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Edited by Dan-Eugen Ratiu and Connell Vaughan

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# ***A Portrait of the Artist as a Gifted Man: What Lies in the Mind of a Genius?***

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ABSTRACT. In this paper, I look at Kant's third *Critique* and the persona of an artist that is at the heart of his account of beautiful art. My analysis shows that the genius has four-fold capacity: (i) to summon aesthetic attributes so as to give substance to otherwise ineffable aesthetic ideas, that is, rational and moral ideas and concepts derived from experience, (ii) to arrange these attributes in a formal order so as to create beautiful art and inspire aesthetic pleasure, (iii) to touch other artists by awakening their genius, so as to establish schools of style, (iv) to initiate reflection in the audience, so as to contribute to their cognitive engagements with the world.

## **1. The Artist and Artistic Creation**

“[O]nly production through freedom, i.e., through a capacity for choice that grounds its actions in reason, should be called art” (§43, 5: 303), claims Kant, arguing that only human beings are capable of creating art.<sup>2</sup> One sees art in everything that is so “constituted that a representation of it in its cause must have preceded its reality” (§43, 5: 303). When we judge something to be art, we have to recognize that “the cause that produced it conceived of an end” (§43, 5: 303). For reasons of clarity, I will refer to this *cause* as an *artistic vision*. My aim here is to analyse where this vision comes from and how it instigates an artist to create art. I am interested at exploring which elements of artistic creations are under artist’s control, and which originate spontaneously and unconsciously within him as a result of him being endowed with genius. On Kant’s view, there are two main generating

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<sup>2</sup> Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. All the quotations are from 2000 Cambridge edition edited by Paul Guyer. Following Kant, I will use the noun artist in a masculine form. Unless states otherwise, I take artist to be an individual who has a talent, i.e. is embodied with a genius.

sources of artistic creation, imagination and taste, and I am interested at exploring the role of each in artistic creation.

A central claim in Kant's account is that artistic creation does not depend on artist's knowledge of how to produce something. Artistic creation is separated from activities that require knowledge of how to produce them, activities that Kant unites under the name of mechanical arts. These include the sciences, handicrafts and those arts which do not aim at pleasure.<sup>3</sup> Art is a practical, not theoretical faculty, and as a technique it is divorced from theories, i.e. from a set of rules which specify how to create a certain product. There is only "a determinate intention to produce something" (§45, 5:306), rather than knowledge on how to do it. However, this intention cannot be the intention to produce a *determinate* object, for if it were, the resulting product would please through concept, and on Kant's view, judgments of beauty do not depend on a concept. A product of such creation would not classify as beautiful art. For something to be beautiful art, it has to be regarded as nature, regardless of audience's awareness that it is not nature but a work of art. For a product of art to appear as nature, it has to be in agreement with rules of creation, but it mustn't be obvious that these rules dominated artistic creation or "fettered [artist's] mental powers" (§45, 5:307). How then is an artist to proceed? Given that a conscious following of the rules would only make one create mechanical art, artistic creation must be such that an artist is unaware of how his art comes about, i.e. such that the process originates within the artist without him consciously initiating it. To solve this apparent paradox, Kant internalizes the rules of creation by locating them within the artist's inborn faculties, i.e. his genius.

Kant's account of a genius is multi-layered and complex, centered around two crucial points. Corresponding to the *ingenium* sense of the word genius, it represents the inborn predisposition of the mind, an integral aspect

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<sup>3</sup> Kant's account of beautiful art is primarily developed against the comparison between an artist and a scientist. His main idea, as I will discuss below, is that art is only possible if one has a natural talent for it, (genius), and if one does not proceed in one's creations by consciously following any set of rules, as such activities are only applicable in mechanical arts. Science, on the other hand, is a matter of learning from and following upon one's predecessors who can teach and instruct others on how to accumulate and expand knowledge.

of his nature, a gift “apportioned to each immediately from the hand of nature” (§47, 5:309). Consequently, the talent for artistic creation cannot be self-developed, learnt or adopted in some way, perhaps by training or practice. One is an artist due to one’s nature, not one’s choice or desire. In another sense of the word, *genius*, genius implies that the person endowed with it cannot pass it on, perhaps by verbally instructing others on which rules to follow, because he is himself ignorant regarding the origin of his art. Kant argues: “the author of a product that he owes to his genius does not know himself how the ideas for it come to him, and also does not have it in his power to think up such things at will or according to plan, and to communicate to others precepts that would put them in a position to produce similar products” (§46, 5:308).

As a generative source of artistic creation, genius is not found in any other domain of human productivity. “Beautiful art is art of a genius” (§46) claims Kant, stating that it is from genius’ inspiration that original ideas stem (§46), ideas which are expressed in a work of art. In addition to giving the rules for art, genius also “provides rich material” (§47, 5:310). ‘Rich material’, I suggest, refers to the psychological state of an artist which amounts to him having an artistic vision, and to the subject matter of the work itself. Below we will see how ‘rich material’ is connected to imagination’s production of aesthetic ideas, which are crucial element in artistic creation.

Given that the rules necessary for artistic creation originate from one’s individual nature, a product of a genius is original. However, since there can be original nonsense (§46), originality doesn’t suffice for a work to be artistically relevant, i.e. relevant for the inclusion into the class of fine arts. Rather, the work has to be original in a way that renders it *exemplary*. Such works serve a double function. First, they are used as models, i.e. “as a standard or a rule for judging” (§46, 5:308) other works of art. This is because as products of genius, they embody the rules for creation which, while cannot be “couched in a formula”, can nevertheless be “abstracted from the deed” and thus serve as a model to others, “not for copying but for

imitation” (§47, 5:309).<sup>4</sup> Imitating such works should enable an artist to develop his own talent, since a work of a genius embodies all the properties of a work of *fine* art, and can therefore establish criteria for judging other products which strive to that same status. Precise implications of this claim will become explicit when we turn to the role of taste in artistic creation.

