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REFLECTIONS ON KANT'S VIEW OF THE IMAGINATION



REFLEXIONES SOBRE LA CONCEPCIÓN KANTIANA DE LA IMAGINACIÓN

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ABSTRACT

The paper elaborates the theory of imagination in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Judgment*. From the first *Critique* to the third *Critique*, the imagination emerges under different titles such as reproductive, productive or transcendental imagination. The paper shall try to decide whether its *functions* suggested in the first *Critique* and its performance in the third *Critique* are *contradictory* or *developmental* with respect to Kant's critical philosophy. Thus, it will examine of the power and the scope of the imagination in the first *Critique* and of its status and performance in the third *Critique*.

Keywords: I. Kant, aesthetic comprehension, imagination, inner sense, synthesis.

RESUMEN

El artículo discute la teoría de la imaginación en la *Crítica de la razón pura* y la *Crítica del juicio* de Immanuel Kant. Desde la primera *Crítica* y hasta la tercera, la imaginación recibe diferentes calificativos, tales como imaginación reproductiva, productiva o trascendental. El trabajo intenta determinar si las *funciones* de la imaginación sugeridas en la primera *Crítica* y su papel en la tercera *Crítica* son *contradictorias* o *si implican más bien un desarrollo* respecto de la filosofía crítica de Kant. Para ello, se examina el poder y el alcance de la imaginación en la primera *Crítica* y su estatus y papel en la tercera.

Palabras clave: I. Kant, comprensión estética, imaginación, sentido interno, síntesis.

Introduction

The notion of the imagination has led to a great deal of discussion in Kantian scholarship. Kant never dedicates a separate section to this controversial topic. In *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), a section entitled “The Deduction of the Pure Concepts of Understanding”¹ is generally accepted to contain much of his view on the imagination. However, in 1787, in the second edition of the *Critique*, Kant revises the section known as the A-edition. In the late, *i.e.* the B-edition, he omits almost the entire earlier section of “Deduction”. This alteration sparked numerous discussions about the role of the imagination in Kant’s cognitive understanding. Although there are considerably more studies on the imagination as it is in the context of the first *Critique*, the aim of this paper is not merely to participate in those discussions. Rather, this paper shall focus on the changes in Kant’s handling of the imagination between the first and the third *Critiques*. To this end, as well as the A and B-editions, the pre-conceptual or rather non-conceptual realm addressed by the third *Critique* shall be analysed by tracking the state of the imagination in the aesthetic judgment upon the sublime. This will enable us to recognize the central role and the radical potential of this faculty for both the cognitive and aesthetic realms of Kantian philosophy.

In what follows, first, the synthetic functions of the imagination in the first *Critique* shall be reviewed in order to explain the part it plays in cognition. After that, to give a brief account of its role in the third *Critique*, the experience of beauty and the arts will be briefly outlined. The last section of the paper will concentrate on the regressive performance of the imagination in relation to time in the judgment of the sublime. This kind of analysis will reveal the significance of the imagination in Kant’s philosophy.

Imagination in the *Critique of Pure Reason*²

In the first *Critique*, Kant defines three original sources for all possible experience, namely *sense*, *imagination* and *apperception*. They are called the capacities or the faculties of the soul and together they entail the conditions of all possible experience. Among these faculties, sense is responsible from receiving stimuli in the form of raw material, while apperception involves the consciousness of the received and processed intuitions in a subject. Imagination, regarding its function, stands between the two and has a central role in cognition. As we mentioned

1 Hereafter “Deduction”.

2 The references to this work will appear as the abbreviation CPR and the letter “A” for the A-edition, and “B”, for the B-edition preceded by Arabic numerals.

earlier, this role is taken up quite differently by Kant in the first, A-edition (1781) of “Deduction” from the B-edition. Now, let us visit these editions briefly in order to have an idea of the function of the imagination in the process of fabricating knowledge.

