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Concept-less Schemata: The Reciprocity of Imagination and Understanding in Kant's Aesthetics

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Abstract

In this paper, I discuss Kant's concept-less schematism (*KU*, 5: 287) in the third *Critique*¹ and make three claims: 1) concept-less schematism is entirely consistent with the schematism in the first *Critique*; 2) concept-less schematism is schematism with no *empirical* concept as an outcome; and 3) in accordance with 1) and 2), the imagination is free to synthesize the given manifold and leads to judgements of taste without this meaning either that the categories play no role at all or that these judgements are full-fledged cognitive determining judgements. While most commentators read the freedom of the imagination as its independence from the understanding, I argue that the freedom of the imagination is based on a non-determining employment of the pure concepts of the understanding. The freedom of the aesthetic imagination consists in the temporal schematization of the categories without any complementary determination of the empirical concept.

Keywords: concept-less schematism; imagination; understanding; interplay; aesthetic judgement

1. Introduction: The Problem of Concept-less Schematism

My main concern is to show that in aesthetic judgements, the freedom of the imagination is based on the lawfulness of the understanding. It is undoubtedly true that the imagination is free *from* the *determining* employment of the categories. Yet the most relevant of Kant's aims is to show that the imagination is free *to* yield and grasp aesthetic representations, just as it is free *to* employ the normative import of the understanding without letting the latter take control and without leading to the objective determinacy of an empirical concept. This non-determining employment of the categories also relies on the temporal articulation of the categories, namely their schematization – otherwise it could not lead to a lawful judgement. This aesthetic schematism is concept-less as it does not yield a cognitively objective determination of an empirical concept. The missing concepts in Kant's concept-less schematism can only be empirical, not pure.

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In aesthetic judgements, the categories are used differently than in cognitive judgements, for the pure concepts of the understanding do not determine *beauty* as if it were an empirical concept. Instead, they provide a normative framework within which the imagination operates freely: as driven by the principle of purposiveness and kept within the lawful boundaries of the understanding. Indeed, Kant argues for the free and harmonious play between the imagination *and the understanding* (KU, 5: 217-18; EE, 20: 224). This aesthetic synthesis is not determining (KU, 5: 256), for the universality of these judgements does not depend on the determinacy of the empirical object. It rather consists in an emotional response to an objectively non-determined experience of beauty. This response is universal, for it follows from transcendental conditions and the faculties of reason, not by virtue of any alleged naturally human constitution.² Kant indeed points out that the feeling following from – by no means grounding – an aesthetic judgement, rests ‘on a mere sensation of the reciprocally animating imagination in its freedom and the understanding with its lawfulness’ (KU, 5: 287; see also EE, 20: 231). No aesthetic judgement presupposes a feeling as its ground. At the opposite, the aesthetic feeling is a feeling of *pleasure* for it follows – as a communicable outcome – from the *harmonious reciprocity* between the imagination and the understanding. The experience of the sublime brings instead a *negative* pleasure with it, as there is no harmony between the faculties (KU, 5: 244-5).

The interplay of the imagination and the understanding in the aesthetic context has been discussed in a number of contributions (Guyer 2006; Rogerson 2008; Ostaric 2017), but it has never been related to the problem of concept-less schematism (partial exceptions being La Rocca 1997 and Allison 2001). This point is key. The notion of a harmonious interplay between the very same faculties involved in cognition is the idea of a synthetic connection between the faculties at stake. We know that a priori synthesis takes place in the form of synthetic a priori judgements, just as we know that all judgements rely on the temporal articulation of the pure concepts of the understanding. My interpretive move holds fast to this fundamental idea: synthetic a priori judgements take place in time and require us to schematize the categories. This core idea opens up two paths: the cognitive and the aesthetic. While in the former the relationship between the understanding and the form of inner sense converges on the objective determination of the empirical concept, in the latter schematized categories are the lawful guidelines followed by the imagination in its freedom in order to grant the possibility of a non-objective but still universal experience of beauty.

The phrase ‘schematism without concept’ would seem to be an example of Kant’s proverbial obscurity at its best (cf. Makkreel 1990: 55). Kant recalls an issue from the first *Critique* that was already controversial enough – where schemata are time determinations of the pure concepts of the understanding (employed by the power of judgement in order to make experience possible) – and allows it to assume quite the opposite meaning – for aesthetic judgements have no full-fledged cognitive import. This controversial issue has caught the attention of several interpreters. Rachel Zuckert (2007: 304-5), for example, writes the following:

As an activity of combining the empirically determinable sensible characteristics of objects, the purposive imaginative activity in aesthetic experience may be said to be ‘schematizing without a concept’ in an empirical sense: here [...]

we synthesize empirical properties purposively, thus engaging in an activity similar to the imaginative activity of (empirical) schematization (the application of empirical concepts to the sensible manifold). [...] Such imaginative projection unifies temporally presented intuitions, unifies given moments of time – but it does so without the guidance of the categories. It schematizes, as it were, without a concept.

Dealing with the same point from a different perspective, Hannah Ginsborg (1997: 70) claims that

[t]o perceive an object as beautiful [...] is to take my imagination to function as it ought to function with respect to the object, yet without either having in mind an antecedent concept of how it ought to function, nor arriving at such a concept through the activity itself. This qualifies as an act of judgment, but of a non-conceptual kind: it fits Kant's description of an aesthetic judgment as one 'which is not based on any concept we have [*keinem vorhandenen Begriff*] of the object, and which does not provide [*verschaffen*] one' (VII, 190). But in spite of the fact that my act of judgment is neither based on, nor gives rise to, a concept of the object, it makes a claim to universal validity. For in taking my imagination to function as it ought to function in the perception of the object, I take it that everyone ought to perceive the object the same way I do. I take my activity of imagination, that is, to exemplify a universal standard to which everyone ought to conform.

According to Paul Guyer (1997: 80), the harmony of the faculty is

[...] a state in which a manifold of intuition is in some sense apprehended as unified without being subsumed under any determinate concept, or in which the imagination meets the understanding's general requirement of 'lawfulness' without the use of a concept, and in which the unexpectedness of such an imaginative grasp of unity produces pleasure.

