

Passage and infinitude: the aestheticization of time in Kant's *Critique of judgement*

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Abstract: According to the *transcendental Aesthetic* of the *Critique of pure reason* there are two properties of time that cannot be intellectualised: passage and infinitude. This study tries to show that these essential properties of time come to light in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. The contemplation of beauty will be understood as a non-successive time and the wonder which we experience in seeing the sublime will be understood through Kant's concept of infinite moment. These two aesthetic concepts of time will be integrated in Kant's broader view of time as developed in the first *Critique*.

Keywords: Kant, time, moment, aesthetics, beauty, infinitude.

1. INTRODUCTION

Exegesis in recent decades has brought to light the fact that the Kantian theory of time undergoes multiple modifications in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, all of which are moments of an organic evolution of the transcendental system in its theoretical dimension. A complete analysis of the kantian theory of time must integrate not only the distinction between the form of intuition and formal intuition, the genesis of succession or the temporalization of categories, but also the phronomy developed by Kant in his work *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* in order to understand why the Kantian concept of time "explains the possibility of as much synthetic a priori cognition as is presented by the general theory of motion." (CpR:A32/B48) It is thus clear that to get an accurate view of the kantian concept of time we cannot limit ourselves to the *Critique of Pure Reason*. But is it enough to limit ourselves to Kant's theoretical writings in order to understand time in all its complexity? If we turn to the *Critique of Judgement* the answer seems to be 'no'. Kant's aesthetics seems to have a temporal dimension which Lyotard noted in his commentary on the

Analytic of the Sublime (Lyotard, 1994). The aesthetic dimension seems to produce a metamorphosis in the internal dynamics of subjectivity that has the effect of transfiguring time. In other words, the change in the internal relations of subjectivity necessarily causes a metamorphosis of time.

In the case of the sublime, the transformation of temporality is not difficult to identify. At the end of his discussion of the mathematical sublime, Kant describes how the violent outburst of imagination and reason leads to the genesis of a moment that attempts to enclose within itself the infinity of all time. The conclusion can only be that the sublime moment expresses a time totally different from the moment of succession. As far as beauty is concerned, the metamorphosis of the concept of time is not so clear at first sight. However, Lyotard has shown that there is a passage in the *Analytic of the Beautiful* that can only be seen from the perspective of temporality. More specifically, in §12 of the third *Critique* Kant describes aesthetic contemplation as 'lingering'. For Lyotard this is a 'time of pause', different from the time of theoretical subjectivity (Lyotard, 1994:85). However, Kant does not develop the concept of this time of lingering, but only mentions it.

If there is a time inherent in aesthetic subjectivity, then it must be integrated into the larger concept of time as developed in the transcendental system. In other words, aesthetic time must be understood as a consequence of theoretical time. The aim of this study is to interpret aesthetic temporality as it appears in the *Critique of Judgement* as a modification of the concept of time in the first *Critique*.

2. FROM MEASURABLE SEQUENCE TO LINGERING TIME

The transcendental aesthetics of the *Critique of Pure Reason* aims to investigate the receptivity inherent in transcendental subjectivity. This formal capacity to perceive contains two forms of intuition: space and time. The form of intuition offers a simple manifold without being able to add "unity of representation" (CpR: B162n). As the *Transcendental Aesthetic* evolves, Kant will no longer speak of space and time as "forms of intuition" or "forms of phenomena", but as "representations". Thus, space is not only a way of perceiving what comes from outside, but can itself be represented as an object. When I set aside what the intellect thinks as well as all that is empirical, I see pure space as "extension and form." (CpR: B35).