The A-edition of the “Deduction”

According to Kant, representations would mean nothing to each other in the absence of a synthesis. Hence, a synthesis is the essential operation appealing to the representations of both empirical and *a priori* origin. It is “the act of putting different representations together, and of grasping (*begreifen*) what is manifold in them in one [act of] knowledge” (CPR A 77; B 103). As it is, synthesis is the staple of cognition and a function of the faculty of the imagination. It compares and connects the representations that are given by the faculty of sense in the form of a synopsis. The synthesis is achieved in a threefold operation which entails, *The Synthesis of Apprehension in Intuition*, *The Synthesis of Reproduction in Imagination*, and *The Synthesis of Recognition in a Concept* (cf. CPR A 97).

According to Kant, each intuition received by sensibility contains a manifold or multiplicity, and this multiplicity cannot be represented as a manifold unless it is conceived as a sequence of impressions in time. *The Synthesis of Apprehension in Intuition* indicates the synthesis of a manifold of intuitions in a single representation. Since for Kant, if a “unity of intuition may arise out of this manifold (as is required in the representation of space) it must first be run through, and held together” (CPR A 99), the *Synthesis of Apprehension* presents a manifold as a manifold *in a single representation*. In this way, it serves as the first ordering of the manifold of intuitions. It does not entail any connection or necessity, so it can be said that in apprehension, empirical intuition is just placed together.

The synthesis of the intuitions in apprehension is an empirical act of the imagination. There is also a transcendental act of the imagination. *The Synthesis of Reproduction in Imagination* which is also called reproductive imagination is this transcendental act or power of the imagination. It is a requisite for knowledge because the “reproducibility of appearances” is an obligation for experience (cf. CPR A 101). As the second level, *The Synthesis of Reproduction in Imagination* is the ability of recalling past representations in memory. The various representations of an object are connected in a *synthetic unity* in such a way that the representation can be reproduced or made vivid again in memory. Otherwise no experience would be possible. Kant expresses the significance of reproduction in the example of drawing a line:

When I seek to draw a line in thought, or to think of the time from one noon to another, or even to represent to myself some particular number,

obviously the various manifold representations that are involved must be apprehended by me in thought one after the other. But if I were always to drop out of thought the preceding representations (the first parts of the line, the antecedent parts of the time period, or the units in the order represented), and did not reproduce them while advancing to those that follow, a complete representation would never be obtained: none of the above-mentioned thoughts, not even the purest and most elementary representations of space and time, could arise. (CPR A 102)

Clearly, the syntheses of apprehension and reproduction of the imagination are dependent on each other. Kant writes that the synthesis of apprehension supplies the transcendental ground of both pure *a priori* and empirical knowledge. Yet, the reproductive synthesis of the imagination can be counted among the transcendental acts of the mind, since the reproduction of the past intuitions has no root in the empirical realm. By this means, reproduction appears as an *a priori* act. Following these, Kant announces this act as the *transcendental power of imagination* (cf. CPR A 102).

The last mode of synthesis, *The Synthesis of Recognition in a Concept* implies the unity of synthesis that enables us to *think* concepts. Concepts are universal in their form and they are central to our knowledge of the world. As the most convenient means of our knowledge, the notion of concept necessitates the unity of the representations belonging to the same object under a general category. In this process, the faculty of the imagination appears as the primary faculty as it enables understanding to operate by subsuming the diverse representations of an object under the concept of that object. In this way, we can think of the object and have the knowledge of it. For instance, in counting numbers, we add a unit to another successively and without the unity of synthesis, we would not be able to proceed. The concept of the number is built upon the “consciousness of this unity of the synthesis” (CPR A 103).

The threefold synthesis gives the imagination its significant role in cognition. In this edition, Kant also treats the imagination as a distinct faculty of the mind.³ It works as a mediator between sensibility and understanding (CPR A 124). Hence, it is clear that in the A-edition of the Deduction, the imagination appears as central to both *a priori* and

3 Among Kant's commentators, Martin Heidegger, Rudolf Makkreel, Sarah Lee Gibbons and John Llewellyn take the A-edition as the original source on the imagination and support this claim. Yet, Paul Guyer, Henri Allison and Peter Frederick Strawson contend the opposite by leaning on the claim that by revising the A-edition, Kant corrects a mistake and accurately announces the imagination as merely a function of the faculty of the understanding.

empirical knowledge. Yet, as we shall see, in the later edition released in 1787, the role of the imagination is downplayed.

