

Kant on *de re*: some aspects of the Kantian non-conceptualism debate

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In recent years non-conceptual content theorists have taken Kant as a reference point on account of his notion of intuition (§§ 1-2). The present work aims at exploring several complementary issues intertwined with the notion of non-conceptual content: of these, the first concerns the role of the intuition as an indexical representation (§ 3), whereas the second applies to the presence of a few epistemic features articulated according to the distinction between *knowledge by acquaintance* and *knowledge by description* (§ 4). This work intends to dismiss the possibility that intuition may have an autonomous function of *de re* knowledge in support of an interpretative reading which can be labelled as *weak conceptualism*. To this end, the exploration will be conducted from a strictly transcendental perspective – i.e., by referring to the so-called theory of the “concept of a transcendental object”.

1. Kant between Conceptualism and Non-Conceptualism: Preliminaries

As is well known, Kant is regarded as the philosopher of the conceptualist position, i.e., the perspective holding the impossibility to attain knowledge, experience, or perception of reality in the absence of conceptual capacities. In the last decade, Kant has become a key frame of reference even for the theorists of non-conceptual content through a comprehensive reflection on the sensible dimension and the relevant notion of *intuition* in particular.

One of the most influential contemporary theorists of Conceptualism is McDowell. In *Mind and World*, McDowell addresses several parts of the Kantian approach to assert a

Kantian conceptualist theory of experience and attack any other approach based on a non-conceptual content. According to recent interventions in the Kantian debate on non-conceptual content, Sellars and McDowell have not recognized Kant's fundamental contribution to the non-conceptualist theory, nor has the contemporary debate adequately emphasized its own debt to Kant, so much so that Hanna (2006, 90-1) has claimed that «Kant's theory of intuition is the hidden historical origin of both sides of the debate between conceptualists and non-conceptualists».

The debate on non-conceptual content is split among several, not entirely consistent positions. Although it is unquestionably difficult to find an agreed upon definition in the current debate, Bermúdez's general considerations (2003, 1) can be taken as a starting point. Bermúdez argues that if the content of a mental state of a (human or non-human) creature is what the mental state actually represents, according to the *theory of non-conceptual mental content* certain mental states represent reality even if their subject does not possess the necessary concepts to articulate their contents. More precisely, while Conceptualism holds that the mental states of non-human creatures have no mental content due to their lack of conceptual capacities, Non-Conceptualism regards the representational content as being determined not only (or not entirely) by conceptual abilities, but also by non-conceptual capacities shared by infants and non-human creatures (cf. Evans 1982; Bermúdez 2003; Gunther 2003; Hanna 2008, 2011)¹.

¹ Along the lines of Gunther (2003) – cf. also Speaks (2005) and Bermúdez (2003) – Hanna (2008) outlines seven different arguments used in the debate for Non-Conceptualism: 1) if animals and children do not possess concepts, then their perceptual capacity must depend on non-conceptual cognition with non-conceptual content; 2) if the perceptual experience has a qualitative character based on the so-called *phenomenological fineness of grain*, which cannot be captured by a conceptual articulation, then a part of the human perceptual experience is non-conceptual; 3) if a subject can discriminate an item from a perceptual point of view, without the strictly conceptual ability to re-identify the item in question, then the subject is capable of non-conceptual cognition with non-conceptual content; 4) if it is possible to have a perception (or experience) of something without a judgment, then the cognition which is not based on judgments is non-conceptual with a non-conceptual content;

Within the non-conceptualist approach, Speaks (2005, 360) distinguishes two theses. According to the first – holding an *absolutely non-conceptual content*, and endorsed by Evans (1982), Martin (1992), Peacocke (1992), Heck (2000) – a state of mind has an absolutely non-conceptual content if and only if the type of content of the mental state is different from that of beliefs and thoughts. The second argument concerns the relationship between subject and content, and asserts a *relatively non-conceptual content*: a subject's mental state at time t has a *relatively non-conceptual content* if and only if the content of the mental state in question includes contents not conceptually grasped or held by the subject at time t .

Hanna (2008) introduces several Kantian non-conceptualist arguments, among which the well-known *Two Hands Argument*. Already expounded in the pre-critical period, the argument holds that the *incongruent counterparts* do not feature any descriptive or conceptual difference and can be distinguished only from a perceptual standpoint. Therefore, while Hanna contends that an absolutely non-conceptual content, Kantian non-conceptualists have articulated several argumentative strategies in the transcendental system to identify a

5) if one assumes the distinction between *knowing-how* and *knowing-that* (or *knowing-what*), then the capacity to know how to do something without knowing that or knowing what you are doing presupposes that the *knowing-how* is non-conceptual cognition with non-conceptual content; 6) if one of the assumptions of the theories in concept-acquisition is based on the non-conceptual perception of the objects falling under such concepts, then part of the perceptual capacity is non-conceptual with non-conceptual content; 7) if the theory of demonstratives includes the thesis that demonstrative reference is basically fixed indexically – and, on that account, non-descriptively – then perception is non-conceptual with non-conceptual content.

² Within what he terms *Absolutist Non-Conceptualism*, Hanna (2008) distinguishes a *weak Absolutist Non-Conceptualism* from a *strong Absolutist Non-Conceptualism*. According to the first theory, the structure and function of perceptual mental contents are contingently distinct from the structure and function of conceptual content (*contingently absolutely non-conceptual content*). According to the second thesis, the structure of perceptual mental contents is essentially distinct (*essentially absolutely non-conceptual content*). What Tye (2006) terms the *robustly non-conceptual content* of a perceptual state – in his view, a Russellian rather than Fregean proposition – to Hanna might be related to a *contingently absolutely non-conceptual content*: as Tye himself (2006) remarks, it is not excluded that this can be articulated through the conceptual dimension.

comparatively non-conceptual content in the intuition (see Allais 2009). Within this general framework, the difference between non-conceptual cognition and its content and conceptual cognition and its content seems to reflect the Kantian distinction between concepts and intuitions: the intuitive representations are assumed to possess certain semantic features pertaining to the indexical dimension alongside some epistemic features articulated according to the distinction between *knowledge by acquaintance* and *knowledge by description* (see Hanna 2008; de Sá Pereira 2013). The latter will be focused upon after the following framing of the types of representations in the transcendental system.

2. Concepts and intuitions: the *togetherness principle* and Kantian Non-Conceptualism

In the three classic passages presented below, Kant articulates the difference between the main types of representations.

