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Transcendental aesthetics as failed apodictic aesthetics: Kant, Deleuze and the being of the sensible

Abstract

In Difference and Repetition, Deleuze defines his transcendental empiricism as an “apodictic” aesthetics, by which he means a science not simply of the sensible, but of the being of the sensible. Yet, to the extent that the sensibility which is at stake in the Transcendental Aesthetics is a sensibility without sensation, Kantian aesthetics is not apodictic. Sensation is the only contact we have with the being of the sensible, namely that which is exterior with respect to the interior of representation. But transcendental idealism is a subjectivism. Indeed, if one connects what Heidegger considers to be the greatest achievement of Kant’s Copernican revolution (the possibility of feeling “something”) with the achievement that Kant held highest in this regard (the reduction of the outside to spatiality), then the two main precepts of Kant’s subjective phenomenalism fall into place. The first is that we cannot feel outside of us – this amounts to non-sensuous sensibility as transcendental idealism; the second is that we can feel inside – this amounts to non-sensuous sensibility as empirical realism. The aim of this article is to show how Kant’s treatment of sensation (and of the degree of sensation according to the principle of the Anticipations of Perception) prevented him from refuting Berkeley’s idealism.

Keywords

Kant, Deleuze, sensation, intensive magnitude, idealism

Received: 21/09/2021

Approved: 31/10/2021

Editing by: Danilo Manca

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1. *Transcendental empiricism*

In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze argues two theses that a scholar of the *Critique of Pure Reason* cannot ignore. The first states that “empiricism truly becomes transcendental, and aesthetics an apodictic discipline, only when we apprehend directly in the sensible that which can only be sensed, the very being of the sensible” (Deleuze 1995: 56-57). The second states that the true meaning of intensity is “not the anticipation of perception but the proper limit of sensibility” (Deleuze 1995: 237). As can be seen, both theses attack the heart of Kant’s *Transcendental Aesthetics*. The first one attacks it because it challenges the *Aesthetics* on its own ground (the transcendental) by introducing a distinction between the sensible and the *being* of the sensible. This distinction, when combined with a transcendental empiricism rather than a transcendental idealism, turns out to be pernicious. It is pernicious because, by associating apodictic aesthetics with transcendental empiricism, Deleuze suggests that the transcendental idealism inaugurated by the aesthetics of the pure forms of receptivity (space and time) is not actually apodictic, and thus not truly transcendental. And this is because it is concerned with the sensible rather than with the *being* of the sensible, that is, with what may be represented *of the* sensible, and *as* sensible, rather than with the sensible that “can only be sensed”.

The second thesis apparently concerns something else: intensity. Seemingly, this is because “intensity” is another name for the *being* of the sensible. For Deleuze, the *being* of the sensible is pure difference of intensity, but “difference of intensity” – he explains – is a tautological expression. Intensity is always differential because it is the same form of difference: the reason (which just means the “being”) of the sensible. Its true sense, therefore, is not the anticipation of perception, which is always anticipation of a quality, but the proper limit of sensibility: the different as the reason behind qualitative diversity. The reference to Kant is clear: the *Anticipations of perception* is the second principle of the pure intellect of his *Transcendental Logic*. It states that “in all appearances the real, which is an object of sensation, has intensive magnitude, i.e., degree” (KrV B207). But, intensive magnitude (that is, differences in degree), as presented in these albeit “extraordinary” pages (Deleuze 2004: 81), is only a quality thanks to which an object can be qualified (*Refl.* 6338a, *Ak.* 18:663), in contrast to what is nothing, because it is unqualified. Deleuze later comments on this principle in the lectures he dedicates to Kant in

the late 1970s, thus after the enunciation of this thesis. Yet, what he argues there, is only a corollary of his primary assertion.

What does it mean, in fact, that the very sense of intensity is not the anticipation of perception but the internal limit of sensibility? It means that intensity is neither, as we read in the late lectures, “the matter that occupies space and time by way of quality” (Deleuze 2004: 82, our translation), nor the limit to which we tend in that calculation that is perception. Intensity is a genetic principle, and genetic in a transcendental sense. It is not merely the anticipation of perception but the source of a quadruple genesis: that of the *extensio* in the form of schema, that of extensity in the form of extensive magnitude, that of *qualitas* in the form of matter occupying extensity, and that of the *quale* in the form of the designation of an object. The difference “is not diversity. Diversity is given, but difference is that by which the given is given, that by which the given is given as diverse” (Deleuze 1995: 222). Yet, it is only transcendental empiricism that, in not resting on the given, searches for its ground, which is always of an intensive nature (Ables 2017: 364-365), and thus investigates the givenness of the given. The main idea of transcendental empiricism is that the conditions of experience are real; its method is to unearth them by discarding the possible conditions; its aim is to preserve the concrete richness of the world by bringing to light a denser, though more obscure, reality than that of Kantian experience, reduced to human knowledge. Transcendental empiricism’s objects are allergic to prefabricated concepts and demand the creation of a notion for their own: not a possibility that anticipates them, but a strange “a-posteriori a priori” (Bryant 2008: 229) which, by defining itself close to them, defines them in turn.