A second function of original and exemplary works of art consists in *arousing* genius in another artist. Having the gift of nature doesn't suffice for one's artistic production to begin: the genius has to be aroused to become efficient. For this to happen, a genius needs “nothing more than an example in order to let the talent of which he is aware operate in a similar way” (§47, 5: 309). Artistic production is thus a matter of having one's artistic vision develop spontaneously in one's mind, provided one is endowed with a talent which had been aroused via an original exemplary model – a work of art produced by (another) genius. I will refer to this pattern of interaction between two artists, a pattern via which a work of art of one artist triggers the talent and consequently, artistic production in another artist, as *interactive patterns of exemplarity*. One artist has the capacity to influence artistic creation of another one not by directly communicating to him the rules or instructions on how to create art, but by non-verbally stimulating his talent via his own original, exemplary work. An artwork thus serves as a means of communication between two artists. Kant explains this pattern of interaction via the chain of influence mediated by ideas, stating that “ideas of the artist arouse similar ideas in his apprentice if nature has equipped him with a similar proportion of mental powers” (§47 5:309). As we will see below, the reason for such mentalistic account is Kant' view that certain kinds of ideas originating within the genius (namely, aesthetic ideas) are expressed in (i.e. give content to) a work of art.

Up to this point in Kant's account, artistic creation was a matter of an artist creating a work of art (i.e. communicating his artistic vision) by following his natural inclination to do so, with respect to which he is mostly in the dark. Aware only of his talent, he doesn't know where his artistic vision comes from or how to incite it; yet this vision guides his “rational

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<sup>4</sup> The idea that a genius' work embodies rules for creation and judgment motivates normative approaches to Kant's theory. See Allison 2001, Ostarić 2012.

considerations” (§43, 5:303) with respect to the final product. William Wordsworth’s famous claim that poetry comes as naturally to the poet as leaves do to the trees illustrates such artistic creation: those endowed with the gift of nature, talent, spontaneously, out of their nature, create beautiful poetry, without knowing how they do it and lacking the capacity to instruct others on how to do it. Once the talent has been awakened, a genius’ mind becomes like a boiling spring, overwhelmed with ideas that need to be expressed.

In §47, 5:310, Kant introduces another condition necessary for the creation of fine art: academic training. Although he insists on separating beautiful art from mechanical, he nevertheless claims that “there is no beautiful art in which something mechanical, which can be grasped and followed according to rules, and thus something academically correct, does not constitute the essential condition of the art”. This has to be the case, for otherwise we couldn’t recognize an artwork as a product of deliberate artistic creation, rather than as a product of pure chance. In addition, claims Kant, “originality of the talent is only one essential element of the character of genius” (§47, 5:310), evident in the material that the genius provides. Another essential aspect is that this talent has been academically trained. This is needed in order to give “elaboration and form” to the material provided by the genius’ originality, so that “it can stand up to the power of judgment” (§47, 5:310), that is, taste. Taste, “a faculty for judging” (§48, 5:313) is required to give form to a work of art and is subject to practices and corrections “by means of various examples of art or nature” (§48, 5:312) which an artist uses as a criterion for judging his own work. This is why works which are original and exemplary serve as models for judging. The mechanical aspect of artistic creation is exhausted by paying attention to, and abstracting the rules from, the original and exemplary works of art, which help one, through practice, develop one’s own taste so as to become capable of creating original and exemplary works. Kant ultimately describes the process of artistic creation in the following way:

To give this form to the product of beautiful art, however, requires merely taste, to which the artist, after he has practiced and corrected it

by means of examples of art or nature, holds up his work, and after many, often laborious attempts to satisfy it, finds the form that contents him; hence this is not as it were a matter of inspiration or a free swing of mental powers, but a slow and painstaking improvement, in order to let it become adequate to the thought and yet not detrimental to the freedom in the play of the mental powers. (§48 5:312).

Artist's attempts to improve his work imply that, even if he doesn't know where the rules for creation come from and is in no position to consciously apply them, he is guided by them, having abstracted them from the exemplars he observed. Thus he gains control over his creation by developing taste, a capacity to judge when a certain form is the best form to impose upon the material that genius provides him with.<sup>5</sup> This control extends to him making sure that a work is adequate to the thought (i.e. that the audience can conceptualize it and properly evaluate), and suitable for the freedom of the mental powers which are necessary for the feeling of pleasure crucial for an experience to count as aesthetic.

If all goes well in the process of artistic creation, the final product is a beautiful work of art. However, failures can occur at every step in the process. If a work is lacking in formal arrangement, it is inspired, but not beautiful. A work can also be such that "one finds nothing in [it] to criticize as far as taste is concerned" (§49, 5:313) and yet not be considered beautiful. This happens when it lacks *spirit*. In this sense, spirit is a property of a work, whose presence in the work elevates it to the status of beautiful art.

