

Kant's Aesthetic Theory: key issues. An Introduction by the Guest Editor of the Special Issue

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Abstract

This introduction presents an overview of the special issue of *Con-Textos Kantianos* devoted to Kant's aesthetic theory. The articles in this issue have been organized into two sections: those written by keynote-authors, and those written in response to the general call for papers. Within each of these two sections, articles have been organized thematically, although the philosophical traditions that they engage with, as well as points of contact between articles, have also been considered. In the first section, keynote-authors address questions of aesthetic normativity; the role of aesthetics in the acquisition of empirical concepts; the emotional nature of aesthetics; subjectivity and disinterestedness; connections between aesthetics, anthropology, and politics; and aesthetic non-conceptualism. The second section begins with contributions dealing with matters of formalism and conceptualism in Kant's aesthetics, as well as their relation and relevance to thinking about art, the arts, and contemporary art. It continues with papers that address key issues of Kant's aesthetics, such as the free play and the role of imagination, as well as possible complementarities between the three Critiques. It closes with articles that focus on the reception of Kant's aesthetic theory in the works of major philosophers of the 20th century, namely within critical theory and the phenomenological-hermeneutical tradition.

Keywords

Aesthetics; judgment of taste; beauty; sublime; art; aesthetic normativity

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The call for papers for the special issue of *Con-textos Kantianos – international journal of philosophy* devoted to **Kant’s aesthetic theory** was announced at the beginning of 2020. In the meantime, major contributions on Kant’s aesthetic theory kept being published in leading journals, with one particularly welcome development being that Aviv Reiter was awarded the 2020 British Society of Aesthetics Essay Prize for her paper ‘Kant on the aesthetic ideas of beautiful nature’, soon to be published in the *British Journal of Aesthetics*. Equally welcome is the news that the ultimate outcome of the conference “Kant, aesthetics and contemporary art”, which took place in October 2020, will take the form of a special issue of *Kantian Review* on the relation between Kant’s aesthetics and contemporary art, to be published in 2021. Kant’s aesthetic theory is clearly a lively field of research both within and beyond the scope of Kantian scholarship.

Con-Textos Kantianos plays a key role in propagating this field of research, as a journal which commits to both a clear Latin American scope and a Kantian cosmopolitan vocation. The call for papers for this special issue on Kant’s aesthetic theory elicited responses from a number of authors, with outstanding contributions being submitted in five different languages (Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, and English). Fifteen papers have been selected, in addition to the articles of six keynote-authors who have kindly accepted our invitation to head the issue.

The papers within the two parts of this issue have been organized thematically, although the philosophical traditions that the papers engage with, as well as how they work in dialogue with other papers, have also been considered.

Among the contributions given by the keynote-authors, the first three are on aesthetic normativity. **Hannah Ginsborg**’s leading status in the scholarship on Kant’s aesthetics is reason enough for this issue to start with her article, but the way that the two following papers develop in dialogue with her views serves to reiterate the importance of her contributions to this field. Indeed, both **Ido Geiger** (who takes the experience of pure aesthetic pleasure as revealing to us a condition of empirical experience and knowledge, without itself being that condition) and **Serena Feloj** (who argues for a reconsideration of aesthetic normativity in favour of regulativity) explicitly address Ginsborg’s views in their discussions. While Ginsborg, Geiger, and Feloj help us to consider how Kant’s aesthetic

theory can be relevant to current discussions on aesthetic normativity, **David Fenner** reminds us about the impact that Kant has already had on aesthetics, namely by solidifying the subjective turn and by offering perhaps the most sophisticated view of disinterestedness of any other thinker. The following contribution from **Virginia Figueiredo** broadens the spectrum of discussion by addressing the themes of critique, reflection, the sublime, and humanity. Figueiredo draws mostly on the views of Portuguese and Brazilian authors, as well as some French thinkers, and ultimately proposes an alternative conception of the human species. The first part of the issue closes with **Dietmar H. Heidemann**'s response to his critics: Heidemann carefully considers the objections raised (in previous issues of *Con-Textos Kantianos*) against his non-conceptualist reading of Kant's aesthetic theory and defends his interpretation of Kant's aesthetics against them.

