaciones más recientes sobre este tema. En última instancia, intentaremos mostrar que —a pesar de que los juicios de gusto *no son* juicios de conocimiento— la tercera *Crítica* presenta elementos importantes para evaluar en qué medida los juicios estéticos pueden contribuir a nuestro conocimiento.

**Palabras clave:** Kant, juicio estético, idea estética, genio, intuición.

## 1. Introduction

In the “Analytic of the Beautiful”, Kant makes the distinction between two different powers of judgment: the reflective *aesthetic* power [*die reflektierende Urteilskraft*] and the determining *logical* one [*die bestimmende Urteilskraft*]. While determinant judgments provide knowledge—since they link a given representation [*Vorstellung*] to an *object* of experience through the subsumption of an intuition under a concept—reflective aesthetic judgments refer such representation only to the *subject*’s feeling [*Gefühl*]. In other words, judgments of taste tell us nothing about the existence of objects, but only refer to the way in which the latter affect our feeling of pleasure and displeasure. Therefore, although according to Kant, judgments of pure taste are based on subjective conditions for all cognition *in general* [*Erkenntnis überhaupt*] (namely, on the agreement between our cognitive powers), it is not in itself a judgment of cognition. Moreover, the distinction between a subjective and an objective element of representation is already drawn by Kant in the Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*:<sup>2</sup>

What is merely subjective in the representation of an object, i.e., what constitutes its relation to the subject, not to the object, is its aesthetic property; but that in which serves for the determination of the object (for cognition) or can be so used is its logical validity (*KU*, AA 05: 189).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> From now on we will refer to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* by the acronym *KU* following the *Akademie Ausgabe*’s pagination. The abbreviations AA will be followed by volume and page number.

<sup>3</sup> Such characterization between aesthetic and logical judgments runs throughout all the Analytic. See, for example: §1, §8, §9, §11, §15, §16, and §17. We will return to it in the second section of this paper.

By way of introduction, we can point out two major differences between aesthetic and logical judgments, which will allow us to understand why, according to Kant, aesthetic judgments could never provide knowledge (at least in the way in which logical judgments do). First of all, a judgment is aesthetic to the same extent that it is singular (*KU*, AA 05: 215); in the sense that there are no *a priori* rules for beauty, and consequently, there is no such thing as *the* beautiful, regardless of what we may subjectively feel through sensibility when we are faced with a particular representation: “if one judges objects merely in accordance with concepts, then all representation of beauty is lost. Thus there can be no rule in accordance with which someone could be compelled to acknowledge something as beautiful” (*KU*, AA 05: 216).<sup>4</sup> Secondly, aesthetic pleasure is immediate: although the beautiful is neither reduced to the enjoyment of sensation nor to the delight of the senses, but involves the imagination’s reflection on the formal purposiveness of a representation, it is important to note that such satisfaction does not involve the mediation of a given concept (*KU*, AA 05: 227).<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, logical judgments depend on rules of synthesis—given by concepts—which determine *a priori* the manifold given in intuition, thus establishing a mediation between sensible intuition and cognition in the strict sense of the term. According to what Kant already established in the first *Critique*, cognition [*Erkenntnis*] arises from the collaboration between intuitions [*Anschauungen*] and concepts [*Begriffe*]; consequently, without conceptual activity, there can be no objective knowledge (see, for example, *KrV*, A19/B33, A49/B733, A231/B283).

Taking into account the gnoseological theory of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, if Kant happened to claim that aesthetic judgment does provide cognition, he would be forced to admit, on the one hand, that it is not immediate—for in that case the intuitive representation should be subsumed

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<sup>4</sup> In the “Table of Judgments” (*KrV*, A70/B95) Kant maintains that cognitive judgments may also be singular. However, the main difference between a pure judgment of taste and a singular determining judgment lies in its reference: as was said before, *because* the former is *not* determined by a concept, it does not link a particular representation to an object of experience, but only to the subject’s feeling of pleasure or displeasure. Therefore, unlike cognitive judgments, judgments of taste are not objectively universalizable.

<sup>5</sup> As pointed out by McMahon (2017), the term *unmittelbares* does not refer to a temporal immediacy. Instead, it indicates that aesthetic feeling is direct, meaning it does not involve a conceptual mediation. However, against the formalist thesis defended by Greenberg (according to which the aesthetic judgment would imply an immediate communion with a work of art), McMahon points out that aesthetic contemplation depends on other structures of knowledge, such as experience, education of taste, as well as our successive encounters with a work of art.

under a concept. On the other hand, aesthetic cognition would be a defective one, since it would express beauty in a ‘sensible way’, the former being strictly rational or conceptual. As Kant puts it: “but an objective inner purposiveness, i.e., perfection, already comes closer to the predicate of beauty, and has therefore been held to be identical with beauty even by philosophers of repute, though with the proviso *if it is thought confusedly*” (*KU*, AA 05: 227). Thus, against the rationalist thesis of Baumgarten or Leibniz, Kant maintains that the difference between beauty and truth (or between aesthetics and logical-rational knowledge), it’s not a difference of degree but a difference of *kind*. In this sense, as Lebrun points out, it is from this distinction between two absolutely heterogeneous types of judgment that Kant succeeds in liberating aesthetics in particular—and philosophy in general—from the Platonic assumption according to which the beautiful would be nothing more than a defective (or apparent) cognition of the true. For Kant, aesthetics should not be reduced to a doctrine of taste; on the contrary, it reveals a dimension of consciousness whose origins lie in what he defines as *Gemüt* [a subjective capacity of the mind] and not in the *Erkenntnisvermögen* [a faculty of cognition] (Lebrun, 1970). Likewise, Jáuregui (2010) points out that in the *Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment* we find a new sort of sensitive consciousness which corresponds neither to the practical nor to the theoretical operations of reason.

