



A Kantian Sense of Aesthetic Methodology: ‘Manner’ Instead of ‘Method’

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SPECIAL ISSUE
RESEARCH ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore a potential avenue for applying ‘aesthetic methodology’ through an examination of Kant’s distinction between method (*modus logicus*) and aesthetic manner (*modus aestheticus*). In the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, Kant refers to this distinction explicitly in two contexts: regarding the creation of the genius artist and the possibility of teaching this creation. I will discuss these two contexts as two dimensions of aesthetic judgement, arguing that the genius artist’s creative process provides valuable insights into the aesthetic judgement process for the viewer. I conclude by asserting a direct link between the idea of humanity and our aesthetic commitment: the way we practise our humanity is through ‘aesthetic methodology’, as manifested in concrete judgements of beauty.

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KEYWORDS:

aesthetic methodology;
aesthetic manner;
exemplary originality;
genius artist; Kant; method

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Godess-Riccitelli, Moran. ‘A
Kantian Sense of Aesthetic
Methodology: “Manner”
Instead of “Method”.’
*Estetika: The European
Journal of Aesthetics*
LXII/XVIII, no. 2 (2025):
pp. 142–156. DOI: [https://
doi.org/10.33134/eeja.588](https://doi.org/10.33134/eeja.588)

In the appendix to the *Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgement* (§ 60), entitled ‘On the Methodology of Taste’, Kant claims that a doctrine of method that precedes science cannot be applied to aesthetic judgements of beauty because ‘there cannot be any science of the beautiful’.¹ Furthermore, aesthetic judgements are not determined by principles but by a subjective feeling of pleasure or displeasure. This means that aesthetic judgements cannot be based on laws or determined rules, and consequently it is not possible to teach others to appreciate aesthetically according to a rule-following method. Given the absence of specific rules for correct aesthetic judgement, what serves as the standard? And how can one teach others to appreciate beauty without a systematic methodology?

These questions – concerning the normativity, justification, and communicability of aesthetic judgement – have received extensive attention in the secondary literature and generated multiple, often divergent interpretations.² However, the question of methodology has largely been explored only within the context of teleological judgements about the organization of nature, not in aesthetics. This paper aims to present a potential avenue for the application of ‘aesthetic methodology’ through an examination of Kant’s delineation between method (*modus logicus*) and aesthetic manner (*modus aestheticus*).³ In the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* Kant refers to this distinction explicitly in two contexts:

1. In relation to the *genius artist* and the original manner in which beautiful art is created as an exemplary model, distinct from a method following fixed principles (§ 49).
2. In relation to *aesthetic education*, emphasizing how beauty can be delivered by stimulating the student’s imagination, in contrast to learning through imitation (§ 60).

I aim to discuss these two contexts as two dimensions of aesthetic judgement:

1 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5:355, Hereafter: *CJ*.

2 For a representative range of interpretations of the normativity of Kantian aesthetic judgement, see Henry E. Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Taste: A Reading of the ‘Critique of Aesthetic Judgment’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), part II; Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chaps 7–9; and Ralf Meerbote, ‘Reflection on Beauty’, in *Essays in Kant’s Aesthetics*, ed. Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 55–86, all of whom emphasize the role of the harmony of cognitive faculties in grounding subjective universality. Hannah Ginsborg, *The Normativity of Nature: Essays on Kant’s ‘Critique of Judgment’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), and Miles Rind, ‘What Is Claimed in a Kantian Judgment of Taste?’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38 (2000): 63–85, instead propose more primitive or sui generis accounts of normativity. Keren Gorodeisky, ‘A New Look at Kant’s View of Aesthetic Testimony’, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50 (2010): 53–70; Karl Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), chap. 12; and Brent Kalar, *The Demands of Taste in Kant’s Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2006), chap. 1, develop perspectives centred on the autonomy of aesthetic judgement and its resistance to external authority. Angela Breitenbach, ‘The Beauty of Science without the Science of Beauty: Kant and the Rationalists on the Aesthetics of Cognition’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 56 (2018): 281–304, explores the mediating role of aesthetic judgement between nature and freedom, particularly within the context of scientific understanding.

3 The proposed interpretation of the act of aesthetic judgement does not emerge from Kant’s own arguments in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* concerning the terms ‘method’ and ‘aesthetic manner’. Instead, it is presented as an original and independent reading of these terms. Nevertheless, it is my intention to demonstrate that the proposed interpretation is consistent with and does not contradict Kant’s use of the various terms.

