

The Aesthetic Agent:  
The Annex of Genius into  
Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory

by

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## Introduction

Born *Originals*, how comes it to pass that we die *Copies*?  
-Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*

“O my friends! Why does the stream of genius so rarely burst forth, surging in such great floods and shaking your astounded soul?” exclaims Goethe’s tormented prodigy in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.<sup>1</sup> “On either side of the river dwell the comfortable gentlemen whose garden sheds, tulip beds, and fields of vegetables would be destroyed, people who therefore know how to avert in time with dams and diversions the threatening future disaster.” The genius, a rare phenomenon whose capacity to shock the soul is as perilous as it is great, is like a young heart in love for Werther. Before being tamed and restrained by imposing rules, the wild genius alone is capable of artistically expressing the genuine feeling for nature. Once such stifling rules secure their grip, a man may never form anything tasteless or bad, but “his love is over and done with, and if he is an artist, his art as well.” Such a portrait of the genius, the *recherché* figure capable

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<sup>1</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, trans. Burton Pike (Modern Library, 2004). 17.

of artistically expressing the true beauty of nature, resonates with conceptions about the idea of genius in eighteenth-century philosophy.

In the eighteenth century, an emerging preoccupation with the subjective experience of sensory stimuli kindled the intellectual sparks that led to the genesis of contemporary aesthetic theory. Attempts to characterize these sense-based experiences more broadly were focused on the particularly-extraordinary experiences of beauty and sublimity. The eighteenth-century British thinkers concerned with these questions of subjectivity resolved the exploration of sensory experience by employing the ideas of taste and genius as the faculties enabling perception and production of beauty. Thus, the defining tenet of eighteenth-century British aesthetic theory is this very discussion of taste and genius. At least, so the widely-repeated academic summary of the eighteenth-century origins of aesthetic theory would lead one to believe. Unfortunately, this summary is wrong.

While the faculty of taste was integral to the eighteenth-century exploration now termed aesthetics, the idea of genius, I suggest, was philosophically absent from British aesthetic theory. Rather, according to my reading of the primary sources that intellectual historians have canonized as eighteenth-century British aesthetic theory, the genius did not enter British aesthetic theory until the middle of the century, and even then was conceived of as a related but still philosophically autonomous concept from the core of aesthetics. My interpretation of the primary sources indicates that it requires an expedition to German aesthetic theory at the very end of the century in order to discover the annex of genius into aesthetic theory. This is an annex that I claim

British aesthetics necessitated but never achieved. The misidentification of the basic tenets of the origins of aesthetic theory and my argument for why it was possible reveal fundamental risks of intellectual history more broadly. These risks should not be ignored. Despite the difficulties accompanying such risks, they must be taken into consideration in order to construct an intellectual history that considers the complex textures of theoretical development without misrepresenting such evolution.

Today, the popular usage of the term “aesthetics” to mean formal principles guiding artistic work may cause the reader to be surprised at the origins of modern aesthetics. These eighteenth-century origins were firmly rooted in the experience of beauty and sublimity in nature as well as art and were originally centered on the cultivation of taste. Part of this surprise derives from the standard approach of contemporary aesthetic theorists who deal with aesthetics in its more mainstream usage as artistic formalism. These aestheticians often view the early origins of aesthetic theory as a necessary but now irrelevant precursor to aesthetics post-1800. Eighteenth-century writings are thus dismissed as feeble discourses that were useful in introducing certain topics into the sphere of intellectual discourse but were made obsolete once nineteenth-century dialogue commenced. Of course, such an accepted dismissal would not be tenable without assuming that these “certain topics” can be categorically summarized. Such a categorical summarization has certainly been attempted. While this era of aesthetic theory is not as common

a topic as later periods are, it has nonetheless been summarized often enough to establish conventionally-accepted views.

Eighteenth-century discourse on aesthetic theory is addressed less in the contemporary mainstream and academic consciousness than are the philosophical advancements made by its descendants. I suggest that snub is largely due to the rapid and lasting popularity of Immanuel Kant's critical aesthetic work, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment* published in 1790. A typical summary of aesthetics prior to the nineteenth century is found in a popular university-class aesthetics reader:

Aesthetic experience has, for the greater part of the history of western philosophy, been regarded as subordinate to rational enquiry. Traditionally, sensory or aesthetic experience is dismissed as a means to truth either because it can be confused or indistinct or because it is not amenable to conceptual analysis; both Plato and Descartes offer arguments along these lines. This changes in the eighteenth century when two German thinkers make aesthetics central to philosophy: Alexander Baumgarten and Immanuel Kant... Kant's writing, however, has overshadowed Baumgarten's contribution.<sup>2</sup>

Such a typical summary contains no allusion to the pervading popularity of aesthetic theory in the eighteenth century, evident well before Baumgarten's mid-century writings and not just in Germany but also in France and Britain. The passage's additional eschewal of even Baumgarten's significance illustrates an unfortunately orthodox standard of dismissing pre-Kantian aesthetic philosophy as only shallowly-rooted preliminaries preparing public discourse before the publication of Kant's *Critique* makes such prior musings philosophically obsolete. The aesthetic historian Peter Kivy even goes to the

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<sup>2</sup> Clive Cazeaux, *The Continental Aesthetics Reader* (London: New York, 2000). 3.

extent of claiming that, for Kant, “aesthetics failed to qualify as a philosophical discipline” before he published his third *Critique*, but that after the publication, “the change in philosophical climate, vis-à-vis aesthetics...[was] abrupt.”<sup>3</sup> The popularity and lasting influence of Kant’s third *Critique* has facilitated a guiltless neglect of his intellectual predecessors, despite the sources revealing that before Kant’s work was published in 1790, Britain in the eighteenth century was abuzz with discussion on what is now conventionally categorized as aesthetics.

The product of such conventional categorization has been for intellectual historians to commandeer an accepted coterie of themes to define eighteenth-century British aesthetic theory.<sup>4</sup> This coterie is misleading. The basic entry for “18<sup>th</sup> Century British Aesthetics” from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* introduces a summary of these themes:

18<sup>th</sup>-century British aesthetics addressed itself to a variety of questions: What is the nature of taste? What is the nature of beauty? Is there a standard of taste and of beauty? What is the relation between the beauty of nature and that of artistic representation? What is the relation between one fine art and another, and how ought the fine arts be ranked one against another? What is the nature of the sublime and ought it be ranked with the beautiful? What is the nature of the picturesque and ought it be ranked with the beautiful and the sublime? What is the nature of genius and what is its relation to taste?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Kivy, *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*, Blackwell Philosophy Guides; Variation: Blackwell Philosophy Guides. (Blackwell Pub., 2004). 2, 4.

<sup>4</sup> This discussion was certainly not limited to Britain; it was comparably popular in French and German discourse. However, the thesis at present is limited to discussions of British theory.