It is important to note that Baumgarten is one of the first to have emphasized a purely sensible ‘truth’ proper to aesthetics. However, by identifying the latter with a sort of ‘science of sensitive knowledge’ or an ‘inferior’ type of cognition, he seems to reduce it, or at least compare it, to theoretical knowledge, thus remaining under the spirit of intellectualism (Lebrun, 1970). Hence, if we do not lose sight of the philosophical position from which Kant seeks to distance himself—namely, the rationalist thesis that seems to transpose metaphysical categories to the field of aesthetics—the sharp distinction between aesthetic pleasure and knowledge takes on a different sense. According to Kant, aesthetic judgment is not a cognitive one since, unlike judgments of cognition, it cannot be demonstrated on the basis of evidence, nor it is limited to an objective end or purpose that could be demonstrated through concepts.

Moreover, if in the “Analytic of the Beautiful”, Kant is emphatic about the fact that aesthetic judgments must never be considered as judgments

of cognition, it is in the framework of the theory of Genius [*Genie*]—developed in the “Deduction of Pure Aesthetic Judgments”—where we find new elements that will allow us to evaluate this statement. In fact, it is in the present section that Kant develops the *content* of aesthetic judgments through the notion of “aesthetic idea” [*ästhetische Idee*]; hence, a comprehensive interpretation of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* must not lose sight of the Deduction of Pure Aesthetic Judgments (McMahon, 2017). In fact, in §49 Kant defines genius as the one who possesses spirit [*Geist*], that is, “the animating principle in the mind” [*das belebende Prinzip im Gemüte*] which “sets the cognitive powers in motion”, through the exhibition of certain representations called “aesthetic ideas” [*ästhetischer Ideen*] (*KU*, AA 05: 313–314). The latter are intuitions of the imagination that give rise to much thinking, but to which no particular thought (or concept) seems adequate. If ideas of reason [*Ideen der Vernunft*]—such as those of God, the soul and the world—are concepts to which no intuition can correspond, aesthetic ideas present an excess of intuition in relation to which no concept seems to be sufficient (*KU*, AA 05: 313–314).

In this sense, according to the development of aesthetic ideas condensed in §49, we can affirm that—although it is true that aesthetic judgments are non-cognitive—pure aesthetic pleasure may contribute to cognition (even if it is not by means of a determinant cognitive judgment). In this sense, while the traditional interpretation of aesthetic ideas maintains that these only sensitize [*versinnlichen*] moral ideas (Guyer, 1993, 1997) or rational ideas—though not only moral—(Allison, 2001; Chignell, 2007; Guyer, 1997; Rogerson, 1986), a number of recent studies analyze their cognitive function (Kuplen, 2021, 2019; Lüthe, 1984; Matherne, 2013; Oroño, 2017; Savile, 1987).<sup>6</sup> For both Kuplen and Matherne, these partake a cognitive role, mainly for two reasons: not only because they expand our cognitive powers—by indirectly offering a sensitive representation to ideas that cannot be directly exhibited in experience—but also because they present material left unelaborated by concepts, which may involve introspective, emotional and affective aspects that can hardly be articulated in words and propositions. Moreover, in the face of the inadequacy between the intuitive content of aesthetic ideas and their conceptual counterpart, Oroño argues that it concerns a kind of “cognitive function that does not determine objects”

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<sup>6</sup> We follow the classification of the three interpretative models as recently outlined by Oroño (2022).

(2022, p. 44, a. trans.). That is to say, a form of knowledge that is not theoretical but symbolic.

To put it briefly—and based on what has been said so far—we may assess the following questions: firstly, how would it be possible to express, through representations of art and nature, that which cannot be communicated through determinate language? Secondly, how can a judgement that only links a subjective representation to our feeling of pleasure and displeasure may provide cognition, even if it is not a theoretical one? The challenge is, therefore, to reflect on the relation between aesthetics and knowledge, without reducing the former to a sort of ‘confused cognition’ or *cognitio sensitiva*.<sup>7</sup> In order to provide a possible answer to these questions, in the first section of this paper we will analyze the four moments of pure aesthetic judgments, making special emphasis on the contrast established by Kant throughout all of the *Analytic* between reflective-aesthetic judgments and determinate-logical judgments. In the second section, we will develop the notion of ‘aesthetic idea’ in the framework of the Kantian theory of genius, relying on some of the more recent interpretations mentioned above, in order to evaluate its cognitive function. Finally, in the last two sections of this work, we will try to show that—although judgments of taste are not judgments of cognition—the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* presents enough elements to affirm that aesthetics contribute—even if it is indirectly—to *cognition in general*. As we will see in the following section, this last notion refers to a different type of cognition Kant introduces in §9 of the “*Analytic*”, described as the free play of our cognitive powers when “no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition” (*KU*, AA 05: 217).