1. The performative dimension of judgement. This aspect emphasizes that the aesthetic judge functions as an exemplar – a ‘standard or rule for judging’ (CJ, 5:308) – through their subjective evaluation. I will argue that the way the genius artist creates beautiful art offers insights into the aesthetic judgement process for the viewer.⁴
2. The link between the aesthetic manner and the concept of humanity. This section draws an analogy between Kant’s depiction of teaching beautiful art – without predefined rules that can be imitated – and the nature of aesthetic judgement, which similarly lacks strict rules. Nevertheless, both must serve as models for others. In this sense, the aesthetic judge, like the genius artist, functions as a ‘teacher’ by exemplifying the aesthetic manner underlying their judgement. The concept of humanity comes into play as the foundation for aesthetic education. Kant claims that ‘the propaedeutic for all beautiful art, so far as it is aimed at the highest degree of its perfection, seems to lie not in precepts but in the culture of the mental powers through those prior forms of knowledge that are called *humaniora*’ (CJ, 5:355). The term *humaniora* expresses a general sense of humanity. I will argue that there is a direct link between the idea of humanity and our aesthetic commitment: one way in which we *practise* our humanity is through ‘aesthetic methodology’, as manifested in concrete judgements of beauty.⁵

Through an analysis of these two aspects of aesthetic judgement, I aim to demonstrate that, while Kant explicitly rejects the possibility of a scientific doctrine of method for the beautiful, he nonetheless leaves open the possibility that the evaluation of beauty might involve a different kind of methodology in the aesthetic sense. This distinctive aesthetic methodology, I argue, is articulated in the notion of the ‘aesthetic manner’ (*modus aestheticus*) as formulated in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*.

To understand the inner logic of this ‘manner’ in aesthetic evaluation – and how it might ground a regulative framework for both judgement and creation – it is essential to first clarify Kant’s unique and nuanced use of the terms *lawfulness* (*Gesetzlichkeit*) and *method* (*Methode*). These terms, while often associated with objective or scientific domains, take on a distinctive meaning in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, where Kant develops a notion of ‘subjective lawfulness’ that governs aesthetic judgement. Clarifying these terms outside the aesthetic context allows us to see how *manner*, though irreducible to rules or method in the strict sense, may nevertheless be understood as expressing a form of universal lawfulness – thus motivating a reconstructive account of aesthetic methodology.

4 This reading alludes to Kant’s approach towards aesthetic appreciation or taste itself as a natural talent that must be cultivated. The assertion is not that the act of aesthetic evaluation contains a productive or creative aspect; rather, an analysis of stages from the creative process of the genius artist allows us to gain insight into the process of aesthetic judgement. This interpretive proposal is based on Makkreel’s interpretation, which identifies the aesthetic function of reflective judgement as an independent form of evaluation. For further elucidation, see Rudolf A. Makkreel, ‘Reflection, Reflective Judgment, and Aesthetic Exemplarity’, in *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant’s Critical Philosophy*, ed. Rebecca Kukla (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 223–44. Makkreel’s work emphasizes the normative power of aesthetic appreciation through the notion of exemplarity, examining the capacity of specific objects within our experiences to serve as exemplars and the extent to which they can guide our aesthetic appreciation. The present paper aims to extend this line of interpretation by examining exemplarity itself, that is, the *manner* in which we conduct aesthetic evaluations in practice, as an aesthetic methodology.

5 A full examination of this topic is provided in Section IV, which concludes this paper.

II. FREE LAWFULNESS AND CRITICAL METHODOLOGY

Lawfulness holds a central place in Kant's system, both in the epistemological sense – regarding the possibility of theoretical knowledge of nature – and in the practical sense, relating to the possibility of autonomous moral legislation. Theoretical cognition of nature operates through a method of deriving conclusions from given laws, though these laws are always limited to empirical nature. By contrast, practical reason legislates autonomously according to the 'concept of freedom' (*CJ*, 5:175), which by definition transcends nature. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant shows that, despite their essential differences, theoretical and practical lawfulness can coexist harmoniously within the same subject without contradiction, thus resolving the conflict between freedom and determinism.⁶

Kant's innovation in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* lies in introducing a third form of lawfulness, one that mediates between nature and freedom: the principle of purposiveness, which Kant characterizes as the 'lawfulness of the contingent' (*Gesetzlichkeit des Zufälligen*; *CJ*, 5:184; see also 5:404). This principle is not an objective law of nature, nor is it derived from moral legislation. Rather, it is a subjective, a priori principle that guides our reflection on nature (*CJ*, 5:186). It allows us to view nature as if it were organized according to ends, even though no actual ends or concepts determine it. In this sense, the principle of purposiveness does not legislate to nature but conditions our ability to reflect upon it coherently and systematically (*CJ*, 5:186; see also 5:190).

From this, we already discern a unique Kantian notion of 'lawfulness': not as the imposition of rules upon objects but as a reflective form that enables us to make sense of nature and our experiences within it. The faculty of judgement, in its reflective use, prescribes this principle to itself.⁷ Thus, lawfulness here signifies the *structure* of our cognitive activity rather than the objective validity of a law.

