CON-TEXTOS KANTIANOS.
International Journal of Philosophy
N.º 15, June 2022, pp. 272-286
ISSN: 2386-7655
Doi: 10.5281/zenodo.6591047

Does a genius produce his artworks like an apple tree, its apples?

VIRGINIA FIGUEIREDO[1]

Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil[2]

Abstract
This article addresses two issues: the first is the philosopher's fear of a lawless freedom of nature. I quote Deleuze and Guattari, who explain our terror before chaos and the consequent call for help and protection. My hypothesis was that this threat of chaos has affected also the enlightened mind of Kant. Facing the possibility of chaos, the objective Kant did not exactly fear delusion and madness, which affect only fragile subjectivities, but was terrified with the chance that nature does not behave regularly, i.e., that *knowledge* becomes impossible. The second issue is a harder and more difficult question, and it is related to the *modern* artist's (or genius) anguish. It is a technical or an artistical complaint. He/She finds no more given rules to create his/her artworks. Differently from the philosopher, the genius fears the silence and the absolute muteness of nature. I try to deal with these two issues by taking into account Kant's concept of purposiveness of nature as a regulative principle. I realize that, although this sufficed to calm down the philosopher's anxiety, it proved to be insufficient to guide the artist. The delusion and madness that threaten the genius are deeper and more extreme than those of the philosopher. In order to treat the artist's pain, without having to abandon the connection between art and nature, that constitutes one of the most fruitful reading keys of Kant's Aesthetics, I resort to other ideas I found reading Lacoue-Labarthe and Hannah Arendt.

Keywords
Kant; Theory of Genius; Critique of Power of Judgment; art and nature.

[1] Academic affiliation: Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brasil. E-mail: virfig1955@gmail.com
[2] This text is one of the results of the Research Project (KANTINSA - Kant in South America), developed together with professors Patrícia Kauark-Leite and Giorgia Cecchinato (Department of Philosophy at UFMG), financed in Brazil, by FAPEMIG, and abroad, by the European Commission Marie-Sklodowska Curie.

[Received: 7 de febrero de 2022
Accepted: 6 de mayo de 2022]

> Ultimately, in the practice of art, we can only vie with nature
> when we have at least to some extent learnt from her the process
> that she pursues in the formation of her works.
> *About truth and verisimilitude of the work of art*, J.W.Goethe

> Enlarge art? No. On the contrary, take art with you into
> your innermost narrowness. And set yourself free.
> *The Meridian*, Paul Celan

Introduction

I wonder if it is convenient to make a very brief report here about the notion of natural genius, precisely the one of the vegetable concepts of genius to which my title refers and which is an essential topic of the "general philosophy of organism" (Abrams 1971, p. 186). For one thing I warrant, the Kantian concept of genius as a natural gift was not an originality by the Königsberg philosopher. It was not a novelty in the history of ideas to use this conceptual pair nature and art, an example of which is the paradigmatic formula in the 45th paragraph of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, that clearly and concisely exposes this use aiming at a mutual or reciprocal explanation: "Nature was beautiful, if at the same time it looked like art; and art can only be called beautiful if we are aware that it is art and yet it looks to us like nature." (Kant KdU, AA, 05: 306; CPJ, p. 185).[3] This use had long been connected to an old and long tradition of English literary criticism and poetry, which distinguished two meanings in "nature": one internal and the other, external.

> As A.O. Lovejoy has pointed out, the term 'nature', in the usage in which it was opposed to 'art', possessed two main areas of application. In reference to the mind of man, 'nature' designated those inborn attributes 'which are most spontaneous, unpremeditated, untouched by reflection or design, and free from the bondage of social convention'. In reference to the external world, it designated those parts of the universe which come into being independently of human effort and contrivance. The element of nature in natural genius, of course, was comprehended under the first of these applications; but it was easy, in these discussions, to make the transition from human nature to external nature and to compare the natural products of mind to the products of the vegetable world (Lovejoy *Essays in the History of Ideas apud* Abrams 1971, p. 198).

According to M.H. Abrams, "the most important document in the development of the vegetable concept of genius is Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition*, published in 1759" (Abrams 1971, p. 198). Abrams quotes a mighty and synthetical passage of Young, in which the opposition between art, mechanism, imitation, on the one hand, and nature (particularly vegetal), organism, and originality, on the other, is evident:

[3] This couple of conceptual opposites was extremely important for the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* as a whole, but specially for the Kantian theory of genius.