In this passage the first objectification of space takes place, which will reach its goal in §26 of the transcendental deduction. In the *Metaphysical Exposition*, not only will space and time be explicitly called "necessary representations", but categories of the intellect will already be applied to them, as they are understood as "infinite given magnitude[s]". (CpR: B40, B48)

There is, however, an essential difference between the two representations: "Time can no more be intuited externally than space can be intuited as something in us" (CpR: B37). In the case of space, the process of transforming the form of intuition into an object does not encounter difficulties since it is the form of external sense. But time as an internal sense cannot be brought before the gaze as an object because "it cannot be a determination of outer appearances; it belongs neither to a shape or a position." (CpR: B50). Time as an inner passage (Nacheinander) can never become something external. However, Kant solves this impossibility by attempting to replace the irrepresentability of time through an analogy: "and just because this inner intuition yields no shape we also attempt to remedy this lack through analogies and represent the temporal sequence through a line progressing to infinity." (CpR: B50). In other words, time can only be known as a theoretical object through spatialization. It is important, however, that through its transformation into a line, time retains all its properties but one, namely that it is a "one-after-another" (nacheinander) (CpR: B50). Therefore, the concept of time in the *Critique of Pure Reason* will leave behind what is precisely the essence of temporality: passage. As I will try to show, it is precisely this dimension of time that makes its appearance in the contemplation of beauty.

We can therefore distinguish two forms of time in *Transcendental Aesthetics*: time spatialised as a line and time as pure passage. The former will lead to the concept of succession and the latter to the lingering of aesthetic contemplation.

2.1 Time as succession

In §24 of the *transcendental deduction* Kant thematizes the self-affecting of the self which he describes using a kind of psychology of geometry: "We cannot think of a line without drawing it in thought, and we cannot even represent time without, in drawing a straight line (which is to be the external figurative representation of time), we attend merely to the action

of the synthesis of the manifold through which we successively determine the inner sense, and thereby attending to the succession of this determination in inner sense." (CpR: B154) In order to understand the meaning of the Kantian concept of succession we must start from the act of "attending". For example, as Waxman (Waxman, 1991: 256) points out, we can be aware of a pain in several ways. If awareness is diffuse its temporal duration cannot be precisely determined. Thus, if pain occurs while working, I may not perceive its temporal beginning and end. If consciousness is a clear and directed one, then the temporal extent of the sensation can be precisely measured by consciousness: "There is here a succession of states and only insofar as one is aware of the succession as such, is it possible to be aware that the pain is over, or that it now is present." (Waxman, 1991: 256) This quasi-psychological explanation cannot, however, be satisfactory. It starts from the concept of succession, whereas for Kant succession is generated precisely by this "attending".

We have seen that in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* time is spatialized by being transformed into a line. Here in §24 of the deduction, the central focus becomes the act of drawing a line, which contains two movements: one of the line in space and the other taking place within consciousness, as Kant also states in the *Axioms of Intuition*: "I cannot represent to myself any line, no matter how small it may be, without drawing it in thought." (CpR: A163) In the next sentence Kant adds "it is exactly the same with even the smallest time"(CpR: A164). There is thus a close connection between the internal motion of the mind in drawing a line and the genesis of time as succession: "Motion as action of the subject (not as determination of an object) consequently the synthesis of the manifold in space - if we abstract from the latter and attend merely to the action by which we determine the form of inner sense, first produces the concept of succession at all." (CpR: B155) When I draw a line I create a measurable continuity - I can go back over the line and segment it using a unit of measure. If I disregard the line stretched out in space and turn my attention to the movement of the mind required to draw such a line, then I see how my consciousness produces measurable time, i.e. succession. But in order to complete the foundation of measurable time Kant takes one more step. Having succeeded in abstracting from the spatial dimension contained in the drawing of a line and turned our attention to the act of drawing in order to trace how time is determined by it, we must

project the measurable time obtained onto the line: "time, although it is not itself an object of outer intuition at all, cannot be made representable to us except under the image of a line, insofar as we draw it, without which sort of presentation we could not know the unity of its measure at all" (CpR: B156) The line thus becomes not an analogy of time in general as in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, but an image of measurable time. This is also the reason why the line of the *Aesthetic* was infinite whereas the line obtained in the deduction is finite and segmented. There are therefore three steps that consciousness follows in order to obtain the concept of measurable time, i.e succession:

a) Turning time into a line b) Focusing attention on the internal movement of consciousness that happens when the line is drawn c) Returning to the line and projecting into it the concept of the measurable sequence obtained. All this exposition of the genesis of time - succession was necessary in order to develop the following thesis: *the lingering contained in the contemplation of beauty represents a non-sequential time.*

