

**Grundtvig Learning Partnership 2012 - 2014:  
ART-AGE, Art based learning and active ageing**



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

**ART-AGE SEMINAR**  
**4th of June, 2013 in Vartov, Copenhagen**

**Third Presentation:**

***Aesthetic Learning***  
***with reference to Kants Critical Philosophy***

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# The background

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## **Aims of our project**

1. To take stock of current methods
2. To choose or develop a method
3. To test the possible method

## **The lack of words**

An example from the Danish Folk High Schools

Examples from the field of Voluntary Arts

## **Possible explanations**

The Zeitgeist of instrumental rationality

The main stream political agenda of the competitive state

The theoretical agenda since the 60ies – the death of the subject

## **Our challenge**

The lack of Bildung discourses in Pedagogy– lifelong learning

The lack of Aesthetic discourses in Arts – Voluntary arts



# Guidelines

## The need for an aesthetic theory with reference to

- The Enlightenment and Bildung tradition (human autonomy)
- A well esteemed systematic philosophy that include the foundation of aesthetics as well as moral and science
- Modern roots for main critical philosophies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and especially art theories.

## Back to Immanuel Kant 's Critical Philosophy

The prime philosopher of modernity

- Human freedom and autonomy was pivotal (not throne, alter or tradition) \*
- Differentiated knowledge in epistemic, moral and aesthetic discourses (separated domains for the truth, goodness and beautiful)

\*) *"Have courage to use your own reason .. that is the motto of enlightenment"*

An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?, 1784



# Kant – the modern philosopher

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## Biography:

Kant (1724 – 1804) Born and lived in Königsberg (Kaliningrad)

The bon vivant changes to a clockwork - the race against death

## Bibliography:

The pre-critical phase - before 1770 (became professor finally in 1769)

The silent phase - until 1781 (he withdrew from the festivities)

The mature critical phase - from 1781 to 1790 included the three Critiques:

Kritik der reinen Vernunft (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781)

Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 1788)

Kritik der Urteilskraft (*Critique of Judgment*, 1790)

## The three critiques corresponded to a differentiating of

- **Knowledge** in epistemic, moral and aesthetic discourses
- **Judgements** of the truth, goodness and beautiful

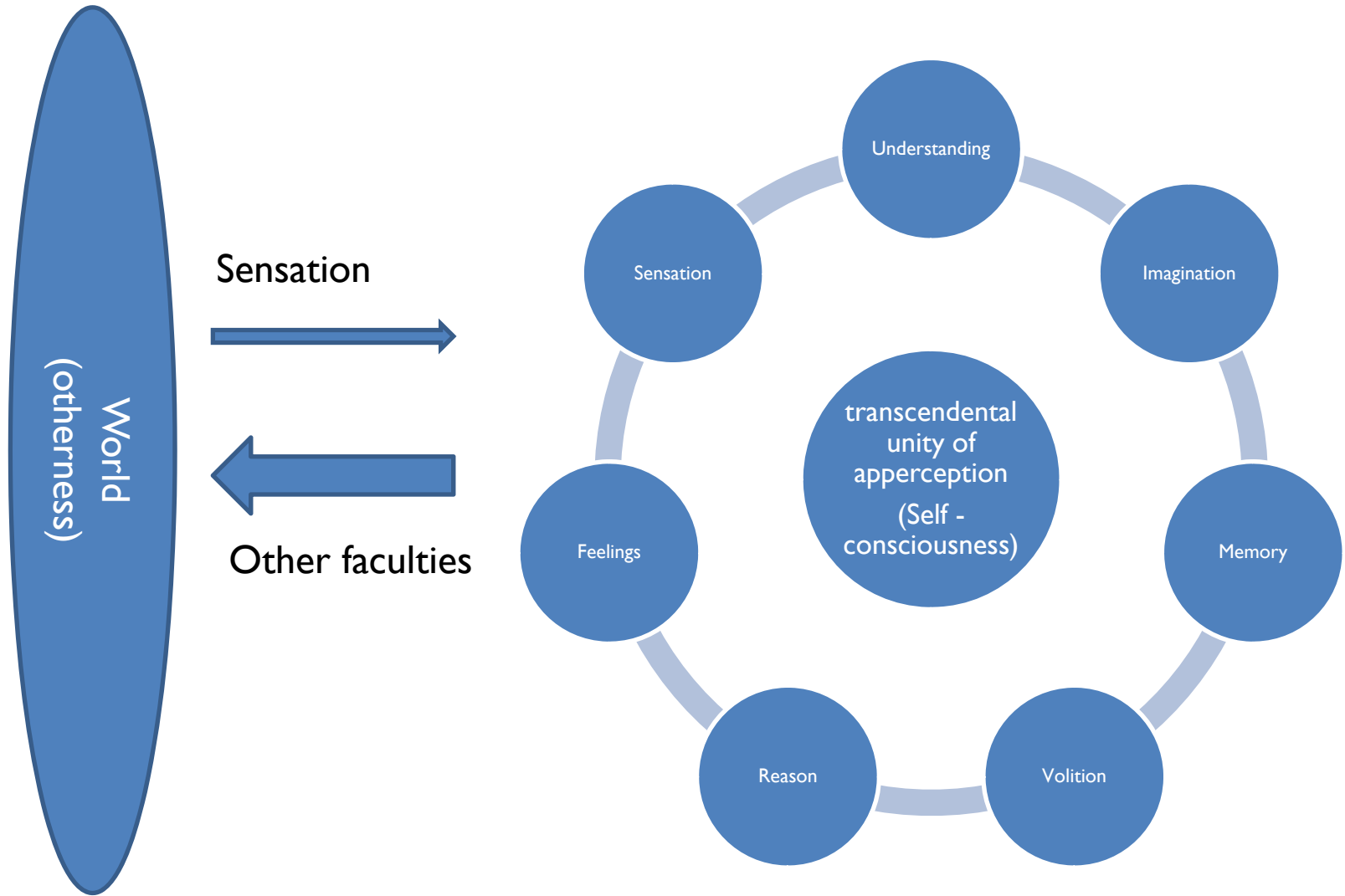
Kant's philosophy is entitled **Critical Philosophy**