All cognitions, that is, all representations related with consciousness to an object, are either *intuitions* or *concepts*. An intuition is a singular representation (*repraesentatio singularis*), a concept a universal (*repraesentatio per notas communes*) or reflected representation (*repraesentatio discursiva*) (*Log*, 589).

In whatever way and through whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, that through which it relates immediately to them, and at which all thought as a means is directed as an end, is intuition. This, however, takes place only insofar as the object is given to us; but this in turn, is possible only if it affects the mind in a certain way. The capacity (receptivity) to acquire representations through the way in which we are affected by objects is

called sensibility. Objects are therefore given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone affords us intuitions; but they are thought through the understanding, and from it arise concepts. But all thought, whether straightaway (*directe*) or through a detour (*indirecte*), must ultimately be related to intuitions, thus, in our case, to sensibility, since there is no other way in which objects can be given to us. (*KrV* A19/B33)

The genus is representation in general (*repraesentatio*). Under it stands the representation with consciousness (*perceptio*). A perception that refers to the subject as a modification of its state is a sensation (*sensatio*); an objective perception is a cognition (*cognitio*). The latter is either an intuition or a concept (*intuitus vel conceptus*). The former is immediately related to the object and is singular; the latter is mediate, by means of a mark, which can be common to several things. (*KrV* A320/B376)

Starting with the mathematical-philosophical debate stirred up by Hintikka (1967, 1969, 1972) and Parsons (1969, 1984, 2012), there have been identified certain conditions to be fulfilled in order for a representation to be an intuition. In the selected passages above Kant argues that the intuition is a *singular representation*: in other words, he introduces (a) *the singularity condition* based on the type of denotation involved, where the intuition is a singular representation denoting an individual object, as opposed to the concept, which relates to different objects falling under it in view of the presence of the very property the concept represents. In the second and third passages, where Kant adds that the intuition is «immediately related to the object», he virtually spells out (b) *the immediacy condition*, which concerns the type of relationship between the representation and its denotation, as opposed to concepts referring to the object through the mediation of the conceptual features or marks composing the very concept's intension.

Although the latter condition has been at the centre of a harsh dispute between Hintikka and Parsons³, several commentators are inclined to link the immediacy condition with the *referential directness* of the intuition. These scholars contend that intuitive representations not only bring about the immediate cognition of objects, but also identify them with no mediation of conceptual or descriptive contents. In the second passage, Kant (1783, 33) also introduces (c) *the object dependence condition*, i.e., the condition of immediacy implying a criterion of object-dependency whereby intuitions are produced as long as the objects are given: «An intuition is a representation of the sort which would immediately depend on the presence of an object». The intuition is assumed to be a relational form of cognition, its objective validity resting on the existence of the object.

³ According to Hintikka, singularity and immediacy are not to be regarded as distinct criteria in the definition of an intuition: while the former is the only distinctive feature needed to define an intuitive representation, the condition of immediacy is a secondary trait arising from the criterion of singularity itself. Expressly, singularity is the necessary and sufficient condition to define the notion of intuition, the criterion of immediacy – understood as the absence of mediation of conceptual marks – being just a mere corollary of singularity. This concerns the intuitions' reference modality based on a specifically immediate or direct relationship with their respective objects; on the other hand, the concepts' characteristics or notes are involved in the determination of the reference (Hintikka 1972, 342). It follows that the immediacy criterion does not establish a necessary link between intuition and sensibility – Hintikka (1965; 1967) points out that in a phase of Kant's approach the intuitive representation was not connected to sensibility – nor, *a fortiori*, can the criterion serve as an additional specification for its definition: understood as a mere corollary of singularity, it does not presuppose the presence of any object (Hintikka 1972, 341). On account of his different approach to the Kantian philosophy of mathematics, Parsons rejects the primacy Hintikka assigns to the singularity criterion in the definition of the intuition: the condition of immediacy – considered by the author as an essentially phenomenological-perceptual epistemic criterion – is not so much a dark formula nor a corollary of the singularity condition but rather the criterion to identify intuitive representations, which also implies that the object to which the intuition refers is somehow directly present to the mind and perception. To Parsons, singularity is a necessary but not sufficient condition, too large a criterion to encompass the notion of intuition: in fact, there can be singular representations which are not immediate, such as those linguistically expressed by definite descriptions; for this reason, he introduces the immediacy criterion as a separate condition from singularity. Ultimately, while to Hintikka the intuition is immediate for the very reason that it is singular, to Parsons it is singular and immediately linked to its object.

This basically demonstrative relation implies (d) *the relatedness to sensibility condition*: the intuitive representation has a direct reference to the sensible object because this can be given only through the faculty of sensibility, i.e., the faculty to receive sensible representations based on the way in which the subject is affected by the objects: «it comes along with our nature that intuition can never be other than sensible, i.e., that it contains only the way in which we are affected by objects» (*KrV* A51/B75) (cf. Howell 1973, 209). This amounts to saying that, to Kant, it is logically possible for a non-human mind – e.g., the divine mind – to have an intellectual intuition (cf. *KrV* B 72). Hanna (2006, 102) points to a further (e) *priority-to-thought condition*, for which the intuition is a representation that can be given before thinking. The priority of intuition is both cognitive and semantic, its independence and objective validity being marked regardless of the conceptual dimension.

Concepts and intuitions can be both pure and empirical; in particular, an empirical intuition is the product of both *sensation* (*Empfindung*) – the effect produced by an object on the capacity of sensible representation, i.e., the matter of sensibility – and pure intuitions, namely time and space, i.e., the *a priori* pure forms in which the sensible matter is organized. At the empirical level, it seems possible to summarize these conditions by arguing that an object is given only through sensibility, producing intuitions by virtue of a relation with the object. Such a relation depends on the sensations composing the matter of the intuition; they are articulated before the intervention of thought through the pure forms of sensibility – time and space – producing a singular representation immediately linked with the object.