2.2 The temporality of beauty: lingering

In contemplating natural beauty, subjectivity undergoes a transformation that changes its internal relations. In the theoretical state, the intellect functions as a sovereign that commands the submissive imagination. More often than not, Kant speaks of placing an intuition "beneath" the concept, which leads to a pre-eminence of conceptual rules over sensible content. Confronted with living nature, subjectivity is forced to change its internal dynamics. The intellect can no longer subordinate the imagination because it lacks the concept by which to exhaust the meanings of what it sees. When I see a door, the intellect covers the perception with the rules of use contained in the concept of "door". But faced with a beautiful forest or a flower, the same intellect is powerless to reduce the perceived thing to a conceptual rule. Likewise, categorical knowledge does nothing to help us understand what that forest is along with its beauty. The fact that we are dealing with a substance in space and time, caught in causal relations with other objects in no way explains the beauty of the forest. This is why the intellect, unable to reduce the perceived thing to a categorical unity, is forced to let the imagination unfold the meanings of what it sees, to extract all the latencies and to search for a different unity. In this way, the two faculties of knowledge cease to be in a relationship of subordination and

enter into one of mutual coordination. The intellect asks the imagination "what is this unknown in front of me?" and it continually delivers meanings in order to achieve a possible unity. This relationship is called by Kant "harmony of the faculties of cognition" (CJ: V,218) which translates into a "cognition in general" (CJ: V,220) that becomes manifest in the act of contemplation. The following passage is central to understanding how the change of subjectivity through contemplation leads to a transfiguration of time: "We linger over the contemplation of the beautiful because this contemplation strengthens and reproduces itself, which is analogous to (yet not identical with) the way in which we linger when a charm in the representation of the object repeatedly attracts attention, where the mind is passive." (CJ: V,222)

This description of the dynamics of subjectivity involved in aesthetic contemplation contains elements already present in the first *Critique*: causality, attention or passivity. In §24 of the transcendental deduction Kant introduces attention to explain how the subject affects itself: "I do not see how one can find so many difficulties in the fact that inner sense is affected by ourselves. Every act of attention can give us an example of this. In such acts the understanding always determines the inner sense, in accordance with that it thinks, to the inner intuition that corresponds to the manifold in the synthesis of the understanding." (CpR: B156n) Attention is here an empirical example meant to explain how we can actively relate to ourselves, in other words, how transcendental subjectivity must contain both an active and a passive dimension. More precisely, the form of experience is constituted by the intellect acting on receptivity, the categories on the pure forms of space and time. In the *Critique of Judgement* the relation of activity and passivity within the subject is preserved, but the direction is changed; here "the object repeatedly attracts attention, where the mind is passive" (CJ: V,222). There can no longer be a determination of sensibility by the intellect, since the latter contains no precise concept by which to encircle the imagination. We remember from §15 of the first *Critique* that the main characteristic of the intellect is to bind what it receives through the forms of sensibility. This act of the intellect has acquired "the general name of synthesis" (CpR: B130). Kant explicitly states that it "can be executed only by the subject" (CpR: B130). We see, however, that in this passage things change: it is the representation that synthesizes itself, and the state of consciousness "reproduces itself".

Aesthetic contemplation mirrors a state of transcendental subjectivity in which *experience seems to constitute itself*. It is no longer necessary to perform acts of synthesis in order to bring the representations to the form of consciousness, but beauty brings the subject into a state in which it need only passively contemplate how aesthetic experience creates itself organically. Beauty thus brings the mind into a state of self-organization, similar to organic life. For this reason, Kant makes the rapprochement between aesthetics and biology (Zuckert, 2009) by saying that in contemplation "the representation is related entirely to the subject, indeed to its feeling of life, under the name of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure." (CJ: V,204) This change in the internal organisation of subjectivity brings with it a new concept of time.