<sup>5</sup> James Shelly, "18th Century British Aesthetics," Stanford University, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetics-18th-british/>.

Likewise, Umberto Eco's popular aesthetic history book aimed at the layman, *History of Beauty*, identifies a similar digest of themes, claiming that in the eighteenth century,

...certain terms began to become popular: "genius," "taste," "imagination," and "sentiment" and it is these words that let us see that a new concept of beauty was coming into being. The idea of "genius" and "imagination" certainly refers to the qualities of those who invent or produce a beautiful thing...<sup>6</sup>

Secondary scholarship cites these themes as not only prevalent in British discourse, but also in their effectual influence on Kant's aesthetic theory from 1790:

At least six elements of the third *Critique* display Kant's relation to British aesthetics: (1) the sublime, (2) disinterestedness, (3) the question of whether there is a standard of taste, (4) the role of imagination, (5) common sense, and (6) the relation of taste to genius.<sup>7</sup>

This coterie of themes identified as defining aesthetic theory in the eighteenth century in Britain are thus taste, beauty and sublimity and the subjective experience of each, and the diverse relationships between the faculties of mind and sensory experience. Additionally, common to these summaries is the inclusion of genius as a defining subtheme of aesthetic theory.

Indeed, as outlined by the above scholars' lists identifying aesthetic themes, the prevailing tendency among historians is to take it for granted that genius was a central topic of concern for aesthetics in the eighteenth century. I have found this tendency to be groundless. Proof of the ubiquity of such a

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<sup>6</sup> Umberto Eco, *History of Beauty*, trans. Alastair McEwen (New York: Rizzoli, 2004), 275.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore A. Gracyk, "Kant's Shifting Debt to British Aesthetics," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 26, no. 3 (1986). 210.

convention is abundant: Gilbert and Kuhn's renowned *History of Esthetics* (1939) includes genius as one of their several subtopic headers in the British eighteenth-century section, as does the more recent *Cambridge History of Eighteenth Century Philosophy* (2006).<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Ernst Cassirer's 1951 seminal *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* includes genius as a subsection in the chapter titled "Fundamental Problems of Aesthetics" and claims that as a result of the British doctrine, "the problem of genius assumes a central position in aesthetic theory."<sup>9</sup> Charles Harrison's impressive compilation of aesthetic writings glosses that throughout the century "Questions of imagination, genius, and originality came to play an increasingly prominent role in debate about the arts."<sup>10</sup> In an extensive study of the British roots of Kant's aesthetic theory, John Zammito goes to the extent of insisting that "Finding a response to this 'enthusiastic' theory of original genius preoccupied the most serious philosophical minds in Britain."<sup>11</sup>

Even Paul Guyer, perhaps the foremost Kant scholar today, contributes to this misleading convention. In his 2004 essay "The Origins of Modern Aesthetics," Guyer claims that "the central idea to emerge in eighteenth-century aesthetics is that of the freedom of the imagination."<sup>12</sup> For

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<sup>8</sup> Katharine Everett Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939); Knud Haakonssen, *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy* (New York, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C.A. Koelln Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951).

<sup>10</sup> Charles Harrison, *Art in Theory : An Anthology of Changing Ideas. [1], 1648 - 1815*, 1. publ. ed. (Oxford [u.a.]: Blackwell, 2000). 754.

<sup>11</sup> John H. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment* (University of Chicago Press, 1992). 29.

<sup>12</sup> Guyer in Kivy, *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*. 16.

Guyer, this idea is the single most unifying theme in aesthetics and resonates with theories presented even at the beginning of the century:

Thus, Kant's complex and delicate interpretations of the freedom of the imagination in the experience of beauty can be seen as the summation and synthesis of ideas set forth at the outset of the flowering of the modern aesthetics in the first decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

Free imagination becomes increasingly associated with the genius as the century progresses, an association culminating in Kant's aesthetics. Such a prioritization of the free imagination, while not directly claiming the *genius* as a major theme, places the qualities of the imagination that are later associated with the genius at the core of aesthetic theory. Guyer arguing that the free imagination is the central question of aesthetics inadvertently gives credence to the conventional misidentification of genius as a central theme in eighteenth-century aesthetics.

Nevertheless, this convention of identifying genius as a major theme of aesthetic discourse, though prevailing, is wrong. In this thesis, I propound that (1) despite conventional appropriations of genius as one of the core ideas developed in eighteenth-century British aesthetic theory, genius had a distinct development from other major themes such as taste, beauty, and sublimity, and did not become incorporated into aesthetics until after these other ideas had been well-established. Even then, the annex was only predicted, not performed, by British theorists. After arguing for this late annexation, I suggest that (2) this seamless transition into aesthetic theory, as well as into

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<sup>13</sup> Guyer in *ibid.*, 41-2.

scholarly summaries of aesthetic history, was possible because genius had been preconditioned to fit into an underlying theoretical framework already familiar to aesthetic theory at a moment when aesthetics was primed to require and accept the genius. The framework's facilitation of intellectual induction and of inaccurate history reveals underlying risks of intellectual history more broadly.

In an attempt to prove this, I construct an intellectual history of aesthetic theory's relationship to genius and then a parallel history of genius as a discrete tradition in eighteenth-century Britain. This history tracing the idea of genius leads me to conclude that genius was not philosophically problematic in aesthetics until late in the century when Alexander Gerard transformed the conceptual relationship between taste and genius and thus necessitated the annex of genius into aesthetic theory. I then employ Immanuel Kant's two main aesthetic writings to further corroborate the changing role of genius in the British tradition by virtue of its influence on German thought. Additionally, I argue that Kant's later conception of genius demonstrates the theoretical consequences for the idea of the genius that resulted from its annex into aesthetics. By annexing the genius as a subtheme to his aesthetics, Kant changed the theoretical definition of the term. Finally, I conclude by suggesting how this surreptitious seizure of genius into aesthetics was possible due to fundamental frameworks of thought pervasive in the Enlightenment. In my Epilogue, I suggest that this theoretical hijacking

in aesthetic theory has implications more broadly for the field of intellectual history.