When it is transcendental, empiricism renounces neither the transcendental nor the concept, both of which are conditions of experience, but makes them the objects of an encounter. They are intensities that are not distinguished from the thing they refer to, because they are materially inherent to its thisness. Kantian in its aspirations, transcendental empiricism is more profoundly Humean in dealing with that which the subject struggles to recognise and which, for this reason, forces him to think (Deleuze 1995: 132-146). The intelligibility it affirms is the aesthetic intelligibility of circumstance, an intelligibility in virtue of which aesthetics itself becomes jurisprudence, or casuistry, of affectivity: a science of encounters where harmony is made locally instead of being predetermined by eternity. Deleuze opposes the perversion of the transcendental made by criticism, with its “distortion” (Sauvagnargues 2010: 32), questioning, in

the wake of the post-Kantians and radical empiricists who were his masters, Bergson, James and Whitehead, the abstract invariability of the a priori with the concrete variability of the material contents of knowledge. The second thesis against *Transcendental Aesthetics* is the consolidation of this questioning. The limit of sensibility is a real condition of experience because those conditions that refer to extension are possible, whilst those that are confused with intensity are real (Deleuze 1995: 232). However, it is not surprising that intensity is inexplicable. Intensity is expressed, but it remains implicit in what expresses it. It is hard to grasp because, where there is intensity, nothing is felt; but when something is felt, there is no longer intensity.

Intensity is the *being* of the sensible, but the *being* of the sensible is, at the same time, “the insensible and that which can only be sensed” (Deleuze 1995: 140). Insensible from the point of view of a representative sensibility, the *being* of sensible can only be sensed from that of a sensory or visceral sensibility. As soon as it becomes the quality of a thing, the merely sensed is already no longer perceptible because the *being* of the sensible is an intensive *ratio*, which, as soon as it is constituted, reduces itself to something other: the extensive sensible.

2. *Transcendent exercise*

For Deleuze intensity is insensible because we cannot sense intensity regardless of what alienates it and it is that which is only sensed because it cannot not be sensed. Intensity makes us sense, and it is in this sense that it is the very limit of sensibility: a condition that forces it to do what it is by occasioning an exercise that is sensibility’s whole being or, and this is the Spinozian thesis that Deleuze draws on, a power indistinguishable from essence (*Eth.* I, XXXIV). For Deleuze, in fact, faculties are powers that individuate themselves at the limit, but individuation is an effort that must do violence against a faculty’s nature. Deleuze says it is a torment, a “passion” (Deleuze 2000), because each faculty finds itself in the presence of its specific limit when it engages itself in a transcendent exercise by conquering its transcendental form. Indeed, it is from the point of view of the transcendent exercise of the faculties that the sense of intensity is the proper limit to sensibility and that sensibility constitutes the non-phenomenal trigger of the phenomenon, the transcendental element of the very reality of *Vorstellung*. Yet the transcendent exercise is not an exercise to which, properly speaking, the faculties engage them-

selves. What is transcendent is the involuntary exercise forced by the unforeseen and casual encounter with that limit which Deleuze calls *aisthétéon* (Deleuze 1995: 140), to distinguish it from the ordinarily perceptible object.

Aisthétéon is a threshold that is neither spatial nor temporal, both infrequent and to be frequented. Like a *kerygma*, the difference grasped in the act of deferring (Deleuze 1995: 56) obliges sensibility to feel, imagination to imagine, memory to remember and thought to think. But it obliges sensibility to feel the insensible, imagination to imagine the unimaginable, memory to remember the immemorial and thought to think the unthought. "Proper" means "immeasurable" because "transcendent in no way means that the faculty addresses itself to objects outside the world but, on the contrary, that it grasps that in the world which concerns it exclusively and brings it into the world" (Deleuze 1995:143). Unlike empirical use, "higher use" (Deleuze 1984: 4) of faculties apprehends what cannot be grasped from the perspective of common sense. The latter measures the empirical use of all faculties according to the part each one plays in the recognition of the so-called "whatever object," but the *being* of the sensible is insensitive above all because it is insensitive from the point of view of recognition. Otherwise, it would not compel thinking. Deleuze presents it as "something which simultaneously cannot be sensed (from the point of view of the empirical exercise) and can only be sensed (from the point of view of the transcendent exercise)" (Deleuze 1995: 236). Yet, the empirical exercise is the only one admitted by Kant as legitimate and which, however, is secondary, that is, accessory rather than apodictic.