(because of these titles and their critical encounter of all former philosophy)



# Experience - relation world and human faculties

- our mind is programmed to process sense data



# First Critique: Theoretical reason

## - epistemic discourse

Kant provided a "Copernican Revolution" in epistemology:

- Placed the human subject at the center of knowledge
- The structure of our mind imposes order on our knowledge
- We cannot experience things independently of how they are for us

Our sensuous experience is structured a priori by

- Forms of Intuitions (time and space)
- Categories (twelve apriori concepts) such as causality, substance

*Critical Philosophy – against dogmatic rationalism and naïve empiricism*

*"Thoughts without (sense) content are empty,  
(sense) intuitions without concepts are blind."*



# Second Critique: Practical reason

## - moral discourse

The moral law is an a priori principle of human reason.

Its foundation is freedom

- The human will is above the determinism of nature
- Humans have moral autonomy

A free will must be acting under laws that it gives to *itself*.

Categorical imperatives are such universal laws:

1. Act only according to a maxim whereby it could become a universal law ('Golden Rule': "Do not impose on others what you do not wish for yourself")
2. Act in such a way that you treat humans, never merely as a means but at the same time as an end.
3. Every rational being must act as if he were a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends.

*"Everything has either a price or a dignity. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price, and therefore admits of no equivalent, has a dignity."*

Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, 1785



# Third Critique: Aesthetical Judgement

## - aesthetic discourse

The Third Critique seek to solve weaknesses in the two previous critiques, which

- Lacked attention on the importance of feelings for our cognition
- Inner tension between the laws of Nature and the laws of Human Freedom

*“Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe, .. :  
the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.”*

(a third thing to mention could be our experience of Beauty in the world)

## Aesthetic as mediator of nature and freedom

- We transcend the mechanistic causal framework of nature; but at the same time our relation to nature is enriched
- Here nature is a stimulus for, rather than an obstacle to, freedom (morality)
- We experience – as IF – nature express a higher order of things (our home)
- Aesthetic opens / discloses a possible moral image of the world





# Experiences of Beauty

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## 1. Presuppose a pure aesthetic experience

- Disinterested relation  
The sunrise is beautiful – even though we cannot own it, sell it, eat it or fuck it.  
It is not a mean for us to control, but an end in itself
- Presenting unity and purpose without a determinate concept or rule  
Purposiveness without a purpose - an experience of generosity or surplus

## 2. Providing a peculiar subjective feeling of pleasure caused by

- The free play of our faculties (between sensation, imagination and understanding)
- Surplus of aesthetic attributes and ideas (open meanings)
- Reflective aesthetic process of judgements

## 3. Motivated by objective qualities of the art work (or art-based activity)

- Objective qualities gives more intense free play of our faculties.

## 4. Resulting in a judgement of taste

- This object (natural or art work) is beautiful / has aesthetic excellence
- The judgement claims universal validity and is communicable
- Because all humans share the same “Sensus Communis”



# Architecture of human mind

Main capacities	Knowledge	Volition	Feelings
Domains	Natural laws (Determinate laws)	Human will (Final purpose)	Beauty & Sublimity (Purposiveness)
Our relation/ interests	Instrumental/control	Duty/freedom	Disclosure/disinterested
Discourses	Epistemic (is a fact)	Moral (ought to be)	Aesthetic (sense of beauty)
Cognitive powers	Understanding (What and How)	Reason (Why)	Taste (Pleasure)
Applied faculties	Senses & imagination serve <b>Understanding</b>	Imagination & feeling serve <b>Reason</b>	Understanding (reason), senses, imagination and feelings interact in <b>a free harmonious play</b>  <i>NB: gives a cognitive / spiritual pleasure</i>



# Basic forms of judgement

Determinate judgement	Reflective Judgement	Aesthetic reflective judgement
A universal is given by understanding or reason	Universal missing (concept, rule or law)	Universal missing (concept, rule or law)
The sensed particular (a thing, an act) is subsumed under a given universal.  Reproduce a meaning	The imagination must invent a new universal for this unknown thing or act.  Produce a new meaning	No final universal can be found by imagination  The sensed particular express an unfinished or open unity with a multitude of meanings.
“This is a cat” “You must not lie”	“We call it an UFO”	“This is beautiful – I feel pleasure”
The understanding (or reason) use sensation and imagination as servants to find a clear (closed) meaning.		The free play between understanding and imagination create new and open meanings