Several questions arise. According to Zuckert, in the case of aesthetic judgements the imagination is at work 'without the guidance of the categories'. While it might be easier to see why the imagination is at work without being *unavoidably bound to apply* the rules of the understanding in a determining way, it is unclear why even *the guidance* of the categories should be excluded. How can the imagination unify temporal-intuitive manifolds and work *harmoniously* with the understanding while utterly disregarding its rules? Does 'without a concept' mean 'without the guidance of the categories'? With regard to Ginsborg's claims, one might ask how the imagination can 'exemplify a universal standard' if the respective act of judgement is of a 'non-conceptual' kind. It is clear that no empirical object may serve as the ground for a judgement of taste, but it is not equally clear how a judgement can, simultaneously, be both non-conceptual and a judgement. According to Kant, a judgement always entails a synthesis between heterogeneous elements, whereby the pure concepts enable cognition and, as I claim, even aesthetic experience. No mere sensible or imaginative import may be enough to constitute a judgement in the Kantian sense.

A similar doubt arises when trying to make sense of a non-conceptual 'general requirement' for lawfulness. Guyer explicitly points out that aesthetic subsumption does not take into account any 'determinate concept', but one might still wonder whether the subsumption of the faculties – for which Kant argues – makes room for conceptual lawfulness. After all, what else can grant lawfulness but the rules and laws of the understanding?

Answering these questions in a satisfying way would seem to depend on drawing a sharp distinction between the empirical concept, which cannot ground any true judgement of taste, and the pure concepts of the understanding, which Kant brings into play when arguing for the harmonious interplay between the understanding and the imagination. A strategy that may legitimately aim to make sense of a seemingly paradoxical claim cannot disregard Kant's general account of judgement – for it extends far beyond the pages of the third *Critique* (cf. Pollok 2017). The case of aesthetic judgement is, in the proper sense, a case: a specific argument that belongs to the general problem of critical philosophy, namely the possibility, legitimacy and objective validity of synthetic a priori judgements. This does not mean that cognitive judgements play the role of genus while aesthetic judgements represent one of its species. Instead, it means that in order to make sense of this specific kind of judgement, we have to take into account the basic structure of a judgement in general, its conditions and principles, the faculties involved, and the achievable outcomes.

For once, Kant's perhaps involuntary but certainly provocative obscurity is not just an obstacle. We know that any judgement is a synthetic act, and we also know that any synthesis requires elements to be synthesized. Finally, we know that Kant's controversial answer to the question of synthetic a priori judgements in the first *Critique* also relies on the schematism of the pure concepts of the understanding. I aim to show that Kant's concept-less schematism in the third *Critique* is far from being a mere relic of the past: not only is it entirely consistent with Kant's aims in the third *Critique*, but a proper understanding of it allows us to answer the questions raised above.

2. The Transcendental Doctrine(s) of Schematism

Every time Kant argues for the possibility, legitimacy and objective validity of synthetic a priori judgements, he appeals to schemata and types. These are the necessary conditions for the transition – performed by the *Urteilkraft* – from pure thought to objectively real cognition and experience. Despite the role they play, the scholarship's attitude towards the occurrences of schematism in Kant's philosophy has often oscillated between two equally misleading alternatives. First, schematism – not to mention the almost completely overlooked topic of the second *Critique*³ – represents a problem that Kant himself was not completely able to manage (cf. Prichard 1909: 246-47; Warnock 1949; Bennett 1966: 150). Accordingly, our interpretive efforts should be limited to a reasonable acceptance of the difficulties it raises without treating it as an essential point of the critical philosophy. As a result, schematism in both the first and the third *Critique* does not deserve specific attention, for it does not significantly alter our understanding of a priori synthesis. On the second view, schematism proves the inconsistency of Kant's fundamental cognitive claims, thereby representing a

target for those who strive to overcome the limitations of Kant's thought (Pendlebury 1995; Champagne 2018).

In fact, however, quite the opposite of both conclusions is true. First, Kant's theory of schematism is both necessary for the possibility of a priori synthesis and coherent across the three *Critiques*. Second, to the question whether schemata and types rely on a single methodological root, I answer that this root is the normative activity of the power of judgement – as the sole function that can establish the possibility of a priori synthesis. Schematism is fundamental to obtaining a proper understanding of the greatest achievements of Kant's critical philosophy: the possibility of experience, moral agency, aesthetic and teleological reflection, and the systematic unity of reason. My guiding hypothesis is that we can obtain a unified and coherent picture of what schematism is – one that can also account for its different applications – if we clarify how schematism is essentially related to the activity of the power of judgement. By highlighting the link between schematism and the power of judgement across the three *Critiques*, it becomes clear that the unity of reason in the domains of nature and freedom depends on a unique methodological point: the normative transition from pure, logical forms to transcendental, moral, aesthetic and teleological laws and principles. It is only by means of synthetic a priori judgements that the categories, the moral law, the principle of purposiveness and the transcendental ideas can function – by assuming the form of schemata and types – as the constitutive elements of a priori synthesis. Schematism is the first procedural requirement of the normativity of the power of judgement and the first evidence of the possibility of a priori synthesis.⁴ In what follows, concept-less schematism will be discussed against this methodological and interpretative background.

3. From Cognitive to Aesthetic Schematism

Kant's schematism in the first *Critique* (A137-47/B176-87) consists of three fundamental claims. First, since intuitions and the pure concepts are heterogeneous, a third element is required, which is partially homogeneous with both representations. Second, this third element is a schema, a transcendental time determination,⁵ provided by the imagination. Third, it is only by means of the schematic mediation brought about by the imagination that a priori synthesis is complete and the possibility and legitimacy of objective experience and cognition is granted once and for all. Thus, the possibility of synthetic a priori judgements depends on transcendental schematism. In the third *Critique*, Kant claims that the aesthetic imagination proceeds 'in accordance with principles of the schematism of the power of judgment' (*KU*, 5: 269), but he does not clarify this further. Let us try to remedy this and clarify why each of the fundamental claims of cognitive schematism holds in the case of aesthetic judgements as well.

Notice, first, that I cannot judge without the categories. In order to judge, I need logical rules – that is, the normative framework of the understanding. Most importantly, it is not enough that I merely possess them: I am required to *apply* them to the sensible manifold of intuition. Thus, the other fundamental condition for my being able to judge is having intuitive manifolds available to my inner sense – the form of which is time. However, since both representations – intuition and concept – are reciprocally heterogeneous (as they come from different faculties), I need a third

mediating element, a schema. This first requirement is also valid for aesthetic judgements, for in the latter case, too, a) I am dealing with an object given in intuition to which I refer in order to make a universally valid beauty claim; and b) my making a beauty claim is a judgement, a spontaneous act of the power of judgement.