If concepts and intuitions are two distinct types of objective representations, from an epistemic point of view they are both necessarily involved in the judgment for the determination of objective knowledge: with the well-known adage, «Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind». The *togetherness principle*, whereby knowledge is

produced only through the joint intervention of concepts and intuitions, has been supported by McDowell's Kant-inspired conceptualist position:

Our cognition arises from two fundamental sources in the mind, the first of which is the reception of representations (the receptivity of impressions), the second the faculty for cognizing an object by means of these representations (spontaneity of concepts); through the former an object is given to us, through the latter it is thought in relation to that representation (as a mere determination of the mind). Intuition and concepts therefore constitute the elements of all our cognition, so that neither concepts without intuition corresponding to them in some way nor intuition without concepts can yield a cognition. (*KrV* A50/B74)

Against this view, Hanna argues that concepts and intuitions are cognitively and semantically interdependent only as to the constitution of *objectively valid judgments*. Beyond this specific epistemic dimension consisting of *empirically meaningful judgments*, empty concepts or blind intuitions are certainly possible; Hanna distinguishes a direct relation of the perceptual dimension in the Kantian approach: intuitions are representations cognitively and semantically independent of the concepts with non-conceptual cognitive contents (Hanna 2006, 100). Against this background, the *togetherness principle* is consistent with Kantian Non-Conceptualism on account of the epistemic and metaphysical independence of the intuitive representation. From these considerations, there emerge the two above-mentioned theoretical issues which are closely linked to the notion of non-conceptual content: the first is semantic and will be addressed in the next paragraph, whereas the second is more closely concerned with epistemic considerations which will be analyzed in the fourth paragraph.

3. The intuition as an indexical representation

Some of the scholars involved in the current debate on Kantian non-conceptual content consider the sensible intuition an indexical representation; thus, they are prone to link it with directly referential singular terms (Hanna 2000, 21). This position has already been supported within the Kantian philosophical-mathematical debate: regardless of the different approaches, both Hintikka and Parsons correlate the distinction between concepts and intuitions to that between singular and general terms. Moreover, following Hintikka's account, Howell (1973) sees the synthesis of the manifold in the intuition as the Kantian version of quantification in the perceptual context and suggests a synthesis of the two positions⁴.

Hanna (2001, 195-6) focuses on the features of the immediacy criterion to highlight that only intuitions can immediately refer to an object; concepts, on the other hand, are provided with a mediated reference based on the conceptual

⁴ On the one hand, Howell agrees with Hintikka's *Transcendental Aesthetic* interpretation but (and in line with Parsons) rejects Hintikka's assumption that all singular representations are intuitive. As can be seen from different textual evidence in Kant, certain singular representations – such as those corresponding to definite descriptions – depend on the mediation of a conceptual mark. As such, they are not purely intuitive. On the other hand, while he concurs with Parsons' contending that the immediacy criterion is no corollary of singularity, Howell rejects – like Hintikka – Parsons' assumption that this criterion should be identified with the sensible givenness rather than with the relation without mediation of a conceptual mark between the intuition and its object. In conclusion, he considers singular intuitions immediate singular representations – a sort of *mental demonstratives* – and frames them within the theory of direct reference. Within a Fregean discussion on the nature of *Sinn*, in referring to a passage where Frege comments on Kant's notion of intuition in geometry to clarify the matter of apprehension of a geometric entity without this being conceptually distinguishable from other entities, Burge (1979, 431) also identifies the notion of intuition with a strictly non-descriptive indexical representation which will be useful to recall while discussing the nature of *de re* thoughts. Howell and Burge are not the only ones to connect the notion of intuition with this theoretical framework: apparently Hintikka himself (1972, 342) has hinted at a «direct reference to objects» in order to expound the immediacy criterion. In his *Postscript*, Parsons (2012) also emphasizes this point while reporting Hintikka's position during a 1983 discussion (also remarking that it should have led Hintikka to disavow his position on the immediacy criterion as a corollary of singularity).

marks composing their intension and determining the set of objects which fall under them. Hanna redefines the nature of the referential mechanism of the intuition in contemporary terms by explicitly referring to the theory of direct reference mainly developed by Kaplan, Kripke, and Putnam: just as particular singular terms (including demonstratives and indexicals proper) are directly referential, denoting their object directly – i.e., without a mediation or satisfaction of descriptive conditions – sensible intuitions are indexical singular representations directly relating to their objects, that is, without the mediation of a conceptual content: «So the Kantian distinction between conceptual (mediate) reference and intuitive (immediate) reference is most accurately construed as the difference between, on the one hand, indirect or description-determined reference to an object, and, on the other, direct or non-description-determined reference to an object. More plainly put, intuitional reference is direct reference» (Hanna 2001, 197).

While it is possible to recognize the same referential device, it does not seem just as possible to assert a link between the role of the intuition and that of singular terms (Thompson 1972, Capozzi, 2014). In this respect, at least two fundamental theoretical assumptions are to be isolated in the transcendental system: the first regards the logical form of singular judgments, the second concerns the dismissal of lowest species.

3.1 The logical form of singular judgments

Firstly, the logical form of the judgment does not involve any singular representation: to Kant, judgment constituents are always concepts, namely general representations. More specifically, these consist of cases of singular judgments using a) proper names as subjects, as in Kant's examples «Caius is mortal» (*Log*, 599; *KrV* A322/B378) and «Adam was fallible» (*Reflexion* 3080, AA 16, 647); b) demonstratives with the form “This F is G”: «this house is

plastered in this way or that» (*Wiener Logik* 1992, 352) and «This world is the best» (*Reflexion* 3173, AA 16, 695); c) definite descriptions expressing a concept's singular use have to be contextualized within the traditional logical frame accepted by Kant. From the angle of logical form, singular judgments are to be treated as universal ones:

The logicians rightly say that in the use of judgments in syllogisms singular judgments can be treated like universal ones. For just because they have no domain at all, their predicate is not merely related to some of what is contained under the concept of the subject while being excluded from another part of it. The predicate therefore holds of that concept without exception, just as if the latter were a generally valid concept with a domain with the predicate applying to the whole of what is signified. (*KrV* A71/B96)

This entails that the subject of a singular judgment can be used in an equivalent universal judgement, as in Kant's example «God is without error; everything which is God is without error» (*Reflexion* 3080, AA16, 647). Certainly, from an epistemic point of view – but not from that of logical validity – if a singular judgment (*judicium singular*) is compared with a universal one (*judicia communia*) with respect to quantity, the two will appear quite different. Indeed, Kant states that the former relates to the latter as unity relates to infinity, implying a singular use of a concept, as will be observed shortly.

3.2 *The dismissal of lowest species*

The second assumption concerns the anti-Aristotelian and anti-Leibnizian dismissal of lowest species and singular concepts. Concepts are considered predicates of possible judgments through their application to other concepts;

no concept has a singular representative function thoroughly determining an individual or particular (cf. A656/B684 for explicit support).

Following Capozzi, it is important to remember that to Kant every concept has an intension (*Inhalt*) and an extension (*Umfang*)⁵. The inverse connection between intension and extension («Quantum cognitio ab una parte lucri facit, tantum ab altera mulctatur» – *Reflexion* 2893, AA16, 564) sets forth a relation of subordination specifying the hierarchy among the concepts based on *genus* and *species*. The possibility to articulate the hierarchy of concepts depends on two complementary operations: abstraction and determination. Abstraction is a bottom-up process from lower to higher concepts; as marks are subtracted, the complexity of intension decreases. The inverse operation is determination, which is similar to addition in that it practically adds marks and concepts to higher concepts so as to move down through the hierarchy.