However, Kant employs the notion of spirit in another sense, "as the animating principle in the mind" defined as "the faculty for the presentation of aesthetic ideas" (§49, 5:313). The relevance of aesthetic ideas in artistic

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<sup>5</sup> Given how, in §17, Kant describes taste as "a faculty of one's own" and combines it with one's ideal of beauty, we can argue that, by accumulating experiences with works of art, an artist develops his own ideal of beauty, his own sense of appropriateness with respect to formal features, and uses it in his own work. Since every artist's taste is based on his own feeling, each work of art will for that reason also be individual.

creation is crucial, but Kant is sadly inconclusive over how exactly to understand them. In one sense, aesthetic idea is “the counterpart (pendant) of an idea of reason” that is, it seeks to “approximate a presentation of concepts of reason”, i.e. intellectual ideas” (§49, 5:314). In Kant’s overall epistemology, rational ideas include god, soul and the world-whole. Since rational ideas include moral concepts, some Kantians claim that aesthetic ideas are counterparts to moral ideas. In a third sense, aesthetic ideas are connected to empirical concepts, as evident in Kant’s claim that

The poet ventures to make sensible rational ideas of invisible beings, the kingdom of the blessed, the kingdom of hell, eternity, creation, etc., as well as to make that of which there are examples in experience, e.g. death, envy, and all sorts of vices, as well as love, fame, etc., sensible beyond the limits of experience, with a completeness that goes beyond anything of which there is an example in nature... (§49, 5:314).

While interpreters are still negotiating which of the three ways of conceiving of aesthetic ideas is the one Kant had in mind, I will proceed under the assumptions that aesthetic ideas are inclusive of all three of these senses (as counterparts of rational and moral ideas and empirically derived concepts).<sup>6</sup>

Another relevant aspect of aesthetic ideas is their connection with imagination. Aesthetic idea is “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.” (§49 5:314). It is also a “representation of the imagination, associated with a given concept, which is combined with such a manifold of partial representations in the free use of imagination that no expression designating a determinate concept can be found for it...” (§49 5:316). Kant here explicitly links artistic creation with the imagination, one of the cognitive faculties, which has the capacity to

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<sup>6</sup> The most compelling argument for this interpretation of Kant was given by Samantha Matherne, see her 2013.

“create another nature out of the material which the real one gives it” (§49 5:314). This is why Kant explains genius’ activity as providing rich material: genius is the talent of imagination which makes it possible for imagination to create another nature, i.e. develop artistic vision. Consequently, the unconscious aspect of artistic creation has to do with the operation of imagination, and the talent of a genius is in fact a talent of imagination to give content to rational, moral or experience-oriented concepts. Given that these concepts can never be fully intelligible, aesthetic ideas are ineffable: they surpass a concept as well as intuition, and are thus out of reach of empirical cognition. Consequently, they can neither be fully grasped, nor can they be linguistically articulated in a manner that would capture the full extent of what they encompass.

Given that aesthetic ideas are ineffable, and cannot be linguistically captured, Kant introduces the notion of aesthetic attributes to explain how they become conceptualized. As “supplementary representations of the imagination”, aesthetic attributes express “the implications connected with [the concept]” that aesthetic ideas stand for (§49 5:315). By ‘implications’, Kant has in mind those aspects of aesthetic ideas which are not logically contained within the concept, but are nevertheless part of it and can therefore be brought to bear on it. For example, the notion of deity is highly abstract, complex and includes various aspects, such as omnipotence, benevolence, forgiveness, wisdom, love etc. How then to present deity in a work of art? William Blake, for example, in his poem *The Lamb*, arrayed together various aesthetic attributes to point to god’s benevolence, generosity, love and creative power. He refers to deity as Little Lamb and goes on to enumerate a variety of things that deity does, such as giving life, food, clothes and delight. While in no way conclusive in portraying deity, Blake manages to capture that aspect of it connected to his love and innocence.

We can now reconstruct in more details artistic creation. Artistic vision, which develops in artist’s mind as a result of the talent of a genius, i.e. imagination’s productive activity, consists of aesthetic ideas, i.e. those concepts that he expresses in a work of art, concepts designating rational ideas, moral ideas and concepts derived from experience. This vision is

ineffable, because aesthetic ideas can never be linguistically realized in their fullness. Genius's talent lies in providing and arranging the material via which to express that ineffable vision in his mind; i.e. in coming up with the most suitable aesthetic attributes that give substance to the aesthetic idea and consequently, content to a work of art. Therefore, the content of a work of art consists in a union of aesthetic attributes that should, arranged in a certain formal order that an artist, having developed his taste through practice, judges to be the best formal order for expression, bring forward the aesthetic idea. In §49, 5:317 Kant refers to this talent as spirit and explains it as a "faculty for apprehending the rapidly passing play of the imagination and unifying it into a concept (which for that reason is original and at the same time discloses a new rule)". It is in this way that in artistic creation, as an artist acts with a certain intention – to communicate his vision, i.e. a concept behind the aesthetic idea – he does so in accordance with his very nature, i.e. with the particular way in which his imagination provides the material, rather than in accordance with any pre-established rules that do not derive from his taste. It is due to the productive force of imagination that aesthetic attributes can be found and summoned for the purpose of bringing forward aesthetic ideas, and it is due to taste that they are arranged in specific formal order. A product of such process is purposive: its elements serve to express artist's vision, but the purposiveness, as Kant insists in (§46, 5:306) "doesn't seem intentional", i.e. it is not obvious that the artist was consciously following a set of rules with the intention to produce that particular object.

Ultimately, artistic production is a matter of imagination and understanding working together, and genius

consists in the happy relation, which no science can teach and no diligence learn, of finding ideas for a given concept on the one hand and on the other hitting upon the expression for these, through which the subjective disposition of the mind that is thereby produced, as an accompaniment of a concept, can be communicated to others.(§49 5:317).