"An *Original* may be said to be of a *vegetable* nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it *grows*, it is not *made*. *Imitations* are often a sort of *manufacture* wrought up by those *mechanics*, *art* and *labour*, out of pre-existent materials not their own." (Abrams 1971, p. 199; author's emphasis). However, before Edward Young, the poets Joseph Addison (1672-1719) and Alexander Pope (1688-1744) had already used the vegetal metaphor to "illustrate the difference between the natural and the artful kinds of genius", as can be read in two passages quoted in Abrams's book, which I cite below:

> [Natural genius] is like a rich soil in a happy climate, that produces a whole wilderness of noble plants rising in a thousand beautiful landskips, without any certain order or regularity. In the other [artistic genius] it is the same rich soil under the same happy climate, that has been laid out in walks and parterres, and cut into shape and beauty by the skill of the gardener. (Addison *Spectator apud* Abrams 1971, p. 187).
> [Alexander Pope] expanded Addison's parallel between natural genius and a natural landscape. The 'invention' which characterizes all great geniuses is equitable with nature, and 'as in most regular gardens, Art can only reduce the beauties of Nature to more regularity' (Abrams 1971, p. 189).[4]

In fact, the most comprehensive idea of a poet's inspiration is very ancient; since Plato (*Ion*) and Aristotle (the famous *Problem XXX*: "*The man of genius and melancholy*", described as he who "has been seized by the madness or enthusiasm disease"). The explanation of the mysterious inspiration as a deity, a "supernatural visitant" (Abrams 1971, p. 189), an "external power" that takes the place and speaks on behalf of the poet occurred way before nature appeared as mediator between art and the beautiful. From the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century it was not possible anymore to attribute seriously the poetic inspiration to a deity, even if Bishop Warburton (1698-1779) and Father Bouhours (1628-1702) still insisted on finding an "affinity between these poetic mysteries and the supra-rational and contra-rational mysteries of the Christian faith" (Abrams 1971, p. 195) The theory of genius in the 18th century, also named the "Aesthetic Century", would be one of the witnesses of this "momentous historical shift from the view that the making of a work of art is a supremely purposeful activity to the view that its coming-into-being is, basically, a spontaneous process independent of intention, precept, or even consciousness" (Abrams 1971, p. 187). The *Critique of Power of Judgment* that brought together Aesthetics and Teleology, that is, Art and Biology, announces what would soon be acknowledged as "the age of biologism: the area of the most exciting and seminal discoveries having shifted from physical science to the science of life, biology has

[4] In Alexander Pope's Preface to his translation of Homer's *Iliad*, he compared *Iliad* to 'a wild paradise', and also to a single item within a garden – a growing tree. 'A work of this kind seems like a mighty tree which rises from the most vigorous seed, is improved with industry, flourishes, and produces the finest fruit'." (Pope *The Works of Alexander Pope apud* Abrams 1971, p. 189).

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begun to replace Cartesian and Newtonian mechanics as the great source of concepts" (Abrams 1971, p. 204, 207).[5]

Still in this introduction, I would like to refer to the position occupied by the *theory of genius* in the third *Critique*: a position which, according to Allison, is "largely polemical" (Allison 2001, p. 301). This theory occupies paragraphs 46 to 50 of the CPJ, that is to say within the first part entitled "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment", *after* the two Analytics: of the Beautiful and of the Sublime and *before* "The Dialectic of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment". Also, it is necessary to add that these (only) *five* and not so long paragraphs about the genius occupy the *center* of the *theory of art*, about which, the same Allison authorizes us to say that it *exists*. Nevertheless, this assertion that a Kantian theory of art does *exist* is, by itself, equally polemic.

It is really a difficult task to face the almost crystallized interpretation that points out that, if it was not negatively, it was quite ambiguously that Kant inserted, within his phenomenal Aesthetics, the problem of art. There are several very consistent arguments, in fact, that led the official commentary to decide for that *negative* position towards art. The first of these arguments states that, as the main problem of Kant's Aesthetics is the *aesthetic judgement*, the privileged point of view is that of the spectator and not that of the artist. In other words, it is a *theory of taste* or, as Allison says: "a 'reception aesthetic' rather than a 'creation aesthetic'." (Allison 2001, p. 271).

Moreover, it is claimed that, in general, for Kant, the beautiful that is worthy of all attention is that which nature produces involuntarily and spontaneously, i.e., without any intention or purpose. On the other hand, the undeniably intentional and artificial character of works of art would arouse in the philosopher very little (if any) affinity for them.