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<sup>7</sup> Halper (2019) recuperates Guyer’s (2006) classification on the different interpretations that have been suggested in relation to the cognitive dimension of aesthetic judgments. On the one hand, the *pre-cognitive* reading insists on the incompatibility between judgments of taste and judgments of cognition: if a judgment is aesthetic, it cannot provide knowledge and *vice versa*, if a judgment is determinate, it will have no relation with our feeling of pleasure and displeasure. On the other hand, both *metacognitive* and *multicognitive* readings are practically at the opposite end of the spectrum, since both of them make the aesthetic judgment a type of cognition. The problem with the last two interpretations is that they seem to ignore a fundamental aspect of the judgment of taste mentioned above, namely, its immediate and not conceptual character. Although we cannot elaborate the particularities of such debate, the present work aims to provide a possible answer to the problem of cognition through aesthetic judgments on the basis of the notion of ‘aesthetic ideas’ (discussed in the last two sections).

## 2. Why Aesthetic Judgments Are Non-Cognitive?

In this section we aim to reconstruct the main arguments that Kant develops in the “Analytic of the Beautiful” in order to support the distinction between judgments of taste and judgments of cognition. As previously mentioned, Kant distinguishes the aesthetic property from the logical validity of a representation: while the latter determines an object for cognition, the former links the representation of the object to the subject’s feeling of pleasure and displeasure, and to that extent “*cannot become an element of cognition at all*” (*KU*, AA 05: 189). The beautiful concerns the feeling of satisfaction when confronted to a given representation, regardless of any interest we may have in its objective existence. To that extent, the normative basis of aesthetic judgments does not depend on formal characteristics of *objects*, but rather on the nature of the *subject’s* experience (Chignell, 2007).

In other words, Kant defines taste as the power to judge an object by means of a satisfaction or dissatisfaction *without any interest* (*KU*, AA 05: 211). If we were to judge a palace aesthetically, for example, its existence or inexistence must be totally indifferent to us; placed between brackets, all that should matter is the *formal* aspect of its representation and the feeling it provokes on us:

it is readily seen that to say that it [an object] is *beautiful* and to prove that I have taste what matters is what I make of this representation in myself, not how I depend on the existence of the object (*KU*, AA 05: 205).

From the previous point, we can observe another distinction drawn by Kant between aesthetic sensibility (or feeling) [*Gefühl*] and sensibility conceived as the receptive power of cognition [*Sinnlichkeit*]: while the green color of the meadows is a sensation that determines our cognition of an object (since it refers to ‘the meadows’), the pleasure or displeasure that we may *feel* in front of such a representation is only linked to *the way we judge* it in our sensibility and, therefore, “does not serve for any cognition at all, not even that by which the subject *cognizes* himself” (*KU*, AA 05: 206–207).<sup>8</sup> At the

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<sup>8</sup> In fact, as Lebrun points out, Kant strives to establish the difference between the notion of *Sinnlichkeit* [aesthetic sensibility] from the theory of knowledge developed in the Transcendental Aesthetics of the *KrV*. As we already know, after the third *Critique*, aesthetics no longer refer—as it did for Leibniz or Baumgarten—to a doctrine of the senses or to the laws of ‘sensible cognition’. However, Lebrun (1997)

same time, the beautiful is also distinguished from the agreeable [*angenehm*]: while a pleasant sensation is produced by stimuli and is therefore “pathologically conditioned”, satisfaction in the beautiful presupposes *reflection* since it leads to a concept, although this concept remains indeterminate (*KU*, AA 05: 207).

Therefore, Kant argues that if a given representation was determined by a particular concept, then “the consciousness of this relationship (between the imagination and the understanding) would be intellectual (as in the objective schematism)”, and so the judgment would be one of cognition (*KU*, AA 05: 218). On the contrary, aesthetic judgments only presuppose the *feeling* of a ‘subjective agreement’ between both faculties of cognition (imagination and understanding). In this sense, contrary to the *logical* universality of judgments of cognition, Kant ascribes to judgments of taste an *aesthetic* or *subjective* universality (not mediated by a particular concept). The latter refers to the ‘common validity’ of judgments of taste, as it doesn’t denote any particular properties of objects (i.e., it does not contain an objective quantity), but at the same time it extends “over the whole sphere of those who judge” (*KU*, AA 04: 214–215). It is in this precise sense that we speak of beauty as if it were a property of things, when in reality we are only referring to a subjective state, since “beauty is nothing by itself, without relation to the feeling of the subject” (*KU*, AA 05: 218). Nonetheless, if it is true that judgments of taste cannot be universally valid—since they do not refer to objects of experience—they are not grounded on private feeling neither (as it would be the case of an *agreeable* sensation). Instead, judgments of taste depend on a particular *unanimity of our cognitive powers*, which allows us to communicate our feeling and claim that everybody else should agree with our judgment (even if afterwards this is not the case).