B-edition of the “Deduction”

In the B-edition of the “Deduction”, the imagination is first defined as the “faculty of representing in intuition an object that is *not itself present*” (CPR B 151). As to its relation to sensibility, Kant writes that “Now since all our intuition is sensible, the imagination, owing to the subjective condition under which alone it can give to the concepts of understanding a corresponding intuition, belongs to *sensibility*” (CPR B 151). Following Kant in the B-edition, Sarah Gibbons, accurately says that Kant “demotes” the imagination from being a “fundamental faculty of the human soul” to being a “mere function of the understanding” (cf. 37).⁴

Compared to the A-edition, the role of the imagination is much less emphasized in the B-edition. In the latter, it is given to the “service” of the understanding along with the tasks of reproduction and comparison. In this edition, its most important participation seems to pave the way for “the original synthetic unity of apperception”, that is, the consciousness of the “I think” which necessarily accompanies all representations. Because of this, Kant writes: “imagination is [...] a faculty which determines the sensibility *a priori*; and its synthesis of intuitions, conforming as it does to the *categories* must be the transcendental synthesis of *imagination*” (CPR B 151-152). The transcendental synthesis of imagination implies the act of understanding in which it determines the sensibility internally (cf. CPR B 153). Due to its transcendental character, it is the basis of all other possible applications of understanding concerning the objects of all possible experience.

The transcendental use of the imagination resides in its function in the act of schematizing. When it is responsible for producing a *schema* in order to subsume the intuitions (particulars) given by sensibility under a concept (universal), it is called *productive* imagination or “figurative synthesis” (cf. CPR B 151).

We learn about the productive side of the imagination when Kant looks for the answer of “How, [...] is the *subsumption* of intuitions under pure concepts, the *application* of a category to appearances, possible?” This application requires a third kind of representation that is both *intellectual* and *sensible*, and also *homogenous* both in category and appearance. Kant calls this kind of a representation the *transcendental*

4 As a proponent of the A-edition she writes: “Imagination, in its connection with understanding and reason, is a characteristically human capacity, and therefore a clarification of its functions and of reason’s dependence on it allows us to characterize a distinctively human kind of knowing” (Gibbons 2).

schema (cf. CPR A 138; B 177). The schema is a product of the imagination. It is universal and can never be represented in one single representation. Hence, an image is a product of the empirical faculty of reproductive imagination, whereas the schema of a concept is a product of *a priori* imagination (cf. CPR A 141; B 180). Following this, then, the schema of a concept is a means to subsume a particular representation under a specific concept of a thing. Kant writes, for instance:

The concept of a “dog” signifies a rule according to which my imagination can delineate the figure of a four-footed animal in a general manner, without limitation to any single determinate figure such as experience, or any possible image that I can represent *in concreto*, actually presents. (CPR A 141; B 180)

Kant mentions the act of schematization as “an art concealed in the depths of human soul” (cf. CPR A 141; B 180-181). The unknown portrait of schematism causes the view that Kant’s usage of schema is sometimes ambiguous. For instance, Donald Crawford rightly asserts that “on the one hand it is characterized as both a product of the imagination and the intuition, on the other hand it is said to be a rule or universal procedure of the imagination which exists only in thought” (2003 153). According to Jonathan Francis Bennett, Kant appeals to “schematism” because he hopes to account for causality and schematism enables the conditionality or “if-then-relatedness” (qtd. in Crawford 2003 153).

Roughly, in the first *Critique*, the imagination synthesizes the manifold of intuitions, reproduces images, schematizes. It is also responsible for the synthesis of *a priori* intuitions *i.e.*, space and time which are, in the end, the very conditions of all possible experience. Furthermore, the categories, which are situated high in the hierarchy of cognition, have to *employ* synthesized intuitions to perform a proper cognition and in this sense the function of imagination appears to be more elementary (cf. Schlutz 85). Despite all its significant functions, Kant seems to be indecisive about the imagination when he writes that it is “a blind but indispensable function of the soul⁵ without which we should have no knowledge whatsoever, but of which we are scarcely ever conscious (cf. CPR A 78; B 103). Therefore, it is not easy to sum up the role of the imagination in the first *Critique*. Due to this intricacy, Kantian scholarship does not seem to prefer one edition to the other. Both editions are referred to by scholars. Furthermore, an analysis of the role or the scope of the imagination in the third *Critique* is usually performed in comparison to

5 In his own working copy of the first edition, Kant changed the word “soul” for “understanding”. This fact also seems to support the claim of his undecidable attitude on the matter.

the first *Critique*. In order to evaluate its status in the realm of aesthetics, we will also take the same route and refer to the elementary functions of the imagination such as the threefold synthesis, reproductive imagination, and its a priori synthesis of time in the first *Critique*.