The fatal and definitive argument, however, which interpreters usually find undeniably explained in § 42 of the CFJ, literally establishes a difference between men of taste who admire the beauty of nature and those who cultivate the artistic beautiful, a difference which is quite unfavorable to the latter, while the former would denote a "favorable disposition to the moral feeling" (Kant KdU, AA, 05: 298-299; CPJ, p. 178), art lovers would be "usually vain, capricious [and] given over to pernicious passions". As the system of Kantian philosophy has traditionally been understood as convergence towards morality, one can estimate how much this indisposition of the admirers of the artistic beautiful towards the "morally good"[6] constituted a fatal argument against art. Besides, the only artist that enters and leaves the Kantian polis without being blocked is the genius,

[5] "To Goethe, who hailed the treatise [CPJ] with delight after its appearance in 1790, it seemed that Kant's joining of the problem of poetry and biology confirmed his own view that these are essentially parallel phenomena." (Abrams 1971, p. 204, 207).

[6] Cf. Crawford 1985. About this most famous passage, from the natural beautiful to the morally good, Donald Crawford comments on how *clumsy*, *incomplete* and even *flawed* this transition is: "Here Kant does a rather *uneasy* transition from the pleasant to the good, but only with respect to the pleasure taken immediately in natural beauty." (Crawford 1985, p. 168).

because, in fact, his rule is the same as *nature's*, which means, at least paradoxically and apparently, that the genius' rule is ultimately not … *artistic*.

Finally, I would also like to add one more comment by Allison that pointed out the fact that Kant hesitated between two conceptions of genius, both of which he clearly distinguished: one *thick*, and the other *thin*. I describe them below quoting Allison:

> the "thick" conception is at work throughout most of the discussion of fine art. It is this conception that is characterized as an "exemplary originality" and that includes understanding and, indeed, judgment, together with an inventive imagination as essential components. It is also genius in this sense that 'gives the rule to art', thereby distinguishing genuine products of genius from "original nonsense".
> At some points, however, and particularly in § 50, Kant presents a "thin" conception of genius, according to which genius seems to be limited merely to an imaginative capacity, and therefore does not itself involve understanding, judgment or taste. Consequently, in these places Kant emphasizes the necessity of "clipping the wings" of genius, of "disciplining and training" it through taste and a judgment, lest the imagination in its "lawless freedom" produce nothing but original nonsense. (Allison 2001, p. 301)

It is clear that I'll try to defend, along with a certain Allison, the "thick conception of genius", the one that, perhaps like all theses developed by Kant in the third *Critique* (the beautiful, the sublime, the taste, etc.), depends also on an essential connection between art and nature. I can affirm with a certain assurance that this relationship (art/nature) constitutes one of the most powerful and fruitful reading keys of Kant's Aesthetics. Not being an exception, the Kantian genius depends on both a reflection on nature, and a "serious discussion about art" (as Allison taught us) which "begins only in §45" (Allison 2001, p. 274), observing that the theory of genius (§§46 to 50) comes right after that "serious discussion" (§46 is entitled: "Beautiful art is the art of genius") and constitutes the true center of the Kantian theory of art.

The dreadful fear of the philosopher

I begin with a long quotation of Deleuze and Guattari, from their book *What is philosophy?*, from the last chapter entitled "From chaos to the brain":

> We require just a little order to protect us from chaos. Nothing is more distressing than a thought that escapes itself, than ideas that fly off, that disappear hardly formed, already eroded by forgetfulness or precipitated into others that we no longer master. […] We constantly lose our ideas. That is why we want to hang on to fixed opinions so much. We ask only that our ideas are linked together according to a minimum of constant rules. All that the association of ideas has ever meant is providing us with these *protective rules* –

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> resemblance, contiguity, causality – *which enable us to put some order into ideas, preventing our 'fantasy' (delusion, madness)* from crossing the universe in an instant, producing winged horses and dragons breathing fire. But there would not be a little order in ideas if there was not a little order in things or states of affairs, like an objective antichaos: 'If cinnabar were now red, now black, now light, now heavy..., then my empirical imagination would never even get the opportunity to think of heavy cinnabar on the occasion of the representation of the color red.' And finally, at the meeting point of things and thought, the sensation must recur – that of heaviness whenever we hold cinnabar in our hands, that of red whenever we look at it – as proof or evidence of their agreement with our bodily organs that do not perceive the present without imposing on it a conformity with the past. This is all that we ask for in order to *make an opinion* for ourselves, like a sort of 'umbrella', which *protects* us from chaos. (Deleuze; Guattari 1994, pp. 201-202)