The ‘subjective disposition of the mind’, i.e. the aesthetic ideas, is what I have been calling artistic vision: the rich, new material created by imagination. In itself disordered, it consists of a multitude of representations; to illustrate it, above I used the image of a boiling spring, and I alluded to Wordsworth’s statement regarding the leaves coming spontaneously to the trees. The poet Robert Frost vividly illustrates such a state of mind stating: “A poem is never a put-up job so to speak. It begins as a lump in the throat ... It is never a thought to begin with. It is at its best when it is a tantalizing vagueness.”<sup>7</sup>

In order for the ‘tantalizing vagueness’ to be communicated to the audience, it has to be given a certain form. The actual production of a work of art is thus a matter of arranging the multitude of representations, i.e. a matter of arranging aesthetic attributes in the most suitable formal order for the presentation of aesthetic ideas. This is the job for understanding, which has to bring imagination under its control by exercising the power of judgment, i.e. taste. Taste assumes a dominant role in artistic creation, as Kant claims it is the “corrective” of genius which introduces “clarity and order into the abundance of thoughts” (§50, 5:319) that comprise artistic vision. That is the final step in artistic creation, which results in art that is not only inspired, but beautiful as well, i.e. one that has spirit. Original creation is thus a matter of finding the balance between “methodological instruction according to rules” and individual “mannerism”, where the only standard for an artist is “the feeling of unity in the presentation” (§49, 5:319).

Let us pause here to point to an ambiguity that permeates Kant’s account, an ambiguity concerning taste. Based on textual evidence in the third *Critique*, it is not clear whether taste, as corrective, rather than productive faculty, is built into the notion of genius as another aspect of the talent (in addition to genius’ capacity to provide material) or is a separate capacity.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, it is ambiguous whether Kant sees formal choices

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<sup>7</sup> Frost offers various visual images to illustrate the creation of a poem. In *A figure that a Poem Makes* he refers to a poem as a wildness, which begins in delight and inclines to the impulse.

<sup>8</sup> Allison (2001) argues that taste is part of a genius.

as arising unconsciously from the genius or as resulting from practice and academic training, independently of genius. Both options are problematic.

Consider first the option on which taste is a separate faculty, not an aspect of genius. This reading is supported by Kant's comparison of those who have genius but fail to see the need for academic training (i.e. development of taste) with those who "parade around on horse with the staggers" (§47, 5:310). In addition, in §48 and §50 quoted above, Kant treats taste as a faculty that is developed, rather than 'apportioned' to each, arguing explicitly in §50, 5:319 that, in case of conflict between genius and taste, i.e. imagination and understanding, a preference must be given to taste as "*conditio sine qua non*" which is "the primary thing to which one must look in the judging of art as beautiful".<sup>9</sup>

What is ambiguous under this interpretation? First of all, if art is beautiful only if it exhibits taste, why do those works which lack spirit (i.e. material provided by imagination) but are not prone to criticism with respect to their formal arrangement, not fall within the category of beautiful art? Second, on this interpretation, Kant's claim regarding taste in §48, 5:313 seems at odds with his initial distinction between beautiful art and other forms of human agency (science and mechanical arts) which proceed according to rules which can be taught and consciously and intentionally applied. Here is Kant, claiming that taste is "merely a faculty for judging, not a productive faculty; and what is in accordance with it is for that very reason not a work of beautiful art, although it can be a product belonging to a useful and mechanical art or even to science." It seems then that works which are in line with taste so that no criticism is appropriate with their formal features, are not beautiful. If taste is a capacity distinct from genius, Kant's distinction between beautiful and mechanical art breaks down.

The other option, on which taste is not a separate faculty, but another aspect of the talent that is genius, is less supported by textual evidence, but it is not to be neglected. It is grounded, first of all, in Kant's very definition of beautiful art as art of a genius. Beautiful art is neither one which is

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<sup>9</sup> Lara Ostarić argues that it is a puzzling aspect in Kant's theory that the conflict should arise. On her view, it is Kant's inconsistent use of the word genius that gives rise to it. See Ostarić 2012.

inspired (rich in material but lacking with respect to formal order) nor one which lacks spirit (formally appropriate but lacking with respect to the material), but only art in which formal order and spirit are united. For this to happen, taste and spirit have to work together, i.e. come united prior to the acts of creation, with the development of artistic vision.

In §48, 5:313 Kant claims that judging the beauty of nature requires only taste, but “the beauty of art (which must also be taken account of in the judging of such an object) requires genius.” While in one sense this implies that non-genius is not capable of evaluating (and potentially appreciating) a work of art, it also implies that one aspect of genius relates to the way his faculty of judgment operates: in such a way as to make it possible for genius to arrange aesthetic attributes in a way which gives rise to aesthetic ideas. In this sense too, taste and spirit come united in the act of artistic creation and part of what makes an artist great is his capacity to present aesthetic attributes in a proper formal order without damaging the spirit. The conflict between the two, between taste and spirit, or understanding and imagination, on my view, emerges only in cases when an artist has not yet properly developed his own “feeling of unity in the presentation” (§49 5:319); that is, his own standard of art.<sup>10</sup>

The ambiguity I pointed to makes it hard for us to decipher how much of the artistic creation is unconscious (i.e. how far does genius’ ignorance extend) and what precisely genius’ creative capacities are. When Kant claims that artist is ignorant with respect to the origins of his art, how far does this ignorance extend and does it include an inability to explain certain of his artistic choices? On some interpretations, his ignorance relates not only to the origin of his art (i.e. the workings of the imagination in the formation of artistic vision) but also to his formal choices. Lara Ostarić’s interpretation suggests this possibility, when she claims that “the form of the work of genius does not lend itself to systematization, and hence cannot be fully exhausted by the judgment of either its creator or its receiver” (76).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See §32 of a third Critique for an explanation of how an artist develops his genius over time and with accumulation of experience.