This peculiar form of 'lawfulness' becomes even more striking in the aesthetic domain, where Kant describes the judgement of taste as exhibiting 'lawfulness without a law'. Aesthetic judgement arises from the free play of imagination and understanding – a harmony that bears the *form* of purposiveness yet is not determined by any concept. Concepts, as rules of the understanding, normally guide the synthesis of the manifold in experience. In aesthetic judgement, however, the imagination remains free from any particular concept while still engaging the understanding in a harmonious, rule-like manner. Hence, Kant uses the term 'free lawfulness' to designate this unique structure: the judgement claims universal validity, even though it cannot be grounded in any determinate rule (*CJ*, 5:190, 218).

This leads to two central questions: (1) how can an activity guided by 'free lawfulness', unbound by any determinate concept, be intelligible and communicable to others and (2) consequently, how can a judgement based on a subjective principle carry a claim to universal assent, which Kant regards as essential to aesthetic judgement?

6 This is a reference to Kant's solution to the third antinomy of pure reason, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A444–51/B472–79; see also A491–515/B519–43.

7 Kant names it *Heautonomie*, see *CJ*, 5:186.

Kant's answer relies on the idea of the *subjective purposiveness* of the representation in relation to the power of judgement in general (CJ, 5:281). Aesthetic judgements do not rely on objective concepts but rather on the shared subjective conditions governing the use of our power of judgement. Because the free harmony of imagination and understanding reflects the formal condition of the faculties, Kant argues that we are justified in demanding universal assent. The principle underlying the judgement of taste is subjective but necessary, because it is rooted in the a priori conditions of our cognitive faculties (CJ, 5:290).

At first glance, this suggests that merely possessing the faculty of judgement suffices for making aesthetic judgements. However, Kant emphasizes that such judgements must be made in a particular *manner* – free from personal interest and not guided by determinate concepts (or rules; CJ, 5:290). This is where the notion of *aesthetic manner* (*modus aestheticus*) comes into play.

Kant explicitly contrasts *aesthetic manner* with *scientific method*. The latter, understood as a procedure governed by objective principles, is not applicable to aesthetic judgement. Indeed, Kant insists that no doctrine of method (*Doctrin der Methode*) can ground the critique of taste, since taste admits of no objective rule or concept.⁸ Nevertheless, Kant's broader use of the concept of 'method' throughout the three *Critiques* – particularly in its critical form – can help us clarify the function of *aesthetic manner* and its relation to lawfulness.

For Kant, 'method' refers to the systematic organization of cognition through principles.⁹ He distinguishes between 'naturalistic' methods, which lack firm grounding, and 'scientific' methods, which are based on principles. Among scientific methods, Kant favours the critical method, defined as the self-examination of reason to determine the scope and limits of its own concepts.¹⁰ Crucially, Kant's critical method is not an externally imposed procedure but emerges from reason's own activity. Method, in this sense, is the lawfulness that reason gives to itself in relation to its various manifestations.¹¹

Seen in this light, there is an analogy between method in the critical sense and the 'free lawfulness' of aesthetic judgement. Both refer to internal structures that guide activity without recourse to determinate rules. In this context, *aesthetic manner* may be understood as the aesthetic counterpart to method: a regulative, non-rule-bound form through which aesthetic judgements¹² maintain coherence, communicability, and critical reflection.

8 In this context, Kant refers to the manner of creation of the genius artist, who must create in what he calls 'exemplary originality'. This topic will be addressed in greater detail subsequently, with an examination of the manner in which the productive aspect of this process can inform the evaluative judgement aspect.

9 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 5:151.

10 For further details regarding the different types of method and their historical background, see John Dewey, 'Kant and Philosophic Method', *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 18 (1984): 162–74; Gabriele Gava, *Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason' and the Method of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), part IV.

11 It can be argued that the method represents an opportunity for Kant to reflect on the principles that enable the lawfulness of the method itself. For a detailed explanation of this interpretation, see Alfredo Ferrarin, 'Method in Kant and Hegel', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 27 (2019): 255–70.

12 The reference here is to both the aesthetic judgement and the aesthetic genius, as I show next.

To be clear, this is not to claim that Kant posits a methodology of taste in the strict sense. On the contrary, Kant insists that taste cannot be taught according to rules. However, the development and cultivation of taste – especially in relation to the idea of genius – nonetheless involve instruction and critique. What can be taught, Kant argues, is the *manner* of judgement or artistic production: not the content but the formal way in which the faculties engage harmoniously. Thus, aesthetic manner plays a role analogous to methodology – it provides form and orientation to the aesthetic process, both evaluative and creative, without being reducible to a doctrine of method.

Against this background, we can now better understand the connection between aesthetic manner, lawfulness, and the critical method. Although Kant denies that taste can be grounded in principles in the same way as science or morality, he does not abandon the idea of form or orientation. The notion of aesthetic manner allows us to reconstruct an aesthetic ‘methodology’ – not as a system of rules but as a reflective form of practice grounded in the subjective principle of purposiveness. In this way, aesthetic judgement, while irreducible to a science, can still be understood as an expression of universal lawfulness.