From the *sentiendum* to the *cogitandum*, "all begins from sensibility" (Deleuze 1995:144), because it is always an intensity which compels transcendent use; it is always a free figure of difference that awakens the faculty. Hence the privilege of sensibility as origin: "in an encounter what forces sensation and that which can only be sensed are one and the same thing [...], the intensive or difference in intensity is at once both the object of the encounter and the object to which the encounter raises sensibility" (Deleuze 1995: 144-145). *Aisthétéon* is an object which cannot also be grasped by other faculties because it is not also the imaginable, the memorable, the cogitable. The *being* of the sensible is essential with respect to sensibility alone. Yet, if it is both sensed and insensible, it is because sensibility, when it is engaged in its legitimate exercise, does not grasp intensity apart from the qualities that intensity itself generates. Only a sensibility which is excessively employed directly grasps, in the

sensible, the *being* of the sensible. And directly means immediately. Then, neither before, as in the case of perception intent on anticipating intensity so as not to encounter it (perception tends to the limit in an empirical exercise), nor after, as happens in the sublime which, for Deleuze, is paradigmatic of the transcendent exercise (Deleuze 1995: 146ff12)¹. For the sublime to be experienced, Kant says, it is necessary to have found shelter in “a safe place” (*KDU*, § 28, 5: 262, 145), but the safe place – the perceptual zone – is always a place at a distance from the place of sensation where one feels “a present actual powerlessness” (*KDU*, § 28, 5: 262, 146). The sublime is a feeling. Therefore, it is a judgement, albeit a reflective one. Sensation, instead, is “a mere modification” (*KrV* A129).

In the fifth chapter of *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze states that only sensation grasp intensity independently of extensity and prior to the qualities in which it is developed. So, the apodictic aesthetics as an integral part of “transcendentalism” (Deleuze 1995: 237; 306) must be directed towards sensation. Deleuze presents this new aesthetics as a pedagogy of the senses whose only precepts are: 1) to affirm the lowest (Deleuze 1995: 234), that is, to make degradation the object of an affirmation; and 2) not to explicate oneself too much (Deleuze 1995: 244), namely, to consent to the violence with which the “outside”, another name for intensity, affects us and generates a magnitude. Only when the magnitude is produced by intensity’s affection, in fact, it works as a concept, or measure, of the intensity’s impact on our senses. Does Kant’s *Transcendental Aesthetics* ever conform to these two precepts?

¹ Unfortunately, here we cannot demonstrate in detail why the sublime is not paradigmatic of the transcendent exercise. We briefly point out a few reasons. 1) It is a feeling and therefore a judgement, while the encounter with intensity suspends the latter. 2) It is a feeling experienced by the imagination in the presence of the omnipotence of reason and sensation plays no role in it. 3) What is glimpsed is an idea, but the idea, for Kant, is a totalising totality and not, as Deleuze wants, an individualising differential. 4) As a consequence of this, in the sublime one does not directly grasp the *being* of the sensible but, indirectly, the super sensible. 5) One grasps the latter with the imagination, thus within the spatial-temporal confines of schematism which intensity blows up. 6) The sublime is the movement with which one subtracts oneself from the violence which is necessary to the object of an apodictic aesthetic (Deleuze 1995: 303). And subtraction, as Nietzsche well understood, means: “domestication”. Exactly the opposite of what the ethics of intensity suggests.

3. *Metaphysical idealism*

According to Deleuze, Kant's great lesson, his real revolution, is to have said that the phenomenon is not appearance but apparition (Deleuze 2004: 57). Every phenomenon is a sign that refers to a difference in level as to its condition. But *Transcendental Aesthetics* is not the science of this referral. Sensibility we read in the *Prolegomena*, "is affected in its characteristic way by objects that are in themselves unknown to it and that are wholly distinct from said appearances" (*Proleg.* §36, 69-70). But Kant is categorical: we cannot feel outside ourselves. To feel is to know and what is outside is unknown. Intensive magnitude is a gradient of this "outside", because even Kant admits that the capacity of a ground to affect us is measured intensively (*Refl.* 4183, *Ak.* 17:448; Guyer 1987: 200; Warren 2011: 22-30) and that intense reality is that which is merely sensed (*Refl.* 1250, *Ak.* 28:1250; *Refl.* 5704, *Ak.* 18:331; *Refl.* 6324, *Ak.* 18:648). Nevertheless, Kant does not deal with sensation as the specific manifestation of this capacity (*KrV A* 166-B 207, 339; *Refl.* 5853, *Ak.* 18:36; Herring 1953: 67). All knowledge implies sensation, and there is nothing to prevent us from admitting, as Kant does in *KrV A* 19-B33, that the sensible datum results from the action of an object on our representational faculty. But, although such an assumption presupposes a theory about the existence of external objects and their action on us, Kant does not develop it, nor does he believe that he should.