Concerning the imagination, it is even harder to argue for an alleged incompatibility or inconsistency between cognitive and aesthetic schematism. In both cases, Kant explicitly states that schemata follow from the activity of the imagination (*KrV*, A 140 B 179; *KU*, 5: 240: the aesthetic imagination is 'productive and self-active'): a mediating function for a mediating element. If we do without the synthetic mediation brought about by the imagination in its schematizing activity, the faculties that the power of judgement is required to connect will not match each other. Therefore, as to the third point, my eventual judgement will be compromised at the root. In both cases – the cognitive and the aesthetic – the power of judgement deals with the interaction between sensibility (and imagination) and the understanding: either in terms of a determining synthetic connection and unity or as a harmonious but non-determined interplay.

It is misleading to claim that Kant referred explicitly to the necessity of the understanding's rules only for the cognitive case. In its reflecting use, the power of judgement must still 'provide a concept [...] as a rule [...] but not as an *objective rule*' (*KU*, 5: 169, my emphasis). The point is not to establish whether the categories play a role, but to prove the legitimacy of a non-objectively-determining synthetic connection between the imagination and the understanding. It is equally misleading to argue for the absolute independence (a rather non-Kantian sense of freedom) of the imagination from the understanding when Kant clearly grounds his argument for aesthetic judgements on the harmony between the freedom of the imagination and the lawfulness of the understanding. This suggests that the crucial point of concept-less schematism is not schematism, i.e. the temporal articulation of the categories, but being concept-less.

The missing concept in the case of aesthetic judgements cannot be the pure concept, for otherwise my activity of judging could not count on those rules I am required to employ when making either a cognitive or an aesthetic claim. In the latter case, the power of judgement still follows rules, but, as I will show, this rule-following is not one and the same as the determination of an empirical concept for the purposes of cognition. In the context of aesthetic evaluation, I do follow rules, yet I do not apply them to the intuitive manifold straightforwardly in order to unify its sensible notes into an empirically determined concept of the object. Rather, reflecting judgements of taste make use of the understanding's normative framework in order to target – i.e. to judge – the activity of the power of judgement itself. This key point will be discussed more extensively in the coming sections. First, though, I would like to stress that – in order to judge – the pure concepts of the understanding must be schematized,⁶ that is, articulated according to the transcendental conditions of sensibility, meant either as the sheer receptivity⁷ to intuitions (in the case of cognition) or as the *active* function of the imagination (in the case of aesthetic evaluation). A priori synthesis takes the form of judgements because judgements are synthetic connections between rules and data, form and matter, pure thought and experience of the outer world. I cannot judge without schemata, that is, without those methodological and normative guidelines that follow from the synthetic interaction between the faculties of reason. More

precisely, schemata follow from the sensible (i.e. temporal) articulation of otherwise overarching, purely logical rules – and from the connection between these rules and the objects provided by experience, whether a tree, a red supergiant, a painting, a symphony, or even agency.⁸

Since in judging I cannot disregard the pure concepts of the understanding, in the case of concept-less schematism the missing concept is the empirical one,⁹ intended as the missing objective determination of the concept of beauty. This raises a relevant question, however: how can we make room for a non-objectively-determining employment of the pure concepts of the understanding? In what follows, I will try to answer this by making sense of the reciprocity of imagination and understanding in Kant's aesthetics.

4. Freedom as Lawfulness

Drawing on the distinction between logical judgements and the judgements of taste, Kant states that in the latter case 'no concept of the object' can be 'the ground of judgment'. The ground

can consist only in the subsumption of the imagination itself (in the case of a representation by means of which an object is given) *under the condition that the understanding in general advance from intuitions to concepts*. I.e. 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, contains a principle of subsumption, 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**. (KU, 5: 287, italics mine)

Kant's point concerns neither the synthetic connection that every judgement must entail nor the universal and necessary validity to which we lay claim by means of the judgements at stake. Rather, Kant's point concerns the (non-)determinacy of the synthesis. Judgements of taste are judgements, i.e. forms of synthetic connection between intuitive and conceptual elements. No judgement, even in the aesthetic case, is possible outside of the normative drive of a synthesis between two heterogeneous elements. When judging about beauty, however, one faces a peculiar problem. Beauty cannot be determined in the same way that a variety of empirical concepts can, such as the frame of the painting in front of me (or the metal support of the statue I am contemplating in delight), nor is the result of my judging activity a full-fledged cognition.

Concerning any artwork, I may tell you something about what I have seen, but I cannot provide an objectively determined cognitive outcome. It may well be the case that I need plenty of words in order to share my thoughts and feelings on Van Gogh's

Starry Night, but I cannot say anything similar to ‘Betelgeuse’s brightness has dimmed by a factor of approximately 2.5 from magnitude 0.5 to 1.5’ after looking through my telescope. While almost no one would doubt that intuitions play a role in the context of aesthetic judgements, the role of the categories may seem more obscure¹⁰ – after all, Kant himself clearly says that these judgements are not grounded in concepts (*KU*, 5: 190). By drawing on the necessity of schematization outlined in previous sections, however, we can see that aesthetic judgements require a specific use of the categories under the principle of purposiveness.