Moreover, while aesthetic judgments do not allow us to know any property of objects (nor of ourselves), in the second moment of the “Analytic” Kant refers to the discovery of a property of our faculty of cognition that can only be revealed through the examination of judgments of taste, which is

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questions why Kant retains the same term for two different domains of our sensibility: on the one hand, for the receptivity of our faculty of cognition, and on the other, for judgments of taste. Anyhow, a possible answer to Lebrun’s question might be that Kant discriminates two different ways in which the same faculty—our sensibility—operates: on the one hand, it participates in cognition while determining objects; on the other, it is the ability we all humans have to be affected by objects through feelings of pleasure or displeasure.



certainly not remarkable “for the logician, but [...] for the transcendental philosopher” (*KU*, AA 05: 214). In fact, since no concept is suitable for judging the representation given in sensibility, our imagination entertains in the contemplation of a given representation without any particular purpose, thus motivating the feeling of the vivification of our cognitive powers “without a further aim” (*KU*, AA 05: 222):

We *linger* over the consideration of the beautiful because this consideration strengthens and reproduces itself, which is analogous to (yet not identical with) the way in which we linger when a charm in the representation of the object repeatedly attracts attention, where the mind is passive (*KU*, AA 05: 222).

Once again, imagination lingers in contemplation as if it were an external stimulus that holds our attention while we remain passive in the presence of it. However, as already established by Kant in §3, it cannot be pleasure that which is at the basis of such a contemplation, for in that case it would consist of an agreeable and superficial sensation. Consequently, Kant introduces the notion of *Zweckmäßigkeit* [or purposiveness without an end] which constitutes “the key to the critique of taste” of §9. As a matter of fact, the formal purposiveness of a representation refers to the conjoining of an intuitive manifold into a unity, although such unity remains indeterminate. Since no concept seems adequate to capture the free play of our imagination, the representation “does not bring to our attention any property of the object, but only the purposive form in the determination of the powers of representation that are occupied with it” (*KU*, AA 05: 228). As already pointed out by Oroño (2017), it is important at this point to stress the distinction made by Kant between the notion of *Erkenntnis überhaupt* [cognition in general] and *particular* cognition: while the latter depends on specific rules of cognition (i.e., concepts), the former do not depend on any particular concept [*kein bestimmter Begriff*] which would limit our faculties to a determinate rule of cognition (*KU*, AA 05: 217).

Indeed, our imagination does not perform the same functions in aesthetic judgments and in logical judgments: if in the latter the function of imagination is limited both by empirical laws of association as well as by the concepts of our understanding, aesthetically the power of imagination must be considered “as productive and self-active (as the authoress of voluntary

forms of possible intuitions)” (*KU*, AA 05: 240). To further develop this point, Jáuregui (2010) emphasizes the importance of imagination within the Kantian gnoseological theory: on the one hand, imagination is reproductive when performing contingent syntheses of representations according to the laws of association; on the other, imagination is also productive, since it synthesizes the intuitive manifold under the sensible forms of time and space—a necessary condition without which intuition could never be subsumed under a concept. In any case, unlike what happens in judgments of taste, in determinant judgments our imagination does not operate freely, but remains subjected to the binding rules of the understanding. Thus, to contemplate an object aesthetically means freeing ourselves from the laws of association inherent to the empirical use of imagination as well as from the categories of the understanding (Chignell, 2007).

In order to elaborate this last point addressed by Kant in the third moment of the aesthetic judgment, it is worthwhile to dwell on §15. Kant states that when representing to ourselves a specific object, we must first possess the concept of that which the object is to be—i.e., its particular end. Thus, for example, in regular geometric shapes (a cube, a square, a circle) we easily see that it is their concept which prescribes the rule for their presentation, according to which the figure is indeed possible (we couldn't represent to ourselves a circle, for example, if we weren't familiar with the concept of a circle; that is to say, with its rule of cognition). In fact, it is for this precise reason that such representations are dull to the imagination when they are judged aesthetically and not cognitively (*KU*, AA 05: 241), and therefore are considered by Kant as “contrary to taste” (*KU*, AA 05: 243). In other words, Kant argues that if judgments of taste were to be mediated by the concept of “perfection”, we would be dealing with a judgment that is partly intellectual and not purely aesthetic. More specifically, the judgment of taste would be ‘impure’ and beauty merely ‘adherent’ (*KU*, AA 05: 230). On the contrary, since ‘free beauty’ depends on a singular and empirical representation, no concept is able to determine *a priori* whether or not an object should be considered beautiful, but each individual must try it out for himself (*KU*, AA 05: 191). That is why seeking a rule or principle of taste that would indicate through concepts the universal criterion of the beautiful is a “fruitless undertaking, because what it is sought is impossible and intrinsically self-contradictory” (*KU*, AA 05: 231).