In the *Transcendental Aesthetics*, Kant refers to sensation only to emphasise that the senses are not spontaneous, namely that they cannot affect themselves, and that human knowledge is not creative since it depends on something that the subject does not produce, being, on the contrary, imposed on him by something else. But he does not explore how sensation synthesises this "other". The result is that the world of the *Critique* is an angelic world of effects without causes and forces without agents, and "without" not because they do not exist. The effects are without causes and the forces are without agents because causes and agents are unknown and because there is criticism only when the unknown, "that of which the knowledge makes us uneasy" (Heidegger 1965: 167), is removed. Yet, if unknown is however present and active, it is very hard to blame Jacobi. According to him the existence of noumenal affecting things raises a big dilemma and transcendental idealism can resolve it only by affirming the strongest idealism, namely that of Berkeley. In Jacobi's view, the contradictions associated with the postulation of the thing-in-itself and the qualification (which is never explicitly

declared by Kant) of its relation to phenomena in causal terms could be overcome only by denying the existence of something “outside us”. Even if obscure, the transcendental object is a ground too close to the grounded, “the noumenon closest to the phenomenon” (Deleuze 1995: 222). So close, that Jacobi’s aporia takes shape by itself: impossible to enter transcendental idealism without the presupposition that things in themselves causally affect our sensibility; impossible to remain within it with that presupposition (Jacobi 1912: 336).

Impossible to enter because without the action of an outside object there is no knowledge. Impossible to remain there because, although Kant abjured the thesis of the *Dissertatio*, that phenomena are true insofar as they are caused, sensation will always be for him a bridge between cause and effect, the *being* of the sensible and the sensible. The transcendental idealist, it is true, raises the bridge as soon as he abandons fantasies of an encounter with the “outside” *as existent*, to deal with its *recognition as something existent*. But despite the fact he adopts the legitimate point of view of perception – “wherever perception and whatever is appended to it in accordance with empirical laws reaches, there too reaches our cognition of the existence [*Dasein*] of things” – KrV A226-B273-274 – within his sensible state as thinking percipient, there is always something that is not of the *mens* but collides with it. Kant does not investigate this complicity. Instead he relegates its analysis to “empirical psychology” and reserving for it only “a little place” (KrV B876-877) within the architecture of pure reason. However, according to some, his agnosticism leads quite directly to the necessity of the thing itself because by insisting on attributing phenomena to a transcendental object, the metaphysical object of the “inferred cause of immediately felt representations” (Carabellese 1969: 42, our translation) seems to be the only kind of realism that Kant wants to save. Kant, in other terms, neither denies the transcendental object, nor does he analyse the link it has with representations. Therefore, as a world grasped *sub specie perceptionis*, the world of the *Critique* ends up being a world suspended in the air, and not so different from Berkeley’s.

By separating space from being, the transcendental idealist gains the possibility of reaching the external world without leaving the subject. “The external world is the phenomenon of the outside, which sensibility, with its spatiality, gives us as distinct from the phenomenon of the inside, which sensibility itself gives us with its temporality” (Carabellese 1969: 425, our translation). But where is exteriority if space is the form of our sensibility? Where is the exterior, the transcendental exterior, once it is

reduced to an exterior that pertains only to us and that results, moreover, in perception? Kant denies that transcendental idealism is phenomenalism, claiming that it is an idealism compatible with the empirical realism of external objects. According to *the Refutation of Idealism*, the existence of objects in space is immediately proved by the empirically determined consciousness of our existence: “the consciousness of our existence [*Da-sein*] is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence [*Dasein*] of other things outside us” (KrV B276). But if “empirical” is only an object represented as given as to its existence, where is the very outside? Where is the outside once the only direct contact we have with it, the sensation, has been excluded from it?

4. *Formal aesthetics*

Transfigured into pure form, external reality becomes subjective even if not in a psychological sense. But, for this reason, to judge the *Refutation of Idealism* successful is very difficult². On the other hand, some point out that, rather than a “refutation”, what Kant presents as such is only a confirmation of *Transcendental Aesthetics*: a *petitio principii* with the value of “tautology” (Benoist 2006, 306). Kant merely restates his thesis on knowledge – “the conditions of the possibility of experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience” (KrV A158-B197) –, because all he wants to show is that every empirical interiority is conditioned by “an empirical exteriority” (Luporini 1967: 185). Yet, it is always interiority, since external things exist in the same way as the subject: as representations of which we are immediately aware. The representations of matter and corporeal things do not refer to “something that is outside us in the transcendental sense” (KrV A372). Matter, in those rare moments of the first *Critique* in which it is considered, and which are, significantly, the moments in which transcendental idealism is defined (empiricism is its ultimate theme – Benoist 2006: 306), is only “a thought in us” (KrV A385) which, thanks to the external sense, is represented as “outside”, even if only empirically.