This argument relies on the interplay between the imagination and the understanding. Kant clearly states that the freedom of the former must go hand in hand with the lawfulness of the latter. What I want to stress is that the freedom of the imagination and the lawfulness of the understanding stand in a reciprocal relationship:¹¹ in the case of aesthetic judgements, they do not simply proceed in parallel; rather, the one is because of the other. Dealing with aesthetic judgements, Andrew Chignell writes that

[...] here we find that there is *no determinate rule* connecting the faculties involved whatsoever. Instead, the imagination ‘freely plays’ through a series of thoughts and associations which cannot be pinned down by determinate concepts and yet seems somehow amenable to the aims of our understanding. Alternately, we might say that if there is a rule animating this activity, it is one that the imagination legislates or draws up for itself, yet in a way that is in ‘harmony’ with the laws of the understanding. (Chignell 2007: 425)

It is undoubtedly true that the free play of the imagination ‘cannot be pinned down by determinate concepts’. However, the idea that the imagination may be capable of rule-giving is inconsistent with Kant’s thesis that the place of the imagination is, as it were, interstitial – for the imagination does not belong to either sensibility or the understanding (*V-Met L2*, 28: 585). Rather, since only the latter is actually capable of rule-giving, the point at stake is how to dismantle the co-implication between the rules of the understanding and the determinacy of the synthesis. As already mentioned, it seems to me that the reciprocity of freedom and lawfulness represents a valuable interpretative option, for it does not compel us either to claim that the imagination is completely detached from the understanding or to state that the imagination is capable of rule-giving. The imagination is free because it counts on the normative framework of the understanding without letting it determine the concept of beauty as if it were one concept of possible experience among others. Moreover, the imagination is free because it is able to use logical rules to enable aesthetic evaluation and, at the same time, because it escapes the determining grasp of the very rules the imagination uses. In short: We must understand why and how, without conceptual lawfulness, no authentic imaginative freedom is possible.

Had Kant meant that the imagination disregards conceptual import, he would not have written that the imagination works (i.e. plays) together with the understanding. Most importantly, without the understanding, the imagination would be tied to the intuitive sphere so tightly that it would be impossible to judge. Aesthetic evaluation would be impossible as well. Rather than the imagination’s freedom, we would be

dealing with its self-slavery. No aesthetic evaluation – i.e. no judgement of taste – is possible if the subject is unable to employ (i.e. schematize) the normative conceptual framework provided by the understanding: quantity, quality, relation, and modality. Without these, my sight would be lost in a flood of images and sensible impressions that I could neither grasp nor codify to arrive at meaning – however objectively non-determined it may be. More succinctly, no *Ein-Bildung* is possible if I give up employing the rules provided by the understanding. The result would be an ecstatic upheaval, not an aesthetic evaluation. On the other hand, in the case of aesthetic judgements, the imagination is free not because it is detached from the normative framework of the understanding but for two reasons in particular.

First, the imagination makes use of the rules of the understanding in order to interact with artworks in a lawful way. Outside of this lawfulness, no authentic legitimate universal beauty claim may be raised. At the same time, the imagination is not subjugated to the understanding: It makes use of the normative framework provided by the latter, but it never lets the understanding take control and lead to objectively determined cognitive claims. Take permanence in time as the schema of substance: I have to rely on this schema if I am to raise a beauty claim; otherwise, what I see in the artwork will evade my aesthetic grasp. How can I appreciate a specific detail of a work of art without the logical guidance of the permanence in time of any representations whatsoever? I need this schema. Still, as I will clarify further, the schema of the pure concept is enough. I do not need an empirically determined outcome.

Second, the intuitions of the imagination are of a very peculiar kind. The manifold they provide us with is not just empirical. Any work of art is an object of the outer world among others, but its intuitive content is not simply given, for it is *made*. More precisely, and most importantly, it is made according to the same rules and functions I am required to employ when judging aesthetically.¹² It would be misleading to say – perhaps implicitly – that the imagination disregards the understanding when Kant firmly states that it does not. It is therefore of the greatest importance to clarify why the imagination cannot.

The intuitive import of a work of art is not merely given, and this may well be why Kant mentions the imagination rather than sensibility. Here, imaginative apprehension takes the place of sheer receptivity. I am receptive to the intuitive manifold the conceptual connection brings to the empirical concept *tree*, for example, but I am not merely receptive when I am in front of, say, Yves Klein's *Anthropométrie*.¹³ In the latter case, my imagination plays with shades and lines; it unavoidably tries to re-frame, re-configure and even fill any gaps in perception – in a way that is still consistent with the figurative core displayed by the artwork, by grasping and following the lawful elements of the painting, the reasons why lines and shapes take one peculiar form instead of another, the reasons why the blue sketches take up a specific portion of the painting, and so on. In the *General Remark* following §22, Kant writes that

[...] everything flows from the concept of taste as a faculty for judging an object in relation to the **free lawfulness** of the imagination. But if in the judgement of taste the imagination must be considered in its freedom, then it is in the first instance taken not as reproductive, as subjected to the laws of association, but as productive and self-active (as the authoress of voluntary forms of possible intuitions); and although in the apprehension of a given object of

the senses it is of course bound to a determinate form of this object and to this extent has no free play (as in invention), nevertheless it is still quite conceivable that the object can provide it with a form that contains precisely such a composition of the manifold as the imagination would design in harmony with the **lawfulness of the understanding** in general if it were left free by itself. Yet for the **imagination** to be **free** and yet **lawful by itself**, i.e. that it carries autonomy with it, is a contradiction. *The understanding alone gives the law.* [. . .] Thus only a lawfulness without law and a subjective correspondence of the imagination to the understanding *without an objective one* – where the representation is related to a determinate concept of an object – are consistent with *the free lawfulness of the understanding* (which is also called purposiveness without an end) and with the peculiarity of a judgment of taste. (*KU*, 5: 240-1, italics mine)¹⁴

My imagination purposively takes on the work of art as if it were made for the purpose of being represented as being in accordance with a very specific interplay between the faculties – that is, in accordance with a specific configuration of my activity of judging. Thus, this interplay is lawful, although there is no objectively determined law (cf. Gibbons 1994: 93).

My aesthetic apprehension is no mere reception and affectivity, for it also implies a drive, an activity. My imagination plays with the painting because, in the first place, it plays with the understanding. This requires rules – although these rules do not lead us to determine empirical concepts of objects. If it is true that, thanks to the normative import of the categories, the imagination is neither lost nor self-enslaved, it is also true that we must carefully move within a balance. The understanding grants lawfulness,¹⁵ but it is not required to provide us with objective determinacy – otherwise the imagination would be completely subjugated to, and by, the categories. Interplay and balance – i.e. reciprocity – even within the theoretical boundaries of a subsumption, take the place of the full-fledged determining synthesis we are dealing with in the case of cognitive judgements – where, as we know, the subsumption concerns intuitions and concepts, not their respective faculties.¹⁶

Analogously to the imagination, we know that, according to Kant, the understanding does not provide us with any concept of the object as the ground of the judgements of taste. Again, let us try to understand why it cannot.