My approach has admitted limitations. My discussion is confined to British aesthetic theory, ignoring French and German discourse that undoubtedly played a role in influencing the development of approaches towards the genius. A culturally broadened exploration would likely be fruitful in elucidating the way British aesthetics was conditioned to appropriate genius in the latter half of the century, however that is beyond the scope of the task at present.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps one of the most substantial complications arises from the breadth of aesthetic theory in the eighteenth century. This project will not provide and does not aim to provide a comprehensive picture of aesthetics. Instead, I only briefly explicate tenets of aesthetic theory as I see useful when propagating my argument on genius, and even then I cannot explain all that is necessary in its full adornment.<sup>15</sup>

Writings on taste and beauty, topics that are now identified by historians as eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, were popular throughout the century. This has resulted in a plethora of thinkers available for inclusion in

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<sup>14</sup> Incidentally, I am in good company with a British focus as this reflects a common concentration for secondary scholarship on aesthetic theory. See: Dabney Townsend, "From Shaftesbury to Kant: The Development of the Concept of Aesthetic Experience," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48, no. 2 (1987).; George Dickie, *The Century of Taste: The Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> Such an exhaustive explication has been done elsewhere. See: Gilbert and Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics.*, Harrison, *Art in Theory: An Anthology of Changing Ideas. [1], 1648 - 1815.*; Ekbert Faas, *The Genealogy of Aesthetics* (New York, 2002).

historiographies of aesthetic theory and has made it necessary to erect criteria of limitation for inclusion here. I focus on mid-century aesthetic writers. This is justified for two reasons: as they are from the middle century, they both demonstrate remnants of the early-century writings and foreshadowing of the late-century writings. Therefore, they represent the crux of eighteenth-century discourse on aesthetics. Also, because the writers I include in the following chapter on genius are also primarily from the mid-century, they are a more useful counterpoint to leverage my entire argument. Nevertheless, readers familiar with aesthetic history may question how these early thinkers would qualify my claims. I have therefore included a short appendix using two of the most oft-cited early thinkers, Lord Shaftesbury and Frances Hutcheson, to further prove my argument.<sup>16</sup>

My main criterion for including thinkers is whether or not other intellectual historians have included them. This method of limitation is appropriate because I am essentially making an argument about the failures of these other intellectual histories to accurately acknowledge the texture of the history. Using the very texts that these historians include in order to refute their claims strengthens my point. A quick overview of those aesthetic thinkers includes Joseph Addison, William Hogarth, David Hume, Edmund Burke, and Alexander Gerard.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Page 127.

<sup>17</sup> The apogee of aesthetic theory in the eighteenth century was Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* from 1790 and, consequentially, this work directly influenced the scholarly identification of key themes in earlier aesthetic theory from Britain.

I am concerned with works of *aesthetic* theory. While readers may be familiar with some of the included authors' other work, such as Hume's philosophical empiricism or Burke's political writings on the French Revolution, I address only their aesthetic works. Some figures who may appear worthy of greater attention because of fame earned in other fields receive only the attention their aesthetic writings warrant. Nevertheless, the term aesthetic theory itself is often only a historically applied term. Thinkers at the time may not have identified themselves as writing "aesthetic theory" at all. Throughout the work, when I refer to texts as "aesthetic works," what I mean is "works that have been identified by intellectual historians as part the aesthetic canon."

While eighteenth-century British aesthetic theory may be a less-popular era of aesthetics than later periods, it still has enough germane secondary scholarship to make it impossible to engage with all of it. I focus on demonstrating the falsity of a standard, scholarly approach and do not contend with every view of the genius from the 1700s.

I ignore it here, but readers may be familiar with the overall denominational change in the term genius starting in the seventeenth century as it evolved from a term describing a talent or gifted inclination in an individual to instead become a character-defining trait. In other words, this was the change from *having a genius* for an activity like dancing, painting, or cooking, to *being a genius* that dances, paints, or cooks. From there, genius

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Coincidentally, my list of selected authors also includes the work that Kant would have been familiar with or that can be justifiably interpreted as an influence.

acquired a limitation to the realm of art. This trajectory has been described elsewhere in scholarship and is not central to advancing my argument.<sup>18</sup>

The reader may note a paucity of secondary sources cited in my footnotes throughout the work. I use secondary scholarship primarily in order to establish and verify the conventional approach of appropriating genius into aesthetic theory. However, the bulk of my argument is derived from primary source research that seeks to refute the basis for this scholastic tendency. Throughout the work, I do attempt to point to secondary scholarship that I think relevant if the reader wants to explore certain ideas more thoroughly. However, to prove my arguments, I rely on the primary sources.

Finally, it should be noted that my project is of course victim to the same risks subjugating any attempt at intellectual history. The benefit and risk of historical perspective lends itself to the teleological projection of ideas into existent theories, and if not merely producing a facsimile of the original work, essential texture will always be lost in interpretation. This is a problem that perturbs my personal thoughts about intellectual history, and I hope that my conclusion helps irradiate some of the implications of these risks.

Chapter One surveys the use of genius in aesthetic theory, concluding that, despite conventional academic claims to the contrary, it did not become

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<sup>18</sup>See: Christine Manteghi Goulding, "From "Witz" Culture to Cult of Genius: Lessing and Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics," *Monatshefte* 92, no. 2 (2000).; George J. Buelow, "Originality, Genius, Plagiarism in English Criticism of the Eighteenth Century," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 21, no. 2 (1990).; Thomas McFarland, *Originality & Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985)..

philosophically problematic in aesthetics until late in the century, and even then was conceived of as external to the core of aesthetics. Chapter Two constructs a parallel intellectual history of the sovereign genius theory concurrently developing in its own tradition, an independence that I argue is not sufficiently acknowledged by aesthetic historians. Chapter Three contends that one figure, Alexander Gerard, was integral in enabling the fusion of these previously disjointed traditions. Chapter Four illustrates this transformation in British thought using its influence on Kant's thought and then propounds an interpretation of Kant's theory of genius that demonstrates the consequences of the appropriation for the idea of genius. In the conclusion, I attempt to explain the possibility for the late intellectual annexation of genius into aesthetics by virtue of underlying intellectual infrastructures shaping broad spheres of thought during the Enlightenment. This underlying theoretical framework, I suggest, explains why aesthetic historians have so easily misidentified genius as a major theme of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory. This is a flaw of intellectual history that has the potential to occur in any theoretical field. It is this final suggestion which, in my opinion, is the most consequential beyond the present test case of aesthetic theory, and thus I hope the reader keeps it in mind throughout the reading.

By the conclusion of the thesis, it should be evident that genius was not a major tenet of aesthetic theory in the eighteenth-century and that, rather, the idea of genius developed as its own topic of discourse until aesthetics necessitated its incorporation late in the century. The misleading

intellectual history of aesthetics can partially be explained by acknowledging the influence of the contemporary intellectual framework informing discourse on both the genius as well as aesthetics.

## Chapter One

# British Aesthetic Theory in the Eighteenth Century

Taste united with genius renders the effects of the latter like to diamonds, which have as great solidity as splendour.<sup>19</sup>

Scrutinizing British eighteenth-century aesthetic writings reveals an absence of philosophic discourse on genius. At the same time it exposes the laying of a groundwork that requires the genius in order to sustain the very existence of the field. Scholarly summaries of such works have traditionally noted genius as one of its major themes.<sup>20</sup> Yet in the writings that scholars include in those summaries, the defining question is how humans subjectively experience beauty, in both nature and art, using the faculty of taste, not genius. This chapter conducts an intellectual history in order to discern how genius and its

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<sup>19</sup> Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Taste (1759), Together with Observations Concerning the Imitative Nature of Poetry* (Gainesville: Fla., Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1963).

