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THE AESTHETIC IDEA AND THE UNITY OF COGNITIVE FACULTIES IN KANT'S AESTHETICS

by

Maria Gourova

Under the direction of Dr. Melissa Merritt

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I will try to answer the question how the aesthetic idea in Kant's aesthetic theory accounts for the universal validity of the subjective judgment of taste, and what the nature of the aesthetic idea is that makes such account possible. This claim about universal validity of the subjective judgment of taste in Kant's philosophy is regarded to be problematic because of the seeming contradiction between the subjectivity of a judgment and its universality. What can solve this contradiction, from my point of view, is the role of the aesthetic idea that it plays in the judgment of taste and the subjective principle that puts cognitive powers of mind in a harmonious free relationship. The main feature that makes the aesthetic idea the source of the universal validity is its universal communicability expressed in the universally pleasurable feeling of the judgment of taste.

INDEX WORDS: Aesthetic idea, Judgment of taste, Subjective principle, Kant's Aetshetics

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Maria Gourova

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Introduction

When we try to identify the nature of beauty, we usually come to the question of whether we all appreciate beauty in the same way and whether the feeling of beauty is universal for each and every individual, or whether this aesthetic feeling is something contingent or dependent on particular circumstances such as personal experience or the environment in which one observes beauty. If we all are able to appreciate beauty in the same way, then our aesthetic judgment about a beautiful object must contain a certain universal component which, on one hand, allows all individuals to react to certain object of beauty in the same way and, on the other hand, allows artists to share their personal experience of beauty with their audience.

The question about the nature of the universal element in the aesthetic contemplation is not easy to answer. When we try to identify the universal element in our aesthetic feeling of beauty, we realize that all we can discover in our aesthetic experience is an observed object and our feeling of pleasure. If we focus on the observed object, and try to recognize the universal element of the feeling of beauty there, we realize that we are analyzing our own personal experience but not the experience of each and every individual. If we make an attempt to analyze our pleasurable feeling apart from the beautiful object, then we realize that our pleasurable aesthetic feeling cannot exist separately from the beautiful object. The only possibility for us to identify a universal element in the aesthetic judgment of a beautiful object is to study the nature of the unity between the beautiful object and the contemplating subject. In order to be universally applicable to all people, this unity must be such that the principles of it would be the same for all individuals.

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant claims that such universal principles exist. These principles arise from the universal capacity of our mind –specifically, the power of judgment. Kant studies in detail the nature of these principles in his third *Critique*. However, there is a question that seems to require further clarification in Kant's aesthetics. This question concerns the nature of the universal element that all the aesthetic judgments of the beautiful would contain. I will argue that this universal element is what Kant calls the "aesthetic idea," a notion that figures in Kant's discussion of genius and art. Interpreting the significance of the aesthetic idea shall be the focus of my analysis.

In order to answer the question whether the aesthetic idea is that universal element which allows all of us to experience the same feeling of beauty towards some object, I need to study the nature of the aesthetic idea and its basic principles and components. In the first part of this work, I will attempt to make it clear why the question of the nature of the aesthetic idea is so important for Kant's aesthetics. I will discuss Kant's claim about the universal validity of the subjective judgment of taste (the aesthetic judgment about a beautiful object), and will show that the introduction of the universal element in the judgment of taste is required. This element has to be such that it does not preclude the subjectivity of the judgment of taste. In the second part, I will discuss the grounds and the features of the aesthetic idea that make it possible for this notion to be the carrier of the universal communicability. In order to support Kant's theoretical reflection on beauty by an actual experience of beauty, I will introduce and study one of Claude Monet's paintings.

In the third part, I will discuss the role that the aesthetic idea plays in the judgment of taste in a more detailed way, not only introducing the basic theoretical grounds of the aesthetic idea, but also indentifying distinctive features and connections that, although not obvious at first

sight, are, nevertheless, crucial for the aesthetic idea and its function in the judgment of taste. Such important features are the features that distinguish the aesthetic idea as a separate element in the philosophical system of Kant's aesthetics. Analyzing these distinguishing features, I will compare the aesthetic idea to the ideas of reason and the concepts of understanding (section A of part III). In order to clarify the role of the carrier of the universal communicability of the aesthetic idea, I will talk about it in terms of the universal communicability of the works of art (section B). And finally, I will consider Kant's notion of the "free play of cognitive faculties" to explain why the aesthetic idea provides a free harmonious unity of imagination and understanding (section C).

I. Why the Clarification of the Aesthetic Idea is Crucial for Kant's Aesthetics

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant claims that there is a judgment which "merely from **one's own**[1] feeling of pleasure in an object, independent of its concept, judges this pleasure, as attached to the representation of the same **object in every other subject**, *a priori*, i.e., without having to wait for the assent of others (5: 288).[2] This is a challenging and astonishing claim**:** Kant says that the judgment of taste — i.e., a subject's appreciation of beauty — is marked or determined by a certain feeling of pleasure that is universally valid. For Kant,

[1] Here and elsewhere in this thesis, all the emphases in citations, except for two underlines that I will point to, belong to Kant.

[2] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Eric Matthews and Paul Guyer (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). References to Kant's works shall be given internally, by volume and page number of the Akademie edition (the standard edition of Kant's works in German) — with the exception of references to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which will be given, according to custom, by the pagination of the first ("A") and second ("B") editions.

the universality of *thought* is to be explained in terms of the "pure understanding" and the activity of theoretical judgment (5:287-8).[3] But in the *Critique of* Judgment, Kant accounts for the possibility of the unity of consciousness in aesthetic, non-theoretical, subjective judgments, in which the requirement of its validity for every thinking subject is not common understanding in the form of a universal concept, but rather "one's own feeling of pleasure."

Kant's claim about the judgment of taste is especially challenging because we always derive the feeling of pleasure from our experiencing the object, not from the mere understanding of it. So, while Kant bases the criterion of the apriority and universality of the judgment of taste on the feeling of pleasure, at the same time the feeling of pleasure would seem to be cognized a posteriori in experience. This is the difficulty, and Kant draws attention to it explicitly: "To establish *a priori* the connection of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure as an effect with some representation (sensation or concept) as its cause is absolutely impossible, for that would be a causal relation, which (among objects of experience) can only ever be cognized *a posteriori* and by means of experience itself" (5:221-2).

Kant calls such a priori universal subjective judgments, those that refer to the feeling of pleasure as the criterion of the validity, **judgments of taste.** Such judgments are those which we make when we judge something as beautiful. Any judgment, Kant writes, that "is supposed to prove the taste of the subject" requires that "the subject judge *for himself*, without having to grope about by means of experience among the judgments of others and first inform himself about their satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the same object" (5:282, my emphasis). Therefore,

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[3] These concepts are discussed in detail in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason.* However, I am making a reference to a passage in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* where Kant appeals to these concepts.

the judgment of taste — one's appreciation of beauty — can never be *imitative*, and we do not determine that something is beautiful based on the testimony of others. So, Kant concludes, "he should pronounce his judgment not as imitation, because a thing really does please universally, but *a priori*" (5: 282). In other words, the determination of beauty does not wait upon the testimony of others, and does not even depend upon a given community's finding something beautiful. It is possible that an object regarded as beautiful by one person might not be regarded in the same way by everybody else in some particular circumstances; nevertheless, everybody must be able to recognize the beauty of this object in principle. The a priori principles of the judgment of taste consist in this very universal capacity to recognize the beauty of an object.

Let us bring this back to the problem with which I began. If our appreciation of beauty depends upon a feeling of pleasure, why should we suppose that this appreciation should claim universal validity? After all, it would seem we are making this judgment on purely subjective grounds, since the judgment depends upon the feeling of pleasure as the criterion of this universal validity. When contemplating an object that we regard as beautiful — or, in Kantian terms, when we are making the judgment of taste — we do not have to appeal to other people's judgments about the beauty of the object. That we regard something as beautiful is purely a matter of our own relationship to the object: it is neither a matter of somebody else's opinion, nor of the consensus among people. Others' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with an object tells us nothing about our perception of its beauty. References to others' opinion can make us logically admit that the object is valuable for other people, but they can never make us experience pleasure from the contemplation of an object. The feeling of pleasure is always subjective and cannot be merely passed from one person to another. There has to be a certain means involved there that

allows such communication, and the clarification of the essence of this means is the core task of this thesis.