# Aesthetic attributes and ideas

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## Definitions of concepts, ideas and aesthetic ideas

- Understanding provides concepts that determine a sensory manifold / define an empirical identity. e.g. “a dog”, “a young girl”
- Reason provides ideas that refers to something beyond the bounds of sense intuitions, e.g. “Love”, “Spleen”
- The free play of imagination and understanding/reason provides a multitude of aesthetic attributes seeking a unity of an aesthetic idea (attunement)

## The pleasures of aesthetic Idea:

- A coherent whole of an unspeakable wealth of thought without a determinate concept.
- Creating a "quickenning" of the cognitive faculties by producing a “train of thoughts” containing a "wealth of material" from the aesthetic attributes
- Prompts the imagination to spread over a multitude of kindred presentations that arouse more thought than can be determined by words.

## The universality of judgement of taste

- Even though our assessment of the object’s aesthetic quality is grounded on our subjective feeling of pleasure, our judgement claims to have objective validity
- Because only objects with a high potential for aesthetic ideas can provide the feeling of pleasure (attunement of the human mind)

## The non-beautiful object does not initiate aesthetic ideas

- makes the mind dull and dissatisfied with itself,
- because its aesthetic attunement to the object is contra-purposive.



# Primordial significance of aesthetic experience

## **The primordial significance of the aesthetic experience and judgement,**

- Basic cognitive capacities which are **essential to judgement *per se***, are brought into a free and mutually stimulating interaction
- Like a repetition of the **ontogenesis** of experience  
(Ontogeny: development of a single organism – phylogeny: evolutionary development of the species)

## **An infant interacts with its environment on the basis of playful curiosity**

- Searching out and exploring different patterns of relation and order
- Playing with possibilities of order in a non-determined manner
- Creating a systematic calibration of understanding and imagination
- Which enable a personal sense of reality (and self-consciousness)

## **Aesthetic learning *exemplifies***

- a mode of experiential free formation, which reaches back into our primordial formation as individuals
- The pleasure of aesthetic learning may be the same for infants, grown-ups and elder / re-establishing the experiential free formation.



# Aesthetic as the Sundays of experiences

**Paul Crowther:** English philosopher, professor at University of Ireland

The Kantian Sublime: From Morality to Art, 1989

Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism, 1993

Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-Consciousness, 1993

Defining Art, Creating the Canon: Artistic Value in an Era of Doubt, 2007

## **Normal specificatory (determined) judgements - the everyday of cognition**

- Is tightly directed by a relevant concept, and functions in a 'reproductive' way.
- Exist in a *discursively rigid context* involving definite concepts to definite objects
- On the basis of definite practical interests or physiological needs

## **Pure aesthetic (reflective) judgement – Sundays of cognition**

- Brings the cognitive powers into a free play, since no definite concept restricts them
- Lets *the cognitive powers* interact in loose, experimental, explorative ways
- On the basis of an existential openness to the world (pure disinterest)

### **We have cognition *in the making***

- Imagination and understanding rediscover their free formative power through creating possibilities of conceptualizability.
- The very fabric and impetus of cognitive life in its primordial sense is renewed and replenished



# Sense of Life – transcendence

The freedom of the aesthetic life domain  
**contrast** the rigidity of the epistemic and moral domains.

## **In ordinary epistemic and moral existence,**

- Our freedom is channelled into the *means* / end nexus routines of daily life
- Our existential freedom is caught up and hidden by the everyday structures

## **The extraordinary “disinterested” aesthetic activity**

- Can be felt as a release and a renewal.
- Returns us to something fundamental, even if we cannot find words for it.
- The intrinsic and pure pleasure of the activity leads us to an intuitive sense of its having a higher significance (as gates to transcendence)

## **The aesthetic can be interpreted as**

- both a mode of pleasure inherent in the fabric of self-consciousness itself,
- and one which (however vaguely or intuitively) discloses and deepens our sense of free-belonging to the world.
- It strengthens our feeling of life - our feeling of being at home in the world, and amongst other people.

**It bridges the Gap between Nature and Freedom. It makes Life worth living.**



# Methodological guidelines

*Quotes from the project application:*

“We know that active learners in amateur culture have an important outcome, and they can also put many words on it – for example

- Pleasure, joy, passion, unity, sense of life
- Self-awareness, authenticity, autonomy, freedom,
- Elaborated interpretation register, improved communication ability, developed imagination, more distinctive emotions, better sense of moods and sensual expressions,
- Elaborated taste, improved judgement of artistic quality”

## **However, these many words need**

First - to be explained and justified from a more systematic learning discourse (such as Kant’s aesthetic philosophy)

Second – these theoretical distinctions must be transformed to an operational documentation method for empirical research (using questionnaires or interview guides)

*This presentation has tried to outline a possible approach to the first step.*