I have the impression that this threat of chaos, "delusion and madness", depicted with an undeniable humor by Deleuze and Guattari, also affected, and in an obsessive way, the "enlightened" mind of Kant. Perhaps Kant translated this danger of chaos not in terms of delusion and madness, but rather in the possibility of a nature that could behave in an irregular way or even the possibility of a nature which he would have called "sublime".[7] Let us imagine a Humean Kant asking himself: "and if, perceiving the color green of a leaf, could I not, in some way, 'include it' (comparing it with previous sensations) or 'classify it' in an empirical concept of a subspecies, for example, an oak, an almond tree or any other 'tree' and keep 'rising' toward the 'plant species', and soon reach the genus 'living being'? And if looking at the green leaves of a tree, I had to suspect that I was standing before a mineral such as malachite or quartz? And could I not, at the expense of my very dear notion - that of the 'system' - realize that the mineral world has distinct and unmistakable features from the plant world? And without any help from a 'protective rule', assigning meaning and significance to the world, could I not make an experience of the empirical specific world? What should I do, as I wrote in my first *Critique,* 'if cinnabar were now red, now black, now light, now heavy' (Kant 1998, AA, 3-4: A 100, p. 229), 'if a human being were now changed into this animal shape, now into that one, if on the longest day the land were covered now with fruits, now with ice and snow'? (Kant 1998, AA, 3-4: A 100, p. 229). Faced with an unruly nature, which we are unable to organize according to an *a priori* system of classification that divides everything into genera, species, and subspecies, I'm sure I would become crazy!

Consequently, I see a great resemblance between what Deleuze and Guattari mean by "to make an opinion for ourselves, like a sort of 'umbrella', which protects us from chaos", and what Kant called "*sensus communis"* or even his "concept of the purposiveness of nature". I wonder if the "opinion" of Deleuze and Guattari, on one side, and Kant's "*sensus communis"*, on the other, have both a similar role or function: to

[7] "[I]n that which we are accustomed to call *sublime in nature* there is so little that leads to particular objective principles and forms of nature corresponding to these that it is mostly rather in its *chaos* or in its *wildest and most unruly disorder and devastation*, if only it allows a glimpse of magnitude and might, that it excites the ideas of the sublime" (Kant KdU, AA, 05: 246; CPJ, p. 130; emphasis mine).

answer to that painful experience of fear or distressing feeling; an answer to give us (human beings) a consolation, a quietness. This *sensus communis* promises us some order, some understanding, capable of protecting us from the "lawless freedom" of nature, which, just like the unbridled imagination (*Schwärmerei*[8]) of genius, "produces nothing but original nonsense." This protective rule assures us the confidence and the legitimacy of the "movement" of our power of judgment, which Kant called, only in the third *Critique*, "reflective". This "movement", that starts from an empirical intuition, consists of getting more and more general concepts (of subspecies to species, and from these, to genera) or higher genera, in view of a classification, a generalization or, better said: in view of *a unit of nature in a concept*.

As everyone knows, the discovery of the principle of purposiveness of nature seems to have constituted the main password for the faculty of judging to ascend to the Olympus of the Transcendental, forcing Kant to consider it, with the understanding and the reason, as one of the three higher faculties. Although not obvious, it is possible to argue that, at least indirectly, the concept of the purposiveness of nature provides a basis for the judgment of taste. In other words, the principle mentioned could be a guide to the spectator of the beautiful both in nature and in art. As a formal and subjective principle, the question that it was trying to answer would never lead to a "methodus", because it recognizes the impossibility of any "science of the beautiful". The concept of the purposiveness of nature would refer, at most, to the *external* "manner" or "modus" of nature (Kant KdU, AA, 05: 355; CPJ, pp. 228-229). It is the grounding of the *artistic* or *technical* way of looking at nature and, thus, it must be free of all conceptual restriction, making this regard to nature intentionally superficial, exterior, held in the *forms*, as someone gazing at a landscape.

Aesthetic reflection, as we know, is not an act aiming at knowledge of the object. The so-called "contemplation" is the attitude of reflection that keeps *outward* the regard of the viewer of the work of art or nature as if they were mere landscape. It allows us to be attentive to (or distracted by the) forms; it suspends or decrees the "strike" of the scientist's regard who goes *inward* to examine and make the anatomy of the bodies. In opposition to a biologist who turns his guinea pig organs inside out, reflection allows the aesthete or the *flâneur*, that is, the man/woman of taste to stroll through the beautiful works of nature (or art), keeping them at a certain distance, measured, at same time, by modesty and admiration. As stated by Jean-Yves Chateau: "In the aesthetic perception, I don't consume the object, it remains intact; or rather, it becomes more and more itself, it seems to be enriched by determinations more and more numerous and complex, as I feel increasingly invaded by pleasure." (Chateau 1981, p. 14).

[8] Paul Guyer & Eric Matthews translated the word *Schwärmerei* into both "enthusiasm" and "visionary rapture" (AA, 05: 275; CPJ, p. 156). In this last passage, Kant defines *Schwärmerei* as a "delusion of being able to see something beyond all bounds of sensibility, i.e., to dream in accordance with principles (to rave with reason), precisely because the presentation in this case (the presentation of morality or the presentation of the idea of freedom) is *merely negative*."