We might suppose that the means that allow us to make a universal claim about the beauty of an object is the understanding of the perfection of an object. There is a commonly accepted opinion that perfection of an object is the source of the aesthetic admiration. So, if it were possible to identify the elements of the perfection, we would be able to articulate what the nature of this perfection consists of, and hence, we would be able to communicate our pleasurable mental state from contemplating the beautiful object to others. In this case, the communicated judgment might be universally valid.[4]

However, Kant argues against this position. He claims that it is impossible to articulate beauty in the form of perfection. He describes perfection in the following way: "if the agreement of the manifold as a unity is to be called perfection, then it must be represented through a concept, or else it cannot carry the name of perfection" (20: 227). In other words, when we recognize perfection, we do so "under" a concept: something is a perfect specimen *of its kind*. All of the essential parts are there, in a harmonious and complete manifestation. "Perfection, as a mere completeness of the many, insofar as together it constitutes a one, is an ontological concept,

[4] It may be useful to clarify why I appeal to the universal communicability of the judgment of taste, but not simply to the universality of the judgment of taste. The universality of judgments consists in their being necessary and a priori. Kant writes, "Necessity and strict universality are thus sure criteria of a priori knowledge, and are inseparable from one another" (B 4). However, there is a difference in which logical judgments are universal, necessary and a priori, and in which judgments of taste are universal, necessary and a priori. Logical judgments can be understood by means of concepts, and to be communicated by means of concepts, while judgments of taste cannot be understood by means of concepts, and thus they cannot be communicated by means of them. Therefore, we are facing a problem here: how can the judgments of taste be communicated then if not by means of concepts? I think that they can be communicated by means of the aesthetic idea. This is why the question of the communicability of the judgments of taste is so crucial for the topic of my thesis.

which is the same as that of the totality (allness) of something composite […], and has not the least to do with the feeling of pleasure or displeasure" (20: 228). Here, Kant explains that we can grasp the notion of perfection by means of the understanding of the appropriateness of its elements: it is an ontological concept, a concept of understanding, that contains the totality of the composite elements. "[T]he causality of a **concept** with regard to its **object** is purposiveness" (5: 220). Thus, if we want to express our aesthetic feeling towards a beautiful object through its perfection, we have to express it through the appropriateness, or "purposiveness" in Kant's terms, of its elements. He also says here that these composite elements are unified by one concept that represents the perfection of the object, and by which perfection can only be expressed. But by appealing only to the concepts that we all share, we cannot evoke the purely subjective feeling of pleasure in other people. Kant writes, "the judgment of taste is an aesthetic judgment, i.e., one that rests on subjective grounds, and its determining ground cannot be a concept, and thus not a concept of a determinate end" (5: 228). Kant claims that a concept cannot determine the judgment of taste because, being objective, a concept cannot communicate the subjectivity of the judgment of taste. Then, we can see, the judgment of taste cannot be determined and articulated by a concept. In this case, the feeling of pleasure experienced in the judgment of taste must be based on grounds that are different from the concepts of understanding. "[T]he satisfaction in beauty, however, is one that presupposes no concept, but is immediately combined with the representation through which the object is given (not through which it is thought)" (5: 230). This connection of the representation of an object and the pleasurable feeling is not determined by a concept.

Grounding solely on the concepts of pure understanding, one might provide a successful mathematical proof of a theorem, and claim that this proof is elegant and beautiful. However,

there are significant differences between judging an object beautiful and a theorem elegant. The elegance of a successful proof of a scientific truth is usually based on its simplicity and clarity for our understanding. The beauty of an object may equally be very complicated (a beauty of nature, for example), and the impossibility to understand logically the sources of its beauty only strengthens our capacity to admire such an object.

According to Kant, we can say about the judgment of taste in which we judge some object as beautiful that "[t]he judgment of taste is not determinable by grounds of proof at all," that "the approval of others provides no valid proof for the judging of beauty," and that "an a priori proof in accordance with determinate rules can determine the judgment on beauty even less" (5: 284). However, there is a feature of the judgment of taste that makes us think that it is possible to attribute universal validity to this type of judgment, although the grounds of it may not be expressed in terms of logical understanding. This feature consists in the fact that having once recognized beauty in some object, we are ready to conclude that everyone ought and can recognize this beauty as well. Of course, we may take into consideration the fact that there are many views on the subject of beauty in general, but if we recognize beauty in some particular object, then it is always accompanied with the feeling that this beauty is not a contingent fact, but that it ought to be something universally valid. Otherwise, our admiration would not be the one of a beautiful object, but a mere logical comprehension of its relative values. At least for Kant, a judgment about beauty is not a contingent fact, but a universally valid judgment, although staying at the same time a subjective judgment.

Identifying what a beautiful object is, Kant writes,

> That object, the form of which (not the material aspect of its representation, as sensation) in mere reflection on it (without any intention of acquiring a concept from it) is judged as

> the ground of a pleasure in the representation of such an object – with its representation this pleasure is also judged to be necessarily combined, consequently not merely for the subject who apprehends this form but for everyone who judges at all. The object is then called beautiful; and the faculty for judging through such a pleasure (consequently also with universal validity) is called taste. (5: 190)

Kant talks about the most important elements that constitute the beauty of an object: beauty cannot be based on a mere pleasurable sensation, the one that pleases accidentally and not universally; beauty may not be based on the logical understanding in the form of an acquired concept; beauty of an object must be rooted in such a pleasure that is valid for everyone who contemplates this object. Kant calls the contemplation of beauty, identified by him here, "the judgment of taste".

Discussing beauty and the judgment of taste, Kant writes: "Its peculiarity, however, consists in this: that although it has merely subjective validity, it nevertheless makes a claim on **all** subjects of a kind that could only be made if it were an objective judgment resting on cognitive grounds and capable of being compelled by means of a proof" (5: 285)**.** This means that the judgment of taste possesses validity analogous to the objective validity of cognitive judgments. However, the difference consists in the fact that there can be found no concept of understanding that could explain the grounds of this validity in logical terms. Thus, such validity being universal, is, nevertheless, only subjective.

The reason for the subjectivity of the judgment of taste may lie in the fact that the feeling of beauty is always a personal feeling, the nature of which stems from the actual connection of the contemplator with the beautiful object. In this sense, the judgment of taste is subjective in its nature. When we are trying to attribute to a judgment of taste objective significance, this usually leads to the elimination of the subjectivity in the judgment. When we are looking at something objectively, that is, when we are abstracting from the subjectivity of our judgment, we have at

the same time to abstract and ignore the connection that exists exclusively between a particular judging subject and his object. What makes a judgment objective is the independence from any subjective point of view. Thus when we attempt to put a certain judgment of taste (some contemplation of a beautiful object) under an objective law of understanding, we actually violate the main principle of beauty: its subjectivity in the form of the connection of the contemplator and his beautiful object.

We can appreciate now the challenge that Kant advances: to reconcile the subjectivity of the judgment of taste with its assumed universality. "This is the basis of the problem with which we are now concerned: How are judgments of taste possible?" (5: 288).

Answering this question, Kant says that although there may not be cognitive grounds determining the apriority and universality of the judgment of taste, there might be non-theoretical grounds for it. "The judgment of taste does not itself postulate the accord of everyone (only a logically universal judgment can do that, since it can adduce grounds); it only ascribes this agreement to everyone, as a case of the rule with regard to which it expects confirmation not from concepts but only from the consent of others" (5: 216). And this consent of others may be achieved through some universal element in the judgment of taste**.** However, this universal element cannot, on Kant's model of the judgment of taste, be expressible in logical terms; it must, nevertheless, be communicable**.** Indeed, it must be universally communicable.

> Now here it can be seen that in the judgment of taste nothing is postulated except such a **universal voice** with regard to satisfaction without the mediation of concepts, hence the **possibility** of an aesthetic judgment that could at the same time be considered valid for everyone […] The universal voice is thus only an idea […] Whether someone who believes himself to be making a judgment of taste is in fact judging in accordance with this idea can be uncertain; but that he relates it to that idea, thus that it is supposed to be a judgment of taste, he announces through the expression of beauty. (5: 216)

> Now if the determining ground of the judgment on this universal communicability of the representation is to be conceived of merely subjectively, namely without a concept of the object, it can be nothing other than the state of mind that is encountered in the relation of the powers of representation to each other insofar as they relate a given representation to cognition in general. (5: 217, my underline)

Here, Kant talks about the possibility that the judgment of taste is universally communicable, which he refers to in terms of "a universal voice" that is yet "only an idea." We can see from the passage above that this universal voice – this "idea" – plays an important role in the judgment of taste, since it is that element of the judgment of taste which can be universally communicated: it is what allows the "possibility of an aesthetic judgment" to be "valid for everyone." At the same time, this "idea" is inexpressible through concepts of the understanding. This idea is that to which one relates when one is expressing, or communicating, beauty. As long as this communication is impossible through the concepts of understanding alone, there has to be a means that makes this communication possible. The main question of my thesis is the question about the possibility of this "universal voice" or "an idea" which is the universal communicability of the judgment of taste

Kant makes the following observation: "In all judgments by which we declare something to be beautiful, we allow no one to be of a different opinion, without, however, grounding our judgment on concepts, but only on our feeling, which we therefore make our ground not as a private feeling, but as a common one" (5: 239). So, making the universal claim that some object is beautiful, we are basing this claim not on the logical concepts, but on a certain feeling which we hold to be universal, or valid for each and every individual**:** this is the essence of the universal communicability of our judgment of taste. This universally accepted feeling is the

feeling of pleasure, which although being subjective, is at the same time a feeling that everyone is capable of experiencing with regard to a certain object.[5]

Having claimed that the universality of the judgment of taste is based on the feeling of pleasure, Kant faces "[t]he obligation to provide a deduction, i.e., the guarantee of the legitimacy, of a kind of judgment [which] arises only if the judgment makes a claim to necessity, which is the case even if it demands subjective universality, i.e., the assent of all, in spite of the fact that it is not a judgment of cognition, but only of the pleasure or displeasure in a given object" (5: 279). As we have seen, we can give the guarantee of the legitimacy of the universality of the judgment of taste only under the condition that we provide grounds for the universal communicability (i.e., the universal voice or idea, as Kant calls it) of the judgment of taste. Our feeling of beauty universally applicable to everyone can be given to us in our aesthetic experiences. The validity of such claim about beauty is the subject of our philosophical investigation. The key to the comprehension of the universal validity of such a claim lies in the comprehension of the source of the universal communicability.