<sup>20</sup> For examples of standard aesthetic theory histories, see: Gilbert and Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics*; Harrison, *Art in Theory : An Anthology of Changing Ideas. [1], 1648 - 1815*; Faas, *The Genealogy of Aesthetics*; *ibid.* Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*. Kivy, *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*. Haakonssen, *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*; Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*.

prerequisites are present in eighteenth-century British aesthetic writings.<sup>21</sup>

Such an investigation reveals that genius was *not* a central philosophic problem. However, as aesthetic discourse increasingly focuses on beauty in art rather than nature, that discourse's implications increasingly demand a privileged artist capable of originally producing beauty.

### **Addison: Popular Pleasure**

Joseph Addison's (1672-1719) intellectual popularity in the eighteenth century derived largely from his "eminently popular" serial publications *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*.<sup>22</sup> Through the success of these publications, Addison "became the premier arbiter of taste in England."<sup>23</sup> This popularity reflects the need to view his opinions through the lens of mainstream dialogue as opposed to lofty philosophy. However, that popularity also makes Addison an apt thinker to begin with, as he introduced aesthetics to the sphere of public discourse and largely defined the common usage of the terms central to aesthetic theory. Addison's contribution to aesthetics is attached to a series of essays titled 'On the Pleasures of the Imagination' that have been cited as "his most influential piece of cultural journalism."<sup>24</sup> Published in *The Spectator* in

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<sup>21</sup> For a note on how these texts were selected, see the introduction, page 15.

<sup>22</sup> Note, Addison will also be included in Chapter Three for a separate essay in the genius tradition. See page 37.

<sup>23</sup> Harrison, *Art in Theory : An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. [1], 1648 - 1815. 382.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 382.

June of 1712 these essays engage with the debate on the role of taste and introduce the imagination as new topic for philosophic dialogue.<sup>25</sup>

While secondary scholars posit that Addison's use of taste is emblematic of common eighteenth-century usage, such a claim must acknowledge that Addison's works were formative in shaping that common usage. The essay defines fine taste explicitly for writing, as "that Faculty of the Soul, which discerns the Beauties of an Author with Pleasure, and the Imperfections with Dislike," and argues that, while "this Faculty must in some measure be born with us, there are several Methods for Cultivating and Improving it."<sup>26</sup> While this definition of fine taste is bound specifically to writing, it can be assumed to extend to other arts as well. Such a definition mirrors later usage of taste in eighteenth-century aesthetics because later definitions derive from Addison's essay. This reflection suggests the extent to which Addison influenced ensuing aesthetic theory.

Addison's eleven-part essay 'On the Pleasures of the Imagination' is consistent with later aesthetic theorists' exploration of the experience of beauty. Again, this consistency must be interpreted in context of the historical definition of the field. Secondary scholarship identifies Addison's essays as what "elevate 'imagination' and rescue it from a morass of critical terms" in eighteenth-century discourse.<sup>27</sup> It is from 'On the Pleasures of the

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele, *Addison and Steele: Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator*, Rinehart Editions,; 87; (New York: Rinehart, 1957).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 202, 203.

<sup>27</sup> James Engell, *The Creative Imagination : Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Harvard University Press, 1981). 33.

Imagination' that the exploration of beauty and its affects on the imagination "gathers force quickly."<sup>28</sup> In the essay, Addison himself claims that "an Undertaking of this Nature is entirely new."<sup>29</sup> Its similarity in content to later aesthetic writings partially demonstrates how secondary scholars identified what topics define aesthetics and then teleologically cited works as being the first to engage with those topics.

Addison does not seriously address genius in his aesthetic essays, but he does directly mention the genius's ability to help cultivate fine taste. This ability could be mistaken as tacitly predicting an implicit role of the genius in aesthetics. He recommends "Conversation with Men of Polite Genius" as a "Method for improving our Natural Taste."<sup>30</sup> The ability of such conversations to "furnish us with Hints, which we did not attend to, and make us enjoy other Men's Parts and Reflections as well as our own" explains why "Men of great genius...seldom rise up singly, but at certain Periods of Time appear together, and in a Body."<sup>31</sup> He posits that many of the recognized masters of the past "would not have written so well as they have done, had they not been Friends and Contemporaries."<sup>32</sup> Such statements maintain that genius arises in groups because intercommunication fosters the "Natural Taste" of the participants. Such natural taste is a primary tenet in

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>29</sup> Addison and Steele, *Addison and Steele: Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator*, 205.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 204.

aesthetics, and allowing the genius a role in the cultivation of it hints at a central role of genius in aesthetic theory.

Such a hint cannot be accepted without contest, however, and a more thorough evaluation of the text reveals that genius, despite having a role in relation to taste, is not *essential* to taste. These conversations with genius, considered here to be the authors or producers of works of their own, are merely “another method,” not the singular method for developing taste. Indeed, it is “likewise necessary for a Man who would form himself a finished Taste of good Writing, to be well versed in the Works of the best *Criticks* both Ancient and Modern.”<sup>33</sup> It is engagement with men of refined taste via their critiques that Addison thus prescribes as necessary for cultivating one’s own taste while conversation with men of genius is only one of several methods. Engagement with the genius is subsidiary to engagement with men of taste for developing taste in aesthetics, indicating that genius is not at the core of aesthetics.

Addison’s incorporation of genius into his aesthetic writings must be understood as only a peripheral inclusion, while taste, beauty, and pleasure occupy the central themes of the work. Addison demonstrates awareness of the concept of the genius, but for his aesthetic theory, the topics of concern are taste and the experience of beauty, *not* the genius. In contrast, the next chapter will introduce Addison’s undeniably genius-centric work as evidence

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 204.

that he was indeed engaged with the idea of genius in a philosophic way but that he thought of genius as a separate topic from his aesthetic theory.<sup>34</sup>

### **Hogarth: The Gobelin's Genius**

William Hogarth (1697-1764), as a successful painter, printmaker, and critical cartoonist, is the only writer included in the thesis dually producing artistic work and aesthetic theory. A popular social critic who often performed such critique using pictorial satire, Hogarth published the critical treatise *The Analysis of Beauty* in 1753 with the aim to consider objects “in a new light, both as to Colour and Form” and more specifically, to “fix the fluctuating Ideas of Taste.”<sup>35</sup> The work explores qualities evoking the response of beauty in an attempt to standardize views on taste that will presumably enable and instruct artistic production.