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The anxiety of the natural poet

A similar feeling of anxiety to that of the philosopher with the possible objective chaos of nature, takes place in the subjective intimacy of the modern (and also contemporary) artist, as already announced in the passage of the Holderlin's *Observations on the Oedipus*:

> In order to ensure to poets, also among us, a citizen's existence, it would be nice to raise poetry, also among us, taking into consideration the difference of times and conditions, to the *mekhane* of the Ancients. (Hölderlin 2008, p. 67)

Hölderlin's quote takes us to the problem immediately raised by the, so to speak, *natural* paradigm of art. This is the modern artist's complaint that remains in force in contemporary times. The motto that characterizes, according to Arthur Danto among countless theorists and philosophers of contemporary art, the "everything is permitted"[9] only increased the disorientation and aggravated the problem. The question that obsessed Hölderlin was "*how* to write *Modern* poetry and drama once 'the ancient rule', precisely the Aristotelian one, was over?" The poet lived in stormy times, when a big *transition* occurred from the Classical to the Romantic model. The typical *modern* artist, this Shakespearean phenomenon, began to question the validity of the rules (especially the Aristotelians) of ancient tragedy. In the absence of artistic rules, poets should get their new rules from nature. Faced only by a silent and unfathomable nature, Hölderlin was desperately struggling with his production, searching for this new technical and artistic principle to guide him in his work. There is an undeniable tone of supplication in his words, an explicit demand of "citizenship" for art. And what is "citizenship" but law or rule serving as a guide for acting? What is that but the painful problem of the possibility of modern art? What is this if not the recognition of the major difficulty of modern art? Translating into Kant's terms: the question about the conditions of the possibility of modern (and contemporary) art.

It is, therefore, in this rough context, in which we can hear, on one hand, Hölderlin's complaint, and on the other, Goethe's enthusiastic exclamation about Shakespeare's characters, the highest expression of a Romantic Genius: "Nature! Nature! Nothing is as nature as the men created by Shakespeare!" (Goethe 1983, p. 214). In this praise, we confirm the bankruptcy of the old and imitative model and the consecration of the new paradigm of the genius, which is the modern artist. If there is a model to follow, it will no longer be found in the ancient classical rules; this "model", if it still exists, should be sought, from now on, in nature. As the third *Critique* states it is nature that will provide the "rules" of modern art: "*Genius* is the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*)

[9] "The contemporary is, from one perspective, a period of information disorder, a condition of perfect aesthetic entropy. But it is equally a period of quite perfect freedom. Today there is no longer any pale of history. Everything is permitted" (Danto 1997, p. 12).

through which nature gives the rule to art." (Kant KdU, AA, 05: 307; CPJ, p. 186; author's emphasis).

Would the principle of the purposiveness of nature save the poet from chaos? From his anxious disorientation? Probably not! We know how much nature's answer is mute, speechless and how much does it not reveal its ways of *producing*, which are so heterogeneous as casual and contingent, at least for us. Facing Hölderlin's desperate demand that nature should present, show its ways of *acting*, that the apple tree should teach how it makes its apples, we discover that the answer is a unique and unfathomable silence! Maybe here, not even the concept of purposiveness of nature will serve as a protective "umbrella" against chaos. The delusion and the madness[10] that threaten the genius are deeper and more extreme than those of the philosopher.

Maybe, appealing to the famous fourth proposition of *Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan Aim*, geniuses are nothing but human beings for whom the natural law, which guides the *species*, prevails over the human law, which concerns the individual. When he argues that genius is a "talent or natural gift" (Kant KdU, AA, 05: 307; CPJ, p. 186), it is possible that Kant was only trying to distinguish those human beings for whom, for some equally unfathomable reason (i.e., casual or contingent), the finality of the species spoke louder than the individual's. Because, as he states in the Proposition mentioned above: "nature knows better [than human beings] what is good for his species" (Kant 2007, AA, 08: 21, p. 112). It is not hard to verify this point and, agreeing with Kant, testify how much artists (if not the whole lot of *artists*, at least a great majority) sacrifice their lives or individual existences (and not voluntarily) in favor of their works, their art. How much suffering and anguish have artists endured? Examples abound: from Arthur Bispo do Rosário to Cézanne, from Amy Winehouse to Beethoven, from Antonin Artaud to Lima Barreto, from Celan to Hölderlin, and the list could grow indefinitely.