Kant introduces the notion of the "aesthetic idea" in his discussion of beauty in *art* (as opposed to nature). Kant writes that there is an "animating principle in the mind" which "purposively sets the mental powers into motion, i.e., into a play that is self-maintaining and even strengthens the powers to that end," and that "this principle is nothing other than the faculty for the representation of aesthetic ideas" (5: 314). Kant writes, "by an aesthetic idea, however, I

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[5] In Kant's theory all experience we can have is a priori determined by the concepts that form the structure of human mind. He talks about it in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. That something in one's experience can be picked up, or determined, by a certain concept means that it can be a part of other people's experience too. The problem for the communication of the universally applicable pleasure in the judgment of taste consists in the fact that we cannot find some particular concept that would correspond to and determine the existing experience. The aesthetic idea, I think, is what provides such communicability in Kant's theory.

mean that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it, which consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible" (5: 314). Kant refers to the aesthetic ideas as "representations related to an object in accordance with a certain […] principle, insofar as they can nevertheless never become a cognition of that object" (5: 342). He also describes aesthetic idea as "an **intuition** (of the imagination) for which a concept can never be found adequate" (5: 342).

In the passage quoted above (5: 216), Kant claims that the "universal voice" – which is the source of the universal communicability of the judgment of taste – is "only an idea." In this essay, I will argue that the "idea" in question in that passage is what he elsewhere denominates the "aesthetic idea." Notice that Kant says that this "universal voice" is "only an idea" (5: 216); at the same time, Kant suggests that this idea — which is very likely to be the "aesthetic idea" — accounts for the universal communicability of the judgment of taste (5: 216). It has been already mentioned that the question about the possibility of the universal communicability of the judgment of taste will be the main focus of this piece of work. The only way we can give an account of the universal communicability expressed in the universal validity of the subjective judgment of taste is by appealing to certain a priori principles of the judgments of taste, a project which Kant accomplishes in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and which constitutes a very important part of it.

What provides evidence in favor of my claim that the aesthetic idea is really the source of the universal communicability is the fact that the notion of the aesthetic idea appears in the parts of the book where Kant discusses the questions of art and genius. Art is known to be a means for the communication of the aesthetic feeling of beauty without appeal to logical understanding.

Hence, if the aesthetic idea is the carrier of the universal communicability, then it is very likely that it is deeply connected with art and genius. This claim can be supported in a slightly different way; we can show that the judgment of taste is subjective in its nature and that the creative work of genius requires a deep subjective connection of the genius and his work of art. As it has been mentioned earlier in the discussion, the judgment of taste is subjective in its nature as a unity of the contemplator and its beautiful object of contemplation. So, the only way to communicate the judgment of taste without changing its essence is by preserving its subjective character, that is, by preserving the unity of the contemplator with its object. And this communication seems to be available uniquely to genius, the one who can communicate his feelings by means of an object, but at the same time without resorting to the help of logical concepts. So, the appearance of the notion of the aesthetic idea uniquely in the discussion of genius and art is not accidental.

I need to face the following objection here. One might say that what provides the feeling of beauty in the contemplation of a work of art is the beautiful object itself, and that there is no need in the universal communicability expressed in the aesthetic idea. I would reply to this objection the following. If the source of judging some object beautiful were not the universal communicability of pleasure, or the aesthetic idea, but the presence of a given object as such, then making their judgments of taste different observers would refer to absolutely different kinds of beauty. This supposition would be plausible if only it did not matter what exactly some artist wants to express through his work of art. But I think that most of us would agree that the genius of an artist consists in his capacity to make other people experience what he experiences himself.

There are several questions that need to be answered in order to clarify the role of the aesthetic idea in the judgment of taste. First of all, the grounds of the aesthetic idea in Kant's aesthetics are not clear enough, although its importance for the judgment of taste is obvious (Part

II). Second, it has to be explored more precisely what role the aesthetic idea plays in the judgment of taste (Part III). In terms of the discussion of this second question, there are some particular problems to study. It should be clarified what the difference is between the aesthetic idea, the idea of reason and the concepts of understanding (Section A). Also, it is not clear enough why the concept of the aesthetic idea[6] appears uniquely in the discussion of art and genius, and whether the reason for that is really the capacity to produce universal communicability without appeal to logical understanding (Section B). And finally, it has to be discussed why the aesthetic idea provides a harmonious free relation of the judging subject and a beautiful object (Section C).

II. The Grounds of the Aesthetic Idea

A. Discussion of an Example: Claude Monet's "Luncheon on the Grass"

In order to answer these questions, I will start with the analysis of a particular work of art. Kant says about the critique of taste that "It is **art** if it shows this [the judgment of taste] only in examples; it is **science** if it derives the possibility of such a judging from the nature of this faculty as a faculty of cognition in general. It is with the latter, as transcendental critique, that we are here alone concerned" (5: 286). And there is no wonder that in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant is concerned only with the "scientific" aspect of the judgment of taste. In order

[6] As long as Kant emphasizes that the aesthetic idea is different from a concept (5: 342-3), the expression "the concept of the aesthetic idea" might seem questionable. I think that the concept of the aesthetic idea can be called a conception that we form on the basis of Kant's discussion of the meaning of the aesthetic idea. I have to admit that we can never have a full understanding of what the aesthetic idea means to us, for we cannot have a logical concept fully corresponding to what it really is. In this sense, every new contribution to the understanding of the meaning of the aesthetic idea would make the system of concepts explaining it more adequate. However, the impossibility of the aesthetic idea to be adequately expressed through concepts does not mean that that we should not try to make this notion more clear. We equally cannot have a full understanding of what the judgment of taste means, or what the a priori principles of the judgment of taste mean, but, nevertheless, Kant studies these conceptions in detail.

to deal with the other aspect, as Kant says, we need to experience the judgment of taste, and not merely reflect philosophically on its conditions. This can be made only by means of an example of a beautiful object. I am going to explore an example of a particular work of art as a helpful device that may allow us to experience in reality what Kant is reflecting on in his theory. The analysis of a work of art that we judge to be beautiful is needed in the discussion of the aesthetic idea because the only possible way to test the reality of the universal communicability is the contemplation of beauty itself – for mere theoretical understanding, although it may provide good reasons for thinking that universal judgments of taste exist, cannot make us feel that this universal communicability is real.

I will discuss a particular work of art that will allow me to apply Kant's theory of beauty to an actual aesthetic experience. I have chosen Claude Monet's painting *Luncheon on the Grass,* 1866. **(Figure 1.)** This painting seems to me extremely interesting for a philosophical analysis for many reasons. First of all this painting is a combination of a landscape, portraits, and even a kind of still life. This combination of different types of beautiful objects depicted on the painting will, I think, make my analysis of the aesthetic idea more fruitful. Another thing that makes this painting attractive is the fact that it is an impressionist work, and the absence of rigid forms opens a possibility of the analysis of the connections between existing vague shapes and colors and enough clear images that these shapes and colors generate. It would be interesting to trace a connection between vague shapes of an impressionist's work, from one side, and the way these vague shapes can be universally interpreted by our sight in some particular way, from another side.

The first amazing thing in art, to my mind, is a possibility to see a certain kind of reality that was at first absent from view, a possibility that an artist favors us with. Looking at the

touches of various colors in different parts of the painting, we believe that we actually see a group of people that spend their time in a glade in the forest. We not only recognize their figures, gestures, dresses, but also their emotions. We can identify almost with certainty that some character feels curiosity, another relaxation, and somebody else indifference. The characters in the painting, the nature, glares of light, dishes and food, together constitute a unity.

If we look at the left top corner of the painting and disregard everything else, we will see yellow, green and blue touches. We would never recognize among these touches the crown of a tree if we were not able *to introduce* something into the painting we contemplate – something apart from yellow, green and blue colors. What we introduce is the concept of the crown of a tree.

Another curious observation: the spots on the dress of a young woman depicted on the painting would seem to us formless dark touches, if we did not have in our mind an idea that identical round spots on a material may have different shapes depending on how they are placed against an observer. By judging these spots to be almost identical (while they are not depicted in this way), we are adding something (in our vision and thinking), that makes the differences between depicted spots understandable; that is, we recognize that this is the same material and the same dress, and that the spots are different because there is difference in the way the light falls on the dress, because some elements of the dress are closer or further to the observer and to the light. So, we can conclude that there is a certain principle in the work of art that allows us to recognize differences (different shades and forms, in this case) as belonging to one concept, and that this principle allows us to recognize the reality created by the artist. The differences may consist in the variety of ways the colors are put on the canvas; a concept to which this variety of colors is referred can be anything to which we attribute this combination of colors: a circle, a

leaf, the feeling of curiosity, a man, a dog, a movement of leaves, the feeling of warmth or cold, or the sunlight.