Since the subjective validity of judgments of taste is not based on any given concept, we must therefore presuppose a common sense [or *sensus communis*], which Kant defines as “the necessary condition of the universal communicability of our cognition” (*KU*, AA 05: 239). As a matter of fact, in the fourth moment of the “Analytic” Kant states that through aesthetic judgment we discover that which is at the basis of *all* cognition, namely: the state of mind that presupposes the agreement between our representative powers. Following Kant’s argument, if every cognition—as the effect of the harmony between our faculties—can be universally communicated, then the feeling of such a state of mind should be so too (*KU*, AA 05: 239).<sup>9</sup> Indeed, according to Días Carvalho (2001), it is this presupposition of an agreement between our cognitive powers that underlies the cognitive aspect of aesthetic judgments. In the same sense, against Guyer’s thesis, according to which aesthetic pleasure is produced previously and independently from its universal communicability through a judgment of taste, but also against Ginsborg’s thesis, who states that aesthetic pleasure is the phenomenological manifestation of its universal validity, we agree with Arenas (2001) in that the *sensus communis* is not an effect of aesthetic pleasure, but rather one of its conditions of possibility. In other words, the free play of our faculties of cognition (and therefore our capacity to communicate it) is at the very basis of reflective-aesthetic judgments.

In any case, towards the end of the “Analytic of the Beautiful”, Kant insists once again on the importance of unravelling aesthetic (subjective) judgments from logical (objective) ones. As stated in our introduction, the confusion between these two would imply the reduction of aesthetics to a kind of confused (or inferior) cognition, based on a sensibility that would represent objects by means of concepts, or of an understanding that would judge sensibly, “both of which are self-contradictory” (*KU*, AA 05: 228). On the contrary, asserting that a judgment is aesthetic implies, fundamentally, that “its determining ground is not a concept, but the feeling (of inner sense) of

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<sup>9</sup> According to Halper, aesthetic pleasure is the feeling of our cognitive faculties in their frustrated effort to determine an object of cognition. In this sense, the only difference between a judgment of taste and a judgment of cognition would be the “gap” between a given representation and the determinate object of experience: “on my account of aesthetic judgment, the activity of these faculties is no mystery at all. They are doing precisely what they are always doing, namely determining objects of experience” (2019, p. 48). While it is true that aesthetic judgment is based on the play of our cognitive faculties as they can be *felt*, the main issue of the current interpretation is that it seems to ignore the fact that the ground of aesthetic judgment is not cognition, but the *feeling* of pleasure. Therefore, pure aesthetic judgments are *not* objective and the cognitive faculties are *not* determining objects of experience.

that unison in the play of the powers of the mind, insofar as they can only be sensed” (*KU*, AA 05: 229). Consequently, according to the four moments of the judgment of taste, the beautiful: i) arises from a disinterested and therefore free contemplation of an object, ii) possesses a subjective validity, in the sense that it rests on the imagination’s free play, iii) is independent from conceptual determination, and finally, iv)—since its determining ground is the agreement of our cognitive powers—it is then universally communicable.

### 3. The Intuitive Dimension of Aesthetic Ideas

Moreover, In §49 of the Deduction of Pure Aesthetic Judgments, Kant introduces the notion of ‘aesthetic ideas’ in the framework of his theory of genius. Besides taste—that is, the exercise of the power of judgment which implies a subjective agreement between the faculties of the imagination and the understanding (developed throughout the “Analytic”)—the creation of beautiful art presupposes genius:

One says of certain products, of which it is expected that they ought, at least in part, to reveal themselves as beautiful art, that they are without *spirit*, even though one finds nothing in them to criticize as far as taste is concerned. A poem can be quite pretty and elegant, but without *spirit*. A story is accurate and well organized, but without spirit. A solemn oration is thorough and at the same time flowery, but without spirit. [...] What it is then that is meant here by “spirit”? (*KU*, AA 05: 313).

Firstly, Kant defines *Geist* [spirit] as the genius’s natural talent. Considered aesthetically, spirit is the “animating principle in the mind” that mobilize our powers of cognition, inciting them “into a play that is self-maintaining and even strengthens the powers to that end” (*KU*, AA 05: 314). Secondly, spirit is “the faculty for the presentation of aesthetic ideas” (*KU*, AA 05: 314): the artist succeeds in capturing the free play of imagination and to unify it under a concept that, however, is free from the understanding’s coercion. Precisely because such a concept cannot be reduced to a set of prior principles or rules (nor to prior knowledge), beautiful art expresses something absolutely new and original (*KU*, AA 05: 317). Additionally, if in the Introduction Kant establishes the distinction between an aesthetic and a logical element of representation, in the Deduction he distinguishes between

two different forms of expression: the manner [or *modus aestheticus*] and the method [or *modus logicus*]. If the latter obeys to determinate rules for its presentation, the only standard for the former is nothing other than the *feeling* of unity in its exhibition. In other words—through a given representation—it does not seek to express more than the singularity of a given intuition and its inadequacy in relation to any definite conceptualization (*KU*, AA 05: 319).