[10] It would require an extra chapter (and not a small one) if we were to examine the relations between the genius/the artist and madness, more or less established "philosophically" by the ancient Greeks, Plato and Aristotle, as well as by more modern and contemporary medical diagnoses and "psychiatric expertise", which have affected not a small number of artists (the list would be long): Hölderlin himself, Van Gogh, Artaud… And even philosophers, as was Nietzsche's case. Cf. De Duve 1999, pp. 318-319: "What is striking to the retrospective eye of the 'archaeologist' is how almost every road leads to Freud, as if psychoanalysis had established nothing but the theory of the romantic self, the 'components' of which were, from the very outset, the unconscious and the *Witz*, both variations on the theme of genius as something with which, ultimately, everyone is endowed. From the moment Schelling had systematized Kant's notion of genius as a gift of nature into the notion of unconscious creative power unknown to the artist, genius began to be seen as the dark, unconscious side of human nature, verging on insanity. Time and again, in Schopenhauer, in Hartmann, in Nietzsche, in Dostoyevsky, in the poetry of the symbolists and the Décadents, the association was made between madness and genius, until it became, with Lombroso and Max Nordau, the most hackneyed pseudoscientific cliché of late-nineteenth-century thought. That the romantic notion of genius, which had started as natural innocence in the poetry of Hölderlin, could by the end of the century have been turned into natural degeneration in the criminology of Lombroso, is an indication that a claim of universality was built into the notion from the start."

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Would it be possible to establish a parallel between the faculty of genius, this "*favorite of nature*" (Kant KdU, AA, 05: 318; CPJ, p. 196), which consists of a "faculty for apprehending the rapidly passing play of the imagination and unifying it into a concept (which for that very reason is original and at the same time discloses a new rule, which could not have been deduced from any antecedent principles or examples)" (Kant KdU, AA, 05: 317; CPJ, p. 195), and "free favor", through which Kant defined our (the spectator's) satisfaction in or pleasure with the beauty of the nature? (Kant KdU, AA, 05: 210; CPJ, p. 95). Well, following the philosopher, we do not achieve this faculty through any technique, knowledge, or study; and not even the one who received its gift and benefit can take possession of it. As happened with Rousseau, according to Kant, who not even understood what he "discovered": "Rousseau made an effort to sketch human nature. *Every original is unintelligible: even the one who discovers does not understand*." (Kant *Logik Phillippi apud* Suzuki 1998, p. 47). Therefore, our difficulty to understand and absorb what is original and unprecedented. Because it is a personal and untransferable gift of nature, the one that benefits from it can only exercise himself/herself in it, many times in a blind, even *vegetal* way, as Edward Young suggests in the seminal text *Conjectures on Original Composition*, which we have already mentioned here.

As a last attempt to deal with the distress of the artist, I would like to propose an interpretation of Kant's theory of genius in the light of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's theory of *mimesis*, as it still demands support in the indisputably essential relationship between art and nature. This French philosopher resorted, in a unique way, to an Aristotelian definition of *mimesis* that is not found in the *Poetics*, but in *Physics II*, and states that the *tekhne* (the art and not the technique) completes what nature (*physis*) cannot achieve (*telos*).[11] This original reformulation of the concept of *mimesis* allowed Lacoue-Labarthe to update Kant's theory of genius, and to abandon the traditional art theory, according to which art is a mere *imitation* of nature, in favor of a much more interesting art theory based on a reciprocity or complementarity relationship between art and nature. On this re-reading, the Kantian genius stops mimicking the finished form given by nature, and creates something that is *beyond* nature or that nature is unable to do, for example: change the gender's law. Would this mean that the artist would stop imitating the form finished and given by nature and would start creating his/her own work (of art) following the same obscure principle through which nature also produces its work? Invoking Spinozian terms, could we say that

[11] ARISTOTLE *Physics* II, 192 b 8, translation slightly modified. "Of things that exist, some exist by nature, some from other causes. 'By nature' the animals and their parts exist, and the plants and the simple bodies (earth, fire, air, water […] All the things mentioned present a feature in which they differ from things which are not constituted by nature. Each of them has within itself a principle of motion and of stationariness (in respect of place, or of growth and decrease, or by way of alteration). On the other hand, a bed and a coat and anything else of that sort, qua receiving these designations i.e. in so far as they are products of art have no innate impulse to change." And a little further on [199 b 17]: "Generally art (*techne*) partly completes what nature (*physis*) cannot bring to a finish, and partly imitates her." One of the most beautiful comments that I read about this passage from Aristotle is in a text as small as magnificent of Jean Beaufret, "*Physis et Tékhne*" (Beaufret 1986?).

the artist (or the genius) would stop representing (imitating) the "natured nature" to represent (would it still be "to represent"?) the "naturing nature".