The more marks the abstraction subtracts from the concept's intension, the higher we ascend to the very top of the *summum genus*, i.e., the concept of something (*Etwas*) (cf. *Log*, 593; *Logik Pölitz* AA24, 570), of a being (*Wesen*), or of a thing (*Ding*) (cf. *Logik Dohna-Wundlacken* 1992, 488). On the contrary, and according to the *law of specification*, there is no concept or *species infima* under which no other conceptual content can possibly stand. Determination is virtually unlimited:

⁵ Both intension and extension fall under the notion of “containment”. While the former consists of the set of marks contained by the concept (*Logik Pölitz* AA24, 569) – a generic content to be kept distinct from the logical essence (cf. *infra*) – «the extension of a concept is a *sphaera*, and it is concerned with the multitude of things that are contained under the concept» (*Wiener Logik* 1992, 354). In particular, «the more the things that stand under a concept and can be thought through it, the greater is its extension or sphere» (*Log*, 593). It is necessary to specify that the extension can also consist of a set of concepts (cf. *Philosophische Enzyklopädie*, AA29, 17). Following the *Port-Royal* tradition (see Capozzi, Roncaglia 2009, 99-100; Capozzi, 2009, 127), in the literature there are two definitions of “extension”: 1) in the logical doctrine of judgments and inferences, the extension consists of the things contained by the concept, also referred to as “extension-class” by Capozzi; 2) in the logical doctrine of concepts, Kant speaks of *extension logic* (*Log*, 596), whereby the extension consists of the concepts in whose intensions the concept is contained (Capozzi, 2009, 128; Capozzi, 2014).

Every *genus* requires different *species*, and these *sub-species*, and since none of the latter once again is ever without a sphere, (a domain as a *conceptus communis*), reason demands in its entire extension that no species be regarded as in itself the lowest; for since each species is always a concept that contains within itself only what is common to different things, this concept cannot be thoroughly determined, hence it cannot be related to an individual, consequently, it must at every time contain other concepts, i.e., subspecies, under itself. This law of specification could be expressed thus: *entium varietates non temere esse minuendas*. (KrV A655-6/B683-4)

Although each concept is a species contained in some higher genus up to the very top of the *summum genus* hierarchy, which expresses the maximum generality, each concept can be further articulated by an even more specific one. Consequently, following *Log* (595) no concept can be not common, free of extension and not subject to further determination:

[. . .] in the series of species and genera there is no lowest concept (*conceptus infimus*) or lowest species, under which no other would be contained, because such a one cannot possibly be determined. For even if we have a concept that we apply *immediately* to individuals, there can still be specific differences in regard to it, which we either do not note, or which we disregard

All this results in an anti-Leibnizian rejection of the *principle of indiscernibles*, which lies on the assumption that in the absence of *haecceity* – i.e., according to the dictates of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, the complete notion of an individual which defines a set of attributes determining the metaphysical identity of the individual substance (*monad*) – one cannot state that two individuals with the same concept are the same.

3.3 *The conceptualist form of singular terms*

It is exactly because the possibility of singular concepts⁶ is rejected that the intuition – a singular representation by definition – amounts to the best possible candidate to fill the subject role in singular judgments. The principle whereby intuitions cannot fill the subject role in singular judgments holds together with the denial of an *infima species* and singular or individual concepts: in fact, Kant allows for the possibility of a singular *use* of a concept in the subject role within singular judgments. While Kant (*Log*, 589) explicitly states that concepts are representations whose logical form is always general by definition, he also allows for three different uses of concepts, namely general, singular and particular: «it is a mere tautology to speak of universal or common concepts – a mistake that is grounded in an incorrect division of concepts into universal, particular, and singular. Concepts themselves cannot be so divided, but only their use (*Gebrauch*)».

In this regard, one should refer to the Kantian view that no thought is non-linguistic, every name referring to the concept's logical essence. This consists of marks being a) necessary or constitutive in order to define the concept itself (*Wiener Logik* 1992, 293); b) primitive (cf. *Letter to Reinhold*, May 12 1789, [1967, 138]); c) inseparable and immutable, no other concepts being possible without them (*Logik Dohna-Wundlacken* 1992, 463); d) numerically limited (*KrV* A728/B756); e) arbitrarily associated with the name attributed to the concept (1798, 191);

⁶ With Capozzi (2009), proper names are associated with *conceptus singulares*, «as disconcerting may be the presence of this term in the Kantian logical lexicon» given Kant's explicit dismissal of singular concepts: *being something* and *being one* are the only necessary marks to articulate the *conceptus singulares*. If they cannot differ in content – this obviously being the same in all of them – then singular concepts designated by proper names differ only in number: «*differentia numerica (Caius, Titius)*» (*Reflexion* 2901, AA 16, 566). In a further *Reflexion* (2392, AA16, 34), Kant argues that in the judgment the *conceptus singulares* designated by such names as “Julius Caesar” can fulfil the role of the subject, not that of the predicate, given their lack of logical extension.

f) subject to logical-linguistic analysis (*Logik Dohna-Wundlacken* 1992, 464). If the word “home” designates a common concept, this can be used in three different ways based on the quantitative determination (universal, particular, or singular) of its extension-class, i.e., the set of things which can be articulated *in toto*, *in parte*, or *in individuo* (1992, 352). The *Wiener Logik* (1992, 352) expounds the issue as follows:

I can make use of a concept insofar as it is applied to many objects[;] then the concept is used as a *repraesentatio communis*, i.e., is used *in abstracto*, e.g., house. If I say of all houses, now, that they must have a roof, then this is the *usus universalis*. It is always the same concept, however, and is here used wholly universally. For having a roof holds for all houses. This use of the concept is concerned universally with all, then. But a particular use is concerned only with many. E.g., some houses must have a gate. Or I use the concept only for an individual thing. E.g., this house is plastered in this way or that.

Consequently, it is judgments, not concepts, that are divided into universal, particular, and singular, as only judgments can specify the use of concepts based on their quantitative determinations.

In an epistemic context, taking up the singular judgments used by Kant (employed singularly as a subject of a judgment so as to represent a given object and ascribe it a certain property), a concept must fulfil two conditions: the condition of existence, according to which the concept must represent an existing object in a space-time dimension which can be met only through the intervention of intuition, and the condition of uniqueness, whereby the concept must represent an object through the specific features that only that particular object possesses. These conditions further articulate the issue of identification, whereby the same intuition – that is, the same phenomenal object – can be identified on several occasions

only with respect to a conceptual dimension under which the intuition falls (see Thompson, 1972).