I now turn to the two contexts in which the notion of *aesthetic manner* appears in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*: the artist’s genius and the possibility of teaching it.

III. EXEMPLARY ORIGINALITY: THE AESTHETIC MANNER OF THE CREATOR AND THE VIEWER

At the end of § 49 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, Kant writes:

There are in general, to be sure, two ways (*modus*) of putting thoughts together in a presentation, one of which is called a **manner** (*modus aestheticus*) and the other of which is called a **method** (*modus logicus*), which differ from each other in that the former has no other standard than the **feeling** of unity in the presentation, while the latter follows determinate **principles** in this; for beautiful art, therefore, only the first is valid. (*CJ*, 5:318–19)

Kant here identifies a foundational distinction between manner and method, central not only to the nature of artistic production but also, I argue, to the broader aesthetic process, including acts of aesthetic judgement. The *modus aestheticus*, or aesthetic manner, refers to the genius artist’s capacity to present ideas in beautiful art through a unity grounded in feeling rather than in conceptual determination. This manner resists systematization: it is not reducible to a rule-governed method, nor can it be replicated through systematic instruction. Instead, it reflects a distinctive subjective orientation that gives form to the work while preserving the freedom of imagination.

This creative freedom, according to Kant, is inseparable from aesthetic pleasure – a non-conceptual satisfaction abstracted from interests or external ends (*CJ*, 5:203–4). The unity of the presentation evokes this pleasure by enabling the free harmony of imagination and understanding. Thus, the aesthetic manner becomes not only the mark of genius but also the condition of possibility for aesthetic judgement. The artist creates a work of art that is, in Kant’s words, ‘exemplary’, meaning that it serves as a model for inspiring future artworks without providing a determinate rule. The central tension Kant explores is that of exemplary originality: how can a genius

create something that is both original (that is, not derivable from prior models) and exemplary (that is, suitable to serve as a model for others)?

Kant defines genius as

the exemplary originality of the natural endowment of a subject for the **free** use of his cognitive faculties. In this way the product of a genius [...] is an example, not for imitation [*Nachahmung*] [...] but for emulation [*Nachfolge*] by another genius, who is thereby awakened to the feeling of his own originality. (*CJ*, 5:318)

This exemplary function of the genius is not prescriptive and does not rely on a scientifically defined method; as Kant states, the genius cannot ‘describe or indicate scientifically how he brings its product into being’ (*CJ*, 5:308). Rather than laying down principles to follow, the genius’s work awakens others to their own imaginative capacities.¹³ The creative process becomes a stimulus, inviting others to exercise their freedom in a similarly non-mechanical manner. As Martin Gammon has shown, Kant’s discussion of exemplarity must be understood in relation to a nuanced genealogy of imitation in eighteenth-century aesthetics, including distinctions between *Nachfolge* (emulation), *Nachahmung* (imitation), *Nachmachung* (copying), and *Nachäffung* (aping).¹⁴ Kant ultimately privileges *Nachfolge* as the proper mode of engaging with genius’s work, while explicitly warning against *Nachäffung*, the mechanical reproduction of form that lacks internal principle or spirit by stating that ‘this imitation [*Nachahmung*] becomes aping [*Nachäffung*] if the student copies everything, even down to that which the genius had to leave in, as a deformity’ (*CJ*, 5:318). Thus, for Kant the main distinction between *Nachfolge* and *Nachahmung* lies in tapping into the same sources of creativity rather than reproducing existing models mechanically.

This distinction proves pivotal for the argument that follows. A model in Kant’s sense does not provide a method of mechanical replication but a stimulus for free following of a predecessor’s *manner* of composition rather than just replicating the pattern of their thoughts.¹⁵ The genius’s artwork functions as both an external guide and an internal source of creative inspiration. This means that the exemplary quality of a work does not impose rigid rules but leaves space for others’ imagination to develop.¹⁶ The genius’s creation must strike a delicate balance: it must be original yet capable of inspiring others to follow – not by imitating but by drawing from the same sources of creativity.¹⁷

In simple words, the genius’s artwork does not dictate what should be created but reveals *how* creation might arise from the harmonious play of our faculties. In

13 Some commentators link this idea to innovation, suggesting that every work of genius introduces a new standard for imitation, see, for example, Paul Guyer, ‘Autonomy and Integrity in Kant’s Aesthetics’, *Monist* 66 (1983): 167–88. However, such an interpretation risks reducing genius to mere technical invention.

14 For Gammon’s analysis of these distinctions and their aesthetic-historical background, see Martin Gammon, ‘“Exemplary Originality”: Kant on Genius and Imitation’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 35 (1997): 563–92.