Hogarth's claim that there are rules of taste that guide artistic production must be interpreted in view of this attempt to instruct the artist. That the production of beauty can benefit from designating the qualities composing beauty is an implicit assumption of his work. Despite this, he maintains that genius is not manifest in the act of using knowledge of qualities of beauty to directly imitate another's work,

For though the picture copier may sometimes to a common eye seem to vye with the original he copies, the artist himself requires no more

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<sup>34</sup> See page 37.

<sup>35</sup> William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, ed. Ronald Paulson (New Haven, Conn.: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for British Art by Yale University Press, 1997). Xvii.

ability, genius, or knowledge of nature, than a journeyman-weaver at the Gobelins.<sup>36</sup>

Genius is distinguished from mere production. There must be an additional component, presumably intentional awareness, in the production of genius. Hogarth does not, however, find it necessary to expand on what does constitute a work of genius as opposed to a work of beauty. This is a testament to the negligible role of the genius as philosophic problem in the mindset of authors writing on the beautiful. To this eighteenth-century mindset, a focus on works of genius would have to be the aim of a separate treatise than one focusing on works of beauty. This distinction attests against the convention of blindly listing genius next to taste when summarizing eighteenth-century aesthetics.

Despite not acknowledging genius as a topic of discussion in his aesthetic writing, it can be argued that Hogarth is familiar with theories of genius developing elsewhere. He obliquely quotes another thinker, for example, describing how the genius should educate himself: “A bright genius, in my opinion, who aspires to excel in the ideal, should propose [to himself] what has been the principle study of the most famous artists.”<sup>37</sup> This claim that the genius should emulate the *individual* of past genius by similarly occupying one’s mind as opposed to imitating the *work* of past genius by copying their rules parallels claims concurrently being made in what I argue is

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 6. The Gobelín works were tapestries woven in imitation of Charles Lebrun’s painted series *The Battles of Alexander*. Those weaving the tapestries followed guides and would not know what the final product was until after the tapestry was complete.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 10.

a separate intellectual tradition of genius theory. The basic assumption of this suggestion indicates a fundamental difference between the premises of genius and aesthetic theory: aesthetics attempts to identify and describe rules for beauty, but the genius is not supposed to follow these rules in their production. The incorporation of such a quote without expanding on its implications signifies genius as aesthetically nugatory. Even Hogarth, the only artist identified as an aesthetic theorist, testifies against secondary scholarship that appropriates genius as a core aesthetic theme.

### **Hume: A Universal Standard**

David Hume (1711-1776) published “Of the Standard of Taste” as the final essay in his *Four Dissertations* of 1757. Well known for his philosophical empiricism, Hume claims that this essay was hastily written in order to bulk up the other *Dissertations* to an acceptable print length, but despite several editorial corrections made in the following twenty years he never changed his overall argument.<sup>38</sup> The essay’s primary aim is establishing a universal standard of taste and explicating such a standard’s role. In contrast, it has very few references to genius. Nevertheless in the process of arguing for the standard of taste, Hume makes unintentional but consequential claims about the genius as the agent of artistic production.

Hume uses the genius to describe the agent of production, but this use must be qualified by his theory of the standard of taste being universally

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<sup>38</sup> *The Letters of David Hume*, edited by J.Y.T. Greig, 2 volumes, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932. 2, 253.

accessible. The standard of taste, as the proper critique of beauty, is a standard that can be cultivated in all humans, granted there is no unusual handicap. While few men will properly develop it, "Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character" and such a union, while rarely improved and perfected, is available to anyone.<sup>39</sup> It is this "joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found" that Hume identifies as "the true standard of taste and beauty."<sup>40</sup> As long as fundamental, not extraordinary, natural criteria are in place, any man is entitled to this standard. Practice, including practice through both production and critique, improves this critical capacity.

Nothing testifies better to the universality of Hume's standard of taste than its especial eternity. Taste is and can be a stable standard because beauty itself is comparably stable. Such stability is inimitable in any other field:

Theories of abstract philosophy, systems of profound theology have prevailed during one age: In a successive period, these have been universally exploded: Their absurdity has been detected: Other theories and systems have supplied their place, which again gave way to their successors: And nothing has been experienced more liable to the revolutions of chance and fashion than these pretended decisions of science. The case is not the same with the beauties of eloquence and poetry.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> David Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste, and Other Essays*, ed. John W. Lenz (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965). 17.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 18.

If beauty itself does not change, then the standard of taste for experiencing beauty is justifiably likewise stable. This view allows for infringements of ancillary cultural habits hindering the lasting success of a work, but while “this must be allowed to disfigure the poem, and to be a real deformity,” such a blemish is merely incidental to the underlying beauty.<sup>42</sup>

After arguing that only taste is stable, Hume’s ensuing comments about the endurance of the genius incidentally aligns genius and the arts. For Hume, works of genius contain “a mutual relation and correspondence of parts,” or the internal harmony that is a prerequisite to meet the standard of taste.<sup>43</sup> Just as there is a standard for taste, there are similarly “general rules of art” that the artist must follow in order to attain that internal harmony.<sup>44</sup> This does not suggest, however, that production is entirely dependent on knowledge of the rules through the refinement of taste; rather “all the general rules of art are founded only on experience and on the observation of the common sentiments of human nature.”<sup>45</sup> This argument becomes more contentious when Hume asserts that the test of a “real genius” is how long his works endure, claiming that beautiful works of genius, “while the world endures...maintain their authority over the minds of men.”<sup>46</sup> By establishing that only the standard of taste can be stable because only the beauty on which it is based is stable and then maintaining that the testament for a work of

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 9.

genius is the duration of its endurance, Hume binds the work of the genius to the production of beauty. This entanglement of genius and beauty is unprecedented in aesthetics.

Before concluding with Hume, it must be emphasized that Hume does not justify secondary scholarship's identification of genius as a major theme of aesthetics because it remains true that genius is tangential to his theory. Hume's essay is identified as an aesthetic writing because of its discourse on the standard of taste as taste engages with beauty. Genius is mentioned only casually. While the standard of taste has oblique consequences for a related artistic standard of genius, these consequences merely hint at the way aesthetics is increasingly forcing itself to incorporate an artist to produce beauty, not that it has already done so. Genius persists as a peripheral, not central theme in the work.

### **Burke: Novelty's Demands**

Widely known as a political thinker, particularly on the French Revolution, Edmund Burke's (1730-1797) popular work dealing with aesthetic topics was published in his academic youth. *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* from 1757 reflects the quintessential approach of aesthetic theory—exploring the qualities of the subjective experience of the beautiful and the sublime and attempting to describe the causes and characteristics of such experiences. Direct mentions of the term “genius” are almost nonexistent in the text, however Burke constructs one of the most apt

foundations of aesthetic theory demanding the introduction of genius into aesthetics.