<sup>11</sup> Ostarić (2012). Her interpretation is based on the third *Critique*, as well as on Kant's essays (pre-Critical Reflexionen).

On this view, an artist, even after creating his work, remains ignorant regarding the process of creation. This strikes me at odds with our critical practices. Scholars, and artists themselves, often provide precisely those judgments that on Ostarić's view are not available to them. At the theoretical level, our highly sophisticated critical vocabulary reveals the richness of formal choices available to artists. In practice, artists and critics (and to various extents the audience) know and can explain why certain choices were made and how these choices affect artistic value of a work.<sup>12</sup>

On my view, the aspect of artistic creation over which genius remains ignorant and which cannot be systematized, is captured by what Peter Lamarque, in a separate discussion, refers to as the finegrainedness of poetry: roughly, the act of capturing specific development of poet's thoughts into a concrete linguistic expression.<sup>13</sup> A poet is ignorant with respect to this because his judgment on whether or not his work is proper and satisfying in artistic sense is based on a feeling, not on a concept. As Kant explains in §49, 5:319, the only standard for "putting things together in a presentation" in artistic creation, i.e. in *modus aestheticus*, (as opposed to the *modus logicus*), is "the feeling of unity in the presentation". The claim is that an artist, having observed exemplars and having practiced his skills against them, feels, rather than knows, which formal arrangement of the 'manifold of thoughts', i.e. aesthetic attributes, is the most acceptable.<sup>14</sup> Once the

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<sup>12</sup> Ostarić might be claiming that these kinds of critical statements do not "fully exhaust" all that could be said with respect to a certain form, and this is plausible – researches into the origins of our artistic practices are still inconclusive. But so are our explanations for most of the practices we have – after all, we still do not know what is it that enables humans to be conscious, self-reflective, to create art as well as to engage with the sciences.

<sup>13</sup> Lamarque 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Consider the case of Ezra Pound. With reference to his poems collected in *A Quinzaine for This Yule, Personae, Exultations, Canzoni*, a critic claims they were "either translations or imitations of other poets" through which he "perfected his craft and developed his fine ear for the rhythmic and tonal effects of poetry. Pound experimented in this early work in a wide range of poetic modes, including the dramatic monologue ("Cino"), the troubadour love song ("Na Audiart"), the poem of Ovidian metamorphosis ("The Tree") ... the Yeatsian symbolist lyric ("The White Stag"), the sestina ("Sestina: Altaforte") the ballad ("Ballad for the Goodly Fere"), the elegy (...), the Pre-Raphaelite portrait (...) and the verse parody. As a developing poet who had spent years training himself as a scholar of comparative literature, it was only natural that Pound's first instinct

choices are made, he can explain why they were necessary for the work to assume its final form, and how each of these choices contributes to the work's purposiveness. Frost again offers a telling illustration. With reference to his own acts of creation he claims:

I have never been good at revising. I always thought I made things worse by recasting and retouching. I never knew what was meant by a choice of words. It was one word or none. When I saw more than one possible way of saying a thing I knew I was fumbling and turned away from writing. If I ever fussed a poem into shape I hated and distrusted it afterward. The great and pleasant memories are of poems that were single strokes (one stroke to the poem) carried through. I won't say I haven't learned with the years something of the thinker's art. I'm surprised to find sometimes how I have just missed the word.<sup>15</sup>

However, the fact that (some, at least of) Frost's poetry came out 'in one stroke' which, if I understand his point, wouldn't work if it were forced, decided upon or even chosen by the poet himself, did not preclude him from making exhaustive judgments regarding these strokes. And his various letters, essays and public speeches testifies, Frost was very interested in the working of language and highly aware of its prosodic features, which enabled him to develop a capacity for critical judgments regarding his (and others poets') poems. He defined his own versification „as breaking rhythm across established mater”, explaining it thus:

It is as simple as this: there are very regular pre-established accent and measure of bank verse; and there are the very irregular accent and measure of speaking intonation. I am never more pleased than when I can get these into strained relation, I like to drag and break the intonation across the metre as waves first comb and then break stumbling on the shingle.<sup>16</sup>

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was to try out as many different styles as possible, imitating the work of great poets from the past before embarking on his own, more personal poetic project” (Beach, 2003, 24/5).

<sup>15</sup> Frost 1949.

<sup>16</sup> From Faggen 2008, 29.

## 2. The Artist and Artistic Tradition

Ambiguity of taste aside, artistic creation cannot begin unless the genius is awakened by his predecessors' work. Kant does not say much with respect to this – a phenomena I called interactive patterns of exemplarity – but he acknowledges the potential of an artist to give rise to a “a school” (§49, 5:318). To illustrate how this might happen, I will turn to Anna Christina Soy Ribeiro's account of poetry, which I take to be strikingly similar to my understanding of Kant.<sup>17</sup>

Inspired by Jerrold Levinson's intentional-historical definition, she argues that something is a work of art if it is, via the intentions of an agent, connected to preceding art, i.e. art tradition. A certain text is an instance of poetry (1) if a text is made with the intention that it belong to the category 'poem' and (2) that intention is guided by the history of poetic art. “To count as a poetic intention”, she argues, “an agent's intention must somehow relate to [poetic] tradition. A writer's work must be intentionally connected to preceding poems in order for it to be a poem as well” (48).