Recall the distinction between thought and cognition (*KrV*, B 146). The categories are the logical forms of thought: it is impossible to think of an object without them. However, in order to cognize and experience objects, we must employ the categories as rules, thereby applying them to the manifold given in intuition. Conceptual determination and lawful cognition and experience proceed in parallel. The determinacy of any empirical object follows directly from the determining activity of the understanding. My cognition and experience of the empirical object *tree* are nothing but the outcome of the determining judgement that leads to the concept of that *determined* object – by lawfully synthesizing its constitutive intuitive elements. Whether I am dealing with trees or with Betelgeuse's brightness, I only cognize what I conceptually (i.e. categorially) determine. Now, Kant says that nothing like an objectively determined empirical object can function as the ground of a judgement of taste. Beauty is not an empirical object, that is, not the outcome of determining judgements.

Still, our aesthetic judgements make a claim to universality and necessity. How is it possible to make a lawful and necessary claim to universal validity without providing, at the same time, a full-fledged objective concept as the ground of the claim at stake? Kant's answer to this question – i.e. *concept-less schematism* – is the most satisfying, for it also involves a specific principle: purposiveness.

5. Reflecting Judgements and Purposiveness

The next interpretative step requires that we answer the following question: Can I make use of the categories in a non-determining way? I will argue that I can, by reflectively employing them with reference to the activity of judging itself. What I want to suggest is that employing the categories in a non-determining way involves schematizing without a concept.¹⁷ In order to understand how concept-less schematism works, we must clarify that the primary object of reflecting judgements of taste is the power of judgement itself, not an external *something* on which I lay my eyes.¹⁸ Kant is quite explicit on this point. Consider the following quotations from the third *Critique*:

[...] the judgment of taste is not determinable by means of concepts, it is grounded only on the subjective formal condition of a judgment in general. *The subjective condition of all judgment is the faculty for judging itself, or the power of judgment.* (KU, 5: 287, my emphasis)

How are judgments of taste possible? This problem thus concerns the *a priori* principles of the pure power of judgment in *aesthetic* judgments, i.e. in those where it does not (as in theoretical judgments) merely have to subsume under objective concepts of the understanding and stands under a law, but where it is itself, subjectively, *both object as well as law*. (KU, 5: 288, my emphasis)

There is no doubt that judgements of taste are reflecting judgements. Yet it is one thing to claim that judgements of taste refer to the same objects as determining judgements, though in a different way (i.e. reflexively), and quite another to state that the very first object of reflecting judgements is the power of judgement itself, its operative conditions and principles (cf. Hughes 2007: 195-6). I think the latter option is the most appropriate, even though the former is not simply wrong.

Clearly, *our judgements of taste are directed at objects*, and since all objects are phenomena in time, we need schematism to be able to reach them. Yet aesthetic judgements are reflecting because their primary object is their own function, not because they target beautiful objects in a reflecting way – where in this case *reflecting* would be opposed to *determining*. This does not mean that reflecting judgements do not have a proper object but rather that their *being-reflecting* is due to the power of judgement targeting its own activity. Kant writes that in the case of aesthetic judgements, the power of judgement 'is itself, subjectively, both object as well as law'. I find this phrase extremely telling. However, the idea of taking the power of judgement as its own 'object' may seem clearer than the idea of taking it as a 'law'. As *reflecting*, the power of judgement is its own object. But what does Kant mean when he speaks of a 'law'? Thus far, we have been dealing with the structure of a judgement of taste: the fundamental interplay between

imagination and the understanding, the non-determinability of beauty, and so on. What about the principle of reflecting judgements?

We know that the principle of apperception is the fundamental principle of determining judgements – where bringing intuitions under concepts means bringing them under the supreme unity of the *I think*. Although reflecting judgements of taste bring the principle of purposiveness into play, what remains unclear is the extent to which this additional principle serves as a *Leitfaden* for understanding and making sense of concept-less schemata in the case of aesthetic judgements. I argue that it is precisely because of this specific principle that we can employ the pure concepts of the understanding in a non-determining way. As we have seen, the determination that takes place in cognitive judgements mirrors the determinacy of the concept of the object we cognize and experience. Kant points this out by saying that the laws and objectivity we encounter in nature follow directly from our spontaneous legislative activity (KrV, A 125-6). Analogously, we can now say that the purposiveness we value in the beautiful objects of our aesthetic judgements mirrors the reflecting and purposively-oriented activity of the power of judgement itself. Thus, analogously to the principle of apperception,¹⁹ the principle of purposiveness serves as a law, a guiding light for the reflecting power of judgement in the case of aesthetic judgements. It follows that the reflecting power of judgement takes the specific conditions of its activity as the normative guiding principle of its own function. Thus, the law of the power of judgement is not just synthetic unity²⁰ but rather the reflecting and purposively-oriented balance between the faculties that the power of judgement is required to connect.

In the third *Critique*, Kant writes that – although nothing ‘can be universally communicated except cognition and representation so far it belongs to cognition’ – in the case of a judgement that is not grounded in a concept of the object, the ground is nothing but 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’ (KU, 5: 217; cf. Hughes 2007: 287).

What Kant means, I would suggest, is that the reflecting power of judgement is itself a law; since it reflectively targets its own activity, it has no other normative parameter than the activity of judging itself, in accordance with the principle of purposiveness (which, not by chance, involves lawfulness without a law). This implies quite the opposite of excluding the understanding and its normative framework. It is precisely the purposively-oriented subsumption of the freedom of the imagination under the lawfulness of the understanding that substantiates the activity of the power of judgement in aesthetic judgements. This activity serves as its own law, for it states how a judgement of taste *ought* to be framed in order to be aesthetic in the first place, that is, detached from both mere sensation and full-fledged conceptual determinacy. Both the subsumption of the faculties and the principle of purposiveness are the conditions of the procedure of concept-less schematism. The latter is the methodological requirement for the non-determining use of the categories, for aesthetic judgements rely on a balance between the faculties that is reflectively and purposively set as if it proceeded in accordance with the fundamental requirements of *cognition in general* without actually determining anything empirical. The fact that Kant clarifies that he is dealing with *cognition in general* is telling, since the conditions for cognition in general may take a different form (i.e. an aesthetic one) than that taken in the case of cognition in particular – that is, in the case of determining judgement.