To appreciate the demands for genius in Burke's aesthetic theory, it must first be contended that his definition of taste is limited to works of human production. This is directly demonstrated by his definition of taste: "that faculty, or those faculties of the mind which are affected with, or which form a judgment of the work of imagination and the elegant arts."<sup>47</sup> While this definition suggests a distinction between art and works of the imagination, in either case taste as a faculty of judgment is limited to judging objects of *human* production. This production is enabled by the imagination, which Burke defines as

...a sort of creative power of its own; either in representing at pleasure the images of things in the order and manner in which they were received by the senses, or in combining those images in a new manner, and according to a different order.<sup>48</sup>

In contrast to other theories of imaginative production circulating at the time, however, Burke maintains that the imagination is limited in the potential for originality of such production. Instead, he contends that it "is incapable of producing any thing absolutely new; it can only vary the disposition of those ideas which it has received from the senses."<sup>49</sup> Burke thereby limits taste to products of art or imagination, and then defines the imagination as the mind's capacity to create through representation and recombination. This definition

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<sup>47</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips The World's Classics; Variation: World's Classics. (Oxford [England]: New York, 1990). 13.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

implies that taste for either art or imagination is responding to aspects of human production.

Burke posits the first trait that stimulates the mind, and thus the first impetus for the development of taste, as novelty. This primacy of novelty has the repercussion of necessitating originality in production. The work opens with the claim that the “first and simplest emotion which we discover in the human mind is Curiosity,” by which Burke means “whatever desire we have for, or pleasure we take in novelty.”<sup>50</sup> Novelty incites pleasures that evoke mental engagement with such novel objects, however this pleasure does not endure. Rather, “those things which engage us merely by their novelty, cannot attach us for any length of time.”<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, despite such novelty quickly being exhausted of interest, “some degree of novelty must be one of the materials in every instrument which works upon the mind.”<sup>52</sup> Burke thereby proclaims that in order for the mind to feel pleasure there must be some novel, or original, aspect in the work. This pleasure then fosters the cultivation of taste. He additionally limits the realm of taste to objects of human production, implicitly demanding that there must be novelty in human production in order to satisfy taste. Burke does not seriously address the agent producing that novelty in this aesthetic work, yet he levies the needs for aesthetics to incorporate the role of the agent of production in order to justify the existence of objects of taste. While this still does not justify including

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 29.

genius as a major theme of his aesthetic work, it does indicate an upcoming shift necessitating genius in aesthetics.

Furthermore, Burke demands that the agent of production is required for the advancement of society because he affiliates beauty with social communication. He brazenly establishes beauty as a “social quality” that has the intended effect to “inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affections” towards others.<sup>53</sup> Beauty cast as a social quality lends texture to his coinciding claim that imitation, recognized as one of the principle foundations of the power of agreeable arts, is “one of the strongest links of society” considering that it is “by imitation far more than by precept that we learn every thing.”<sup>54</sup> Beauty and imitation both help forge society. The arts therefore also function for society. Burke mandates that in order to incite pleasures in beauty there must be continual novelty. His implicit demand for an agent producing art in aesthetic theory becomes necessary to advance not only taste but society and social communication as well.

Burke does not undertake such issues in relation to the agent of production. Ignoring these issues signifies that the agent of production still remains outside the accepted jurisdiction of aesthetics and once again testifies against historians’ claims that genius is a central topic of eighteenth-century British aesthetic theory. Burke’s aesthetic arguments, however, are constructed on a foundation that needs an agent of novel production to sustain its very existence. This primes the field of aesthetics to not just

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 45.

incorporate such an agent but to be forced to incorporate one. Appropriating the genius will eventually fulfill this need for an agent of production.

However, genius is tangential to aesthetics up until the point when Burke and Hume start to chisel a void that requires the agent of production. This is a key insight that intellectual historians have ignored.

## **Conclusion**

Counter to conventional assertions of aesthetic historians, the thinkers that secondary scholars identify as advancing aesthetics in eighteenth-century Britain did not seriously contend with the concept of genius. The accepted assertion of secondary scholarship is that “most of the discussions of genius originated in the field of aesthetics.”<sup>55</sup> Diametrically opposed to this claim, a philosophic discussion of genius is notably absent in the works.

The term genius does intermittently surface in aesthetic theory but this is only proof that it must be interpreted as a tangential topic, not a central theme. Hume exemplifies this obliquity when he uses genius as an attribute of authors or poets. Such a use is only a colloquial example of the conventional use of the term before genius theory redefines it later in the century. Hogarth and Burke, exhibit similar colloquial use of the “bright genius...who aspires to excel.”<sup>56</sup> These informal allusions to genius, however, serve only to illustrate that these thinkers were not aware of the philosophic implications of

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<sup>55</sup> Giorgio Tonelli, " Early Theory of Genius (1770-1779)," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 4, no. 3 (1966). 4.2, 222.

<sup>56</sup> Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*. 10.

the term on their aesthetic theory. Such casual usage therefore indicates that genius did not require extensive philosophic definition because it was viewed as an oblique concept to their core theory.

Operationally defining terms was an expected practice at the time and while these writers define terms identified as major aesthetic themes, they do not philosophically define genius. The failure to define genius verifies the view that genius was not central to aesthetic theory. A brief sampling of such definitions should suffice to illustrate this point: Addison defines fine taste as “that faculty of mind, which distinguishes all the most concealed Faults and nicest perfections in Writing”; Burke defines the imagination as “a sort of creative power of its own; either in representing at pleasure the images of things in the order and manner in which they were received by the senses, or in combining those images in a new manner, and according to a different order”; Hutcheson defines the internal sense as “our Power of perceiving Ideas.”<sup>57</sup> More evidence to the point would be superfluous to prove the presence of such definitions. On the contrary, there are no definitions of genius in the works for me to list.

The common custom of secondary scholarship that lists “genius” as one of the core themes of aesthetics is confusing after evaluating the aesthetic canon’s primary sources. In these works, genius is used only colloquially or as

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<sup>57</sup> Addison and Steele, *Addison and Steele: Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator*. 201-2; Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. 16; Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue : In Two Treatises*, ed. Wolfgang Leidhold, *Natural Law and Enlightenment Classics; the Collected Works and Correspondence of Francis Hutcheson* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund, 2004). 23.

a loosely-related theme. However, this taste-based aesthetic theory begins to focus increasingly on objects of beauty produced by man. Such a focus implicitly requires an artist, or an agent capable of producing that beauty. While the field of aesthetic theory had not philosophically developed such an agent of production, there was an external school of thought centered on the idea of genius. This genius was defined by its capacity for original production. “How convenient!” the intellectual historian exclaims.

The next chapter argues that genius in the eighteenth century was philosophically problematic in its own right and sustained intellectual discourse that was not, and in fact could not be, dependent on aesthetic theory.