Provided we can agree there is such a thing as poetic tradition, the question is how to account for the relevant kind of (poetic) intention. Stated in this form, condition (1) relates to Kant's claim (§45) that “art always has a determinate intention of producing something” which, I argued, should be read in connection to his analysis (in §43) regarding the production through freedom, i.e. rational deliberation. His claim that in the production of art, “the cause that produced it conceived of an end” captures the idea of artistic creation as originating within the artist's mind, as a kind of artistic vision, where the poet himself doesn't (yet) know how the work will be, but he knows it is going to be a poem. This awareness guides him in his creation (though not in a manner in which it would fetter his mental powers), which is why the audience can “find the final product to agree punctiliously but not painstakingly with rules in accordance with which alone the product can become what it ought to be (§45, 5:307).

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<sup>17</sup> I rely on a manuscript by Soy Ribeiro entitled *Memorable Moments: A Philosophy of Poetry*.

The same point can be expressed thus: because a poet is aware of his own talent, he knows he is going to create poetry. The “subjective disposition” of his mind, i.e. his artistic vision, gives rise to his intention to create a poem. Such intention originates from his nature, as it is in light of that very nature that artistic vision develops in his mind and induces him to express it in the first place.

With respect to Ribeiro’s condition (2), let us assume that Kant’s notion of ‘school’ is equivalent to Ribeiro’s notion of history of poetic art (though below we’ll see that Kant’s account is oversimplified in that sense). Accumulation of all the works which are (in the relevant way) original and exemplary constitutes a ‘history of the poetic art’, which not only awakens poet’s genius, but serves as a model for him on how to exercise his power of judgment. Intentions relevant for Kant are those pertaining to the features of artworks, not to the way in which these artworks were evaluated by the audience (or were intended to be evaluated by the audience). Given that genius, on Kant’s view, is awakened by a work of another poet, i.e. by the rules couched in a predecessor’s work which, by the very fact that it is a work of art, is part of art history, condition (2) is consistent with the role of intention in Kantian sense.

Two inconveniences emerge for Kant at this point. Consider first the problem of ‘the first poet’. If an artist needs an exemplar for his talent to be awoken, whose work served as a model for the very first poet? How was his talent awoken?<sup>18</sup> The second problem concerns development of a new school. If genius is awoken by rules for creation embodied in predecessors’ work, how do various styles develop and new schools arise? How, in other words, to account for diversity of our poetic forms, given the extent to which they differ with respect to their formal properties? The answer to this will depend on how much force we give to ‘individual mannerism’ of a

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<sup>18</sup> Ribeiro faces the same problem; her solution is to first, claim that „first poems were created by means of the same features which became central to that tradition”, namely, repetition, and then to go on and explore empirical for the use of repetition. She argues that humans have natural propensity to repetition not only for the aesthetic pleasure thus produced, but more importantly, because of the cognitive benefits they had for memory. See *Memorable Moments*, and see Ribeiro 2015, 2016.

successor. For Kant's account to have sufficient explanatory power to account for the diversity of our poetic practices, we have to presuppose that patterns of exemplarity do not restrain one's individuality and originality. Once the genius is awoken, a successor is free to diverge from the exemplar, if his own mannerism instigates him to do so. In line with Kant's description of taste in §17, once that an artist develops taste, he becomes a sole authority on his own creative agency and can shift from the rules embodied in predecessor's work.

We can again turn to Ribeiro for an illustration of how such shifts might operate. She argues that the poet can participate in poetic tradition in three distinct ways: by following it, by transforming it and by rejecting it. To illustrate her account, let us consider development of sonnet as a lyrical form, taking into consideration variations in its formal properties and subject matter.

The sonnet, in its original Italian form, is a poem celebrating the beauty of one's loved one and the nobility of one's own love. Its 14 lines are divided into an octave and a sestet. The Petrarchan rhyme scheme is abbaabba for the octave and cdecde for the sestet, or alternatively cdcdcd. The octave in general introduces a certain theme (an expression of a world view, a feeling, or some kind of conflict) and the sestet offers a solution. The transition line, the first of the sestet, was known as the volta. The Petrarchan form reached England in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century in the writings of Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard. Later poets, most famously Shakespeare, adjusted the rhyme scheme so as to accommodate the less numerous rhymes of English. The "Shakespearean sonnet" consists of three quatrains and a couplet, with the volta on the first line of the couplet. Some English poets continued to use the Petrarchan form, including Milton, Wordsworth and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Despite the significant transformation of form, Shakespearean sonnets are still felt to be sonnets. The Shakespearean transformation of the Petrarchan effect is one element of the aesthetic experience involved.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Further transformations of the original form are visible in poems which include elements of both types of sonnets, such as Frost's *Mowing*. Many commentators credit Frost with an amazing talent for modifying established poetic forms and for introducing

Needless to say, there are poets who, ‘rejected’ the sonnet and opted instead for other forms, such as villanelles.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. The Artist and the Audience

Kant often refers to artistic creation as a process in which an artist communicates to his audience. In this part I analyse how exactly an artist initiates a communication with the audience via his work, and I explore what such communication might be like with respect to the audience’s engagement with the artwork.