Matter is a “Mittelbegriff” (Lachièz-Rey 1950: 460). Its function is to fill the gap between the self-constitution of pure transcendental and non-

² This is a *vexata quæstio* that we cannot deal with here. The focus of our article allows us to deal with it from the very specific point of view of sensation. For a general reconstruction of the problem, however, see Ameriks 2000.

pure transcendental matter, which the axiom “existence is not a predicate” splits up (*BWG*, 113; *KrV* A598-B 626). The phenomenal exteriority that transcendental idealism prides itself on drawing on is not inseity. The “external” objects are shadows, appearances. Kant knows this and “must be content with it” (Carabellese 1969: 426, our translation) because the main axiom of his criticism means that the real, the real as “absolute Position der Sache selbst” of the *Beweisgrund* (1763) sensed in sensation, is not constructible, and that, in the end, it is never given, as such, as a phenomenon. It is thinkable, yes, but only as a transcendental object or pure world of sensible quality.³ According to Jean Wahl, this is the typical vice of all idealisms, transcendental included: since idealism has to admit the existence of something that is not representation, it includes it as “the mere starting point of a reflection” (Wahl 2020: 36, our translation), namely, a “shock” (Basch 1904: 433) or empty and accidental X. The impressions of senses “provide the first occasion for opening the entire power of cognition” (*KrV* B118) and for this reason Kant also calls them the “occasional causes of concepts’ generation” (*KrV* B118). Yet, “if we remain true to the rule not to press our questions beyond that with which possible experience and its object can supply us, then it will not occur us to seek information about what the objects of our senses may be in themselves” (*KrV* A380).

For Kant, to construct the first impressions of the senses is impossible (*Refl.* 3940, Ak. 17:356). Therefore, it is illegitimate to expect a Kantian theory of sensation. The latter, if possible, ought to imply a perfect knowledge of both the reality that is foreign to us and the act of knowing, and thus should also imply “the resolution of those problems that the critical theory of knowledge proposes to pose” (Martinetti 2008: 7, our translation). Of course, if the aim of the *Critique of Pure Reason* were to give a full account of knowledge, it would have to begin by offering a theory of sensation. But its aim is more limited. Kant wants to develop exclusively the hypothesis that a formal factor is involved in all knowledge, convinced the possibility of our a priori knowledge rests solely on this. Thus, even if it is only sensation that provides the prove of a real existence which does not coincide with empirical intuition, since it is “a sensible impression that surpasses experience” (H.-J. De Vleeschauwer 1934-37: 592, our translation), Kant can take sensation as already made and liquidate it with a meaningless “it is given”. Inaugurating the *Aesthetic*, he presents sensation as a modification of sensibility and, so, as an act

³ Kant himself suggested this in his letter to Herz of 12 February 1772.

rather than a given. But here, after having said that sensation is modification, he fails to add anything more. Sensation is the active side of sensibility to which Kant does not pay attention, because the modification that is the object of transcendental analysis is not this or that modification, but the very structure of the modified.

Sensation says the trait of modifiability of the sensibility – sensibility is the faculty of receiving representations in the way we are affected by objects – but a pure, formal trait (*KrV* A129) which “must lie ready in the mind a priori and can therefore be considered separately from all sensation” (*KrV* A20-B34). For Kant only this trait is worthy of analysis, because the a priori is a criterion for the legitimation of the transcendental which, contrary to Deleuze’s wishes, affirms the highest: what is first, superior, sublime. In other words, knowledge begins thanks to the solicitation of an absolute outside that confines it to a posteriority such that it cannot know what grounds it. But Kant soon re-evaluates this impotence and posteriority as a more fundamental power and apriority: the apriorist power of logic and categories. Moreover, there would be no problem in so redeeming the “secondness” to which the “primacy” of modification relegates knowledge if, to this derived a priori, “the name of the essence of things” (Heidegger 2018: 115-116), Kant did not attempt to reduce the original a priori of sensation as “Erzeugung des Empirischen” (Tieftrunk *Brief*. 12:213). There would be no problem in making perception the criterion of the existence of things if, with this criterion, Kant did not explain what is existing in another sense than the sense encoded by the empirical postulate of thought: “that which is connected [*zusammenhängt*] with the material conditions of experience (of sensation) is actual” (*KrV* A218-B266). This, however, is exactly what Kant does: sensation precedes perception, but the transcendental idealist uses the latter to explain the former.