At the same time, we can recognize differences where they actually do not exist. One and the same shade of white color on the painting is perceived by us in a different way if we recognize that this white color belongs to different objects. A hand in the white glove is holding a white plate. We **feel** that the hand in the glove is warmer than the plate, at least every one **could feel that.** One more example of the creative power of our imagination:we recognize the stripes on the dress of another woman there where they actually do not exist, for what we actually see is not a stripe, but a shapeless combination of shades.

When we look at the crown of the tree in the left top corner of the painting, we not only distinguish leaves, but we also feel the movement of the branches and the glares of the sun. It is amazing that we can recognize movement where it is not actually present. (It would be absurd to suppose that the touches themselves change their position.) We can see space, distance, depth, and feel the air of the summer forest. And also, we can recognize the emotions the characters have on the painting. We can see two women talking, a man standing close to them and paying attention to their talk with curiosity.

When we are looking at the man lying in relaxation in the shade of the tree, and the man sitting half-turned and lending an ear to the women's talk, we experience the same feelings that we suppose to recognize in the characters on the painting themselves (these two men, in this case). We can see that one of the women adjusts a little blue cap only because we have a state of mind corresponding to this gesture. But for this state of mind (along with many other states of mind), we would not be able to recognize in the existing combination of colors a young woman

adjusting her cap. It is interesting that these states of mind are not only the feelings in which we recognize the movements and positions of our own body. We possess the states of mind that allow us to recognize the movement of the leaves as well. Yet in order to appreciate the whole idea of what is taking place on the painting, the role of each object placed there, we need something that would allow us to experience every state of mind that these objects arouse in us coherently with any other state of mind. This harmonious combination of feelings that the painting arouses in us is required for our harmonious aesthetic contemplation of the whole painting.

We can suppose that the artist tries to depict those states of mind that he has before he starts to draw the painting. It is very important to have a state of mind that would embrace the whole painting; otherwise, we would not recognize the painting in its unity. We would not be able to feel a durable pleasure from the constant switching back and forth, of our states of mind that goes on when we are contemplating the painting. We might want to suppose that there is an a priori principle that allows all the states of mind that we ever experience to coexist in a harmonious unity. At least it would be nonsense to suppose that in order to introduce the elements of the pieces of art in their harmonious unity, an artist works out this harmonious feeling of pleasure from the whole painting on the basis of the pleasure perceived from each element separately. The unity is more than an adding up of separate elements.

All the states of mind that the painting evokes in us constitute a coherent whole; for when we are contemplating the painting, we feel that that the pleasurable succession of the states of mind follows the logic of the whole painting, that there is some universal idea that holds these states of mind together as belonging to one beautiful object.

Exploring Claude Monet's painting, we noticed that it is possible to interpret the same type of intuitions (white touches) by different concepts. This interpretation is not contingent; we notice that there is a certain logic in the manner we understand some work of art. At least, one individual tends to see a certain state of mind in the beautiful object. The feelings that the elements on the painting evoke in us tend to circle around certain states of mind. Some characters on the painting, for example, tend to evoke the feeling of relaxation and calmness, while others the feeling of concentrated attention. The same can be claimed about the painting itself. The feelings that it arouses in me can be expressed in joyful, calm and positive emotions. I would scarcely be able to name the state of mind that I have while contemplating this painting as one of sadness or grief. And I dare suppose that most of those who will look at this painting would claim the same.

In order to test the possibility of the universal communicability[7], I made the following experiment. By interviewing several people while they viewed Claude Monet's painting, I tried to discern certain tendencies in our appreciation of this work of art. It is interesting to notice that in discussion of this painting with each of five other people, we all agreed upon several aspects of our experience. First, we all identify the same objects on the painting, and these objects evoke similar if not the same states of mind in us. The main story told by this painting appears to be the same for any contemplator. Even the general feeling that the painting evokes in different people is the same: the feeling of joy and relaxation. No one of the observers claimed that the feeling

[7] I will discuss further that the contribution of an artist into his work of art consists in the recognition of already existing beauty, not in the creation of it. The unity of the elements that exists in the imagination of genius is not something that never existed, but rather is something that is reproduced. The a priori principle, conceptual structure of the mind as such and the aesthetic idea that constitute the beautiful unity of a masterpiece are given to an artist. So, the universal communicability that may exist between the appreciators is the same as the communicability that may exist between an appreciator *and* an artist.

that the author tries to convey by his work is the feeling of grief or disappointment, for example. Another curious moment: all of those who looked at the painting (including myself) did not at first recognize one element on the painting – a dark figure of a man hiding behind the tree in the right corner of the painting. And at the same time, all of us tend to focus on the parts of the painting that seem to be illuminated by the sun. Thus our similarity of experience extends not only to what we perceived, but also to what we did not perceive, at least at first glance.

B. Theoretical Grounds of the Aesthetic Idea

As we have seen, there are at least two basic elements of our aesthetic contemplation (or the judgment of taste) that we have distinguished: the given material that we observe (various colors on the canvas), and the states of mind that we refer to the given material of the beautiful object. This observation entirely corresponds to the basic elements that participate in the judgment of taste and that are governed accordingly by two cognitive faculties. According to Kant, there are two cognitive faculties that participate in the aesthetic contemplation of the beautiful (the judgment of taste): understanding and imagination. The understanding is a "faculty of concepts" (5: 287); concepts, Kant claims, "pertain merely to the possibility of an object" (5: 401). In the context of the third *Critique*, Kant refers to sensibility as "imagination"; sensible representations are called "intuitions." Intuitions, Kant explains, "merely give us something, without thereby allowing us to cognize it as an object" (5: 401). In our example of the Monet painting, intuitions are the units of perception we notice in the painting. Concepts are the states of mind in virtue of which these images are conceived by our thought; in my analysis

of the painting, the expression "the states of mind" would then corresponds to the term "concept."[8]

Perhaps the reason why Kant refers to the "imagination" — rather than "sensibility" — as the faculty of intuitions in the context of the *Critique of Judgment* has to do with the fact that appreciation of beauty is not the appreciation of a fixed and bare particular, but rather is marked by a certain flow of intuitions in our consciousness. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant defines imagination in the following way: "it is imagination that connects the manifold of sensible intuition; and imagination is dependent for the unity of its intellectual synthesis upon the understanding, and for the manifoldness of its apprehension upon sensibility" (B 164). In other words, intuitions are the material that is "connected" by the faculty of imagination; here Kant suggests that imagination submits this manifold to certain concepts of understanding. So, to bring this back to the example under consideration, the singularities given in intuition are the variety of colors and shapes on the canvas; this complexity is appreciated under the guidance of certain concepts (e.g., a circle, a shade of light, a concept of relaxation, a concept of movement). By means of the states of mind, or concepts, we relate to the observed variety of colors found on the surface of the painting. So, it is obvious here that the manifold of intuitions given to us and combined through our intuitions must be comprehended in a certain form; otherwise, we would not be able to distinguish and understand what some particular combination of intuitions means,

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[8] I refer to the concepts as to the states of mind and as the rules that form our experience. Hannah Ginsborg, a specialist in Kant, regards grasping a concept as "having a capacity to produce a discriminative response to a kind of thing" (handout for "Concepts as Rules: A Kantian Proposal", lecture by Professor Ginsborg at Georgia State University, 25 April 2008). This way of looking at concepts is consistent, I think, both with their being "the possibility of an object" (5: 401) and their being states of mind as conditions or attitudes for grasping experience that constitute the coherent structure of our thought. I prefer the expression "states of mind," because it is easier to speak about the structure of mind consisting of the states, rather than of the possibilities or attitudes.

or signifies. The understanding plays the role of the interpreter of the manifold provided by imagination. Hence Kant claims: "Understanding is, to use general terms, the faculty of knowledge. This knowledge consists in the determinate relation of given representations to an object; and an object is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is united" (B 137). The understanding formulates and makes clear to our consciousness what place each combination of the intuitions occupies in our consciousness. So, for example, when we recognize, or perceive, the woman's striped dress, or the movement of a tree, in the painting, this recognition clearly depends upon concepts. I realize that this suggestion may seem to stand at odds with Kant's claim that the judgment of taste does not involve concepts as its determining ground (5: 190). However, Kant's claim does not entail that our appreciation of the beautiful involves no concepts *at all*; indeed, he stresses that our appreciation involves the *faculty* of concepts (the understanding) and the faculty of intuitions (imagination) in some kind of harmony (5:287).[9] Therefore, it is possible that concepts may be in play in our appreciation of beauty — for Kant's claim simply says that the *determining ground* of the judgment, or that in virtue of which the presence of beauty is declared, does not itself rest on the application of a concept. We can see how concepts are involved when we consider seemingly identical intuitions are interpreted by us differently. For example, the same shades of brown color placed in different parts of the painting can be interpreted by us as a fur of a dog, or at the same time as the ground. The same can be said about the way we perceive white color: a hand in a glove is very likely to

[9] There can appear a doubt here, whether these two faculties are really distinct faculties or they are two way of talking about one and the same faculty of mind. For Kant, these are definitely distinctive. I think that this distinction is so important because in Kant's theory, our thought in the form of the concepts of understanding is not identical with given existence in the form of intuitions. Thus, a limited human mind in no way can produce given existence.

be perceived as a warm object as opposed to the plates, while both of these objects are depicted by means of the same shades of white color.[10]

Now, I would like to talk about the meaning of the fact that one state of mind (or a concept) can refer to various intuitions. As we have claimed, there is a certain appropriate correspondence that exists between concepts and intuitions when we are observing a painting. This correspondence arises naturally; the painting involves us in a harmonious contemplation; we are not forced to enter this harmonious feeling, and we are not looking for appropriate forms in which we must understand given objects The only thing we need to do is to grasp the unity that exists between the painting and our feelings about it. So, there is a certain leading drive that allows us to relate absolutely freely certain intuitions to certain concepts, and it should be emphasized that contemplating a work of art, we can never fully understand what exactly this harmonious relationship consists of. We can find plenty of explanations for the mystery of the pleasurable feeling that the painting evokes in us, but we are never able to name this principle of unity in the terms of the concepts of understanding.