At first glance, here the emerging picture is descriptivist. In view of the fact that it relates to its object in an immediate way, i.e., without the mediation of any conceptual content, the intuition is a demonstrative singular representation; nonetheless, while the intuitive dimension can only attest to the presence of something spatio-temporally located, it cannot identify nor re-identify it as the same particular object. To take a trivial example, if proper names are the linguistic labels of intuitions, then we cannot apply nor reapply the same name to a specific individual: «Names can be applied, reapplied, and misapplied; so can concepts, but not intuitions» (Thompson 1972, 91). *Mutatis mutandis*, the same argument can be used with regard to demonstratives; as Kant probably concurred with the Port Royalists' claim that the pronoun "this" is equivalent to "this thing", the demonstrative simply makes a concept (even the most general of all) singular. Despite the remarkable differences between names and demonstratives highlighted by Capozzi (2014)⁷, in Kant the use of singular terms seems essentially bound to the conceptual component; the intuitive dimension alone cannot even identify something spatio-temporally located as an object, as will be discussed in the next sections.

⁷ Capozzi (2014): «there is a difference between the *singularization* of "house" and the *singular* "Julius Caesar," a difference that is disregarded in Thompson's interpretation. As we have seen, "this house" preserves the logical essence of the general concept "house" and indicates a point in the class-extension of the concept "house" *and of no other concept*. "Julius Caesar" conveys a conceptual content, but this content differs from the logical essence of general concepts. A singular concept does not contain a complex of few, primitive, immutable, necessary and unchangeable marks that are associated to the name and are available to anyone. A singular concept contains a single obligatory mark – the thought of *something singular* – which can be complemented with variable aggregates of conceptual marks with a freedom impossible for "house"».

4. Knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description: the *weak conceptualist* view

From the semantic considerations on the referential mechanism of the intuitive representations expounded in the preceding paragraph to a more strictly epistemic perspective, as to the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual content, the Kantian difference between concepts and intuitions has been partially related to the distinction between *knowledge by acquaintance* and *knowledge by description*, which specifies two basic types of knowledge (cf. Hanna 2008, 52)⁸.

While descriptive representations represent their referents through the properties they instantiate – their reference being determined by the existence of whatever may satisfy such a property – in the so-called *de re* thoughts the individual or the object to which the thought refers is determined by a demonstrative mode of presentation specified by a relation of information-perception between the object and the occurrence of the thought. In a nutshell, non-descriptive representations represent their referents through a contextual relation between the occurrence of a thought and the object itself⁹ (against this

⁸ Since Russell onward, much has been written on the subject; for our purposes, and taking account of the current debate between *descriptivism* and *singularism* involving both philosophies of language and mind (cf. Jeshion 2010), the intuitive difference between descriptive thoughts, which relate to a particular object or individual (e.g., “the strongest man in the world can lift 150 kg”), and the so-called *de re* thoughts (e.g., “that man is drunk”), based on a relation of acquaintance, can be immediately grasped by highlighting the nature and the different roles of the respective modes of presentation (see Burge, 1977; Bach, 1987; Recanati, 2009). In particular, *de re* thoughts are based on the reconsideration of Russell’s notion of *acquaintance* through Evans’s neo-Fregean lesson, which explicitly takes into account non-descriptive modes of presentation.

⁹ This implies that the determination of the reference does not depend on an inherent representational criterion – in other words, it is not based on the fact that the representation conforms to the object to which it refers – but on a rather external one: a perceptual relation between the representation and its object, which, as such, is not represented in the content of the representation itself. Expressed in a different way, what in *de re* thoughts makes an object the referent of the thought is not the fact that the object satisfies any one of the properties expressed by a concept. Obviously, properties may also come into the picture, as the property

background, non-descriptive representations are *token-reflexive* due to their indexical nature; therefore, they have two semantic levels).

In Kant we can find an articulation of the different types of cognition that calls to mind a specific difference between propositional knowledge (*erkennen dass*) and knowledge by acquaintance (*kennen*) (cf. de Sá Pereira 2013). Following the *Jäsche Logik* (cf. also *Blomberg Logic*, § 139):

The *first* degree of cognition is: *to represent* something;
 The *second*: to represent something with consciousness,
 or *to perceive* (*percipere*);
 The *third*: *to be acquainted* with [kennen] something
 (*noscere*), or to represent something in comparison with
 other things, both as to *sameness* [Einerleiheit] and as to
difference;
 The *fourth*: *to be acquainted* with [kennen] something
 with *consciousness*, i.e., *to cognize* it [erkennen];
 (*cognoscere*). Animals are acquainted with [kennen]
 objects too, but they do not cognize [erkennen] them.
 (*Log*, 569-570)

The classic Kantian example of the savage used by Hanna (2006, 104) to explain one of the Kantian non-conceptual content types seems to fall under the types of *de re* thoughts:

If a savage (*Wilder*) sees a house from a distance for example, with whose use he is not acquainted, he admittedly has before him in his representation the very

of being drunk in the *de re* thought exemplified by “that man is drunk”; nonetheless, the referent – i.e., the man endowed with the property of being drunk – is not so much determined by the properties instantiated as through the direct mode of presentation by virtue of a relation of acquaintance which is not represented as such. In *de re* thoughts, properties play no role in determining what a non-descriptive representation refers to, so much so that I can correctly refer to the man to whom I attribute the property of being drunk even if I actually see that the man is not drunk at all: what matters is the particular perceptual relation established between the object and the mental occurrence.

same object as someone else who is acquainted with it determinately as a dwelling established for humans. But as to form, this cognition of one and the same object is different in the two. With one it is mere intuition, with the other it is intuition and concept at the same time. (*Log*, 544-5)

As opposed to a more “urbanized” subject, the savage neither possesses the concept of “house” nor recognizes that particular object as such; however, he does possess an intuitive presentation that establishes an immediate, singular representational link with the object in question¹⁰.

4.1 *The theory of the transcendental object*

Concerning the issues at the heart of the debate between conceptualists and non-conceptualists summarized above, this paragraph will deal with certain aspects of the so-called *theory of the transcendental object*. This theory has important repercussions because it apparently denies that intuition may be provided with an autonomous function of *de re* presentation. The condition of possibility for intuition to apprehend a phenomenal object is based on an act of thinking of the intellect involving the *concept of the transcendental object* (Allison 1968).