Conclusion

If philosophically, the "issue of taste" and, to some extent, that of "modern art" seems to be resolved, the artist's question, "*how* to do it?", however, seems to continue without response, remaining trapped in a typical *double bind* reasoning struggle. Apparently, neither Kant's principle of the purposiveness of nature nor Aristotle's assumption of a complementarity between art and nature have provided an answer capable of definitely comforting the anxiety of the poet. For the poet's anxiety and despair, his/her natural predisposition does not act on his spirits or faculties in a mechanical way as, for instance, in the bees instinct to produce their honeycombs regularly, according to the distinction that Kant made between an art work and a natural product in the beginning of § 43 of CPJ, "On art in general".[12] Even if we could not reduce the nature of the 18th century to a mere mechanism and that, from the "discovery" of the organism onwards, the concept of nature had grown much more complex, the citizenship of the work of art had to be searched for and conquered in the sphere of Freedom. Our only way out was to appeal to a *new concept of freedom*. Perhaps a "freedom" like the one that is at stake in the great and well-known definition of beauty of Schiller, which states "*Beauty* is the only possible expression of *freedom in phenomena*" (Schiller 23rd Letter 1954; emphasis mine).[13] Of course, in this definition we must "read" *Kant's spirit and follow him beyond his letter*, because here we should be able to imagine a possibility of a *positive* presentation of freedom![14] Although we remember Kant's rigorous letter, which states "the idea of

[12] "By right, *only production through freedom, i.e., through a capacity for choice that grounds its actions in reason, should be called art*. For although people are fond of describing the product of the bees (the regularly constructed honeycombs) as a work of art, this is done only on account of the analogy with the latter; that is, as soon as we recall that they do not ground their work on any rational consideration of their own, we say that it is a product of their nature (of instinct), and as art it is ascribed only to their creator" (Kant KdU, AA, 05: 303; CPJ, p. 182; emphasis mine). Maybe Kant was arguing against another frequent analogy of "natural genius" with "totally instinctive 'art' of bees". A hundred years before CPJ, Sir William Temple had written: "The truth is, there is something in the *Genius* of Poetry too Libertine to be confined to so many Rules; and whoever goes about to subject it to such Constraints loses both its Spirit and Grace, which are ever Native, and never learnt, even of the best Masters… [Poets] must work up their Cells with Admirable Art, extract their honey with infinite Labour, and sever it from the Wax with such Distinction and Choyce as belongs to none but themselves to perform or to judge" (Temple *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century apud* Abrams 1976, p. 197).

[13] This famous Schiller's beauty formula *contradicts* the not less famous Kant's statement that the idea of freedom is a *negative presentation*, and that its inscrutability "precludes any positive presentation". Cf. Kant KdU, AA, 05: 275; CPJ, p. 156. This passage is in the "General remark on the exposition of aesthetic reflective judgments", in which Kant is describing the aesthetic feeling of the sublime, and it deserves to be quoted: "This pure, elevating, merely negative presentation of morality, by contrast, carries with it no risk of *visionary rapture* (*Schwärmerei*), […] precisely because the presentation in this case is merely negative. *For the inscrutability of the idea of freedom entirely precludes any positive presentation*" (emphasis mine).

[14] Maybe it would be there that Schiller found what he had sought for a long time: an objective theory of beauty (or art).

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ISSN: 2386-7655
Doi: 10.5281/zenodo.6591047

freedom is a *negative* presentation". Anyway, the concept of freedom that concerns us now has nothing to do with "free will" and much less with its moral definition, of a law-abiding or of an acting accordingly to the rational will. The "freedom" of the artist can only have an extra-moral sense, maybe a "natural" sense, once the "action" of the genius does not depend on a decision and, therefore, contrary to morality, is not a voluntary act.

Maybe the work of art is the *form of freedom*, or even, maybe it results from the *action*, *work*, *technique*, *exercise of freedom* ... All of these names, be it said in passing, improper, could replace those old names of divine *inspiration*, *originality*, and *geniality*. Maybe the best and most appropriate concept of freedom for us is the one that Hannah Arendt, inspired by an unprecedented Augustine, gave us: that of *a beginning*. And *beginning* can translate exactly one of the formulas through which Kant defined genius, as the one who is able to create "one other [second] nature [...] from the content that the real one gives him" (Kant KdU, AA, 05: 314; CPJ, p. 192).[15] *Form of freedom* on the side of the creative artist, *freedom of form* on the spectator's side. In the latter's case, the pleasure would come from an experience of amplification of the world; the world's time and space are amplified by the work of art. Both in the nature that resembles art and in the art that resembles nature we find this opening strength, this strength of a beginning.