Kant’s explicit interest in the aesthetics of art is exhausted by two claims most commonly associated with his theory: his advocacy of formalism and his claim that aesthetic judgment is not cognitive. Without denying these commonplaces, I will challenge traditional formalist interpretations of Kant by claiming that audience’s aesthetic engagement with work surpasses acknowledgment of and pleasure in works’ formal features and is inclusive of work’s potential for intellectual stimulation. While the artist doesn’t communicate true propositions to the audience (in the sense in which scientists do), he gives his audience incentive to intellectually engage with his vision, as expressed in his work. The aesthetic judgment is not cognitive, but the overall aesthetic experience triggered by a work is, as it is at least potentially imbued with cognitive rewards.

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novelties in poetry’s formal features. See Faggen 2008 ch. 3 for a critical analysis of formal aspects of Frost’s poetry. I am grateful to Matthew DeCoursey for a discussion of sonnet.

<sup>20</sup> I can’t go into details here, so this is just a suggestion, but it seems to me that patterns of exemplarity extend beyond formal aspects of works and include influence along the line of theme and subject, as well as narrative structure and points of view. Consider for example structural and thematic similarities between Frost’s poetry and that of Wordsworth, both of which were highly influenced by Milton. Frost’s *Wild Grapes* are modelled on Wordsworth’s poem *Michael*. Patterns of exemplarity are evident in the similarities between two poems: both poems are parables of nature’s beauty and its power, the main protagonist in both is an old person facing loss and death, there is a Biblical text underlying both poems and both are framed stories in which the narrator first addresses the reader, then tells the story, and ends by addressing the reader once again. A stimulating way in which to think of thematic patterns of exemplarity in Frost’s poetry is offered by Robert Pack, who traces patterns of influence in Frost’s poetry from Milton and Blake to G. M. Hopkins and extending to Dylan Thomas and Wallace Stevens.

Following traditional distinctions within contemporary aesthetics, I will refer to this aspect of art as its cognitive dimension. The insights we gain from elaborating on cognitivist elements of Kant's theory will throw further light on the mind of a genius.<sup>21</sup>

A cognitivist interpretation of Kant's theory of art is motivated by his account of aesthetic ideas and by his reasons for his hierarchical ordering of various arts. Describing the effect of aesthetic ideas, Kant claims that they "stimulate so much thinking that it can never be grasped in a determinate concept", thus giving "more to think about than can be grasped and made distinct in [the concept]" (§49, 5:315). Given that aesthetic ideas stand for rational, moral and experience oriented concepts, it is plausible that the 'thinking' that is stimulated relates to precisely these notions. Consequently, when Kant claims that such thinking "enlarges the concept itself" (§49, 5:315), this enlargement, I take it, relates to one's having a better, wider understanding of what is involved in a given rational, moral or experience-oriented concept.<sup>22</sup> To understand this kind of intellectual

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<sup>21</sup> For reasons of space I cannot dedicate more time and examples to explaining my take on aesthetic cognitivism, but if my reader shares my experience and acknowledges that poetry rewards us intellectually, it will suffice for my overall argument to get going. In other words, for my interpretation of Kant to be on the right track, one only needs to acknowledge that poetry is often intellectually stimulating, and at least sometimes, brings about a change in one's beliefs, one's worldview, one's understanding of experiences, emotions, etc. I am aware that many would object to my claim that these are *cognitive* benefits and would argue that, for various reasons, poetry cannot substantially or justifiably impact our cognitive economy. However, theories of others who argue in favour of cognitive value of poetry (literature and art) make it at least possible that this is an option worth taking seriously.

<sup>22</sup> For example, due to the manner in which Blake brings together images of 'giving love, food and softest clothing', a reader might develop an appreciation of deity's benevolence and concern for his creations in manner not acknowledged before. Perhaps deity's omnipotence dominates reader's idea of deity, causing her to fear it rather than to feel gratitude and take comfort in deity's benevolence. The concept of deity is enlarged in the experience of reading, in that a reader's concept is no longer one-dimensional, but appreciative of deity's various aspects. A reader might come to realize that deity is only to be feared if one denies his love and care for humans. Enlargement that Kant speaks of might again take place after the experience with Blake's poem *Tiger*, which is focused on the deity's potential to create evil. Blake's rhetorical twist in the penultimate stanza, 'Did he who made the lamb, made thee?' might open for one the possibility that deity is responsible for evil, in the same way in which it is responsible for the good. Such possibility in itself

stimulation, consider Kant's description of the relation between aesthetic ideas and aesthetic attributes. He claims that aesthetic attributes are "supplementary representations" of the imagination which do not

represent what lies in our concepts... but something else, which give the imagination cause to spread itself over a multitude of related representations, which let one think more than one can express in a concept determined by words; and they yield an aesthetic idea, which serves that idea of reason instead of logical presentation, although really only to animate the mind by opening up for it the prospect of an immeasurable field of related representations (§49,5 315).

Given the context of this paragraph in the third *Critique*, we have to assume that this description refers to the way in which genius produces aesthetic attributes, as new material that an artist expresses in his work. However, unless we presuppose that this same description is applicable to the perspective of the audience, we cannot explain how the audience manages to grasp work's representative and expressive features (that is, how its engagement with the work extends beyond acknowledgment of works' formal arrangement). There is however one relevant difference. Due to the creative potency of imagination, artistic vision of the artist consists in his manner of presenting a given aesthetic idea. The audience however, is given aesthetic attributes and only upon contemplating on them, does it recognize the relevant aesthetic ideas captured in a work. The choice and formal arrangement of attributes, as well as audience's background beliefs and assumptions, determine how the process will go and what kind of enlargement, if any, will take place. In this way, works of art incite the audience to decipher what the artist communicated via his work, i.e. to make an effort to understand his artistic vision. An artist, then, provides us with a possible way in which to think about the concept, rather than feeding us with true propositions about evil, inviting us to consider his take on it. It is

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brings about a change in reader's concept of deity. The more dimension reader takes in, the more enlarged her concept becomes.

only if we presuppose such cognitive potential of art that it makes sense for Kant to claim that poetry:

expands the mind by setting the imagination free and presenting, within the limits of a given concept and among the unbounded manifold of forms possibly agreeing with it, the one that connects its presentation with a fullness of thought to which no linguistic expression is fully adequate (§53, 5:326).