## Chapter Two

# The Discrete Development of Genius

What there thou seest, fair creature, is thyself.<sup>58</sup>  
-Milton, *Paradise Lost*

The previous chapter delineates the absence of discourse on the idea of the genius within the aesthetic canon, thus debasing the conventional academic incorporation of genius as a major theme in British aesthetics. Tangential to these aesthetic writings, however, was a distinct tradition that was devoted to genius. While the texts central in aesthetics hinge on taste and its relation to beauty, this other tradition was exploring genius as its own philosophic problem. This debate initially cast genius as an agent capable of production in a broad range of fields before asymptotically aligning that production with beauty.

Despite claims of secondary scholars that “most of the discussions of genius originated in the field of aesthetics” and that “genius is, therefore,

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<sup>58</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1935). Book 4.

chiefly related to the production of a work of art,” the intellectual history of genius illustrates a different trajectory.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, genius theory is a sovereign topic of discourse in the eighteenth century that is merely framed with a similar approach and contains similar themes as aesthetic theory. Because the genius is cast as the agent of production in a variety of fields, it did not need aesthetic theory to sustain it. However, the two became increasingly related in the eighteenth-century mind towards the end of the century. This chapter evaluates four examples of genius theory in an attempt to trace the development of the agent of production as it progressively becomes tethered to aesthetics.

## **Addison Part II: Juggling Genius**

Intellectual historians generally acknowledge that Joseph Addison, writing for the *Spectator* and previously addressed for his aesthetic writings in the same publication, is one of the first to bring the topic of genius into the sphere of public discourse.<sup>60</sup> His most explicit discussions of genius appear in a 1711 essay on genius to which secondary scholars argue that “the popularity of the idea in the early eighteenth century can...be traced back.”<sup>61</sup> In the essay, Addison distinguishes between several types of genius, such as the fine genius, the prodigious genius, and the great genius before spending most of

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<sup>59</sup> Tonelli, " Early Theory of Genius (1770-1779)." 4.2, 222.

<sup>60</sup> See Page 20.

<sup>61</sup> John Vladimir Price in the introductory essay to: William Duff, *An Essay on Original Genius*, Foundations of Literary Theory. The Eighteenth Century; Variation: Foundations of Literary Theory.; Eighteenth Century. (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1994). Vi.

the essay on his main design “to consider what is properly a great Genius, and to throw some Thoughts together on so uncommon a Subject.”<sup>62</sup>

While Addison explicitly claims that the refined genius and the natural genius are commensurate, he plainly prefers the wild and untrained genius. In order to “draw the Admiration of all the World” the great genius must produce works that are the “Delight of their own Times and the Wonder of Posterity” *without* assistance or learning.<sup>63</sup> While it is acceptable for the genius to be educated or trained, “There appears something nobly wild and extravagant in these great natural Geniuses,” that do not suffer education’s cultivation “that is infinitely more beautiful than... a Genius refined by Conversation, Reflection, and the Reading of the most polite Authors.”<sup>64</sup> This eminence of the wild genius is rooted in Addison’s preference for originality that is manifested in the great genius. Refinement, on the other hand, lends itself to imitation, and “an imitation of the best authors is not to compare with a good original.”<sup>65</sup> Addison clarifies that a great genius *can* be formed by rules and, furthermore, this type of genius is “not inferior to the first” but just “of a different kind.”<sup>66</sup> This adherence to rules, however, comes with a risk of restricting the full play of the imagination or of wrongfully imitating a past genius’s mistakes that are confused as successes.

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<sup>62</sup> Addison and Steele, *Addison and Steele: Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator*. No. 160. 167.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 169

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

Addison's brief anecdote about the shepherd who has mastered juggling eggs should not be misinterpreted as implying that education is the necessary factor to achieve greatness in genius. The anecdote credits the juggler's "wonderful perseverance and application" for his mastery. The man witnessing the performance claims, "I could not but reflect with myself that with the same assiduity and attention had they been rightly applied, might have made a greater mathematician than Archimedes."<sup>67</sup> Rather than argue that genius is acquired through arduous practice, however, this anecdote about learning a skill through dedication combined with his claims that the "great natural geniuses" are those "that were never disciplined and broken by the rules of art" points to a crucial distinction for the role of education that foreshadows later genius theory.

While the *mechanical skill* must be learnt with perseverance and attention, the unique *style of expression* should remain original. Addison asserts "I believe we may observe that very few writers make an extraordinary figure in the world who have not something in their way of thinking or expressing themselves, that is peculiar to them, and entirely their own."<sup>68</sup> On the other hand Addison warns that the "great danger" for geniuses who use past works as exemplary models is that they "cramp their own abilities too much by imitation, and form themselves altogether upon models, without giving the

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<sup>67</sup> Addison and Steele, *Addison and Steele: Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator*. No. 160, 170.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

full play to their own natural parts.”<sup>69</sup> Originality in method of expression defines the success of the genius. While the rules of taste can serve as a guiding force, they should not force the expression into submission.

This essay on genius published in the *Spectator* in 1711 unequivocally demonstrates that genius was a topic of intellectual discourse in eighteenth-century Britain. Further, it is considered on its own terms, not merely in its relationship to taste or the experience of beauty. Addison himself claims that it is an “uncommon subject,” comparably to the claims of taste’s novelty in his aesthetic essays. Despite the claimed rarity of discourse on both topics at the time, Addison was essential in establishing both genius and taste as independent topics of discourse in eighteenth-century Britain.

### **Sharpe: Educating Genius**

In the 1750s, published discourse on genius hits a high point, starting with William Sharpe’s *Dissertation Upon Genius* in 1755. William Sharpe, Vicar of Long Burton, was notably on the fringe of mainstream British philosophy, and the views posited in his *Dissertation* are “clearly...against the spirit of the time.”<sup>70</sup> I include him here as a testament to the debate centered on genius, a debate whose existence verifies that genius was theoretically problematic unassisted by aesthetics. Sharpe’s work, at least to some extent, contradicts all of the other writings on genius included here. Its underlying premise argues

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>70</sup> John Vladimir Price in the introductory essay to: Duff, *An Essay on Original Genius*.  
Viii.

that genius results from education not nature, summarized by his subtitle, “An attempt to show that the several degrees of superiority in the human genius are not, fundamentally, the result of nature, but the effect of acquisition.”<sup>71</sup>

Sharpe’s theory requires that genius must be a capacity potentially available to all men. It is acquired through experience, not an innate capacity only provided to a select few. In his *Dissertation Upon Genius*, Sharpe is heavily influenced by the *tabula rasa* theory of human nature.<sup>72</sup> By interpreting man as originally being a blank slate, he concludes that genius cannot be an innate or natural talent and must instead be acquired based on experience. In this view, intellect is based on an accumulation of impressions on the mind that are all rooted in sensation and reflection. The imagination for Sharpe is “a common storehouse and receptacle of all those images” gleaned from the senses and is understood to be the activity of the soul.<sup>73</sup> Certain things, such as ill health, idiocy, and even morality, can hinder the development of the intellect and prevent the attainment of genius, however there is no exceptional propensity that is necessary for the average man to be genius. Because man is originally a blank slate, there can be no alternative than that all genius is a result of learning.