So it seems that we suppose that there is a principle behind the harmonious relationship of the elements of the beautiful object; that is, there is a principle behind our delight in the object. The principle has to exist, for the leading drive that moves our thought in the appreciation of beauty is not a drive that unsystematically evokes various emotions in us. Such emotions can never form themselves in an everlasting and universal pleasure. If there were no principle behind our feeling of beauty, we would never have reasons to attribute universal significance to the

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[10] My gratitude to Professor Merritt for help with this passage concerning the role of concepts in the appreciation of beauty.

pleasure we experience from contemplating a beautiful object. We have to presuppose this principle if we want to give accounts to our claim about the universal validity of the judgment of taste. However, it is a principle that cannot be articulated or spelled out: that we cannot spell it out follows from Kant's claim that the judgment of taste does not have a concept as its "determining ground".

In order to realize the nature of this supposed principle, we need, first, to identify the leading role of this principle in the organization of the elements this principle has to govern. The basic elements of the judgment of taste are intuitions and concepts; the two faculties that are required by Kant for the occurrence of the judgment of taste (imagination and understanding) have also been identified, and no one would reject the existence of such aesthetic feeling as the feeling of pleasure. Finally, with the example of a beautiful object, we have seen how the two mentioned faculties operate together, although no logical rule can be found for their relationship.

The next question is what makes us refer some particular concepts to certain particular combination of intuitions, and what governs the relationship of these cognitive faculties in the aesthetic contemplation. This relationship is especially interesting in the case of aesthetic contemplation, for, as it has been said, there cannot be found any definite rule, law, or theory that would determine this relationship of imagination and understanding in the judgment of taste. This relationship must be such that it not merely guarantees the understanding of the material introduced to our consciousness; it must be such that it would endow us with an aesthetic feeling expressed in the durable feeling of pleasure. But what underlies such a unity of imagination and understanding — one that involves us in a durable feeling of pleasure to which we attribute universal validity? Kant refers to these underlying grounds in the very idea of the "universal voice." The judgment of taste consists in a certain relation of the understanding and imagination.

Now, if we find universal grounds or the essence of the harmonious relation of the understanding and imagination, then we should be able to identify what aspect of the judgment of taste is always present in any judgment of taste, independently of who makes it, what beautiful object is contemplated, or what conditions exist for this contemplation. And we always find a certain harmonious relation of understanding and imagination; that harmonious relation is what makes the judgment of taste universally communicable.

So, the "universal voice," as universal communicability, is that which is solely postulated in the judgment of taste. At the same time, we came to the conclusion that this "universal voice" may turn out to be the aesthetic idea, a notion consistently accompanying the discussion of art and genius whenever it appears in Kant's third *Critique*. If we answer the question about what the principle of the harmonious unity of the imagination and understanding is, we will answer the question about what is the ground of the aesthetic idea as universal communicability.

Kant himself points out that there is a principle of unity of the imagination and understanding which cannot be articulated logically. About the harmonious agreement of the faculties of imagination and understanding in the judgment of taste, Kant remarks:

> since the freedom of the imagination consists precisely in the fact that it schematizes without a concept, the judgment of taste must rest on a mere sensation of the reciprocally animating imagination in its **freedom** and the understanding with its **lawfulness**, thus on a feeling that allows the object to be judged in accordance with the purposiveness of the representation (by means of which an object is given) for the promotion of the faculty of cognition in its free play; and taste, as a subjective power of judgment, <u>contains a principle of subsumption</u>, not of intuitions under **concepts**, but of the **faculty** of intuitions or presentations (i.e., of the imagination) under the **faculty** of concepts (i.e., the understanding), insofar as the former **in its freedom** is in harmony with the latter **in its lawfulness.** (5:287, my underline)

In this passage Kant explains how it is possible that intuitions produced by the imagination, and concepts belonging to the understanding, can exist in their free relation to each other without any

logical concept (or theoretical understanding) of this process. The feeling of freedom and harmony arises because the faculties governing intuitions and concepts (faculties of imagination and understanding) are in agreement with each other a priori in some peculiar way, which we cannot determine by a concept. This harmony is expressed in the principle of subsumption of the faculty of imagination under the faculty of understanding. It should be clarified that the principle of subsumption of the faculty of intuitions (imagination) under the faculty of concepts (understanding) is not the subsumption of some particular intuitions under some particular concepts. Subsuming intuitions under some particular concepts, we actually determine intuitions by these concepts. The impossibility of such situation in the judgment of taste has already been mentioned in the discussion above. The explanation of such impossibility will be given later.

The principle of subsumption consists in the coherent harmonious unity of *all* intuitions given in a beautiful object and *all* the concepts that these intuitions evoke. As long as the principle of subsumption underlies any aesthetic feeling, and is the core of *any* harmonious relation of the imagination and understanding, this principle is what provides the universal communicability of beauty. I think we can say that the principle of subsumption is both necessary and sufficient for the harmonious relationship of imagination and understanding. The principle of subsumption is the essence of the harmonious relation of the faculties a priori. In real life, this principle turns out to be realized as a unity of a subject and its beautiful object. The only way for an individual to be governed by the principle of subsumption is to become a subject with her conceptual structure of mind, and not a simple experiencing subject, but a subject that is experiencing a beautiful object. Only in this case can the principle of subsumption have an effect on the individual. Thus, the unity of the subject and its beautiful object in their distinction is required for the implementation of the principle of subsumption in actual experience. The

condition for the existence of such unity is such a perception of an object by a subject that produces a coherent harmonious relation of imagination and understanding. Not any kind of object can be regarded as a part of this coherent harmonious relation, but only the one that is regarded as a source of the universal pleasure, such pleasure that is not limited by one's individual mind (if it is limited, then this pleasure would not be the effect of the universal principle of subsumption); such pleasure must be applicable to any type of mind and any conceptual structure (in this case, this pleasure would be the effect of the unity of the cognitive faculties in principle).

In the parts of the books where Kant discusses art and genius, Kant talks about "**Spirit**, in an aesthetic significance, [that] means the animating principle in the mind" (5: 313). According to Kant, "this principle is nothing other than the faculty for the presentation of **aesthetic ideas**" (5: 314). I think that this animating principle is the principle of subsumption of the faculty of imagination under the faculty of understanding.

I think that now we have good reasons to claim that the aesthetic idea is the expression of the principle of subsumption in the sphere of experience, and is one and the same thing that Kant refers to as the "idea" of the "universal voice," 5: 216) and "universal communicability" of the judgment of taste (5: 219). Therefore, I will argue, we have a right to claim that the aesthetic idea is the realization of the principle of subsumption in the experienced objects. To consider this, let us return again to the example of Monet's painting. The aesthetic idea of it would be what all individuals looking at it are able to recognize in it as universally pleasurable and, thus, universally communicable in principle. However, even if we can recognize such universal communicability in the form of the feeling of universal pleasure, we still cannot articulate what this universal communicability consists in. The only possible way to enter this universal

communicability is by entering the aesthetic feeling from this painting. And this pleasurable feeling becomes possible because of the harmonious relation of the imagination and understanding governed by the principle of subsumption.

I will now try to give an account of the essence of this harmonious relation of the faculties of imagination and understanding, which comprises ~~a~~esthetic contemplation, or the judgment of taste. Kant describes the way these two faculties come into agreement with each other providing in us an aesthetic feeling in the form of a durable feeling of pleasure:

> [B]y means of senses, a given object brings the imagination into activity for the synthesis of the manifold, while the imagination brings the understanding into activity for the unity of this synthesis in concepts. But this disposition of the cognitive powers has a different proportion depending on the difference of the objects that are given. Nevertheless, there must be one in which this inner relationship is optimal for the animation of both powers of the mind (the one through the other) with respect to cognition (of given objects) in general; and this disposition cannot be determined except through the feeling (not by concepts). […] this disposition itself must be capable of being universally communicated […] (5: 238-9).

The above passage is the quintessence of the discussion of the model of the judgment of taste. Kant talks here about one **unique** type of relation between the faculty of imagination and the faculty of understanding that solely provides universal communicability of the judgment of taste. Kant says that this relation must be expressed only through feeling, emphasizing by these words the impossibility of the judgments of taste to be logically articulated. Our task now is to explore the a priori grounds that may help us to find a key to the explanation of the harmonious relationship of the understanding and imagination.