Furthermore, Kant clarifies that the spirit consists on a talent that “no science can teach or diligence learn”, since it implies the ability to express—through *aesthetic ideas*—that which would otherwise be ineffable (*KU*, AA 05: 317). The artist cannot explain nor describe the content of aesthetic ideas in a discursive way, but instead can reveal and communicate it through art. Therefore, although an aesthetic idea is ineffable and cannot be expressed in a linguistic manner, it is communicable only through aesthetic feeling and art (Kuplen, 2019). In this sense, *beautiful art*—or art created by genius, i.e., that which in a work of art is attributed to *spirit* and not to the acquisition of knowledge through a set of rules—cannot be acquired either through theoretical knowledge (for example, about a particular technique employed by the artist) or through mere reproduction (since in this case the uniqueness of the piece would be precisely lost). Instead, beautiful art must be considered *exemplary*, constraining itself to motivate and awaken in others the feeling of originality and independence regarding the already incorporated rules. In any case, both *genius* and *taste* are indispensable for beautiful art, for the latter ‘clips the wings of imagination’, providing directionality and solidity to the artist’s ideas. In fact, it is from the exercise of taste that skills for the expression of aesthetic ideas are acquired, and to that extent, it is considered by Kant as the most necessary condition [*conditio sine qua non*] for beautiful art. If understanding, imagination and spirit constitute the natural aptitudes of genius, only the exercise of taste allows, progressively, to unify the other three (*KU*, AA 05: 319–320).<sup>10</sup>

Kant returns once again to the difference in the way in which our cognitive powers operate throughout the exercise of aesthetic judgment. If in

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<sup>10</sup> As McMahon (2017) explains, artistic talent is not acquired by mere reproduction, but through training and imitation. In this way, the artist progressively recognizes and internalizes a rule, and consequently—at least in exceptional cases—he creates one of his own (even if this process occurs unconsciously). If a work of art reveals genius, then it will introduce a new rule that others will imitate, and so on. In other words—contrary to science—beautiful art cannot be deduced directly from pre-existing rules (*KU*, AA 05: 318).

cognition our imagination is limited both by the empirical laws of association as well as by the rules given by the concepts of the understanding, it is—on the contrary—“powerful [*mächtig*] in creating” (KU, AA 05: 314). As Jáuregui (2010) argues, imagination becomes doubly productive through art: not only because it creates intuitive representations that will eventually allow us to expand our concepts, but also because it confers a particular form to such representations, thereby giving rise to a ‘second nature’. As stated before, aesthetic ideas suppose the counterpart of rational ideas: if the latter present concepts for which no intuition is adequate, the former are intuitions to which no *determinate* concept corresponds. Therefore, as already pointed out by Oroño (2022), in both cases there is an unbalance between a conceptual and an intuitive representation: if in rational ideas there is a conceptual surplus, aesthetic ideas present an intuitive excess in relation to concepts.

No concept is adequate to express the intuitive completeness of an aesthetic idea, since it “allows the addition [...] of much that is un-nameable, *the feeling of which animates the cognitive faculties and combines spirit with the mere letter of language*” (KU, AA 05: 316, italics added). In other words, an aesthetic idea relates to a concept that—nevertheless—turns out to be inadequate to it, since the intuitive content of the former exceeds any conceptual determination, thus vivifying our cognitive powers. Consequently, Kant defines it as *the expression of the ineffable*, that is to say, of that which cannot be expressed nor apprehended through language:

by an aesthetic idea [...] I mean that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., *concept*, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible (KU, AA 05: 314).

At this point we might ask why Kant denominates this kind of sensible intuitions (which he also defines as ‘representations of the imagination’) by the name of ‘ideas’. In fact, Kant himself may offer us an answer: since aesthetic ideas go beyond the limits imposed by concepts of language—according to Kant’s epistemological theory—they should tend towards that which lies beyond the limits of experience. We can then say that these intuitive representations exceed our perception of empirical objects in two different ways: first, aesthetic ideas intuitively exhibit rational ideas, i.e.,

concepts of which we have no empirical intuition. Second—and as we mentioned before—although to be exhibited they must be associated with a concept, there is no concept that is, however, “fully adequate to them” (*KU*, AA 05: 314). For these reasons, Oroño (2022) points out that aesthetic ideas lie between two intellectual poles: on the one hand, they express an idea that underlies a work of art; on the other, they admit multiple possible conceptualizations (since there is no determinate concept that suits *completely* the intuitive representation). In other words, the relation between intuition and its conceptual counterpart remains *inadequate*, as no concept succeeds in apprehending the intuitive wholeness of an aesthetic idea.

Thus, for example, poetry—where, according to Kant, the talent for exhibiting aesthetic ideas manifests itself in the most accomplished manner—allows us to give a sensible form [*versinnlichen*] to rational ideas of which we have no intuition in nature, such as the “invisible things, the kingdom of the blessed, the kingdom of hell, eternity, creation, etc.” (*KU*, AA 04: 314). Nevertheless, aesthetic ideas also express that of which *we do* find examples in experience (namely “death, envy and all sorts of vices, as well as love”), but with an exhaustiveness [*in einer Vollständigkeit*] that goes beyond any example we could find in nature (*KU*, AA 05: 314).<sup>11</sup> Therefore, as pointed out in our Introduction, aesthetic ideas do not only refer to moral or purely rational concepts, but also reveal introspective and affective aspects associated with concepts of which we have experience (Kuplen, 2019). If the traditional interpretation of aesthetic ideas is usually more restrictive (since it only takes into account the first group of concepts pointed out by Kant—namely, moral and rational ideas—a number of recent studies claim that aesthetic ideas also express *empirical* concepts.