The second section of this special issue begins with contributions dealing with matters of formalism and conceptualism in Kant's aesthetics, as well as their relation and relevance to thinking about art, the arts, and contemporary art (**Hemmo Laiho, Sandra Shapshay, Ioannis Trisokkas, Iris Vidmar Jovanović, and Maria João Mayer Branco**). It continues with papers that address key issues of Kant's aesthetics, such as the free play and the role of imagination, as well as possible complementarities between the three Critiques (**Elena Romano, Jackson Hoerth, Moran Godess-Riccitelli, Stelios Gadris, Levi Haeck, and Zoltán Papp**). This special issue closes with articles that discuss the reception of Kant's aesthetic theory in the works of major philosophers of the 20th century, namely within critical theory and the phenomenological-hermeneutical tradition (**María Verónica Galfione, Guillermo Moreno Tirado, Stefano Marino, and Stéphane Vinolo**).

Keynote articles

In 'Aesthetic Normativity and Knowing How To Go On', **Hannah Ginsborg (University of California, Berkeley)** offers an answer to the question of how it is possible that aesthetic responses are appropriate or inappropriate to their objects. Ginsborg's proposal is inspired by Kant and ascribes a central role to Wittgenstein's notion of 'knowing how to go on'. Her main thesis is that there can be legitimate claims to the normativity of one's responses which do not rely on those responses' reflecting

appreciation of objective facts. According to Ginsborg, what we ought to acknowledge is a kind of normativity applicable to our psychological responses to things that does not depend on those responses registering objective facts but that is, rather, a condition of objective cognition.

In ‘Aesthetic Normativity and the Acquisition of Empirical Concepts’, **Ido Geiger (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev)** compares Ginsborg’s account of our most fundamental experience with the account that he attributes to Kant, in order to examine whether the pure aesthetic judgment can serve as a model for fundamental empirical conceptualization. Drawing mostly on the third Critiques’s notion of the aesthetic normal idea, as well as on the first introduction, Geiger suggests taking Kant as putting forward a three-step model in which the first two steps (the delineation of objects in pure aesthetic judgments and the sorting of objects according to form) are pre-conceptual. Within this framework, the experience of pure aesthetic pleasure reveals to us a condition of empirical experience and knowledge, without itself being that condition.

In ‘Aesthetic Normativity in Kant’s Account: A Regulative Model’, **Serena Feloj (University of Pavia)** discusses the normative character of aesthetic emotions in Kant’s third Critique by drawing upon the notions of regulativity and exemplarity. Feloj examines three interpretations of aesthetic normativity and argues that the sentimentalist elements of Kant’s account call for a reconsideration of aesthetic normativity in favour of the more indeterminate notion of regulativity, possibly understood as a peculiar kind of normativity that preserves the ideality, the exemplarity, the indeterminacy and, ultimately, the emotional nature of aesthetics.

In ‘Immanuel Kant’s Aesthetics: Beginnings and Ends’, **David Fenner (University of North Florida)** focuses on the space that Kant occupies at two important crossroads in aesthetics: the culmination of the tradition of disinterestedness, and the subjective turn. By offering perhaps the most sophisticated view of disinterestedness of any other thinker, Kant has brought that tradition to its historic zenith, and by finding the answer to his questions about aesthetics in the nature of subjectivity, he shaped the conversations of aestheticians and art theorists for the last two centuries. What is more, the problem of aesthetic normativity plays a role in Fenner’s paper – according to him, disinterest was a

way to place one's attentive focus on those elements of one's focus that are normatively justificatory when rendering a judgment of taste.

In 'Sobre abismos, pontes e travessias', **Virginia Figueiredo (Federal University of Minas Gerais)** follows the guiding thread given by Kant's metaphors of abysses, bridges, and crossings, and reflects on some key concepts of the third Critique in order to point out a wider Copernican revolution in Kant's philosophy that entails a change in the very concept of the human being. Focusing on the current situation in Brazil and considering the words of Ailton Krenak, Figueiredo ultimately proposes an alternative conception of the human species that walks hand in hand with Patrícia Kauark-Leite's proposal of a poietic enlightenment.