2.3 Non-successive time of contemplation

As already mentioned, Jean-Francois Lyotard is one of the few interpreters who claims that the *Analytic of the Beautiful* brings a change in the Kantian understanding of time. There is, according to the French philosopher, "a temporality inherent in the feeling of beauty" (Lyotard, 1994:85) which he calls the time of pause. I do not think we need to resort to concepts such as 'pause' to describe this temporality. This view of time will appear to us in all its significance if we see it as a moment in the natural evolution of the concept of time in the Kantian system. So far we have developed all the means to be able to integrate aesthetic time into the whole transcendental system. The thesis of this study is that *the Critique of Judgement* brings to the fore precisely that essential feature of time which is lost by its transformation into a line: pure passage. It appears here in the form of an aesthetic lingering that "reproduces itself". The thesis of this study is that the passage of time cannot be known (for thought has a spatializing character) but felt.

Any knowledge of time involves its transformation into a representation. This means that the feature that can never become representation, namely passage, can never be known as such. But this passage of time can be felt. In the contemplation of beauty, the mind quenches its tendency to link representations to one another, to constantly set out to form categorical connections. Experience is "cognition through connected perceptions" (CpR: B161), which makes the subject not dwell

on any particular representation. Whether perceiving the world for orientation or practising exact science, theoretical subjectivity must think of any representation in a space of possible connections. Beauty on the contrary makes up a closed universe, it is, as Christel Fricke says, analogous to a microcosm (Fricke, 2008: 133). This means that the mind does not have to enter into the usual activity of connecting representations. Kant stresses this stopping of the mind several times. For example, the starry sky is not to be analysed scientifically, but contemplated "as we see it" (CJ: V,270), similarly "we must not take the sight of the ocean as we think it, enriched with all sorts of knowledge (which are not, however, contained in the immediate intuition),... for this would yield merely teleological judgments; rather, one must consider the ocean merely as the poets do, in accordance with what its appearance shows." (CJ: V, 270). Put even more concisely, in the theoretical state the mind always has a "purpose" that pushes it towards synthesis, whereas in aesthetic contemplation it looks "without any purpose" (CJ: V, 222). In the latter case the representation is seen as it is shown, without seeking to integrate it into a space of lawful connections. In other words, the imagination takes up the representation and lets it unfold its meanings, and this takes time. But a time of a different quality - one that can never become knowledge, remaining in the form of pure passage. Our mind takes on the form of time that constantly reproduces itself. Since it is an active passage that takes place before time is transformed into succession, it describes a non-successive or rather pre-successive time.

3. THE INFINITE MOMENT OF THE SUBLIME

The part on the mathematical sublime in the *Analytic of the Sublime* is based on the whole conceptual apparatus developed in the transcendental deduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The theory of the triple synthesis described there is also an explanation of the genesis of the unity of time in its three dimensions: present, past, future. It is not by chance, therefore, that research into the mathematical sublime will lead to a certain vision of time, more precisely to a new theory of the sublime moment. Before bringing it up for discussion, we must briefly recall the composition and functioning of the three fundamental syntheses of transcendental subjectivity.

The starting point is what Kant calls "the distinction of time": "every intuition is a manifold in itself, which however would not be represented as such if the mind did not distinguish the time in the succession of impressions."(CpR: A99). This absolute unity has been interpreted as "undifferentiated unity" (Grüne, 2009: 154) or "undivided unity" (Longuenesse, 2001: 38), which can only become unity perceived as such through an act of differentiation: "the function of synthesis consists in transforming the undivided unity into a differentiated one" (Grüne, 2009: 154). In order to achieve this we must "stretch" the undifferentiated unity of representation, as for example when a view is given to us as a unity and only then do we apprehend it in all the distinct elements that compose it. Kant argues that the extension of representation presupposes a prior "extension" of time, performed a *priori*: "This synthesis of apprehension must also be exercised a priori, i.e. in regard to representations that are not empirical. For without it we could have a priori neither the representations of space nor of time..." (CpR: A99). So in order to be able to perceive manifolds, time itself must be apprehended, i.e. produced as a manifold. The first step therefore shows how the transcendental subject takes the undifferentiated time of *Transcendental Aesthetics* and "distinguishes" it i.e. generates it as a plurality of moments.