In any case, Kant defines the aesthetic idea as a representation of the imagination associated with a given concept, but linked at the same time to a diversity of partial or supplementary representations referred to by Kant as ‘aesthetic attributes’ (as opposed to the logical ones). Unlike the latter, the former do not refer to the properties of an object contained within a concept. Rather, aesthetic attributes are apprehended or exhibited when our imagination extends beyond that which can be grasped by our understanding, over “a multitude of related representations, which let one think more than

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<sup>11</sup> In this sense, Oroño defines the aesthetic idea as an “ideal-intuitive model”, insofar as its content exceeds any particular example or representation of it that we could find in experience (2022, p. 51).

one can express in a concept determined by words” (*KU*, AA 05: 315). Strictly speaking, if logical attributes constitute the presentation of a certain concept, and thus the scheme of those general aspects that different objects have in common, aesthetic attributes refer to those features of objects that go beyond logical attributes, namely that intuitive material left out by conceptual synthesis (Kuplen, 2019). In this way, the intuitive dimension of the aesthetic idea produces a heterogeneous whole of thoughts and representations which exceed the logical attributes contained in a concept and, therefore, “stimulates so much thinking that it can never be grasped in a determinate concept” (*KU*, AA 05: 315).<sup>12</sup> Therefore, if empirical intuition is an external representation of the imagination, aesthetic ideas are internal intuitions that present themselves as “a coherent whole of a plethora of ineffable thoughts” (*KU*, AA 05: 314, 339) that, simultaneously, lack a determinate object (Kuplen, 2019; Matherne, 2013). In this sense, Chignell (2007) argues that the normative value of aesthetic ideas lies not so much in their content as in their *form*: namely, a multiplicity of representations, thoughts and feelings intermingled and linked into a whole that, nonetheless, evades conceptual synthesis.

However, it would be wrong to identify aesthetic ideas with a simple addition of discrete elements that the imagination would later subsume under a concept. On the contrary, as remarked by Jáuregui (2010, pp. 162–163, a. trans.), it is the “apprehension of a whole, whose unity is not conceptually determined, but felt”. The understanding provides the conceptual framework for the imagination, although the latter will generate representations freely, filling those spaces that the categorial structure leaves undetermined.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, the aesthetic use of imagination is none other than that which Kant has already introduced in the Third Moment of the “Analytic of the Beautiful”, through the free legality or purposiveness without an end [*Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*] of imagination. The latter refers to a certain ‘unity’ of representations into a whole that causes, in turn, the feeling of an enlivening of our cognitive powers, and simultaneously the basis for its communicability (McMahon, 2017). Indeed, as we saw in our second section,

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<sup>12</sup> Kant offers two examples to differentiate logical attributes from aesthetic ones: “Jupiter’s eagle with the lightning in its claws” and “the peacock” refer respectively to the powerful king and the splendid queen of heaven, though indirectly. For both aesthetic attributes (which Kant also denominates as “supplementary representations of the imagination”) are not contained within the concepts of “sublimity” or “majesty in creation”, and it is precisely for this reason that such images allow us to *aesthetically* expand both concepts (*KU*, AA 05: 315).

<sup>13</sup> In other words, aesthetic ideas are not the result of the *synthetic* activity of the imagination, comparable to the three stages of Kant’s Threefold Synthesis present in *KrV* (Jáuregui, 2010).



already in the Third Moment of the judgment of taste, Kant introduces a kind of non-conceptual—and therefore, non-objective—rule that makes possible the communication of an internal state, even if it is not through determinate language (DeBord, 2012).

#### 4. Conclusion: The Scope of Intuition within the *Third Critique*

As we have established throughout the present work, it is important to explicitly distinguish the function of aesthetic judgments from the cognitive ones. If in determinant judgments imagination is limited to a particular concept, in aesthetic judgments—on the contrary—imagination extends itself beyond conceptual determination.<sup>14</sup> While aesthetic ideas presuppose a concept, at the same time they imply an imbalance between an intuitive and a conceptual representation (since the concept in question fails to apprehend the present intuition in an exhaustive way). Therefore, taking into account Kant's gnoseological theory developed within his first *Critique*, it is clear that intuition in the framework of aesthetic ideas cannot be considered as an objective cognition. Once again, for cognition to take place, there must be a collaboration between intuitions and concepts in such a way that, from the subsumption of the former under the latter, a determinant judgment may be formulated.

However, in §49 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* Kant adds that—although “in an aesthetic respect” and not in regard to cognition—imagination extends beyond its adequacy to concepts, according the understanding: “unsought extensive undeveloped material [...], of which the latter took no regard in its concept, but which it applies, not so much objectively, for cognition, as subjectively, for the animation of the cognitive powers and *thus also indirectly to cognitions*” (*KU*, AA 05: 317, italics added).