The faculty that provides the connection between the empirical sphere, from one side, and lawfulness and universality, from another side, is the power of judgment. "[I]t is only the lawfulness in the empirical use of the power of judgment in general (unity of the imagination with the understanding) in the subject with which the representation of the object in reflection,

whose *a priori* conditions are universally valid, agrees" (5: 190). Here Kant talks about the unity of two faculties of mind governed by the a priori principles of the power of judgment.

As has been said in the long quoted passage above, the essence of the harmonious relationship of the imagination and understanding "cannot be determined except through the feeling (not by concepts)" (5: 238-9); that is, it is determined through the feeling of pleasure. However, the feeling of pleasure cannot itself be a universal principle for the reason of the subjectivity of pleasure; although it can be universally applicable to any person, it can never become a rule**.** This means that every individual who appreciates the beauty of the Monet painting enjoys a harmonious state of mind governed by one and the same aesthetic idea. At the same time, however, the aesthetic idea is not a rule for picking out beauty-making properties this is to say that an aesthetic idea is not a *concept*, it is not a rule that one has ready to hand for determining particulars. Therefore, the reading of the painting can be different for different people; and yet there is a certain unity or coherence to the experience that is shared by all who appreciate the painting as beautiful.[11]

Continuing the discussion of the source of the harmony of the imagination and understanding in the judgment of taste, Kant writes that "its determining ground must **lie not merely in the feeling** of pleasure and displeasure in itself alone, but **at the same time in a rule** of the higher faculty of cognition" (20: 225). Thus, the mere feeling of pleasure cannot be the essence of the harmonious relationship of the imagination and understanding and cannot be the universal communicability of the judgment of taste – for it must be some subjective but still universal principle. The judgment of taste "must thus have a subjective principle, which

[11] Thanks to Professor Merritt for help clarifying this passage.

determines what pleases or displeases only through feeling and not through concepts, but yet with universal validity" (5: 238).

Trying to identify the principle of the universality of the judgment of taste we are looking for the universality which it is not given to us. What is given are particulars, intuitions and concepts, for the harmony of which there must be found a universal ground.

I mean to suggest here that the harmonious unity of imagination and understanding is possible only if there is no conflict of thought in the judgment of taste. As long as the principle of subsumption provides the entire coherence of the imagination and understanding, there has to be such a unity of intuitions and concepts in the beautiful object in which intuitions are not read ambiguously by our consciousness. If there is a struggle of thought, in which the mind is suggesting various alternative interpretations in the form of concepts for the same combination of representations, then the harmony of faculties is impossible. The indicator of the absence of such struggle and the existence of the harmony among the faculties is the durable pleasure and the feeling that this pleasure can be experience universally, by everyone.

In connection with this problem, it is important to talk about one necessary requirement that Kant advances for all the judgments of taste: the judgment of taste must be disinterested, and when making the judgment of taste a contemplator may not aim at some particular purpose, let it be a practical end of satisfaction or an intellectual interest to give logical explanation to the observed beauty. "[T[he judgment of taste, by which something is declared to be beautiful, must have no interest for its determining ground" (5: 296). The combination with interest "can only be indirect, i.e., taste must first of all be represented as combined with something else in order to be able to connect with the satisfaction of mere reflection on an object a further pleasure in its

existence" (5: 296). This means that there can be neither empirical nor intellectual interest in the determining grounds of the judgment of taste (5: 296-9). If we are trying to put the whole judgment under some particular concept or a rule, then the nature of the subjective judgment of taste will be modified, and it will no longer be governed by the principle of subsumption freely animating the play of cognitive faculties. "If one judges objects merely in accordance with concepts, then all representation of beauty is lost. Thus there can also be no rule in accordance with which someone could be compelled to acknowledge something as beautiful" (5: 215-6). Thus, the harmonious unity of imagination and understanding can be provided only if an individual does not try to pursue certain interests and ends making the judgment of taste.

Another feature of the judgment of taste apart from its disinterestedness, is its singularity. Kant insists that "In regard to logical quantity all judgments of taste are **singular** judgments. For since I must immediately hold the object up to my feeling of pleasure and displeasure, and yet not through concepts, it cannot have the quantity of an objectively generally valid judgment" (5: 215). In saying this, Kant means that the judgment of taste refers to a *particular* object, and not a general class of objects as such (i.e., the beautiful ones). The feeling of pleasure, on which the universality of the judgment of taste is grounded, must refer to some particular object given to the contemplator, but not to a group of objects in general that are not given to him, but are merely thought. If one makes a judgment that "all tulips are beautiful […] that is not a judgment of taste, but a logical judgment, which makes the relation of an object to taste into a predicate of things of a certain sort in general" (5: 285). So, even though the judgment of taste makes a claim to universal validity, this is not universality that is appreciated through the rule of a concept. It is, rather, a subjective universality that is appreciated through the pleasure of a harmonious

relationship of our cognitive faculties: the universality is "subjective" — it is one that all judging subjects, with our cognitive makeup, would share.[12]

Contemplating a beautiful object, we refer to some particular combination of intuitions in the form of an object given to us. For any judgment of taste, it is necessary to contemplate an object in experience; and in experience, we can be given only particular objects, but not classes of objects or concepts. If we aesthetically contemplate a multiplicity of objects, then we refer to each object directly, but we cannot not refer to all the objects of some class of objects, like we can do making a logical judgment, such as "all tulips are beautiful," or "roses in general are beautiful." Kant writes, "by means of a judgment of taste I declare the rose that I am gazing at to be beautiful. By contrast, the judgment that arises from the comparison of many singular ones, that roses in general are beautiful, is no longer pronounced merely as an aesthetic judgment, but as an aesthetically grounded logical judgment" (5: 215). Kant concludes, "Hence, all judgments of taste are also singular judgments, since they combine their predicate of satisfaction not with a concept but with a given empirical representation" (5: 289).

However, it is still not clear enough from Kant's analysis what exactly it means for a judgment of taste to be singular. We may interpret this claim in slightly different ways.

Let us take an example of the judgment of taste saying "This painting by Claude Monet is beautiful." The question is what the singularity of this judgment consists of. If we claim that any time we are making this judgment, the character of the judgment is always the same, we will notice that this is not true. Every time we look at the painting, we pay attention to different parts of it, we can experience feelings of different character, and the associations that our imagination

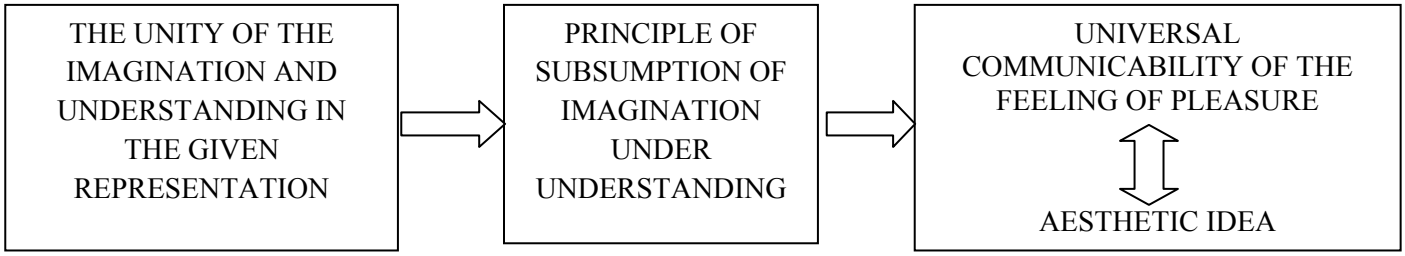
[12] I owe this passage to the help of Professor Dwyer and Professor Merritt

evokes may be very different. However, Kant is very insistent in his claim that the judgment of taste is singular as long as we have a "singular representation of the object" (5: 215). So, the singularity of the judgment consists in the singularity of the representation, even though this representation can be given to us in many possible ways and under various angles. At the same time, a concept itself cannot be a unifying basis for the unity of the imagination and understanding in the judgment of taste; we cannot say that the concept of a tulip or a concept of a picnic is what allows us to call them beautiful. The predicate "beautiful" is different from other predicates that can be known for us and that can be articulated by means of a concept. Making a judgment "this tulip is red," we fully understand what exactly we are claiming, and there is no problem in the articulation of the predicate "red" and in communicating it to other people. When we are claiming that "This abstract painting is beautiful," we are facing a problem of communicability, for there is no concept that would allow us to communicate the feeling of beauty. Beauty must be felt in experience, and the means for the communication of beauty must be essentially different from logical understanding. By the judgment "this object is beautiful" we mean something essentially different from mere attributing to an object a certain known quality. I am claiming in my thesis that the principle of subsumption is what provides the harmonious unity of faculties of imagination and understanding in the representation of an object, and that it is the aesthetic idea which becomes the expression of this principle in experience and is the essence of the universal communicability of the judgment of taste.