This plurality, however, requires the ability to keep in mind past moments and to always relate them to the present moment. Kant gives the example of drawing a line, which presupposes that the first parts are kept in mind in order to generate the line as a whole representation. A mind that could not gather into itself the first parts of the line would perceive a mere moving point. The same is true at the a priori level. Without this reproduction in imagination, as Kant calls it, "no whole representation... not even the purest and most fundamental representations of space and time, could ever arise."(CpR: A102) The third step, called by Kant recognition in concept, a priori generates the future by bringing the first two acts under a rule that helps us anticipate what is to come. Returning to the example of the line, apprehension makes it possible to move the point, the synthesis of reproduction in the imagination makes it possible that the point becomes a line, and the synthesis of recognition in the concept makes it possible to anticipate the fact that the line is infinitely extensible by conceiving the rule of its production. If we disregard the line and turn our attention exclusively to time, we can see how the three

syntheses make possible "even the purest objective unity, namely that of the a priori concepts (space and time)". (CpR: A107). It is therefore a process of intellectualizing time by bringing it to the unity of apperception. The *Critique of judgement*, both through the beautiful and the sublime, advances rather a de-intellectualization of time. If in the case of the beautiful the subject discovers the one feature of time that cannot become representation, namely pure passage, in the sublime Kant shows how the transcendental genesis of time collapses under the grandeur of the contemplated phenomenon, making the subject feel a moment entirely different from that of time-succession.

Kant begins the *Analytic of the Sublime* by discussing the act of apprehension, here called the "aesthetic appreciation of objects" by which the subject obtains a unit of measure, the term "aesthetic" being used in its original sense of sensory perception. Appreciation of quantities presupposes a purely sensory unit of measure: "Thus the estimation of the magnitude of the basic measure must consist simply in the fact that one can immediately grasp it in an intuition and use it by means of imagination for the presentation of numerical concepts - i.e., in the end all estimation of the magnitude of objects of nature is aesthetic." (CJ:V, 251) I can take, for example, a unit of measure equal to my shadow; this aesthetically obtained magnitude can then be multiplied, added together to reach infinite quantities. I can try to calculate the diameter of the earth or the galaxy from the quantity of my shadow. This first aesthetic act (in the sense of sensory act) is performed by the imagination. The appearance of a sublime phenomenon interrupts the mechanism described above, as subjectivity is unable to apply intellectual rules for appreciating size. Kant's example is a pyramid to which we stand too close. In attempting to traverse it by imagination "comprehension becomes ever more difficult the further apprehension advances, and soon reaches its maximum, namely the aesthetically greatest basic measure for the estimation of magnitude." (CJ:V, 252) Aesthetic appreciation of magnitude has a maximum beyond which it cannot go, and this is exceeded when we attempt to traverse a pyramid by imagination, so that, "when apprehension has gone so far that the partial representations of the intuition of the senses that were apprehended first already begin to fade in the imagination as the latter proceeds on to the apprehension of further ones, then it loses on one side as much as it gains on the other, and there is in the