According to the well-known distinction between *noumenon* and *phenomenon*¹¹, the object *o* has an existence in itself and is

¹⁰ This particular case involves two different types of knowledge. Animals, as well as the savage in the example, have the *kennen* – i.e., they represent what they experience – and can distinguish an object from another thanks to the different types of sensations behind the material dimension of the intuition. On the other hand, they are not able to gain knowledge and awareness, i.e., they do not possess the *erkennen*, as no concept is involved.

¹¹ As is well known, also following Prauss (1974) and Allison (2004) – just to mention two classical works within the huge Kantian debate – there are important distinctions to be made (fortunately, for our purposes we can refrain from taking position on the correct interpretation of Transcendental Idealism). On the one hand, Kant introduces *Ding an sich* (and its variants, i.e., *Sache*, *Gegenstand*, and *Object an sich*) as a short phrase for *Ding an sich selbst* (and its variants, i.e., *Sache*, *Gegenstand*, and *Object an sich selbst*) and, especially, for *Ding an sich*

presented as a phenomenon through intuition *i*. Provided that it is not possible to know an object in itself and assign it certain properties outside the representational order, to think an object in itself it is necessary the employment of the indeterminate thought that *something in general* (= x) exists in itself and appears through the intuition (*KrV* A 104). The concept of an object in general is nothing but the *concept* of a *transcendental object*. Intuitions are sensible singular representations that immediately refer to objects, whereas appearances – i.e., the products of this relation – are representations to be kept distinct from what is referred to as “transcendental object” (= x). Considered in its function, the concept of a general or transcendental object (= x) is the indeterminate thought of a single object having an existence in itself. It consists in the condition of possibility to think the singular object – spatio-temporally determined by the intuition as *Erscheinung* – and provide it with objective reality through the consequent unification of empirical concepts and the relative attribution of the properties presented by the intuition:

we are now also able to determine our concepts of an object in general more correctly. All representations, as representations, have their object, and can themselves be objects of other representations in turn. Appearances are the only objects that can be given to us immediately, and that in them which is immediately related to the object is called intuition. However, these appearances are not things in themselves, but themselves only representations, which in turn have their object, which therefore cannot be further intuited by us, and that may therefore be called the non-empirical, i.e., transcendental object = X. The pure

selbst betrachtet. On first approximation, if it is possible to distinguish between *Erscheinung*, the indeterminate object of sensible intuition, and *Phänomenon*, the sensible object falling under the categories, then it should also be possible to identify a further distinction between *Ding an sich* and *Noumenon*: «The former is conceptually undetermined, since our thought of it is empty of real content, while the latter, as putative object of an intellectual intuition, is “conceptually” determined, though not for our discursive intellect» (Allison 2004, 58).

concept of this transcendental object (which in all of our cognitions is really always one and the same = X) is that which in all of our empirical concepts in general can provide relation to an object, i.e., objective reality. This concept cannot contain any determinate intuition at all, and therefore concerns nothing but that unity which must be encountered in a manifold of cognition insofar as it stands in relation to an object. (*KrV* A108/109)

Leaving aside the many exegetical and theoretical problems addressed by the debate on the relation between *transcendental object*, *noumenon*, and the *thing in itself*¹², and on the terminological change introduced in the second edition of the *KrV* as regards the distinction between a positive and a negative sense of *noumenon* – which is not supposed to affect the gist of the theory, despite Kant’s dismissal of the expression “transcendental object” – for Allison (2004, 61) the concept of the transcendental object should be considered as a sort of transcendental pointer: «it serves to define the philosophical task by indicating that the commonsensical and transcendently realistic concern with the “real” nature of objects must be replaced by a critical analysis of the conditions of the representation of an object». At this stage it might be useful to refer to the intensional logic apparatus employed by Howell to

¹² In several passages Kant sharply distinguishes the *noumenon* from the transcendental object, for example *KrV* A 253: «The object to which I relate appearance in general is the transcendental object, i.e., the entirely undetermined thought of something in general. This cannot be called the noumenon; for I do not know anything about what it is in itself, and have no concept of it except merely that of the object of a sensible intuition in general, which is therefore the same for all appearances». In *KrV* A288-89/B344-45 Kant suggests that the transcendental object might also be considered as a noumenon only if it is correctly understood. Even if there are certain *KrV* passages where Kant relates the transcendental object to the thing as it is in itself, for Allison (2004, 60) the concept of the transcendental object is introduced in order to deal with the issue of the “immanentization” of cognition: «The basic problem is that we cannot, as it were, stand outside our representations in order to compare them with some transcendently real entity. Accordingly, such an object “must be thought only as something in general = X” (A104), which is later identified with the transcendental object».

articulate the theory of the transcendental object, starting from a slight adaptation of one of his examples.

Suppose that a subject H has a cognitive relation with a triangular wooden house: empirical intuition i displays the different properties contained in the manifold of representations, e.g., i_1 displays property P_1 of being made of wood, i_2 displays property P_2 of being a house, i_3 displays spatial part s_1 , corresponding to the upper part of the house positioned in l_1 , and, lastly, i_4 displays spatial part s_2 , corresponding to the lower part of the house positioned in l_2 . The manifold is synthesised in the intuition by the imagination and the application of concepts so that the intuitive singular representation falling under the empirical concept “triangular wooden house” displays proprieties and spatial parts jointly (C being the concept of “wooden house”, D being the concept of “being triangular”). Given that the conditions of possibility of (1) *H knows that (object o is made of wood)* presuppose (2) *H thinks that (object o has the property of being made of wood)*, the example can be articulated as follows:

(3) i_1 displays P_1 to H & then i_2 displays P_2 to H & then i_3 displays s_1 (as occurring at l_1) to H & then i_4 displays s_2 (as occurring at l_2) to H & H thinks that [some single object X is such that (X has P_1 & X has P_2 & X has s_1 & X has s_2 & s_1 occurs at l_1 & s_2 occurs at l_2 & X occurs at $l_1 + l_2$ & P_1 and P_2 jointly constitute concept C & s_1 and s_2 jointly specify concept D)].