The structure of the judgment of taste in general form looks in the following way:

THIS OBJECT	IS	BEAUTIFUL

If we suppose that the principle of subsumption unifies the faculties in such a way that the pleasure from their unity becomes universally communicable then the structure of the judgment of taste may be represented in this way (correspondingly to the previous table):



We can recognize the correspondence between two tables above. The block named "this object" corresponds to "the unity of the imagination and understanding in the given representation." The copula "is" corresponds to the role that the "principle of subsumption of imagination under understanding" plays in the judgment of taste. The block named "beautiful" corresponds to "the universal communicability of the feeling of pleasure" which is the "aesthetic idea."

The unity of the imagination and understanding is what the given beautiful object is for us. A beautiful object given to us in the representation manifests in the form of intuitions combined with the corresponding concepts. At the same time the combination of intuitions and concepts in the judgment of taste manifests as a coherent unity of the imagination and understanding. Hence, we can say about a beautiful object that it is given to us as a unity of imagination and understanding (the left block of the table). The unity is expressed in the pleasurable feeling of beauty. And this universally pleasurable feeling is the universal communicability of the aesthetic idea in the judgment of taste (the right block of the table). Only

this feature of the beautiful object can be universally pleasurable, for it is the only element of the object that is pleasurable for everyone who judges the object as beautiful. At the same time, what the aesthetic idea of a beautiful object really means is the coherent unity of the imagination and understanding given in the representation of a particular object. Therefore, we can say that the left block of the table representing the unity of the imagination and understanding and the right block manifesting the aesthetic idea are one and the same thing. What makes these elements co-extensive is the fact that the unity of the imagination and understanding is not a contingent one, but the one that manifests harmony and agreement of the faculties. Such harmony is provided by the a priori subjective principle of subsumption of the imagination under the understanding (the central block of the table). So that we attribute the predicate "beautiful" to an object and that we call the unity of the imagination and understanding "the aesthetic idea" we owe to the realization of the principle of subsumption of the imagination under the understanding.

All the above discussion concerned the grounds for the existence of the aesthetic idea. Now I would like to turn to the discussion of the notion of the aesthetic idea as such.

III. The Role the Aesthetic Idea Plays in the Judgment of Taste

A. Aesthetic Idea as Opposed to the Ideas of Reason and Concepts of Understanding

The notion of an "idea" is present in Kant's philosophical discussion since his first *Critique* where he talks about "ideas of reason": "I understand by idea a necessary concept of reason to which no corresponding object can be given in sense-experience" (A327/B384). Revealing the nature of the aesthetic idea, we are facing the following question now: whether we can refer the aesthetic idea to the ideas of reason discussed by Kant in his first *Critique*, or whether we should distinguish aesthetic ideas as a different type of idea?

Kant distinguishes the aesthetic idea from the idea of reason. Ideas of reason, or pure concepts of reason, "determine according to principles how understanding is to be employed in dealing with experience in its totality" (A321/B387). This definition is not appropriate for the aesthetic ideas, because they deal not with the experience in its totality, but on the contrary deal with partial experience that is given to us in the form of particular objects. Thus, the role of the aesthetic idea must be different.

Kant writes about ideas in general, explaining both the conception of the aesthetic idea, and the idea of reason:

> Ideas in the most general meaning are representations related to an object in accordance with a certain (subjective or objective) principle, insofar as they can nevertheless never become a cognition of that object. They are either related to an intuition in accordance with a merely subjective principle of the correspondence of the faculties of cognition with each other (of imagination and of understanding), and in this case they are called **aesthetic**; or they are related to a concept in accordance with an objective principle, yet can never yield a cognition of the object, and are called ideas of reason, in which case the concept is a **transcendent** concept, which is distinct from the concept of the understanding, to which an adequately corresponding experience can always be ascribed (5: 342)

We can see from this passage that the similarity of two types of ideas consists in the fact that they both cannot be the direct source of the cognition of an object. The differences consist first of all in the fact that the aesthetic idea is "an **inexponible** representation of the imagination[13]" while the idea of reason is "an **indemonstrable** concept of reason" (5: 342). While the aesthetic idea is an intuition for which there can be given no determining concept, the idea of reason is, on the contrary, a concept for which there cannot be given any appropriate representation, or intuition, in experience.

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[13] The most possible reading of this expression seems to be " a representation of the imagination that cannot be articulated."

Another feature that makes these ideas different consists in the difference of the principles in accordance with which ideas relate to intuitions and concepts. The relation of the idea of reason to a concept is based on objective principles. The relation of the aesthetic idea to an intuition is based on a subjective principle. And we have already come to the conclusion that this subjective principle is the principle of subsumption of the imagination under the understanding.

The third difference is based on the different character in which two types of ideas cannot become a cognition.

> An **aesthetic idea** cannot become a cognition, because it is an **intuition** (of the imagination) for which a concept can never be found adequate. An **idea of reason** can never become a cognition, because it contains **concept** (of the supersensible) for which no suitable intuition can ever be given. Now I believe that one could call the aesthetic idea an **inexponible** representation of the imagination, the idea of reason, however, an **indemonstrable** concept of reason. Of both it is presupposed that they are not entirely groundless, but rather (in accordance with the above explanation of an idea in general) are generated in accordance with certain principles of the cognitive faculty to which they belong (the former according to subjective principles, the letter to objective ones) (5: 342).

Both, intuitions and concepts, cannot become a cognition, but this impossibility has different causes. The aesthetic idea cannot be cognized because it cannot be articulated in the form of a cognitive concept. The idea of reason cannot be cognized because no object in experience in the form of intuitions can correspond to such idea.

Another aspect that has to be clarified is the difference between the aesthetic idea and the concepts of understanding. Kant insists that the universal communicability of the judgment of taste cannot become a concept of understanding, thus the concepts of understanding must be essentially different from the aesthetic ideas. Unlike ideas, concepts of understanding *can* become our cognition, because they can be manifested in experience be means of intuitions;

whatever concept we take, certain intuitions will always manifest it in experience. Kant says that "**Concepts of understanding** must, as such, always be demonstrable (if by demonstrating, as in anatomy, it is merely **presenting** that is understood); i.e., the object that corresponds to them must always be able to be given in intuition (pure or empirical): for thereby alone can they become cognition" (5: 342).

Ideas, although they cannot become our cognition like concepts, still can participate in it. The aesthetic idea that, according to Kant, "can be called an inexponible representation of the imagination (in its free play)" (5: 343) has its own "subjective principles for its use" (5: 344). At the same time, there is a sphere of human activity that requires purely subjective principle**s** for its implementation. This sphere is art, a domain that requires the creativity of genius expressed in the beautiful, "which is supposed to make claim to please everyone" (5: 344). Kant says, "in products of genius nature (that of the subject), not a deliberate end, gives the rule to art (the production of the beautiful)" (5: 344). Here, Kant emphasizes that the product of art is not a matter of contingency. By creating beautiful works of art, genius discovers the lawfulness in seemingly contingent facts of experience, and this lawfulness is expressed in the aesthetic idea that genius conveys to the contemplators of his masterpiece.

B. Aesthetic Idea and Genius

Now I would like to talk more about the role of genius in the judgment of taste. Kant writes, "beautiful art, as such, must not be considered as a product of the understanding and of science, but of genius, and thus acquires its rule through aesthetic ideas" (5: 351). "[O]ne can also explain genius in terms of the faculty of aesthetic ideas" (5: 351). It is clear that Kant is certain about the necessary connection between the role that genius plays in art and the aesthetic idea. We notice that not every object meets a pleasurable response in the form of the judgment of

taste. It is easier for us to recognize beauty in the works of art rather than in common objects that surround us in our everyday life. This fact can be explained by the following claim. The author of the work of art already completes a part of our – i.e., the contemplator's – "work" in the incorporation of the intuitions into the concepts. The author introduces the elements of the work of art in such a way that we easily recognize the appropriate proportions of imagination and understanding.

It must be useful to discuss the features of art and genius that make us think that the essence of the aesthetic idea (the main attribute of genius as we have seen from the above quotations) is its universal communicability. A painting or a sculpture as mere combination of materials (canvas, colors, marble, bronze, etc.) as such do not possess the images we are able to recognize in them. The task of genius is to recognize connections other than those that are given in the actual perception of the object. So, it turns out that there are two domains that genius deals with: existing reality that is introduced by the materials and imaginary reality that genius recognizes and manifests in the work of art.

> The aesthetic idea (archetype, prototype) is […] grounded in the imagination; the shape, however, which constitutes its expression (ectype, afterimage) is given either in its corporeal extension (as the object itself exists) or in accordance with the way in which the latter is depicted in the eye (in accordance with its appearance on a plane); or else, whatever the former is, either the relation to a real end or just the appearance of one is made into a condition for reflection (5: 322).

In this passage, Kant says that the forms in which the aesthetic idea is represented to a contemplator can be expressed in various materials depending on the medium in which the artist works. The way in which a certain object is depicted in the work of art in the imaginary reality can correspond to the way it is given in existing reality, but it may not correspond to it. For example, the form of a sculpture of a person can fully correspond to the existing forms of a

human body. At the same time, the material the sculpture is made of is different from what the body of a person consists of. The same can be said about the paintings. We already had a chance to contemplate this creative power that the work of art can animate in us and make us observe non-existing things. The question is whether these non-existing things are the product of the contemplator or of the author of the work.