Imagination in the *Critique of Judgment*⁶

The third *Critique* presents the faculty of judgment. Hoping to reconcile the realms of theoretical and practical reason, Kant places this faculty between the faculties of cognition and desire. As a distinct faculty, judgment employs reflective thinking and works in accordance with its own principles in aesthetic reflection.

An important shift in Kant's treatment of the imagination is recognized in his account of reflective judgments or judgments of taste. In the third *Critique*, the imagination is treated once again, as a *faculty* of mind. Moreover, in the formation of aesthetic judgments it is detected to operate without appealing to concepts or the categories in an aesthetic encounter.

Among several judgments of taste, in the judgment of the beautiful, when the imagination performs a mere apprehension of the *form* an object and this form triggers a *free play* between the faculties of the imagination and the understanding, a feeling of pleasure arises. Due to this feeling of pleasure, the subject judges the object of aesthetic reflection as beautiful (cf. CJ VII). Hence, according to Kant, in discerning what is beautiful or not we do not appeal to the understanding or the representation of the object but to the faculty of the imagination. This indicates a considerable shift in the status of the imagination in the hierarchy of the faculties of the mind. As revealed in the encounter with beauty, the imagination reflects on the form of the object alone, without appealing the concepts of the understanding. Hence, it is not wrong to say that the imagination is in charge in aesthetic judgments. Furthermore, other than the judgments of the beautiful, the role of the imagination is central also in the judgment of the sublime and the arts.

In the "General Remark", Kant indicates that in the judgment of taste, the imagination is not reproductive but productive in its function. It acts freely "as originator of arbitrary forms of possible intuitions" (CJ §22). Moreover, in its *free lawfulness*, it accords with the understanding. Nonetheless, Kant warns us that this does not mean that the imagination is autonomous, for it is not self-determined and it cannot generate laws like the understanding. Thus, here *free lawfulness* is "conformity to a law without a law" and, it indicates the *subjective* conformity of the imagination to the understanding.

6 The references to this *Critique* will appear as the abbreviation CJ and the symbol "§" preceded by Arabic numerals and they are to the translation by James Creed Meredith.

The notion of the productive imagination becomes clear in the sections where Kant deals with arts and genius. Kant's views on art are focused on the creation rather than the evaluation of art work. An art work is created by an artist or genius who rules art. Art, nature and genius complement each other in Kant's definition of genius as follows: "genius is the innate mental aptitude (*ingenium*) through which nature gives rule to the art" (CJ §46). The talent of an artist is an "innate productive faculty of the artist". From this productive faculty of artist either a *tasteful* or a *soulless* work emerges.

In section §49, the power of creation by the imagination (in its productive fashion) turns up as a "powerful agent for creating, as it were, a second nature out of the material supplied to it by actual nature". The power to create "new" forms is indeed to remodel the registered content of experience for Kant. Nature's given perceptions can be reorganized in a new fashion by means of the employment of the productive imagination. By this means, we get a sense of our freedom from *the law of association* (which is attached to the empirical employment of the imagination). An unnatural form can be grasped in this way and since its parts belong to nature, the production Kant talks about is more like a collage. At this point, what needs attention is the freedom bestowed upon the productive imagination. Even if this freedom is not absolute, we can still talk about an extension in the function of the imagination. Basically, its performance of *free play* and its being the originator or the author of *arbitrary forms of possible intuitions* suggests that the imagination is more liberal in the third *Critique*.