In sum, what is at play here is an intensional context allowing no substitution of co-referential singular terms. As is well known, with Quine (1956) – who expressly speaks of the *relational* and *notional sense* of those attitude verbs such as “believe” – a sentence containing an intensional operator can be ambiguous as regards a *de re* or a *de dicto* interpretation. However, this can be immediately grasped as soon as the *scope* of the existential quantifier is ascertained: using the same

example in a synthetic way, (5) *H thinks that (some single object X is such and such)* presents a *de re* and a *de dicto* reading, respectively, (5a) $(\exists x)[x \text{ has existence in itself} \ \& \ x \text{ is an object} \ \& \ H \text{ thinks that } (x \text{ is an object} \ \& \ x \text{ is such and such})]$; (5b) *H thinks that $(\exists x) (x \text{ is an object} \ \& \ x \text{ is such and such})$* . The *de dicto* reading captures the peculiar features assigned by Kant to the concept of a general or transcendental object (= X): specifically, this takes on the role of an indeterminate thought, which, in turn, although referring to a single object (= X), relates to no object in particular:

[H's *de dicto* thought] is in fact an indeterminate thought, a thought about an object in general, and a thought nevertheless not about a special type or kind of object, just in the following sense: namely, just in the sense that in this thought H thinks *that there is an object x*, in the most general sense of 'object', which is such and such; but in this thought H does not think, *de re* fashion, of any particular object (or type or kind of object), that *that object is such and such*. It does seem to be in just this sense that Kant means us to understand the sort of indeterminacy that, according to the transcendental-object theory, is supposed to attach to H's act of thought. (Howell 1981, 102)

The *de dicto* reading of (3) produces (6):

(6) i_1 displays P_1 to H & then i_2 displays P_2 to H & then i_3 displays s_1 (as occurring at l_1) to H & then i_4 displays s_2 (as occurring at l_2) to H & H thinks that $(\exists x) (X \text{ is an object} \ \& \ X \text{ has } P_1 \ \& \ X \text{ has } P_2 \ \& \ X \text{ has } s_1 \ \& \ X \text{ has } s_2 \ \& \ s_1 \text{ occurs at } l_1 \ \& \ s_2 \text{ occurs at } l_2 \ \& \ X \text{ occurs at } l_1 + l_2 \ \& \ P_1 \text{ and } P_2 \text{ jointly constitute concept C} \ \& \ s_1 \text{ and } s_2 \text{ jointly specify concept D})$

In this Kantian scenario, the typically *de re* knowledge of a single particular object – e.g., of a subject perceiving a triang-

ular wooden house before her – is a *de dicto* act of thought. On the basis of a *de re* mechanism, a phenomenal object is identified by the presentation function performed by the indexical empirical intuition locating the object in a given position within the spatio-temporal forms of sensibility. Through a *de dicto* mechanism, the relative concept of a transcendental object is involved as a condition of possibility in order to think an object; the attestation of singularity of a spatio-temporal something by intuition can be thus represented as an object which is attributed certain properties thanks to the synthesis of the empirical concepts.

The concept of the transcendental object is therefore a pointer, although conceptual rather than relational by definition. As to the above remarks on the difference between descriptive and non-descriptive representations, if the intuition presents a non-descriptive relational mode of presentation, and if such a relation is not displayed in the representation's content, in order to represent the object presented by the intuition as an object, then it is necessary the employment of the thought of such a relation and represent it *a priori* as its very condition of possibility: «We find, however, that our thought of the relation of all cognition to its object carries something of necessity with it» (*KrV* A 104).

4.2. Non-conceptualism vs. weak conceptualism

My interpretative reading based on the *theory of the transcendental object*, that might be referred to as *weak conceptualism*¹³, features a number of con-

¹³ The Kant's conceptualism follows directly from the togetherness principle and can be divided in (1) a *strong Kantian conceptualism*: the innate conceptual human capacities not only strictly determine all conscious objective representational content but also strictly determine the faculty of sensibility itself and all the intuitions (cf., e.g., Sellars 1963, Sellars 1968, McDowell 1994, Abela 2002); and in (2) a *weak Kantian conceptualism*: the innate conceptual human capacities strictly determine all conscious objective representational content, although the faculty of sensibility independently provides a necessary condition for conscious objective representation (cf., e.g., Ginsborg 2006, Ginsborg 2008, Grüne 2009,

trasting results with the main points stirring the debate on Kantian *non-conceptualism*. The non-conceptualists' overall aim consists in delimiting the conceptualists' claims behind the argumentative structure of the *Transcendental Deduction*. This includes some of the arguments discussed in the previous paragraphs through a deflationary strategy aimed at weakening the *togetherness principle*. As already observed, the involvement of the faculty of judgment is allegedly necessary only as to objective knowledge, not perception: in fact, perception is assumed to lie on the use of intuitive representations without the intervention of concepts understood as general rules constituting judgments (cf. Hanna 2006; Allais 2009).

The Kantian non-conceptualist strategy has several further ramifications. In particular, 1) it refers to those passages from the *Transcendental Deduction* (*KrV* A89/B122, B 132, B145) holding that no intervention of the intellect is needed to ensure that phenomenal objects are given in the intuition¹⁴; 2) it distinguishes figurative from intellectual synthesis; 3) it asserts that the intuition can be based on a non-conceptual activity of synthesis.

For example, Allais (2009) draws attention to the passages focusing on the threefold synthesis in the first edition of the *Transcendental Deduction*: unlike apprehension and reproduction, here only recognition involves the conceptual dimension. Secondly, Allais refers to *KrV* A78/B103, where a distinction between the imagination's synthesis and the functions of the intellect is made. In this way, Allais (2009) argues for the attribution of the *relative* non-conceptual content

Land 2011, Griffith 2012, Williams 2012). For Hanna (2014), «the weak variety at least minimally preserves Kant's cognitive dualism of faculties, and also some sort of semi-independent *cognitive role* for intuitions (even though it still rejects the thesis that intuitions have an essentially different kind of *representational content* from concepts), the strong variety does *not* countenance any of these concessions to non-conceptualism, and thereby, in effect, strong Kantian conceptualism explanatorily reduces the faculty of sensibility to the faculty of understanding».

¹⁴ Cf. Hanna (2001, 199) (2005, 259), Allais (2009, 396), Schulting (2012, 84); however, cf. the antithetical conceptualist interpretations of *KrV* A89/B122 by Allison (2001, 38), Grüne (2011).

to Kant by rejecting a *strong* conceptualist approach in the manner of McDowell – the view for which the intuition does not make an even notionally separable contribution to cognition¹⁵. To the scholar (2009, 386), the intuition can be assumed to provide a separate, perceptual presentation of spatio-temporally located *mind-independent* entities, be they objects or empirical details, making an at least notionally separable representational contribution. Accordingly, a subject can have a perceptual representation with a content without possessing any concept to describe that content:

While [...] what perceptual states a subject might be in does not depend on what concepts she possesses, this need not mean denying that our perceptual states *are* brought under concepts, and that experience, for us, typically is an actualization of conceptual capacities in sensory consciousness itself. Rather, what is denied is that experience is representational only to the extent that it is brought under concepts. Applying this to Kant, the idea is not that we need deny that our intuitions are brought under concepts (and must be, if we are to cognize an objective world), but that they need to be brought under concepts in order to present us with particulars.