In 'Response to my critics: In defense of Kant's aesthetic non-conceptualism', **Dietmar H. Heidemann (University of Luxembourg)** responds to objections raised (in previous issues of *Con-Textos Kantianos*, by Matías Oroño, as well as Silvia del Luján di Saanza, Pedro Stepanenko, and Luciana Martínez) against his non-conceptualist reading of Kant's theory of judgments of taste. Heidemann concentrates mostly on two difficulties with a non-conceptualist reading of Kant's aesthetics that seem to be central: the cognitive status of judgments of taste and the representationalist capacity of aesthetic feeling as non-conceptual mental content. He defends his overall non-conceptualist interpretation of Kant's aesthetics against his critics.

General articles

In 'On Aesthetic Judgments and Contemplative Perception in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*', **Hemmo Laiho (University of Turku)** claims that Kant's accounts of the aesthetic judgment of sense and the aesthetic judgment of taste both suggest that a contemplative model of perception underlies his largely formalistic account of aesthetic appreciation. The basic aim of Laiho's paper is to outline how this model might work.

In 'Kant, Celmins and Art after the End of Art', **Sandra Shapshay (City University of New York)** builds on Arthur Danto's claim that Kant had two conceptions of art, the second of which is non-formalist, and puts Kant's theory in dialogue with the art

practice of Vija Celmins, in order to highlight two ways in which Kant's aesthetics is of great continuing relevance to the artworld today.

In 'Can Kant's Aesthetic Accommodate Conceptual Art? A Reply to Costello', **Ioannis Trisokkas (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens)** claims that Kant's art theory, as presented by Diarmuid Costello, applies neither to conceptual art nor to all other kinds of art, and holds that either one of two amendments to the theory would enable it to accommodate all art, including conceptual art.

In 'A New Look at Kant's Genius: a Proposal of a Multi-componential Account', **Iris Vidmar Jovanović (University of Rijeka)** argues that genius is multi-componential and includes a capacity to maximize imagination's productivity as well as a capacity to develop taste to the point where it establishes new ways of creation and gives the rule to art. Vidmar Jovanović extrapolates further aspects of genius, which relate to the artist's capacity to create products imbued with moral and cognitive significance.

In "uma certa falta de urbanidade". As hesitações de Kant a respeito da música', **Maria João Mayer Branco (NOVA University of Lisbon)** aims to show how Kant's ambivalent views on music are in line with the modern philosophical reflection on this art, and clarifies the place of these views within Kantian aesthetics. According to Mayer Branco, this justifies Kant's hesitations about whether to classify music as beautiful or agreeable, art or mere enjoyment, free or dependent beauty, and culture or nature.

In 'Can everything be beautiful? Pan-aestheticism and the Kantian puzzle of the free play of the faculties', **Elena Romano (University of Pavia)** provides an overview of the ways in which the problem of Kant's apparent commitment to pan-aestheticism can be confronted and eventually solved. Romano rejects two potential solutions and proposes a third. She draws upon the reflecting status of judgments of taste in order to explain why pan-aestheticism cannot follow from Kant's account.

In 'Schematism and Free Play: The Imagination's Formal Power as a Unifying Feature in Kant's Doctrine of the Faculties', **Jackson Hoerth (Temple University)** argues that the imagination demonstrates a formal capacity that can be seen in the first Critique's schematism and can be more clearly recognized in the third Critique's discussion of

harmonious free play. According to Hoerth, not only does this formal capacity provide the key to demonstrating that the imagination is an original, unified, and independent faculty across Kant's critical framework, but the capacity itself also serves as the ground for the purposiveness of nature.