This last paragraph is crucial for our thesis since Kant seems to be asserting that the intuitive content granted by aesthetic ideas extends our cognition, if only indirectly. This means that—although not with ‘cognitive purposes’—through intuition of aesthetic ideas, our imagination succeeds in granting our understanding material left unelaborated by our concepts,

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<sup>14</sup> According to McMahon, this is basically why Kant considers aesthetic judgments as “non-cognitive” (2017, pp. 441–442).

revealing that which these ones leave out. Ultimately, this excess of intuition drives the imagination beyond the logical attributes given by concepts, in a play that is revitalized as the contemplation of a given representation progresses. To put it differently, it is from an excess of intuition and its simultaneous inadequacy to a determinate concept that our imagination enlarges the latter aesthetically. Once again, it is important to clarify that the enlargement of the concept is *aesthetic* and not logical: in other words, it does not proceed by adding properties or attributes to a given concept. On the contrary, it refers to introspective, emotional and affective aspects of a concept that ordinary language fails to capture adequately. Kuplen (2019) notes, for example, that while the pain or grief we may feel at experiencing a particular loss is understandable through the concept we all share of this particular emotion, it may fail to capture or to express the different qualities or nuances of this emotion, such as they may be felt (Kuplen, 2019). In this sense, we may conclude that genius is nothing other than the artist's ability to express intuitively—that is, non-conceptually—his or her own ideas or emotions (DeBord, 2012).

Thus, although intuition in the context of aesthetic ideas does not grant a theoretical type of cognition—like that one provided by cognitive or determinant judgments—from what has been said so far, we may conclude that aesthetic ideas allow us to enlarge our cognition in an indirect way (even if it is without a cognitive end or purpose). On the one hand, because they extend concepts “in an unbounded way” by expressing the intuitive material that outstrips conceptual synthesis (*KU*, AA 05: 315); on the other, because through the free legislation of the imagination in its effort to apprehend that which exceeds conceptual determination, the very faculties that are at the basis of cognition are at the same time enlarged. As we also mentioned throughout the present work, there are a number of current studies that support our thesis. According to McMahon (2017), aesthetic ideas are not objects of cognition in the sense that they are not given in experience, but rather created or generated by us in experience. As such, they provide a type of knowledge, even though it does not consist of factual truths and cannot be made explicit in a propositional form (Kuplen, 2021). Additionally, Kuplen (2021) recognizes aesthetic ideas as “kinds of cognition” (*KU*, AA 05: 305) insofar as they contribute—through the exercise of the imagination—to the “enlargement of the faculties” (*KU*, AA 05: 329). In a similar way, according

to Oroño (2022), aesthetic ideas provide a particular type of knowledge which does not refer to objects but to a subjective kind of representation.<sup>15</sup>

We agree with Fry (2001) in that the analysis of genius problematizes the epistemological theory developed by Kant in the first *Critique*, since the type of cognition provided by judgments of taste cannot be measured in relation to the one provided by determinant judgments in the *KrV*. If the latter refer to a spatiotemporal experience of *objects* for cognition—as Kant strives to demonstrate throughout all the Analytic—aesthetic judgments refer a representation only to sensibility, and thus to the expression of subjective states of consciousness that were clearly not taken into account by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Once again, it is true that Kant characterizes genius through a natural talent, since the genius' work surpasses purely mechanical art and expresses an intuition which is irreducible both to the reproduction of a technique as well as to theoretical knowledge. However, from the previous statement it does not follow—as Fry claims—that genius is a supernatural talent which exceeds the structures of cognition common to all the rest of human beings. Indeed, Fry (2001) argues that—according to the theory of aesthetic ideas—we should admit a purely intuitive type of cognition, one that would transgress the whole Kantian epistemological project.

On the contrary, although the aesthetic theory developed in the third *Critique* is problematic regarding certain aspects of the epistemological theory of the first *Critique*, this is due neither to an inconsistency in the Kantian system, nor to the assertion of a kind of cognition that would surpass our natural aptitudes. Instead, we can affirm that the third *Critique* adds new elements that illuminate other aspects of Kantian theory, not developed in the *KrV*: namely, the possibility aesthetic judgments have to enlarge cognition through the expression of intuitive representations that stimulate our cognitive faculties. Therefore, in addition to the form of cognition provided by determinant judgments, we do agree with Fry in that we can admit a particular form of knowledge not treated by Kant in his first *Critique*.

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<sup>15</sup> According to Oroño (2022), although aesthetic ideas do not reveal any property of objects, they fulfill a cognitive function that must be understood in the light of the notion of symbolic representation of §59. Kant introduces the notion of *hypotyposis* or *sensibilization* [*Versinnlichung*], which can be of two different types: schematic (when an intuition is subsumed under categories or empirical concepts) or symbolic (when intuition coincides with a concept “according to the form of reflection and not according to its content” (*KU*, AA 05: 351). In this case, intuition is inadequate to a given concept; thus, it may only be presented by means of an analogy. For further development of the notion of symbolic cognition, see: Oroño (2022) and *KU*, AA 05: 351–355.

Taking into account the questions we established in our Introduction, we can then conclude—in the first place—that both through the contemplation of art and nature, it is possible to apprehend that which surpasses ordinary language and expression through concepts. In the second place, due to the intuitive content of aesthetic attributes, art allows—through its effect on our cognitive faculties—to broaden concepts aesthetically. Therefore, although aesthetic judgments are not judgments of cognition, this does not prevent us from conceiving the possibility that they may have effects in our knowledge. With this in mind, the distinction that Kant establishes between aesthetic judgments and determinant (or cognitive) judgments must be interpreted without losing sight of the philosophical position from which Kant struggled to distance himself.

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