15 See *ibid.*, 573.

16 See Makkreel, ‘Reflections’, 223–44.

17 Emulation (*Nachfolge*) entails, for Kant, creating ‘from the same sources from which [the exemplary author/artist] created, and to learn from one’s predecessors only the *manner* of conducting oneself in so doing’ (*CJ*, 5:283; emphasis mine).

this way, the aesthetic manner becomes central to both artistic production and evaluation. The viewer, too, is invited to engage aesthetically – not by imitating the genius’s output but by cultivating a *manner* of judgement that reflects the same subjective lawfulness.

This brings us to the analogy between genius and the aesthetic judge. While Kant does not collapse the two roles and his use of the aesthetic manner primarily addresses the creative process of the genius artist, I argue that it can also offer insights into the nature of aesthetic judgement by drawing structural parallels.¹⁸ Just as the genius does not follow a determinate method and the genius’s work cannot be generated by strict adherence to rules, the aesthetic judge cannot apply pre-given concepts to assess beauty and the aesthetic appreciation of an object resists scientific articulation. Instead, both genius and the aesthetic judge must operate reflectively, guided only by the feeling of purposiveness that arises from the free play of their cognitive faculties. As Jessica Williams has argued, this analogy illuminates how the exemplarity of aesthetic judgement parallels artistic exemplarity: in both, the act functions as a model without grounding itself in a rule.¹⁹

The claim, then, is not that the aesthetic judge creates in the same sense as the genius artist but that aesthetic judgement is itself an act of presentation – an expressive, reflective act that others can observe and emulate. This *emulation* (*Nachfolge*) involves drawing from the ‘same creative sources’, as Kant suggests with regard to the genius’s work (*CJ*, 5:283). It is not merely about recreating a standard for aesthetic evaluation but about adopting the same behaviour that aligns with the aesthetic methodology exemplified in my subjective judgement, making it something valuable and worth committing to. This means that when I make an aesthetic judgement I offer a model of how one might respond to the object: I exemplify how to orient oneself towards beauty in a disinterested and communicable way.²⁰ In this sense, my judgement is more than a report of my subjective pleasure; it is an enactment of a form of engagement that aspires to universality by providing a paradigm that others can reflect upon and emulate.

It is important to clarify that I am not suggesting that aesthetic judgement is productive, or that the aesthetic judge is a potential genius. My point is simply that Kant’s description of the genius’s creative process offers insights into aesthetic judgement. Both acts, though distinct – one involving creation and the other evaluation – serve as subjective models, each exemplifying a practice that others can emulate.

18 For a comprehensive analysis of the distinction between aesthetic manner and method in the context of the genius artist and art, see Aviv Reiter, ‘Artistic Manner as Autonomy: Creative Freedom and the Constraint of Rules in Vasari, Bellori and Kant’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20 (2023): 1–16.

19 Jessica J. Williams, ‘Autonomy and Community in Kant’s Theory of Taste’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 82 (2024): 211–12. Williams takes this analogy further to claim that ‘genuine autonomy requires community, just as genuine community requires that members are autonomous agents who can judge for themselves’ (p. 212).

20 It is important to distinguish between a ‘model’ and an ‘example’ in this context. While examples provide a concrete representation of a concept, they are a specific, definable entity that can be imitated. In contrast, a model is an undefined rule that leaves the imagination free. Kant compares this to a scheme without concepts (*CJ*, 5:287). In the *Critique of Pure Reason* the schema was the rule for subordinating particulars under concepts. In the aesthetic context it means the free play between the faculties of cognition (imagination and understanding) without deciding between them.

Kant emphasizes that aesthetic judgement is not simply empirical reporting of subjective pleasure but a normative, reflective act expressing an expectation of shared agreement.²¹ In judging the beautiful, we consider how every individual would potentially respond to the object, illustrating the normative structure of aesthetic judgement as an exemplar as it uniquely reveals the aesthetic methodology that underlies it. The subjective pleasure we derive from a beautiful object operates as a necessary model of the pleasure others are expected to experience in response to that object.²² In this way, our personal judgement *activates* aesthetic methodology while simultaneously *exemplifies* it, thereby serving as a model for aesthetic evaluation for others.²³

Importantly, not every subjective aesthetic judgement automatically gains universal validity. To judge aesthetically, one must remove any considerations related to personal interest – whether sensuous, cognitive, or moral²⁴ – and exclude objective features of the object (for example, conceptual definitions) or purposes the object serves. Borrowing from Kant's terminology regarding the creative process of the genius, one could say that constructing one's subjective aesthetic judgement as a model allows it to function as a kind of 'artwork' that others can emulate. I do not mean to suggest that constructing one's aesthetic judgement as a model is an artwork in the productive sense but that it exemplifies the aesthetic process – a reflective activity structured by free lawfulness. Just as the genius's creation provides a form others may follow without copying, my judgement can serve as a guide for how others might form their own responses, by drawing from the same subjective conditions that made mine possible.