As for the synthetic acts of the imagination presented in the first *Critique*, the possible use of the threefold syntheses in the third *Critique* has been a point of discussion. Makkreel states that since aesthetic apprehension is non-determinant and subjective, which implies its being non-conceptual and reflective, the synthesis cannot be applied in the aesthetic realm. He writes: "Kant's text supplies no direct evidence for equating the aesthetic apprehension of imagination with the syntheses of apprehension and reproduction, for there is no mention of synthesis in his account of aesthetic apprehension without a concept" (1990 50). For Paul Guyer, it is possible to apply the first two stages of the threefold synthesis and leave out the synthesis in recognition of a concept in the imagination's performance of unifying the manifold in non-conceptual fashion (cf. 85-86).⁷ This kind of thinking seems to preserve the claim

7 Hannah Ginsborg opposes this view reminding us that for Kant all synthesis is necessarily subjected to the categories. For Guyer's response and Ginsborg's counter response, see Ginsborg's "Lawfulness without a Law: Kant on the Free Play of Imagination and Understanding" (cf. 45-46).

for the cognitive import of aesthetic judgments for Makkreel and so, he warns us that it might culminate in placing the “aesthetic imagination in a pre-cognitive sphere, contributing, in effect, an unconsummated or inferior mode of knowledge” (Makkreel 1990 51).⁸

A well argued counterpoint to Makkreel’s approach can be found in Jean-François Lyotard’s interpretation of the sublime. By appealing to a footnote in the B-edition of the “Deduction”, Lyotard claims that the threefold synthesis is applicable and indeed presupposed by the “axiom of composition” in the sublime (cf. Lyotard 104). In the first *Critique*, composition (*Zusammensetzung*) is defined as “the synthesis of the *homogenous* in everything that can be *mathematically* treated” (CPR B 197-198). According to Lyotard, in the sublime in the axiom of composition, the comprehension of the magnitude corresponds to the first two stages of the threefold synthesis, namely, *Apprehension* and *Reproduction*. As for the last synthesis, *Recognition*, it “appears to correspond what the axiom calls the ‘consciousness of the unity’ already obtained by composition, because this consciousness of the unity is nothing other than the concept of magnitude” (Lyotard 105).

These interpretations of the role of the imagination suggest that from the first to the third *Critique*, Kant’s approach to the imagination differs in a considerable fashion. Moreover, the possible relation of aesthetic apprehension to cognition is not explained clearly by the philosopher. This relation becomes much more challenging in the new face of the imagination revealed in the sublime. In the judgment of the sublime, the aesthetic apprehension of the imagination seems to violate the fundamental principle of cognition. In the following section, the sublime experience will be visited in order to examine this claim closely.

Imagination in the Analytic of the Sublime

As we have seen earlier, the judgment of the beautiful results from the harmony (*Stimmung*) of the faculties of the presentation (imagination) and the pure concepts (understanding). Basically, the form of the object in question awakens the feeling of accord between the representation of the object and the very structure of the faculty of understanding. In Kant’s language, the form of the object represents nature and the harmony between the two faculties of the mind designates that a form of nature is in accord with the structure of the understanding.

8 Indeed, Makkreel’s argument is a response to Crawford’s claim (cf. 1974 90) which suggests that experience of the art object is not different from the ordinary experience in application of the reproducibility of apprehension and therefore, it is problematic for Kant to argue that aesthetic imagination is not reproductive. For Makkreel, in the aesthetic realm it is not experience but apprehension is what is at stake. For details see Makkreel (1990 50).

The judgment of the sublime, on the contrary, is the result of the pain and pleasure felt due to the failure of the imagination to aesthetically estimate the *size* or the *might* of a natural grandeur. In an aesthetic encounter in which the imagination is compelled to measure the *size* of a massive object of nature, the imagination fails if the object detected is *absolutely great*. This kind of sublime feeling is called the *mathematically* sublime and when it is the *might* of the object that is concerned, then, it is the *dynamically* sublime that is at stake.

In the sublime experience, a new occasion, which can never hold for theoretical reason, is introduced between the imagination and the highest faculty in the hierarchy of human mind namely, reason. Until the sublime encounter, the imagination appeared only in relation to the faculty of the understanding. Yet, in the aesthetic comprehension of the object in the sublime, the idea of *absolutely great* or *absolutely strong* requires the application of the Ideas. Therefore, reason, the faculty of the Ideas accompanies the imagination in the sublime. This designates a significant shift from theoretical reason and a new face for the imagination peculiar to aesthetic or subjective reflection. For the sake of the simplicity of the argument, we will proceed to explore the imagination in the mathematically sublime.