As said above, this interpretative scenario is essentially based on a distinction between the imagination's synthesis and the functions of the intellect; the matter of the different interpretations of the passages suggested in the debate will not be

¹⁵ McDowell (1994, 9): «The original Kantian thought was that empirical knowledge results from a cooperation between receptivity and spontaneity. [...] We can dismount from the seesaw if we can achieve a firm grip on this thought: receptivity does not make an even notionally separable contribution to the cooperation. The relevant conceptual capacities are drawn on in receptivity. [...] It is not that they are exercised on an extra-conceptual deliverance of receptivity. We should understand what Kant calls “intuition” - experiential intake - not as a bare getting of an extra-conceptual Given, but as a kind of occurrence or state that already has conceptual content». As pointed up by Allais, even if McDowell's intention in *Mind and World* is theoretical rather than historical-interpretative, his reading has largely influenced the Kantian debate.

touched on here¹⁶. The passages discussed above, which make up the so-called “transcendental object theory”, certainly suggest new reflection points to be addressed by those scholars who aim to tackle Kantian non-conceptualism. It is one thing to establish that the intuitive representation makes a peculiar and autonomous (as to conceptual forms) contribution to content, and quite another thing to maintain that this contribution may enable an object to be perceived regardless of any conceptual articulation through an *autonomous* epistemic function of *de re* presentation assigned to the intuitions. For this reason, my perspective might be referred to as *weak conceptualism*: as contrasted with McDowell’s strong conceptualism, here the intuition makes a notionally separable representational contribution to cognition, and does so by making reference possible in the first place (cf. *supra*, §§ 2-3). In contrast with Allais’s non-conceptualism, this epistemic contribution cannot be realized without at least the *concept of the transcendental object*.

4.3 «The object must be thought of only as something in general = X»

To delve even deeper into this view it is necessary to consider the expression “an object of representations” (cf. *KrV* A 104). Appearances are nothing but sensible representations; they are not to be regarded as objects in themselves, outside the power of representation. Hence, the object has to be considered as distinct from cognition: «this object must be thought of only as something in general = X, since outside of our cognition we have nothing that we could set over against this cognition as corresponding to it».

¹⁶ Several commentators (see, e.g., Ginsborg, 2008; Schulting, 2012) have rejected this non-conceptualist reading by highlighting the passages where the synthetic activity is attributed to the intellect (e.g., *KrV* B129) and the spontaneity of the imagination paralleled to that of the intellect (e.g., *KrV* B162n).

The subject cannot be representationally (or perceptually) presented with a particular/object if she does not employ the concept of the transcendental object understood as a thought on the relation between object and cognition. Since «our thought of the relation of all cognition to its object carries something of necessity with it» then this concept is a necessary condition to determine a *de re* link with an object in the spatio-temporal indexical intuitive device. It is worthwhile to quote the full passage *KrV* A 104/105:

What does one mean, then, if one speaks of an object corresponding to and therefore also distinct from the cognition? It is easy to see that this object must be thought of only as something in general = X, since outside of our cognition we have nothing that we could set over against this cognition as corresponding to it. We find, however, that our thought of the relation of all cognition to its object carries something of necessity with it, since namely the latter is regarded as that which is opposed to our cognitions being determined at pleasure or arbitrarily rather than being determined *a priori*, since insofar as they are to relate to an object our cognitions must also necessarily agree with each other in relation to it, i.e., they must have that unity that constitutes the concept of an object.

If so, perception seems to be no mere intuitive event. For Allais (2009, 386), a subject can perceptually represent those particular aspects of things that can be brought under concepts even if she does not possess the relevant concepts, e.g. a subject can perceive a round red particular without the concepts of roundness, redness, and particularity. On the contrary, in my view the non-conceptual intuitive content is not assumed to exist without at least one transcendental conceptual dimension through a *de dicto* act and its relative concept of a transcendental object. The subject can perceive a round, red

particular without the concepts of roundness, redness, and particularity, but cannot ascribe them to an object regardless of the employment of the concept of the transcendental object: «The pure concept of this transcendental object (which in all of our cognitions is really always one and the same = X) is that which in all of our empirical concepts in general can provide relation to an object, i.e., objective reality» (*KrV* A 109).

In *KrV* A 250, Kant seems to be even more explicit about such a descriptivist result. On the one hand, all representations are related to some object through the understanding; since appearances are nothing but representations, the understanding relates them to the object of sensible intuition, i.e. the transcendental object: «This signifies, however a something = X, of which we know nothing at all nor can know anything in general (in accordance with the current constitution of our understanding), but is rather something that can serve only as a correlate of the unity of apperception for the unity of the manifold in sensible intuition, by means of which the understanding unifies that in the concept of an object». On the other hand, and this is the point at issue, «this transcendental object cannot even be separated from the sensible data, for then nothing would remain through which it would be thought». Yet, as it is no object of cognition in itself, the transcendental object is «only the representation of appearances under the concept of an object in general, which is determinable through the manifold of those appearances». It follows that the very appearances cannot subsist without the employment of the representation or concept of an object in general, so much so that the categories do not represent any *special* object given to the understanding, «but rather serve only to determine the transcendental object (the concept of something in general) through that which is given in sensibility, in order thereby to cognize appearances empirically under concepts of objects».

5. Conclusion

It thus seems that the subject can be perceptually presented with a particular/object regardless of the application of empirical concepts – and probably of pure concepts too – provided that the non-conceptual content theorists' arguments on the *Transcendental Deduction* are accurate (cf. *supra*, n. 12); in any event, this cannot possibly be the case without at least the concept of the transcendental object.

To return to the example of the savage perceiving a house, the savage and an urbanized subject will share the same type of intuitive representation and yet not the same conceptual dimension from a strictly empirical standpoint: both must employ the concept of the transcendental object – i.e. the concept of an object in general – as a condition of possibility for «the representation of appearances». Following this, the object is likely to be attributed a number of specific proprieties in the form of a judgment through the synthesis of the manifold, provided that the relevant empirical concepts are available.

In conclusion, the concept of a transcendental object allows the thought of the phenomenal object presented by the intuition in a non-descriptive mode at a spatio-temporal level. Hence, the Kantian *de re* proposal appears to be essentially descriptivist.

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