To reflect on another's aesthetic judgement, then, is to observe a form of orientation: a way of bringing imagination and understanding into harmony without external constraint. What I emulate is not the content of their judgement but the manner in which the judgement is formed – a commitment to disinterestedness,

21 The issue is not about taking into account the judgement of any other person. Consequently, it is not about the actual agreement of any other person to my judgement. Rather, it is about the possibility of a general agreement based on the necessary assumption of a 'common sense' (*sensus communis*). Kant's assertion is that the assumption of the existence of a common sense is necessary for the validity of the aesthetic judgement, which, despite lacking objective validity, aspires to universal subjective validity. For further insight into the role of 'common sense' in aesthetic judgement, see Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, chap. 7; Eli Friedlander, 'On Common Sense, Communication and Community', in *Palgrave Kant Handbook*, ed. Matthew Altman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 407–24; Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, chap. 8; Fiona Hughes, *Kant's Aesthetic Epistemology: Form and World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), chap. 5; Samantha Matherne, 'Kant on Aesthetic Autonomy and Common Sense', *Philosopher's Imprint* 19, no. 24 (2019).

22 This assertion is based on the necessary assumption of 'common sense', as mentioned in ftn. 21 above.

23 The second claim is supported by Kant's assertion in § 32 that '[t]here is no use of our powers at all, however free it might be, and even of reason [...], which, if every subject always had to begin entirely from the raw predisposition of his own nature, would not fall into mistaken attempts if others had not preceded him with their own, not in order to make their successors into mere imitators, but rather by means of their method to put others on the right path for seeking out the principles in themselves and thus for following their own, often better, course' (*CJ*, 5:283).

24 In § 42, Kant does indeed discuss an intellectual interest in beauty that is linked to a moral interest. However, this unique interest in beauty is discussed only after a pure aesthetic judgement is made (see *CJ*, 5:196). For further insight into the development of the subject of intellectual interest in beauty and its relation to morality, see Moran Godess-Riccitelli, 'The Moral Expression of Beauty: Rethinking the Relationship between Aesthetics and Morality in Kant's Third Critique', *Lexicon Philosophicum* 12 (2024): 235–53.

communicability, and the *sensus communis*. In this way, the aesthetic manner underlies both the creation and evaluation of beauty.

Yet, as mentioned above, not every aesthetic judgement achieves this status. As with the genius who may produce mere *Manier* (stylization without inner principle),²⁵ the aesthetic judge may err in mistaking personal taste or idiosyncratic preference for communicable beauty. Kant clarifies that genius is defined by its original talent, one that cannot be acquired through rules or methods. Yet, as he warns, ‘since there can also be original nonsense (*originaler Unsinn*), its [genius’s] products must at the same time be models, i.e., **exemplary**’. That is, they must be understood as paradigms that offer others ‘a standard or a rule for judging’ (*CJ*, 5:307–8). This structure of exemplarity parallels aesthetic judgement. Although subjective pleasure lies at the core of aesthetic experience – and in that sense, the judgement is original – the communicability of that pleasure assumes a shared horizon: we anticipate that others will respond similarly to the same object. For this to hold, aesthetic methodology must be expressed as ‘an example of a universal rule that one cannot produce’ (*CJ*, 5:237). Thus, similarly to the genius’s work that must exemplify an aesthetic *manner* that functions as a model for others to comprehend and follow, the aesthetic judge’s pleasure becomes a necessary model: an exemplary pleasure, not in the sense of prescribing a principle but in demonstrating a lawfulness that cannot be codified.

Hence, I propose that aesthetic judgements, when properly formed,²⁶ activate and exemplify what I have called *aesthetic methodology*.²⁷ This methodology is not a system of rules but a framework of reflective engagement – an aesthetic manner of judging, which others can recognize, reflect upon, and emulate. It provides no doctrine²⁸ but it does provide a standard: not a principle but an example (*CJ*, 5:237).

The analogy with genius thus sheds light on aesthetic judgement itself. In both cases, we see an original act that is at once particular and exemplary. The pleasure I feel is my own, yet I present it as universally valid. This is the central paradox of Kantian aesthetics, and the key to understanding how aesthetic judgement is intimately connected to the moral domain: through it, we express our humanity in a way that invites others to do the same. To respond adequately to the object through necessary pleasure for valid aesthetic evaluation, each person must *practise* the aesthetic methodology exemplified by my concrete, particular evaluation. This introduces a distinction between the ‘aesthetic methodology’ involved in judging beauty and

25 It is notable that Kant employs the term *Manier* (*modus aestheticus*) to describe the aesthetic manner, despite its association in art history with artificial, exaggerated styles, seemingly at odds with his notion of an exemplary model. Kant warns that misapplying the aesthetic manner – using it merely as superficial stylization to signal originality – amounts to self-indulgent behaviour, akin to someone who ‘is fond of the sound of his own voice, or who stands and moves as if he were on a stage, in order to be gaped at, which always betrays a bungler’ (*CJ*, 5:319).