As the faculty of the representation, the imagination is compelled to transcend its own limit during its attempt to represent the size of the object. Achieving such an end requires that the imagination must progress *ad infinitum* (cf. CJ §25). In the mathematically sublime, Kant defines two operations for the imagination: apprehension (*Auffassung*) and comprehension (*Zusammenfassung*). In the face of an absolutely great object, the imagination can perform apprehension infinitely. Yet, comprehension has a limit confronting the limit of comprehension and at the same time being compelled to represent the idea of infinity, the imagination feels inadequate (cf. CJ §26). For Kant,

[...] the inner perception of the inadequacy of every standard of sense to serve for the rational estimation of magnitude is a coming into accord with reason's laws, and a displeasure that makes us alive to the feeling of the supersensible side of our being, according to which it is final, and consequently a pleasure, to find every standard of sensibility falling short of the ideas of reason. (CJ §27)

In its misery to represent what is required, reason allows the imagination to expand. Thus, by this extension of the imagination (*Erweiterung*), the comprehension of the sublime object is achieved. As for the operation of the imagination, Kant writes that apprehending space is an objective moment in the imagination and in this sense it indicates progression. However, "the comprehension of the successively apprehended parts

at one glance is a retrogression that removes the time-condition in the progression of the imagination, and renders *co-existence* (*Zugleihsein*) intuitable” (CJ §27). This is the subjective performance of the imagination that “does violence to inner sense” (*ibid.*).

To elaborate the repercussions of this “subjective movement” for the critical philosophy, it is necessary to consult the first *Critique*. As we already know, the imagination in its transcendental use (productive imagination) is responsible for the production of *a priori* intuitions of time and space that govern the whole possible experience. Time is “the form of inner sense, that is, of the intuition of ourselves and of our inner state” (CPR A 33; B 50). Under its authority, the imagination intuits in a *successive* or serial mode. For instance, in counting, I am aware that each time I add a unit successively and due to the *consciousness of the unity of synthesis* I know the number. In the third *Critique*, conversely, in the section that deals with aesthetic apprehension of an object a possibility for intuition of coexistence (*Zugleichsein*) is introduced.

In the first *Critique*, in the section where Kant deals with the “Third Analogy”, the notion of coexistence proposes that “things are coexistent when in empirical intuition the perceptions of them can follow upon one another reciprocally” (CPR A 211; B 257). Accordingly, coexistence purports that two manifolds of intuitions exist at one and the same time. However, it is not possible to *intuit* two appearances at one time as perceptions due to the basic fact that appearances are apprehended successively under the necessity of time. The imagination apprehends them in sequence and the understanding *comprehends* their relation as coexistence. Following this, it is easy to recognize that coexistence is a link that is not intuitable but comprehensible. Thus, the link of coexistence is of a higher degree and it has nothing to do with the imagination according to Kant’s theoretical reason.

In the third *Critique*, however, the imagination can suspend the progressive sequence of time and move *regressively* to enable the intuition of coexistence. Now, according to Kant, this is not a new function of the imagination. What we witness in aesthetic comprehension is a *subjective movement* of the imagination. The intuition of co-existence is a violation with respect to the inner sense which is conditioned by time sequence. Yet, Kant writes that the attempt of the imagination to apprehend a magnitude in one glance (*in einem Augenblick*) is a “mode of representation, which, subjectively considered, is contra-final, but, objectively, is requisite for the estimation of magnitude, and is consequently final” (CJ §27). Therefore, for the sake of intuiting an object of nature that evokes the sublime feeling in us the annihilation of inner sense is unavoidable in the subjective movement.

Kant's approach has been discussed from different angles. Here I will revisit a transcendental and a poststructuralist approach regarding the notion of the "violence to inner sense". This, I hope, will help us comprehend the position of the imagination with respect to the whole critical frame.