Indeed, it is from the “high” point of view of *Wahrnehmung* that *Empfindung* ceases to be “the effect of an object on the capacity for representation, insofar as we are affected by it” (*KrV* A20-B34), to become the “matter of perception” (*KrV* B209). As species of the “repræsentatio”, genus distinguished, in turn, into “sensatio” and “cognitio” (*KrV* B 377), perception is in fact “a representation accompanied by sensation” (*KrV* B147) or, more simply, “sensation itself” (*KrV* B184), but sensation as the content of a consciousness.

5. Empirical realism

For Kant perception is the first voluntary effort with which we free ourselves from sensation. The latter is an involuntary “hetero-affectation”, but perception is the first ease, in the form of an objectifying reference, extracted from the unease caused by contact with the outside. So, if sensation becomes a fact from the act that appears, for an instant, *sub specie sensibilitatis*, that is in the very first lines of *Transcendental Aesthetics*, is just because it must be present in the perception: “a consciousness in which is present a sensation” (KrV B207). Discouraged by transcendental analysis, Kant no longer speaks of the existent as the “cause of sensation”: he posits it as adherent to sensation in perception. Critical sensation is consciousness of existence (*Dasein*), not existence (*Existenz*). Yet, it is a consciousness that, despite Kant's efforts to conceal it, continues to mediate between the existent and the intellect. Again in the *Critique of Judgment*, sensation is defined as “das Materielle wodurch etwas Existierende gegeben wird” (KDU §7, 5: 189, 76), but if there is criticism only on the condition that this sensory mediation is translated into the intellectual language of perception, it is because the aim of criticism is “éviter le vacillement du sujet, en l'arrimant plus solidement dans la sphère du suprasensible” (Saint-Girons 1993: 455) and perception is the first armature.

Perceiving means giving oneself an impression instead of receiving it in order not to be invaded by what we sense. The world holds us back through sensation, but “pour l'homme, sentir c'est l'esclavage” (Alexandre 1978:24), and perception dominates this servitude by transforming what is merely sensed into advantageous information. As a *cassatio* of *sensatio qua sensatio* in favour of *cognitio*, perception is the art with which we give form to a universe – Kant's *natura formaliter spectata* – by expressing the all-too-human refusal to have only sensations. Thanks to its work, the insensible becomes sensible. Moreover, for Kant, we can only speak of the “sensation of an object” or of an “object affecting our senses” when the intensive nexus is unravelled into phenomenal matter, that is, into a *noema* for the intellect. The possibility of referring our sensations to something that is outside us presupposes that this outside is already given as external and when it is reduced to the matter of perception, sensation works as this externality: the legitimate way of representing the stimulation of the senses *after* it has occurred. Perception, in fact, is the clarification of sensation as the mere registration of a difference in level. Through perception the contrast between inside

and outside, real and unreal, a priori and a posteriori is thematised as such, that is, as a qualitative opposition. Filtered by perceptual rays, the incandescence of intensive differences dries up into extensive segments that do not belong to intensity in itself. Yet, perception – the first and fundamental knowledge of internal thought turned outwards – needs these abstract divisions to delimit the portion of the sensed that it wants to sense, that is, *what* and *how much* sensed it also wants to be sensible.

Space and time help it: perception is “une saisie sous forme d’intuition” (Alexandre 1978: 60), but a seizure that is worth a denial. Indeed, the pure forms of sensibility are receptive only in opposition to the spontaneity of concepts. They are active in extinguishing the fire of sensory matter, which is a simple *Bejahung* of the real (*Refl.* 6324, Ak. 17: 646; *Refl.* 4113, Ak. 17:422), assigning a limit to the limitlessness of the multitude of impressions. To perceive is to “say no” to the unconditional affirmation (*KrV* A574-B602; Maier 1930: 45) of the burning real of sensation through its declination into intentional objectivity. And this declination is necessary: perception must comprehend the sensed. Or rather, it must represent it in advance as comprehensible even when it does not yet understand it. Whereas sensation-modification is merely the relief of modally indifferent vibrations – the *Merkmale* –, perception and its objective correlate, sensation-matter, are “what designates the reality in space and time” (*KrV* A374). Yet, for Kant, the objects of perception only show themselves if from the outset they have been made showable. Such an offering and presence “can only be perceivable as present and lying-before insofar as it is represented in advance in the light of a what-character, in the opened domain of the real in general. The sensible can be sensed only on the basis of the open background of the what-like” (Heidegger 2018: 149), and intensive magnitude is this “what-like”: the limit that defines the object as “etwas” instead of as “Gegenstand”.