26 Kant is clear that aesthetic judgements must be stripped of all interest and concept. Only then can they lay claim to universal validity – not as determinate laws but as exemplary acts.

27 What is at stake here is not an objective, fixed rule that can be applied in judgement or transferred to others to guide their actions (as with a method, for example). Rather, the act of aesthetic judgement *itself* becomes exemplary. In other words, the necessity involved is not that of an objective law or principle but rather one that exemplify a universal lawfulness, which cannot be determined or articulated explicitly.

28 Kant asserts in § 60 that a doctrine of method, preceding science, cannot be applied to aesthetic judgements (see *CJ*, 5:355).

the way it is learned, both of which are intertwined, as they pertain to the 'aesthetic manner' by which aesthetic judgement must be constructed *and* delivered.

The next step is to explore the possibility of delivering beauty not through a formal 'method of learning' but as a 'manner of teaching', underscoring the relationship between aesthetic methodology and humanity.

IV. AESTHETIC METHODOLOGY AND THE IDEA OF HUMANITY

In the final section of the *Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgement* (§ 60), Kant emphasizes the connection of the 'aesthetic manner' as a way of teaching to what he calls 'humanity'. He argues that no method can be provided for aesthetic judgements because 'there cannot be any science of the beautiful' (CJ, 5:355). For Kant, science is based on systematic knowledge made up of determining judgements. Since such judgements cannot establish the kind of pleasure central to aesthetic judgement, beauty resists being subsumed under objective laws or methods in the sense described here. Kant applies this reasoning both to the evaluation and creation of beauty, concluding that

[f]or beautiful art there is thus only a **manner** (*modus*), not a **way of teaching it** (*methodus*). [...] Only by stimulating the imagination of the student toward suitability for a given concept [...] and through severe criticism, can one prevent the examples that are set before him from being immediately taken by him as prototypes and models for imitation [...] thus smothering the genius and together with it also the freedom of the imagination [...] without which *no beautiful art nor even a correct personal taste for judging of it is possible*. (CJ, 5:355, emphasis mine)

Similar to the description of the 'aesthetic manner' in establishing valid aesthetic judgement, which allows it to serve as 'a necessary model' – namely, a subjective evaluative act that exemplifies through its concreteness how each act of evaluation toward the same object should be formed, *not* by imitation but by serving as an internal *guide* for others on how they themselves can establish their aesthetic judgement toward that object as a model – Kant depicts the 'manner of teaching' beauty as a process where the teacher presents artworks as exemplary rather than as examples to be imitated.

Here, the importance of imagination (of both the teacher and the student) in its free lawfulness emerges as the sole criterion to rely on in the absence of a method. Kant addresses, in this context, fine art and aesthetic education, and it can be assumed that the figure of the 'teacher' he refers to is the genius artist.²⁹ For Kant, the teacher should propose to the student 'rules' (which are neither concepts nor principles) for creating beautiful art that exemplify the aesthetic manner through which the genius artist creates – namely, through a disinterested feeling of pleasure and free imagination. These 'rules', expressed through the aesthetic manner, are singular in being a unique product of the genius/teacher while also universal, as they express the means by which any other person can potentially exercise their faculties in the same way.

29 See Angelica Nuzzo, *Kant and the Unity of Reason* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005), 326–27.

The central point is that, since it is impossible to imitate the works of the genius, the role of the teacher is not to teach the work of art as a collection of rules in the sense of imitating its external appearance. Rather, what should be taught in the genius's artwork is its inner essence, that is, the freedom that inhabits it. In this sense, the exemplary originality of the genius artist is a mirror image of the 'free lawfulness' of the artwork's judge: the free play of our cognitive powers in aesthetic judgement.³⁰ Thus, aesthetic judgement is free but in a lawful manner, just as genius is original and free yet simultaneously exemplary.

Building upon Section III of this paper, it can be stated in this context that every act of aesthetic evaluation simultaneously serves as a 'manner of teaching' since it must itself be constructed as a model paradigmatically for every other person. Consequently, every concrete aesthetic evaluation of a given beautiful object constitutes, in fact, guidance for every other person on how to aesthetically evaluate that object by personally experiencing it, without, as mentioned, providing a set of instructions that can be imitated or implemented.