We are now in a position to understand why Kant's concept-less schematism is quite the opposite of an odd attempt to make sense of an allegedly controversial and problematic issue. We are also able to provide the answers to the questions raised in the Introduction concerning the different interpretive moves of Zuckert, Ginsborg and Guyer. In different ways, all three queried the possibility of aesthetic judgement in the absence of any conceptual influence. In response, we have seen that by no means is the guidance of the categories excluded from aesthetic judgements, for the normative import of the understanding instead enables the freedom of the imagination (in response to Zuckert). Accordingly, aesthetic judgements are full-fledged judgements, namely conceptually-informed synthetic functions. Aesthetic judgements are undoubtedly conceptual, though their outcomes are of a non-determined kind (in response to Ginsborg). To meet the lawfulness of the understanding thus means to rely on the categories. More precisely, it means to employ the pure concepts in a non-determining way: to schematize them without determining an empirical concept (in response to Guyer). Put briefly, it means to enable concept-less schemata.

Before dealing with concept-less schemata more concretely, let us take stock and recall the fundamental steps of the argument. We have been discussing the general question of synthetic a priori judgements by pointing out that no judgement can disregard the normative import of the understanding. Thus, aesthetic judgements also rely on the pure concepts of the understanding – although this requires us to argue for a specific use of the categories that does not lead to an objectively determined empirical object. In a complementary way, we have been dealing with concept-less schematism's consistency with cognitive schematism, for both take into account the synthetic connection between two heterogeneous faculties, the role of the imagination and schematic mediation as a necessary condition for the possibility and legitimacy of synthetic a priori judgements (whether cognitive or aesthetic). Accordingly, we have been focusing on the interplay between the freedom of the imagination and the lawfulness of the understanding in order to claim that the one exists because of the other. If we understand the freedom of the imagination as its independence from the lawfulness of the understanding, we unavoidably relegate the imagination to the sphere of sensible apprehension. The imagination would be deprived of logical guidance and unable to detach itself from the perceptual flow of images and representations. By contrast, if we view the understanding's lawfulness as one and the same as the determining activity in charge of cognitive judgements, we unavoidably compromise the non-determinacy of the ground of aesthetic judgements. Finally, we have been making sense of reflecting judgements as having the power of judgement itself as their object. We have been clarifying that the beauty of the beautiful object follows not from the subsumption of a manifold under the unity of the pure concepts, but rather from the purposively-oriented activity of the power of judgement targeting its own function. Put differently, the power of judgement purposively frames the connection between sensibility (in the person of the imagination, so to speak) and the understanding in order to form a judgement about an object as if it were made for the purpose of being judged in accordance with a very peculiar interaction between those faculties. The play at stake is either lawful or not *harmonious* play at all. The pleasure of the aesthetic feeling is due precisely to the harmony at stake.

We now see that Kant's concept-less schematism grants the possibility of a legitimate and lawful judgement of taste. To this end, all necessary conditions are met: the non-determining employment of the categories, their being-schematized as granting the lawfulness of the freedom of the imagination, the non-determinacy of the concept of beauty, and the universal non-objective validity of any beauty claim.

6. Concept-less Schemata: Picasso's Bull

In this last section, I will try to deal with concept-less schematism more concretely, by discussing Picasso's *Bull* (Figures 1 and 2), a suite of eleven lithographs.²¹ I will build on two premises: 1) I take these pictures to provide us with a good and effective example, but I do not think that Kant's concept-less schematism is at work only in the case of artworks with empirically recognizable objects (like bulls). Concept-less schematism is at work in all artworks, as the fundamental methodological condition for the possibility, legitimacy and universality of aesthetic evaluation. 2) The suite at stake may well recall Kant's words in the *Schematism* chapter of the first *Critique*, where the pure concept of quantity is schematized as *number* (KrV, A 140-2 B 179-182). Kant's famous example of the dog as a four-footed animal may be even more telling, for Picasso's suite seems to move from a four-footed sketch to a full-fledged bull.

However, the relevance of Kant's emphasis on the distinction between a schema and an image goes far beyond these similarities. Schemata, both in the cognitive and in the aesthetic case, have no representational status.²² Schemata are not full-fledged representations but rather methodological guidelines according to which my synthetic activity leads to a legitimate judgement. In the case of cognition, by

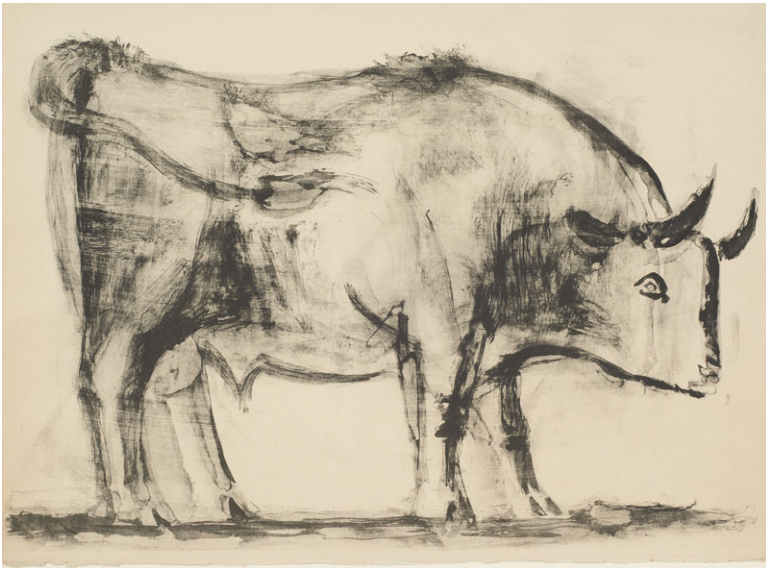


Figure 1. Pablo Picasso, *The Bull*, 1945. Lithograph on paper, first state. © Succession Picasso/DACS, London 2021. Courtesy of the Norton Simon Museum (Pasadena, CA).