Poetry, in other words, does more for the audience than provide pleasure in the judgment of its formal aspects. It expands the mind not only in light of a free play of imagination and understanding, but in light of inviting reflection on the vision (i.e. aesthetic ideas) expressed. Kant's claim that "aesthetic ideas occasion much thinking, though without any determinate concept being adequate to it" implies that, while art does not offer true propositions regarding a specific concept, it does stimulate intellectual processes whereby one comes to reflect on that concept, guided by the artistic vision as expressed in the work. For this reason, beautiful art is, unlike agreeable, one in which "pleasure accompany reflection ... as kinds of cognition" (§44 5:305). The audience never reaches any final, conclusive understanding of what is contained within aesthetic ideas, because they are, by their nature, out of reach of empirical cognition.

Cognitivist interpretation of Kant throws light on another puzzling aspect of his theory: his refusal to accept works which lack spirit into the domain of beautiful art. We can now see that the fault with these works derives from their failure to 'animate the mind' i.e. expand it by presenting to it aesthetic attributes which should yield aesthetic idea. Given that these works lack spirit (as a property), they also lack spirit as the capacity to animate the mind, since spirit is the animating principle in the mind, i.e. faculty for the presentation of aesthetic ideas. For an art to be beautiful, it has to have cognitive impact on the audience, along the lines I described above. Beautiful art pleases in judgment (i.e. in light of its formal arrangement) and in inviting intellectual stimulation (due to the way the imagination creates new nature).

There are additional claims in the third *Critique* which add up to the conclusion that Kant's theory of art is inclusive of poetry's cognitive impact on the audience. When he states that the poet "announces merely an entertaining play with ideas, and yet as much results for the understanding as if he had merely had the intention of carrying on its business" (§51, 5:321) he explicitly links poetry with the 'business' of understanding: that of grasping our world and arranging for the experience we have. Unlike other arts, poetry "leave[s] behind something for reflection" (§53 5:328), which is Kant's primary reason for giving it the highest ranking in his hierarchy (§53). Of all forms of art, poets are the most effective in animating the mind via aesthetic ideas (§49 5:314) – an activity which is imbued with cognitive potential, as I showed above – which is why their creation "owes its origin almost entirely to genius, and will be guided least by precept or example" (§53, 5: 326). This shows that genius has one more capacity: that of initiating intellectual stimulation. It also implies that cognitive value of a work, primarily its potential to incite intellectual stimulation in the audience, matters greatly to Kant, as evident in his hierarchical ordering of the arts.

However, one cannot claim that poetry is cognitively valuable and ignore an old Platonic worry: poets have no knowledge of the things they write about, so why take their word for it? I will refer to this problem as the problem of the reliability of the artist and suggest that, if my reading of Kant is correct, he was aware of the problem, and solved it by incorporating epistemic reliability into the genius itself. Consequently, his creations by default circumvent Plato's worries.

#### **4. The Mind of a Genius**

The most pressing reason to worry about the epistemic reliability of an artist is the fact that, in artistic production, his imagination is free and not restrained in its productive force. Given that aesthetic attributes are not logically contained within the concept, there is always a possibility that an artist chooses attributes which somehow misrepresent the concept.

However, Kant avoids this possibility by arguing that imagination, although free in its creativity, nevertheless remains under the guidance of understanding, and at the service of its cognitive aims. In §49 5:314, he argues that when imagination transforms the given nature, it does so in alignment to the “principles which lie higher in reason and which are every bit as natural to us as those in accordance with which understanding apprehends empirical nature”. Even in its freedom then, imagination does not turn its back on understanding’s cognitive operation, and works in accordance with reason itself. With this in mind, we can understand why Kant argues that poetry “plays with the illusion which it produces at will, yet without being deceitful...” (§53 5:327).

Naturally, we might object that Kant postulates poetry’s cognitive reliability without proving it, and certainly many instances of poetry belie Kant’s claim. But as it stands in Kant’s theory, fine art is, to the extent that it is beautiful art, i.e. the art of genius, epistemically reliable and can reliably contribute to our cognitive endeavours. This is because in genius, spirit and taste come united by definition, which means that imagination is in alignment with understanding. Much to the spirit of romantic poets, Kant’s notion of genius does come equipped with epistemic supremacy.<sup>23</sup>

To conclude: what lies in the mind of a genius is a four-fold capacity: (i) to summon aesthetic attributes so as to give substance to otherwise ineffable aesthetic ideas, that is, rational and moral ideas and concepts derived from experience, (ii) to arrange these attributes in a formal order so as to create beautiful art and inspire aesthetic pleasure, (iii) to touch other artists by awakening their genius, so as to establish schools of style, (iv) to initiate reflection in the audience, so as to contribute to their cognitive engagements with the world.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See Ostarić, who claims that „on Kant's view, a genius's imagination is receptive to something more than her individual finite being and is so instrumental for conforming this transcendent content to the laws of human understanding” (Ostarić 2012, 80).

<sup>24</sup> I am very grateful to the audience of the 2017 ESA conference for their comments and suggestions.

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