The degree allows us to say whether the object that “comes” is real or not because real, from the point of view of perception, is something that is nothing: “that in the empirical intuition which corresponds to the sensation is reality (*realitas phaenomenon*); that which corresponds to its absence is negation =0” (*KrV* A168-B210). However, the quality of a thing as “what-like” is an essence disengaged from potency, a definition of the thing that is not derived from its experience, and which is true regardless of its existence or non-existence. Reality, in the *Anticipations of Percep-*

tion, means *realitas*, *quidditas*⁴: “something whose concept contains in itself a being” (KrV A176; Refl. 6338a, Ak. 18:662), but a being that has no relation to existing. To exist, according to the second postulate of thought, is to be real in perception. What the *Anticipations* anticipate, coming before the *Postulates*, is that the real of perception is always a “what-content”, that to be real in perception always means to be qualified. What occupies space and time as an existing thing (the sensation-matter as *positum* of KrV B276) is never neutral in the sense of undifferentiated. Perception is “the consciousness of the presence of an object” (Refl. 6333, Ak. 18:654, our translation), but the presence of the object, as intensive quantities demonstrate, can vary infinitely between the extreme of a full presence and the *nihil privativum*. In reference to the latter, Kant offers the examples of shadow and cold (KrV B 347) as states in which it is impossible to detect anything existing in the sense of perceptible. Yet it is always the same “what-content” that varies in intensity because unlike extensional quantities, intensive quantities express a difference of state and concern both the variable intensity with which a quality is distributed in the space-time manifold and the fact that it remains unchanged when the extensional quantities vary.

Then, to enunciate the principle of *Anticipations of perception* in addition to that of the *Axioms of Intuition*, means to recognise that the mathematical description and construction of an object of experience exclusively in Cartesian terms of space and time, size and form, is neither sufficient nor exhaustive. For Kant, the object, and the possible experience we have of it, are also mathematically constructible in terms of something else: quality. The aim of the *Anticipations* is to show that a quantity too is possible in accordance with this quality that determines phenomena from their very beginning. Indeed, intensive magnitude is a strange “quantitas qualitatis” (*Proleg.* § 26, 61, ff.; KrV B414) because while the categories of cause, reciprocity etc. determine the connection or synthesis of the sensible texture, the category of reality “penetrates into the depths of every fibre of this texture, into the depths of every sensation, ensuring that each is already constituted a priori (as soon as it is effectively present to consciousness as a sensation), so as [...] to be

⁴ On the identity of *Realität* and *quidditas* see Cohen 1918: 556; Vernaux 1967: 95; Philonenko 1969: 201; Heidegger 2011: 183. However, according to some (Kaulbach 1964: 201-11; Honnfelder 1990: 458; Zoller 1984: 213-296), in the *Anticipations*, the meaning of *Realität* is not conceptual-qualitative. *Realität* here answers the question “how big”. On the nuances of “reality” see Holzhey 1984. On the distinction *Realität/Wirklichkeit* cf. Schwarz 1987: 343-46.

provided with ‘degree’ or ‘magnitude’ or ‘quantity’” (Scaravelli 1973: 78, our translation). If this were not so, sensation could not be connected to the intellect and result truly existent to consciousness. Only “this magnitude internal to the blind quality makes it luminous for science” (Scaravelli 1973: 78, our translation), guaranteeing the presence of an a priori knowable object even where it seemed impossible to find one.

6. *Non sensuous sensibility*

Intensive magnitude is the necessary condition for there to be recognition in the form of a reference of the subject to the object. The possibility of the latter, for Kant, is the incipit of every cognitive eventuality and intensive magnitude is this incipit. It is the first level of the construction of the object, namely, the perceptual one, which is the first conceptualisation of the object as an intentional object. In the *Anticipations*, as Heidegger pointed out, the foundation of intentionality is at stake, because it is intensive magnitude that allows perception to understand the real that comes in advance, so opening the horizon of the “what-like” in which phenomena can appear. Without intensive magnitude, the relation according to which perception is consciousness of sensation reduced to “something” or, as it is more correct to say, consciousness of “something” in sensation, would not be formed. As the “x” that follows the “hoc est” of the determining judgement, intensive magnitude is the first thing understood of the sensation reduced to a thing, the first predicate attributed to the sensation-matter, and it is difficult, given its infra- or hyper-schematic nature (Scaravelli 1973: 17-18), to understand whether intensive magnitude is the cause of this understanding or its effect, that is whether it precedes or follows the constitution of the sensation-data. What is certain is that intensive magnitude is this “what-content” that sensation, at a certain point, has; the quality, under the title of which, sensation reduced to the essential matter of perception occupies space and time.