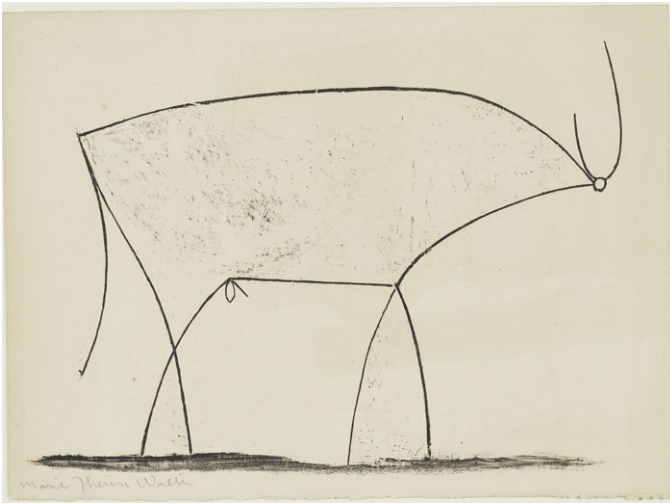


Figure 2. Pablo Picasso, *The Bull*, 1946. Lithograph on paper, eleventh and final state. © Succession Picasso/DACS, London 2021. Courtesy of the Norton Simon Museum (Pasadena, CA).

schematizing the categories, the imagination is able (i.e. free) to let the intuitive and the conceptual code interact. The imagination translates the latter into the former (cf. La Rocca 1997: 8-11), thereby producing the synthetic unity of the empirical concept. No representation allegedly called a ‘schema’ makes an appearance in this context.

The same interaction takes place in the aesthetic case, although according to different criteria. Here, the imagination’s schematizing activity consists in the employment of the categories, according to these two fundamental conditions. First, the interplay between the imagination and the understanding takes the place of the direct application of the categories to the sensible manifold (this requirement is met as the subsumption of the faculties). Second, the interplay at stake is reflectively and purposively oriented: the object is treated as if it were made for the purpose of being evaluated according to a specific connection between the faculties at stake (this requirement is met as the reflecting power of judgement targeting its own function according to the principle of purposiveness).²³

What do I do when schematizing without a concept and reflectively judging about beauty? Consider Picasso’s *Bull*. For one, I am required not to take the images as exemplifying the empirical concept of a bull (cf. Pollok 2017: 286). The latter plays no role in my activity, for Picasso’s lithographs do not represent a case of the empirical concept *bull*. Rather, they are meant to provide the artist’s aims with a figurative shape, where all lines, sketches and shades mirror a meaning of which the artist is the sole keeper. Here, I may treat one plate as if it were the ground of the following ones without actually establishing an objectively determined empirical causal chain. I could also number the lines, shades and points without raising any objective claims concerning the fact that they necessarily represent legs instead of horns or muscles. These rule-governed activities – these concept-less schemata – are essential to my aesthetic judging. Here, I let the figurative and the conceptual code interact in order to make a universal beauty claim without determining anything objective or empirical.

In line with this first step, I must leave undetermined my eventual judgements about the meanings the artist aimed to express. I cannot say something like 'Picasso clearly wants to [whatever]', for even Picasso would not be able to do this (KU, 5: 308). This does not mean either that works of art have no meaning or that this meaning is bound to be hidden, but rather that my conceptual involvement in this search for meaning follows a different route than in the case of objective cognition (cf. Clewis 2019: 11). In order to grasp, express and share aesthetic meaning, I must take into account various interpretive possibilities, the objective truth or falsity of which is utterly insignificant. Aesthetic evaluation takes the form of a web of meanings, while in the cognitive case my synthetic activity converges on a single objective statement. Put differently, aesthetic evaluation tells us more than full-fledged cognition, and it speaks with a multitude of voices – although what it means need not take the shape of full-fledged determinacy. If aesthetic meaning were determined in the way that a variety of empirical cognitive claims are, the work of art would be just one object among others, one language among others. Accordingly, beauty would be just one feature among others. By contrast, in aesthetic evaluation I am required to play, that is, to simulate the same activity that led the artist to depict the subject in that way (cf. KU, 5: 316-17): the understanding *applies* its concept, though not for cognition. If I let my imagination make use of the rules of the understanding without also letting the understanding function as it does in determining judgements (if I let both play with each other), I am free to generate other images and to fill eventual gaps in my subjective perceptual flow. For example, I am free to conceive of intermediate representations Picasso did not actually provide. In order to do so, however, I need to employ the rules of the understanding, for otherwise two alternative outcomes are unavoidable. Either what I see is everything I can imagine – for I would have no means by which to detach my sight from the here and now of the work of art – or my imaginative activity would be utterly inconsistent with the aims of the artist, however non-determined they may be. In both cases, my imagination would be so tightly bound to the intuitive sphere that it would be unable to play with the understanding. Accordingly, I would be unable to make an authentic beauty claim – for raising claims is judging, and judging needs rules.

Alongside the non-determining search for meaning and the lawful play of the imagination, a third component of my authentically Kantian experience of beauty is the acknowledgment of my emotional response to the work of art. More precisely, the emotional response is not due solely to the object but rather, and most fundamentally, to my activity of treating the object as if it were made for the purposes of being judged in accordance with the necessities of the power of judgement itself: according to the lawful freedom of the imagination. My emotional response literally *mirrors* my reflecting on both my judging itself and the object before me, as it follows from a harmoniously active inner state. This makes me acquainted with a power and a freedom that generate pleasure. Emotion is meant quite literally here, as my temporal inner sense is affected and put into motion by the harmonious free play of the faculties. Notice that this feeling of pleasure is analogous to electric potential difference. If we disregard one of the two charges – for example, if we do without the rules of the understanding – a meaningful outcome (i.e. a meaningful feeling) becomes impossible.

7. Conclusion

Allow me to stress three relevant points that emerge from the lawful freedom of aesthetic imagination in concept-less schematism. The first concerns the notion of aesthetic freedom. While it remains true that in aesthetic judgements the imagination is *free from* the constraints of the determining use of the understanding, this does not mean that the imagination is completely *independent of* the rules of the understanding. Rather, the imagination is *free to* employ these rules without being subject to full-fledged conceptual determinacy. This free play alone allows us to have a lawful and meaningful experience that achieves universality without binding it (and us) to objectivity.

The second concerns concept-less schematism. The non-determining search for meaning, the lawful play of the imagination and the emotional response all rely on concept-less schematism, namely the non-determining, reflectively and purposively oriented employment of the normative framework of the understanding. The outcomes of concept-less schematism, that is, aesthetic judgements, are analogous – though not identical – to the outcome of cognitive schematism, that is, cognitive judgements and empirical concepts.