To begin with, Makkreel contends that the "violence to inner sense" would be a "violation of the critical framework" if the aesthetic comprehension suggested a "mode of intuition that transcends time" (1984 308). Similarly, Lyotard writes that if the imagination were able to satisfy reason, then it would mean to "there would no longer be an inner sense to organize representations in a time series. The subject would be deprived of the means of constituting its subjectivity" (144). Yet, it does not. Kant clearly states that all appearances are subject to time. Moreover, it is only time that can "determine them as existing in a twofold manner, either as in succession to one another or as coexisting" (CPR A 161; B 202). Makkreel himself does not favor this option and writes that the "violation of internal sense" is better interpreted as a "possibility of negating mathematical or linear form of time" (cf. 1984 308; 1990 73).

Makkreel supports his argument by suggesting a correction in the translation of the German word *Augenblick*. According to him, the word *Augenblick* which is translated as "comprehension in a glance" (both in Bernard and Meredith translations of *Critique of Judgment*) but it should rather be translated as "comprehension in an instant". Next, following Kant in the first *Critique*, where an instant is defined as a "mere position" that can limit time, which is a continuum (cf. CPR A 169; B 211), he claims that comprehension in an instant can only be a limit point for a time line. This limit point cannot be interpreted as transcendence or annihilation of time *as such* but rather as a *limitation* to it. In other words, comprehension in an instant enables the imagination to comprehend *aesthetically* in its regressive mode (cf. Makkreel 1984 308).

With this argument, Makkreel tries to rescue Kant from falling into metaphysical speculation and keep the query of the sublime in the transcendental frame. His transcendental reading addresses the regress of the imagination as a practice of this faculty in pause with respect to the linear kind of thinking. This remark is favorable for the transcendental frame because it can mean that the third *Critique* and so, the faculty of judgment, can play with the linearity of time. This line of thinking supports the unity of the faculties. Yet, the regress of the imagination is controversial and there is –at least– another view that can contribute to the discussion.

Lyotard interprets the regress of the imagination as "the double weakening of the principle of succession". One is "a weakening in the

strict sense due to the ‘regression’ of the imagination” and the other is “a weakening (in a loose sense) an extemporalization due to the ‘presence’ of the Idea of reason”. These two “feelings” correspond to the acts of the imagination and reason: the first is the imagination’s “fear of losing the minimal power that the thinking has of synthesizing givens (it is own included) by succession”; and the second is reason’s “exaltation of the recovering the maximal power that thinking has of beginning a series of givens without being bound to it”. Regarding these feelings of fear and exaltation, Lyotard writes that in the former case the fear of the imagination due to the risk of annihilating time threatens the faculty of knowledge whereas in the latter, the exaltation of reason indicates the founding of the faculty of desire (*cf.* 145).

Kant, however, has never considered the repercussions of the regression of the imagination with respect to the linear structure of time. For him, the imagination abandons its dependence on the empirical law in order to resolve its conflict with reason. This sacrifice (*aufopfert*) procures for the imagination an *extension* and a *might* through which the aesthetic comprehension is enabled. Hence, according to Kant:

[...] the inner perception of the inadequacy of every standard of sense to serve for the rational estimation of magnitude is a coming into accord with reason’s laws, and a displeasure that makes us alive to the feeling of the supersensible side of our being, according to which it is final, and consequently a pleasure, to find every standard of sensibility falling short of the ideas of reason. (CJ §27)

In Kant’s philosophy, supersensible means the intelligible or “what transcends experience”. Thus, the supersensible side of our being corresponds to the “transcendental conditions of the judging subject” (Makkreel 1990 81). The supersensible substrate referred to in the sublime is a “transcendental idea that allows us to assume the mutual purposiveness of nature and the subject in aesthetic judgments [...] –and in this sense the– sublime points to the possibility of an overall integration of our faculties of mind” (*id.* 83). According to this line of thought, the sublime is the disclosure of this supersensible substrate and also the unveiled relation between this substrate of humanity and aesthetic judgments. This transcendental unity between the faculties is best revealed by the aesthetic comprehension, since it signals a “unity between the finite and the infinite that characterizes the human subject in the feeling of the sublime” (*id.* 87).