In the absence of a method to rely on, Kant proposes the hypothesis that '[t]he propaedeutic for all beautiful art' lies in 'the culture of the mental powers through those prior forms of knowledge that are called *humaniora*' (CJ, 5:355).³¹ The term *humaniora*, in its philosophical tradition, refers to a general notion of 'humanity' (*Humanität*). Kant describes humanity, on the one hand, as 'a feeling of participation' and, on the other, as 'the capacity for being able to communicate one's inmost self universally' (CJ, 5:355). In other words, the idea of humanity alludes to both the possibility of participation and sharing in our feelings and the universal communicability among human beings as social creatures.

Returning to the issue of aesthetic methodology, we can interpret the above quote through the argument that beauty relies on an 'aesthetic manner' rather than on a 'method', as it is based on something that cannot be defined under rules – namely, the idea of humanity. There is a hint here regarding the social significance of beauty, which manifests in the 'aesthetic manner' whereby each individual must take into account every other person when making aesthetic evaluations, positioning themselves as a model for others.

One can consider the pedagogical value of aesthetic evaluation as an aesthetic 'manner of teaching' in relation to the idea of humanity, referring both to the evaluating subject, as a model of singularity, and to the society (or community) in which the exemplarity of the individual is expressed.³² For the universal validity of our aesthetic judgements is only expressed within the intersubjective social context of openness, participation, and communication that constitutes our humanity. These 'properties taken together' in Kant's words 'constitute the sociability that is appropriate

30 For a more detailed examination of Kant's distinctive application of the concept of 'free lawfulness', see Section II of this paper.

31 As Lemos has noted, Kant also emphasizes that beautiful art requires 'much science,' including 'acquaintance with ancient languages, wide reading of those authors considered to be classical, history, acquaintance with antiquities, etc.' (CJ, 5:203), suggesting these historical sciences might serve as sources of exemplary judgements that connect to the broader notion of *humaniora*. See João Lemos, 'Restrictions, Incitements, and Aesthetic Value: The Role of Historical Sciences in Art Production and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Art', *Polish Journal of Aesthetics* 59 (2020): 18.

32 The specific connection to community is articulated in Williams, 'Autonomy and Community', 204–14.

to humankind, by means of which it distinguishes itself from the limitation of animals' (CJ, 5:355).

In simple terms, it can be said that, since it is not possible to imitate or teach freedom directly – whether the creative freedom of the genius artist or the free play of cognitive faculties in aesthetic judgement – it must be communicated indirectly through exemplarity. This is precisely what Kant means when he insists on the universal communicability of judgements of taste: the form of subjective purposiveness expressed in such judgements is shared, not as a determinate rule but as a universally accessible structure of feeling. What is communicated is not a concept but a mode of judgement – a manner of relating imagination and understanding in a free yet purposive way. The communicability of free lawfulness thus refers to the possibility that this inner structure of our judgement can be recognized and echoed by others, who, through reflective assent, engage in the same aesthetic process. This provides a plausible interpretation to understand Kant's insistence on the universal communicability of our free lawfulness when we evaluate fine art.

Thus, if humanity represents the *propaedeutic* for our aesthetic commitment, the 'aesthetic methodology' as described so far, as a necessity of a model that cannot be determined, is what allows us to practise it effectively through concrete aesthetic judgements of beauty. Viewed in this manner, aesthetic methodology not only maintains our intersubjective connections as human beings but also facilitates their enhancement.³³

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I presented a version of this paper at the workshop 'Kant, the Judgement of Taste and the Problem of Intersubjectivity' at the University of Pavia in May 2024, and I am grateful for the helpful comments and questions from participants. I would like to thank Eli Friedlander and members of his reading group at Tel Aviv University, as well as Noam Hoffer, Johannes Haag, and Keren Gorodeisky, for valuable discussions on earlier drafts. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers, Jessica Williams and Stefan Klingner, for their insightful and constructive feedback, which helped clarify the structure and strengthen the final version of the paper. Their identities were disclosed by mutual agreement after acceptance.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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33 This claim suggests a close connection between aesthetic methodology and its moral meaning, as Kant asserts at the end of § 60: 'only when sensibility is brought into accord with this [the moral feeling] can genuine taste assume a determinate, unalterable form' (CJ, 5:356). I elaborate on the moral meaning of aesthetic evaluation in Moran Godess-Riccitelli, 'The Cipher of Nature in Kant's Third Critique: How to Represent Natural Beauty as Meaningful?', *Con-Textos Kantianos* 12 (2020): 338–57.

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Estetika

DOI: 10.33134/eeja.588

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Godess-Riccitelli, Moran. 'A Kantian Sense of Aesthetic Methodology: 'Manner' Instead of 'Method'.'

Estetika: The European

Journal of Aesthetics

LXII/XVIII, no. 2 (2025):

pp. 142–156. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/eeja.588>

Submitted: 15 October 2024

Accepted: 03 June 2025

Published: 15 September

2025

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Estetika: The European

Journal of Aesthetics is

a peer-reviewed open

access journal published by

Helsinki University Press in

cooperation with the Faculty

of Arts, Charles University in

Prague.