Indeed, as the name of the second principle suggests, in the pages in which, according to Cohen (1883; 1918), it would really be a matter of *Empfindung*, we do not find “die bloße Modifikation”, but sensation reduced to representation and connected to a category of the intellect – that of reality – under the guise of which Kant forgets the other sensation. It is in the *Anticipations of perception*, that perception is for the very first-time *sensation + schema, sensation + consciousness*, where the + is the

index of the *Zusammenhängen* in which the perceptual synopsis is resolved. Perception, in fact, is the capture of the intensive qualitative (the properly sensory) in the meshes of representation (the extended quantitative) and intensive magnitude results from this application of an a priori form to an a posteriori matter. Therefore, intensive magnitude does not come *from* sensation but *to* sensation. The form of “what-like” is in us because that which, in the sensible and as sensible, has the character of “what-content” must be known a priori by the mind. This may seem strange, Heidegger comments. How is it possible that even there, as in sensation, where we are dealing with what encounters us and we only receive, a pre-understanding is necessary? How is it that even where, as in simple perception, we should only be receptive, we are also active? For Heidegger, however, not only this is not strange, rather it constitutes Kant’s greatest merit, namely, making explicit the anticipatory character of perception. “No human being has ever sensed a ‘something’ and a ‘what’. Through what sense organ could such a thing take place?” (Heidegger 2018: 151). That we can, however, is what Kant demonstrated with his non-sensuous concept of sensibility: a sensibility without sensation-modification.

In both versions of the principle, after all, Kant never regards sensation as an effect whose causes must be sought, but always as something that, falling within the transcendence of the intentional relation to the object, plays a role in the determination of objectivity. The essence of sensation is defined only in accordance with the function it performs in recognition and is understood only from the conditions of the possibility of experience. Consequently, if perception were not there to meet what meets us with a representation, sensation would not be this or that “what-content” that, in coming, is received. Reduced to the matter of perception, sensation is the first thing we are aware of and it is only insofar as it is effectively, in the sense of the second empirical postulate, present to perception as matter, that is, only as representation (“sensatio est realitas phaenomenon” – *KrV* B186), that sensation has a degree or intensive magnitude. As if intensive magnitude were the prize received for having become *Vorstellung*, as if it were the holy water with which the intellect christens it transcendental. Scaravelli, however, does not seem to agree: the degree is not the product of the synthesis of the category of reality with the matter of perception, but what the synthesis has, and what it has precisely as a synthesis. Sensation, he explains, “has it only for illustrative purposes” (Scaravelli 1973: 170-173, our translation). It is the sensible,

that is, the *realitas phaenomenon*, that has a degree, and precisely insofar as it is sensible (“*realitas phaenomenon est gradus*” – Schwarz 1987: 345).

“Before the sensible”, from the critical point of view of perception, has no meaning. To sense something, when to sense is to perceive, is always to sense a degree, because anterior to the degree or intensive magnitude, as the real opposition between reality and negation tells us,⁵ there is nothing. Without something that determines what results as a something, what comes is not only non-actual, but “is nothing at all” (Heidegger 2018: 147). Reality, for Kant, is the first quality of the object, that by which it comes to us. Real, indeed, is the very fact of being encountered. Which, through Heidegger’s apophantic eyes, proves that without prior apprehension, not even the encounter would be possible. *We receive because we can receive*. This, in short, is the Heideggerian thesis. And yet, at bottom, it is also Kant’s thesis because Kant ascribes to sensation the transcendental function of making possible the pre-understanding of what is received or, as Heidegger often translates it, of grounding the very possibility of receiving. Sensation, for Kant, is grounding because it is grounded, and grounded not in itself. Sensation does not ground the possibility of receiving in the sense that without sensation there would be no sensibility. It is the fact of being by principle, the principle of the *Anticipations*, already anticipated that qualifies sensation’s transcendental character. This character is a very pure one, such as that of the degree-form. Very pure because if transcendental is “every determination of a thing in view of its essence” (*Ref.* 5738, Ak. 18:340, our translation; see Frank 1911: 21) and the degree (as auroral “what-like” thanks to which phenomena appear) is this determination at the original level, it follows that intensive magnitude is the condition of possibility of the very transcendental character of experience. Extraordinary, no doubt, but in line with the equally astonishing prerogative of anticipation.

Kant defines anticipation “all cognition through which one can cognize and determine a priori what belongs to empirical cognition” (*KrV* A166-B208). And, since only what allows itself to be anticipated is pure, without anticipation experience would lack any transcendental dimension. Therefore, within the confines of this gilded cage, there is no margin for a recovery of sensation-modification. Its destiny is to become the fetish of a sensation-matter. Yet, for this reason, it is very difficult not to describe

⁵ The precritical essay on negative quantities (1763) is the truth, *avant-coup*, of the *Anticipations*. For a comparison between the two essays see Granel 1987: 71-88; Romano 2011: 415-432; Guyer 1987, 199 and Giovanelli 2011: 41.

as “subjectivist” a position whereby one only feels internally, feeling being always, even in the third *Critique*, thought beginning from judging⁶, that is from representation.

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⁶ We will work on a comparison between the two Kantian senses of “to feel”, *empfinden* and *fühlen*, in the future.

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