In opposition to the transcendental approach, Lyotard interprets the displeasure that arises when confronting the finite limit of thought as “the extreme dissonance between the powers of thought.” This dissonance is at the same time a “consonance” or pleasure deduced from

the supersensible substrate for Kant (*cf.* Lyotard 147). Yet, according to him, “the object that occasions sublime is assuredly ‘a sign’, that is, the sign of supersensible sphere but it disarms the presentation and goes so far as to discredit the phenomenality of the phenomenon” (Lyotard 1994 237). Thus, the encounter of the imagination and reason indicates a *differend* in a sense they each know the idiom (Form, Idea) of the other as well as the limits of it. That is, the form is finite and the imagination cannot represent the absolute in a form. Furthermore, an Idea is infinite and cannot be represented positively in a form. There is no common judgment that can be applied to both parties. Following this remark we can recognize that for Lyotard, the conflict of the faculties does not culminate in a discovery of the unity of the system but on the contrary, it guarantees that in Kant’s aesthetics, we confront the incommensurability of the faculties of the mind.⁹

Conclusion

So far we have traced the employment of the imagination in Kant’s two *Critiques*. We have reported various uses of the imagination in the A and B-editions of “Deduction” providing the distinctions as Kant presents them. As a result, we indicated that Kant takes an unsettled position with respect to the imagination in the first *Critique*. In the third *Critique*, however, the imagination is assigned to some non-synthetic functions; it is appointed as the faculty of representations and related to both the understanding and reason without any mediation. In particular, imagination’s *accord* with the understanding in a *free play*; its ability to produce *new forms* in artistic practices; lastly and most importantly its *conflict* with reason carries out “unexpected cognitive implications” (Makkreel 1990 51). We have focused on the relation between the imagination and reason in the sublime as the one with most serious consequence. In the sublime, the *regressive* performance of the imagination with respect to time raised the question of whether the progressive sequence of time is annihilated or not. In order to examine this point as well as recalling some sections from the first *Critique* we have appealed to a transcendental and a poststructuralist standpoint.

9 Following Lyotard, Schlutz states that the performance and thus, the position of the imagination is “paradoxical and painfully conflicted” with respect to the Kantian transcendental philosophy. This is because: “at once the solution for the most vexing conceptual problems and a dreaded intrusion of lawless irrationality into the court of reason, the faculty opens up a conceptual abyss that the Kantian system, in spite of its rigorous unifying mechanisms, remains unable to close”. Hence, according to Schlutz, in its the non-synthetic functions the imagination is also “disruptive” and “dangerous” for the unity of the faculties (*cf.* 139).

If handled in a transcendental manner, as Makkreel suggests, the regress of the imagination provides “the possibility of a transcendental philosophy” by revealing the supersensible side in us (*cf.* 1990 86-87). Nevertheless, if a poststructuralist view is taken, then the imagination both supports and disturbs the unity of the subject in the third *Critique*. Lyotard contends that the judgment of taste *promises* a subject whereas the sublime *threatens* it. In the judgment of the beautiful, through the harmony of the faculties, the subject is promised, whereas in the sublime, the very conflict of reason and the imagination *threatens* the unity of faculties. This is because the inability and thus, the agony of the imagination reveal a *differend* which addresses the distinctness and the incommensurability of the faculties.

I think both approaches have their advantages. The transcendental approach has shown that the conflict caused by the regress of the imagination can be interpreted without falling into metaphysical speculation. Yet, the poststructuralist approach may prevent us from empowering the faculties of the mind for the sake of unity. The significance of these two approaches for this particular study lies in the fact that taken together they emphasize that in aesthetic comprehension, the Kantian employment of the imagination supplies a rich hermeneutical ground for evaluating the relation between the theoretical and aesthetic levels of experience. This leads us to the conclusion that if we are to investigate the theory of the imagination in Kant’s two *Critiques* or if we are to decide whether the alterations in the status and powers of the imagination are contradictory or developmental for the Kantian framework, we should be aware of the fact that whether it is a faculty or a mere function of the understanding, the imagination plays a central role in both cognition and aesthetics. Therefore, considering the changes regarding to the role of the imagination it may be more fruitful for Kantian philosophy to embrace different appearances of the imagination, since it seems that further research into the imagination can reveal undiscovered aesthetic or logical possibilities. Therefore, it is a prominent feature of Kant’s philosophy that should be taken as developmental rather than contradictory.

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