Returning to our first question: "Does a genius produce his artworks like an apple tree its apples? Unfortunately, I could only answer this question in a most ambiguous and insufficient way: "Yes *and* no!" Yes, because the genius's impulse to produce something as an artwork does not at all depend on his/her will or his/her decision, it is *not* (as I've just said) a voluntary or rational act. Surely, this initial impetus is a *natural unconscious instinct*, which leads us to claim a *true resemblance* between the apple tree and our genius. Similar to Angelus Silesius's rose[16] (*Die Rose ist ohne Warum*/ The rose is without why), the artist does not control that *natural requirement* and has no rational intention. In Kant's terms this natural instinct could be called "the faculty for the presentation of aesthetic ideas" (Kant KdU, AA: 05: 314; CPJ, p. 192).

Nevertheless, at the same time, we are forced to answer "No", because the *freedom* of an apple tree is very *limited,* as every Kantian present here knows. As they are also aware that it is only through a certain *subreption*[17] that we can speak of a "*natural* freedom", even if it is exactly what *pleases* the Kantian man/woman of taste, when he/she perceives the beautiful (or the *apparently* free) objects (works?) of nature. We love natural beauty as if it were free! Anyway, the apple tree's *freedom* does not allow it to produce

[15] In fact, the real subject of this sentence is the imagination. Kant wrote that "the *imagination* (as a productive cognitive faculty) is, namely, very powerful in creating, as it were, another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it." I took the liberty of replacing *imagination* by *genius*…

[16] Angelus Silesius (1624-1677) was a German catholic priest and physician, known as a mystic and religious poet. He wrote these famous verses: "Die Ros'ist ohn'Warum; sie blühet, weil sie blühet/ Sie acht't nicht ihrer selbst, fragt nicht, ob man sie siehet." [The rose is without why; it blooms because it blooms. It pays no attention to itself, asks not whether it is seen.]

[17] A similar subreption which occurs in the Kantian Sublime, when we substitute "the respect for the object instead of for the idea of humanity in our subject" (cf. Kant KdU, AA 05: 257; CPJ, p. 141).

oranges instead of apples. Unlike the artist's freedom, he/she has *the right or even the duty*, as prescribed in Aristotle's formula, to "complete what nature (*physis*) cannot bring to a finish". But also, as Schiller taught us, by stating that genius, "with *unrestrained freedom*", could "join together what nature sundered, as soon as he can think of it together, and sunder what Nature combined, as soon as he can separate it in his intellect" (Schiller 26th Letter 1954; emphasis mine). To designate this unlimited freedom of genius we appeal to names such as "originality", "talent", "endowment", "spirit". But perhaps the best and most appropriate name for this freedom is the one given by Hannah Arendt, inspired by an *unexpected* Augustine: of *a beginning.* And a *beginning*, for her, means merely "the birth of each man/woman". I quote this beautiful passage of Arendt:

> We find in Augustine not only the discussion of freedom as *liberum arbitrium*, though this discussion became decisive for the tradition, but also an entirely differently conceived notion which characteristically appears in [...] the *City of God,* [...] Freedom is conceived there, not as an inner human disposition, but as a character (sic) of human existence in the world. Man does not possess freedom so much as he, or better his coming into the world, is equated with the appearance of freedom in the universe; man is free *because* he is a beginning [...] In the birth of each man this initial beginning is re-affirmed [...] Because he *is* a beginning man can begin; *to be human and to be free are one and the same*. God created man in order to introduce into the world the faculty of the beginning: freedom. (Arendt 2000, p. 457)

To conclude, I would like to go back to Paul Celan's epigraph in an attempt to decipher its content from this very suggestive notion of freedom. If, according to Arendt, by his/her birth, every human being means a beginning, the *freedom* of each one is to be found in his/her only uniqueness, in the affirmation of each singular existence, which is always and involuntarily an expansion of the world. The genius, understood in the light of this idea of "beginning", will no longer be an exceptional subjectivity, or even an "exceptional intersubjectivity" (Deleuze 1963, pp. 131-132), as once defined by Deleuze. Could I ambitiously conclude that the genius has been turned into a kind of *archetype of transcendental subjectivity*? A subjectivity that, like any other (even before the universal access to reason, morality etc.), is born and "comes to the world", as a living creature, governed by an indeterminate and inexplicable genetic principle whose main act would consist of nothing more, as life itself, than wanting to surpass oneself. [18] Maybe genius is nothing more than someone who took his/her "uniqueness", his/her ability to "begin" (as Arendt would say) to his/her ultimate limits. Finally, paraphrasing Paul Celan: someone who took his existence into one's innermost narrowness, and set oneself free.

[18] That is how Novalis saw the process of reflection, linking it with life: "Exceeding oneself is, everywhere, the highest point, the origin, the genesis of life" (Novalis *apud* Benjamin 1999, p. 75).

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N.º 15, June 2022, pp. 272-286
ISSN: 2386-7655
Doi: 10.5281/zenodo.6591047

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