There are plenty of ways the artist can manifest the same state of mind in the works of art, and there are plenty of states of mind that can be conveyed by seemingly similar artistic means. This leads us to the thought about the variety of the aesthetic ideas. At the same time, in the discussion of the judgment of taste, Kant often talks about the aesthetic idea as if it were the same unique component for all the judgments of taste. The question that arises is whether there is really a variety of the aesthetic ideas.

In his work, Kant equally appeals to the "aesthetic idea" as to the "aesthetic ideas" (5: 314). If we distinguish the main elements of the judgment of taste, we can discover, first, the principle of unity of understanding and imagination, second, intuitions given with the object, third, the concepts that understanding provides in response to the given intuitions, and finally the aesthetic idea, that which is recognized in the work of art as universally pleasurable communicability. The principle of subsumption is unique. But its expression, which is the aesthetic idea, can modify in accordance with the material that underlies it in the form of existing intuitions and produced concepts. This difference in the conceptual and intuitive basis may be the cause that makes us separate different aesthetic ideas and, correspondingly, different judgments of taste. However, there is only one universal communicability as such, and various ways in which this communicability can be expressed are only the instances of one universal communicability. The difference between two utterly different works of art conveying the same

state of mind might consist in the fact that different intuitions are related to the same types of concepts. In this way, the feeling of grief can be expressed in painting, music, sculpture or poetry. So, the aesthetic idea can acquire a different character when it is expressed through different material, that is through different intuitions and concepts.

About the judgment of taste it can be said that, similarly to the aesthetic idea, it acquires a certain character in accordance with the material it deals with, that is, in accordance with the object of the judgment of taste. The universality of the judgment of taste and its universal communicability as its source allows geniuses to engage other people in the judgment of taste they themselves involved in.

When a contemplator enters the communication with the work of art, she has to make the same judgment of taste the genius made. The main idea is the same, and the character of it and of the judgment of taste, that is the state of mind that the work of art evokes, must be at least similar to (if not the same as) what the genius wanted to express. Otherwise, there would be no understanding between the genius and the contemplator at all. So, as long as the contemplator is making the same judgment of taste, and is governed by the same subjective universal principle of subsumption expressed in the same aesthetic idea, the only thing that the contemplator can make herself is the realization of her own unity with the work of art in the form of a response as a harmonious unity of her own cognitive faculties.

This observation corresponds to the principle of the absence of interest in the judgment of taste. The free agreement of cognitive faculties occurs only when an individual does not introduce any concepts that she imposes on the intuitions herself and that are not a part of the

project of genius. Only in this case, the contemplator would be able to enter the universally pleasurable state accessible only through the universal communicability, or aesthetic idea.

On the basis of what has been said about the relation of genius and aesthetic idea, we can conclude that this relation is necessary for the judgment of taste that requires universal communicability, such as the communicability of the beauty in art.

Kant writes that "in products of genius nature (that of the subject) […] gives the rule to art" (5: 344). However, the feeling of beauty requires a free involvement of a contemplator in the universal communicability of the work of art, which is although lawful and governed by a priori subjective principle, but is nevertheless always free. This free involvement is what Kant calls "the free play of the faculties of cognition" (5: 217). I need to explain now how the aesthetic idea can be expressed in the free play of cognitive faculties.

C. Aesthetic Idea and Free Play of Cognitive Faculties

According to Kant, "This state of a **free play** of the faculties of cognition with a representation through which an object is given must be able to be universally communicated, because cognition, as a determination of the object with which given representations (in whatever subject it may be) should agree, is the only kind of representation that is valid for everyone" (5: 217). The source of the pleasure from the agreement of the cognitive faculties in the judgment of taste consists in their harmonious cooperation. Genius is the first to experience this harmonious relation of the faculties, and the only way to experience the same harmonious feeling from the free play of cognitive faculties experienced by genius is through the universal communicability of the work of art, or its aesthetic idea. The feeling of pleasure that genius communicates in his work of art also must be experienced by him as an aesthetic idea. Although the genius is the first person who generates certain harmony of faculties in the form of the

aesthetic idea, he does not create this harmony. He only recognizes the harmonious relation of understanding and imagination that can be expressed by means of the aesthetic idea. This harmonious relation is possible only in the form of the universally pleasurable feeling, thus only under the condition that this harmony of faculties is universally communicable. "Thus it is the universal capacity for the communication of the state of mind in the given representation which, as the subjective condition of the judgment of taste, must serve as its ground and have the pleasure in the object as a consequence" (5: 217). So, we can see that for Kant the pleasure from the free play consists in the universal communicability of the judgment of taste, which I argue is an aesthetic idea.

If the pleasure experienced in the free play comes from universal communicability, then any conceptual structure of an individual's mind will fit into this judgment. When the relation of the understanding and imagination is based on the universal communicability, then this relation is governed by the principle of subsumption of the imagination under the understanding which is universal and can be applicable to any concepts and intuitions. Thus, the fact that the free play of cognitive faculties is based on the principle of subsumption allows any conceptual structure and any type of human mind to be able to participate in this free play.

The durable pleasurable effect from the free play can be explained by the fact that the aesthetic idea allows the contemplator to switch from one combination of intuitions and concepts to another without any interruption of the feeling of pleasure. One's mind usually has an unpleasant feeling of an impediment when faced with a conceptual structure that is not one's own. Yet, when a certain mind faces a conceptual structure that is a priori communicable to *any* mind, then this unpleasant feeling is avoided. As long as the feeling of pleasure from experiencing the aesthetic idea is universally communicable, the contemplator can pass from one

state of mind to another (a concept or a conceptual structure of one's mind) without interruption, since the states of consciousness are unified by the aesthetic idea. As such, the contemplator enjoys a universal pleasure. When the imagination and the understanding are in harmony, there arise such combinations of intuitions and concepts that are entirely coherent with each other, and can be switched without disturbing the feeling of pleasure.

It is interesting to discuss the possibility of a human mind's entering this pleasurable feeling of harmony of the cognitive faculties. The most obvious thing that seems to be open to our control is the capacity to make a disinterested judgment of taste. The absence of the interest in the judgment of taste allows us to contemplate the beautiful objects around us in a way that excludes the intervention of personal desires into the sphere of beauty. Only such a disinterested and pure contemplation of the given object would allow us to enter the free play of the cognitive faculties. As it has been discussed earlier, the presence of a concept in the form of an end in the aesthetic judgment disturbs the free play of cognitive faculties which excludes any particular end as a partial and temporal satisfaction, because aiming at partial and temporal satisfaction is completely different from experiencing the universal pleasure as universal communicability. If we desire to acquire satisfaction from some particular representation, then our satisfaction will always be only contingent and never universal, because in this case, the universal communicability as the feeling of pleasure applicable to everyone is not realized. A durable universal pleasure from experiencing beauty is possible only if we are making a disinterested judgment of taste. What can hinder this aesthetically pleasurable feeling is the fact that we notice a discrepancy between what intuitions actually tell us in the form of the aesthetic idea (what the concepts of understanding are supposed to read into the existing intuitions by the principle of subsumption), and what we purposively introduce ourselves into the way we are judging the

object. This is exactly what happens when we are trying to submit our aesthetic judgment under a certain particular concept, let it be an intellectual interest (the one the art critics, for example, usually have), or a tendency to judge by means of social standards, or a simple habit to regard something as worthy of admiration or cannot. More exactly, what happens in this situation is that we have several conflicting concepts that pretend to refer to certain intuitions, a situation that is avoided in a pure judgment of taste. Or if we put it in another way, we have an intuition that tells us one thing and a concept in mind that tells us a different thing. As it has been said before, even genius creating his work of art only grasps the unity that already exists in the principle of subsumption of the imagination to the understanding, and does not impose his own vision on the object.

Kant writes that a judgment of taste should be made "without any intention of acquiring a concept from it" (5: 190). Not to have an intention to acquire a concept from the judgment of the beautiful object means not to determine purposively given intuition under a desired concept, that is, not to impose our desires on the contemplation of the world. In order to provide and preserve a pleasurable feeling of beauty all we need is to involve freely in the harmonious dialogue of the cognitive faculties.

Conclusion

The main goal of this thesis was to answer the question how the aesthetic idea accounts for the universal validity of the subjective judgment of taste, and what the nature of the aesthetic idea is that makes such account possible. As it has been explained in the course of the analysis, the main feature that makes the aesthetic idea the source of the universal validity is its universal communicability. The universal communicability of the aesthetic idea is expressed in the universally pleasurable feeling of the judgment of taste. The principle of the aesthetic idea that

makes universally pleasurable communicability possible is the principle of subsumption of the faculty of imagination under the faculty of understanding. When these faculties are governed by the a priori principle of subsumption, they constitute a coherent unity of a thinking subject and its beautiful object. We came to the conclusion that this harmonious unity is what Kant calls the aesthetic idea, the manifestation of which we can observe in the works of art of a genius, works of art whose aesthetic appreciation can be open to any person.

Figure 1. Claude Monet, *Luncheon on the Grass*. 130 x 180 cm. Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow. Download 12 May 2008, <http://monet1871.com/images/62-full.jpg>.