Finally, the picture I have tried to sketch may help us to understand that the universality of the judgement of taste relies on transcendental conditions and belongs to the general problem of the possibility of a priori synthesis. Kant's aesthetic theory thus widens the boundaries of a priori synthesis, although it does so not in terms of a mere revision of the previous cognitive account but rather, and most importantly, in terms of the systematic unity of the different domains and activities of reason. Reason, as it were, takes place in time.

Notes

1 All quotations follow the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*.

2 It makes no sense to claim that this universality simply follows from the fact that this is how we are made. Following such a path would mean assuming an empirical fact as the ground of a transcendental argument. From a Kantian point of view, this would be methodologically wrong even in addition to being interpretatively useless. The feeling can be universally shared because its conditions are transcendental.

3 This topic has received specific attention only very recently: see Westra 2016.

4 Accordingly, I do not think that 'by calling schematism a hidden *Kunst* Kant is alerting us to the fact that it, like genius, is a natural endowment we cannot fully understand' (Matherne 2014: 199). I share the view that schematism is not necessarily conscious activity *per se*, but this does not mean that we cannot fully understand it – let alone prove that a transcendental and methodological requirement shares the procedures of art (or of a natural endowment). We undoubtedly schematize in art, but this does not turn our schematizing activity into a full-fledged artistic activity.

5 The question *Why time?* would obviously require a specific discussion which is not possible here. However, it is still useful to stress that *time* is the form of inner sense, that it is where the representations that affect my receptivity are collected. Since the availability of representations to inner sense is a fundamental condition for the activity of the understanding, it is clear that the form of time has two faces, for both sensibility and the understanding must conform to it. On this topic, see Caimi 2012.

6 On schematized categories, see De Boer 2016 and Ferrarin 2015: 295-307.

7 On the non-merely passive status of sensibility, see Ferrarin 2015: 185-214.

8 On practical schematism and the typic of the second *Critique*, see Banham 2007.

9 Makkreel writes that the imagination 'schematizes without using *empirical* concepts' (1990: 56). While this leaves room for the imagination's use of *pure* concepts, I think it is more appropriate to say that the imagination schematizes without *leading to* empirical concepts. Makkreel also writes that aesthetic

imagination makes use of the categories in order to organize the content of experience (1990: 66). I disagree: aesthetic imagination makes a non-determining use of the categories in order to lawfully play with purposively-framed representations. The imagination follows rules in order to grant the possibility of aesthetic evaluation and judgements, without letting these rules determine an objective empirical concept.

10 Let me clarify that I do not hold a conceptualist view. The availability – i.e. the givenness – of representations (including aesthetic ones) to inner sense does not require concepts. Only the judgement does. Accordingly, I agree with Heidemann (2019: 12-17) that Kant's aesthetics leaves room for non-conceptual content, although I do not see how a judgement could completely disregard the import of the understanding. Furthermore, Kant's aesthetics provides us with a very peculiar employment of the understanding that grants lawfulness without letting this be a synonym for objective determinacy – which would require us to go beyond the polarization between conceptualism and non-conceptualism.

11 According to Makkreel (1990: 46-7), the lawfulness of the understanding is something that limits the freedom of the imagination. I think this is only part of the story, for the lawfulness of the understanding also enables, as it were, the freedom of the imagination. It is because of the understanding's rules that the imagination can actively play with artistic representations, thereby functioning independently of mere perception.

12 See *KU*, 5: 282: '[...] the judgment of taste consists precisely in the fact that it calls a thing beautiful only in accordance with that quality in it by means of which it corresponds with our way of receiving it'.

13 Yves Klein, *ANT 104, Anthropométrie sans titre*, 1960. Dry pigment in synthetic resin on paper (mounted on canvas), 278 x 410 cm: <https://www.fondationlouisvuitton.fr/en/collection/artworks/ant-104-anthropometrie-sans-titre>.

14 Notice that Kant mentions both the 'free lawfulness of the imagination' and the 'free lawfulness of the understanding'. I take both phrases to be correct, once we assume that in aesthetic judgements freedom and lawfulness stand in a reciprocal relationship, the one existing because of the other.

15 We might say that the normative framework of the understanding ensures the legitimacy and universal validity of aesthetic judgements, for it keeps the activity responsible for these judgements within the boundaries of the transcendental conditions of the power of judgement in general.

16 Gorodeisky (2010: 179) writes that, '[...] rather than schematizing any specific concept, the imagination in aesthetic judgment schematizes the lawfulness of the understanding in general'. This is telling. Insofar as it means that the schematism of the aesthetic imagination does not yield 'any specific concept', I agree. However, I wouldn't say that the imagination does not schematize any specific concept of the understanding, for 1) a general normative framework cannot be schematized, and 2) any employment of the categories requires schematization. The schematic articulation of 'any specific' *pure* concept of the understanding is not one and the same as its direct application to the given manifold, for it refers to the form of inner sense exclusively. Aesthetic representations must also take place in inner sense (the form of which is time).

17 See Allison 2001: 171: '[...] the schematization without a concept [...] yields [...] what might be described as the exhibition of the form of a concept in general (but not any concept in particular)'.

18 See Pollok 2017: 280: 'it is this reflection (in contrast to sensation) that requires a special legislation in order for the ensuing feeling of pleasure to be reasonably expected in anyone else reflecting on the same object'.

19 By no means alternatively, for apperception is the most fundamental condition of any judgement as such. I wish to thank Rachel Zuckert for helping me to point this out more clearly.

20 Synthesis and synthetic unity are not one and the same, just as an activity is not one and the same as its outcomes.

21 Pablo Picasso, *Bull: Plates I-XI* (1945-6): <http://www.publicartinchicago.com/the-bull-by-pablo-picasso/>.

22 No representation called a *schema* is listed in the *Stufenleiter* (KrV, A 320).

23 The *reflecting* status of the power of judgement is its own *purposive* orientation. In targeting its own function – i.e. in *reflecting* – the power of judgement makes its own use its end. It is, as it were, self-purposive.

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Cite this article: Filieri, L. (2021). Concept-less Schemata: The Reciprocity of Imagination and Understanding in Kant's Aesthetics. *Kantian Review* 26, 511–529. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1369415421000480>