In 'The Cipher of Nature in Kant's Third Critique: How to Represent Natural Beauty as Meaningful?', **Moran Godess-Riccitelli (University of Potsdam)** examines how we represent natural beauty as meaningful while leaving it open to a certain form of interpretation. The systematic question is how and for what end we should treat nature as possessing its own language when it comes to our aesthetic experience in nature. Godess-Riccitelli argues that it is from our experience in nature that it is possible to extend our reflections to the assumption of a final end of nature.

In 'Striving: Feeling the sublime', **Stelios Gadris (University of Crete)** proposes that we ultimately succeed in presenting – rather than representing – the absolute as a symbol or in art, and that this re-affirms that the fundamental role of intuition for human beings is fulfilling the need to make our notions tangible. Gadris claims that Kant ultimately vindicates sensibility in the aesthetic (he)autonomy of the subject.

In 'Exploring the Deduction of the Category of Totality from within the Analytic of the Sublime', **Levi Haeck (Ghent University)** defends an interpretation of the first Critique's category of totality based on Kant's analysis of totality in the third Critique's analytic of the sublime. Haeck ultimately holds that such an aesthetical detour has the potential to reveal how the subjective aspects of objectivity are accounted for in the very system of the categories itself.

In 'Matters of Taste: Kant's Epistemological Aesthetics', **Zoltán Papp (Eötvös Loránd University)** suggests that Kant's theory of taste is intended as the completion of a twofold epistemological job that remained unfinished in the first Critique. By highlighting how the judgment of taste cannot be made without assuming the purposiveness of nature and the uniformity of the cognizing subjects, Papp contends that such judgment offers a solution to the problem that the transcendental theory of experience needs a common sense in order to secure a common objectivity.

In 'Las aporías de la apariencia. Modernidad y estética en el pensamiento de Kant',

María Verónica Galfione (National University of Litoral) reconstructs the epistemic context of the third Critique, considers Kant's delimitation of the autonomy of the judgment of taste, and revises those moments in which Kant goes beyond his own claims. Using this discussion, Galfione proposes that the problem of truth is not completely absent from Kantian aesthetics, because the autonomization of the aesthetic dimension is thought of on the basis of a unified subjective experience.

In 'El "concepto hermenéutico". Una interpretación del juicio estético puro kantiano desde Heidegger', **Guillermo Moreno Tirado (Complutense University of Madrid)** offers an interpretation of Kant's pure aesthetic judgment in a Heideggerian mode by presenting a foundation for the intellectual artifact "hermeneutic concept" based on an interpretation of the third Critique's deduction of pure aesthetic judgments. Moreno Tirado ultimately outlines two reading hypotheses, one for the place of Kant's third Critique in the work of Heidegger, and another for Kant's aesthetics and aesthetics in general.

In 'La ricezione della *Critica della facoltà di giudizio* nell'ermeneutica contemporanea (Heidegger, Gadamer, Figal)', **Stefano Marino (University of Bologna)** proposes that a progressive shift can be observed in the development of the phenomenological-hermeneutical tradition. This tradition initially favoured Hegel's philosophy of art, then moved to an explicit critique of the supposed subjectivization of aesthetics by Kant, and finally culminated in a full-blown rehabilitation and retrieval of the significance of Kant's treatment of beauty as essential for any serious philosophical aesthetics.

In 'La estética kantiana como paradigma de la fenomenología de la donación de Jean-Luc Marion', **Stéphane Vinolo (Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador)** argues in favour of the Kantian legacy of the phenomenology of givenness by establishing a link between Marion's phenomenon of revelation and the sublime in Kant. According to Vinolo, Marion finds that Kant's aesthetics offers the possibility of presenting negativities in a positive way, and therefore also offers evidence of the givenness of negativities.

Considering the wide range of topics covered by this special issue of *Con-Textos Kantianos* devoted to **Kant's aesthetic theory**, as well as the quality of each of the articles included in it – their originality and exemplarity, one might say – I strongly believe that it constitutes an important contribution to fostering further research on Kant's aesthetics, not only within Kantian scholarship, but also in current and future discussion in aesthetics, including its connections with philosophy of art, philosophy of perception, epistemology, ethics, and moral and political philosophy.