comprehension a greatest point beyond which it cannot go." (CJ:V, 252). If the example of the pyramid is still a primitive one, meant to show how the mechanism of quantitative evaluation breaks down, the sublime inspired by St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome helps to outline another kind of "inadequacy of imagination". Such a sublime construction shows us that "the sublime is therefore not to be sought in the things of nature but only in our ideas" (V,250). Here Kant uses ideas in the transcendental sense, i.e. internal infinitude (Soul), external infinitude (Cosmos as a whole) and internal-external infinitude (God). It is the faculty of reason that gives the subject the impetus towards these ideas, pushing him towards them despite its finitude. From a theoretical point of view they are inaccessible, as reason falls into paralogisms and antinomies in trying to know them. But in front of a sublime cathedral reason feels the presence of an infinity that could open the way to the three ideas. In other words, in contemplating the majesty of a cathedral, the imagination does not feel the need to call upon the intellect to help it form rules of measurement. Instead, the subject feels elevated above its own intellect, and thus above its own finitude, leading Kant to state: "That is sublime which even to be able to think of demonstrates a faculty of the mind that surpasses every measure of the senses." (CJ:V,252). The subject feels uplifted because the faculty of the infinite within him begins to speak to him. More precisely, the sublime gives you the feeling that you carry within you an infinite with which you are in an essential inadequacy; being a finite being, the vocation of the infinite makes its presence felt through "the voice of reason, which requires totality" (CJ: V,254). If the intellect and the imagination complement each other in the contemplation of the beautiful, the sublime phenomenon cancels out the intellect (because there is no longer any question of unity, the sublime being something colossal) and puts the imagination alone before reason, which can only think of totality. The subject feels torn between its finite nature and its infinite vocation. The longing for the infinite, although in contradiction with the finitude of man, gives him the feeling of a hidden presence of a destiny that exceeds his finitude. The longing for the ideas of reason awakens an inadequacy through which the subject feels a pleasure combined with a displeasure that gives rise to the intuition that the finite's destiny is the infinite.

From the point of view of time, reason demands the suppression of passage and the compression of the whole infinite into a single instant:

"The measurement of a space (as apprehension) is at the same time the description of it, thus an objective movement in the imagination and a progression; by contrast, the comprehension of multiplicity in the unity not of thought but of intuition, hence the comprehension in one moment of that which is successively apprehended, is a regression, which in turn cancels the time-condition in the progression of the imagination and makes simultaneity intuitable." (CJ:V, 259)

So we see that time can no longer be brought to the unity of thought, but must be compressed into a single moment given in intuition. This instant, by suppressing the syntheses of the intellect, at the same time makes experience as understood in the first *Critique* impossible. Neither synthesis, nor persistence, nor causality are possible in an infinite instant, which makes subjectivity undergo a profound transfiguration due to the fact that reason has lifted it up to the gates of the infinite, which remains inaccessible to it. Of course, reason also demands totality in the *Transcendental Dialectic*, but there the infinite remains potential and is thought in series, whereas here the mind wants to see it all at once. In such an intuition, Kant thinks, we can better conceive of ourselves as noumenal beings because we are separated from our finite temporal self. If in the case of the beautiful, time-succession was overcome by descending into unrepresentable passage, here succession is compressed to the maximum and transformed into a simultaneity trapped in a moment that wants to be infinite.

Naturally, infinity cannot be gathered in such an instant of boundless density, but the subject comes to see himself as having fallen from infinity because of this attempt. The moment spoken of here is the one in which infinity presents itself in a negative way. Through the sublime moment, infinity is given to us as absence in the sense that nature is felt to have fallen from infinity. This phenomenon is called by Kant "merely negative presentation of infinity" (CJ:V, 275).

4. CONCLUSION

The critique of pure reason can be seen as an attempt to intellectualize time. It is given to us as a form of intuition, as a pure capacity to receive impressions one after the other, and becomes a theoretical and measurable object, transforming itself into what Kant called "formal intuition". The

Critique of Judgement can be seen as a broad process of de-intellectualizing time, of aestheticizing it. Beauty brings to light the one property of time that can never be intellectualized: the pure passage that we experience as the mind's lingering in contemplation. The sublime dislocates the mechanism by which time is generated *a priori* and attempts to bring before our eyes another property that is lost through intellectualization: infinitude. Thus, the two temporal forms underlying the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime are passage and infinity.

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