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<sup>71</sup> William Sharpe, *A Dissertation Upon Genius (1755)*, History of Psychology Series; Variation: History of Psychology Series. (Delmar: N.Y., Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1973). Title page.

<sup>72</sup> The *tabula rasa* theory of human nature is derived from John Locke. See: John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch, The Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke; (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

<sup>73</sup> Sharpe, *A Dissertation Upon Genius (1755)*, 9.

Sharpe's *Dissertation* contains several implications for the genius. First, he posits that man's development progresses from "childhood...step by step to the critick, and the critick to the philosopher or divine," implying both that the faculties of critique precede the attainment of philosophy and that philosophy and divinity are linked.<sup>74</sup> Second, he also claims that there "is a struggle for the superiority between mind and body from the birth to the grave" and that one must suffer at the expense of the other, effectively denying the possibility for total well-rounded excellence in exchange for success in either the physical or mental realm.<sup>75</sup> A third and final curious contention is his claim that genius, due partially to its ability to discern the mere appearance of happiness for the reality of happiness, as a result "not only makes its possessor happy in the immediate exertions of it here, but qualifies it for the place of its original derivation and final designation hereafter."<sup>76</sup> With this view, attaining genius leads to happiness both in worldly life as well as in the eternity of the afterlife. These three implications of his work indicate the diversity of issues beyond aesthetic production that eighteenth-century theorists associated with taste.

Sharpe's approach to the genius will be refuted for the remainder of the century by thinkers who posit that genius is at least partially innate. His antithetical approach nonetheless testifies to the existence of debate around the idea of genius in eighteenth-century Britain. He does not use the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 139.

terminology in the same philosophic way as Young, Duff, and Gerard and his definition of genius is based on a premise that, while an intriguing idea, is not in line with the general focus on natural faculty. Sharpe's very opposition to other thinkers in the genius tradition demonstrates that, despite not being central to aesthetic theory, the genius tradition was flourishing by virtue its own topics of debate.

### **Young: Exalting Originality**

Edward Young's (1681-1763) *Conjectures on Original Composition* from 1759 constitutes what at least one historian claims was the most important work signaling the shifting understanding of genius and originality in the eighteenth century. The *Conjectures* was a short, initially anonymous letter written to the author Sir Charles Grandison in which Young, a celebrated English poet who wrote few critical or philosophic pieces other than the *Conjectures*, elaborated on his theory of genius. In 1728, in the interim between the Addison writings and Sharpe's dissertation, Young had also published a short essay on poetry that incidentally predicted all of the essential tenets of his ideas on genius and originality in a barebones form. The early essay proves that this version of genius was available to the public discourse throughout the early 1700s and prior to Sharpe's opposing opinion. However the *Conjectures* of 1759 had two large advantages over the poetry essay: the first of which is that it goes into much greater depth on the topic, and the second of which is that it came out

thirty years later when his contemporaries had thirty more years of conditioning to accept the ideas.

Young's letter of 1759 was written soon after Sharpe's *Dissertation* of 1755, yet Young's view on the nativity of genius is an approach diametrically opposed to Sharpe's view on acquiring genius. Whereas Sharpe opens his dissertation with the claim that genius is acquired only through learning, Young argues that genius is a natural propensity independent of education. He illustrates this by comparing genius to virtue in an analogy to learning and riches: "As riches are most wanted where there is least virtue; so learning where there is least genius. As virtue without much riches can give happiness, so genius without learning can give renown."<sup>77</sup> Genius is a natural capacity that "is like a dear friend in our company under disguise," waiting for the opportunity to surface.<sup>78</sup> Young quotes Milton to describe the experience of a genius viewing their work of greatness:

What there thou seest, fair creature, is thyself.<sup>79</sup>

It is not necessary to be taught the proper rules of artistic expression because the work of genius is merely an expression of the self. The crucial "golden rules" that one must follow to discover this underlying genius are relatively simple: "1. Know thyself; 2dly, reverence thyself."<sup>80</sup> Adhering to these two

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<sup>77</sup> Edward Young, *Edward Young's Conjectures on Original Composition*, ed. Edith J. Morley, Modern Language Texts. English Series; (Manchester: The University press; London, New York [etc.] Longmans, Green & co., 1918). 14.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>79</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*.

<sup>80</sup> Young, *Edward Young's Conjectures on Original Composition.*, 24.

principles, one should be capable of uncovering natural and, by implication, original expressions of ideas emanating from the genius's inner self.

Despite this, Young does not claim that education is entirely futile or unnecessary for genius, but rather posits two categories of genius with different roles for education. Young propounds benefits that can be gained from both innate possession of genius as well as refinement through education: "He who disregards learning, shows that he wants its aid; and he that overvalues it, shows that its aid has done him harm...Learning we thank, genius we revere."<sup>81</sup> Young thinks that education is often critical to genius, positing that genius is actually more common than conceived but that many go unrecognized because they are never educated in the skills needed to display that genius, primarily reading and writing. In this vein, he distinguishes between two distinct types of genius, infantive and adult. Adult genius is born into the world "at full growth and mature," ready to display itself; infantive genius, on the other hand, is that branch of genius that requires education and development in order to come to fruition, and without this nursing it will never be known. In the end "Genius is a master-workman, learning is but an instrument; and an instrument, tho' most valuable, yet not always indispensable."<sup>82</sup> While Young perhaps agrees with Sharpe that learning helps the expression of genius already present, he fundamentally disagrees that learning is *necessary* in establishing genius.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 13.

Despite his respect for the potential to nurture genius through learning, Young argues that the truly essential component constituting genius is innate originality. Such originality is incapable of being learned. Young illustrates the distinction between original and learned genius with an analogy: “Originals are the fairest flowers: imitation are of quicker growth, but fainter bloom.”<sup>83</sup> The role of imitation, he claims, should be to “imitate not the composition, but the man” of past genius.<sup>84</sup> By modeling ourselves after the great men of genius, as opposed to modeling our works after the great works of genius, “we shall resemble them more” and have the chance to exhibit our own original genius.<sup>85</sup>

Young’s necessity of originality for expression of true genius indicates that education can have the counter-effect of hindering the potential expression of genius. Not only may the awe of ancients “fright us out of a proper use of our wits,” but recognition of original works is also harder to achieve “when its excellence, from mounting high, to weak eyes is quite out of sight.”<sup>86</sup> Further, imitation deprives the genius of the potential to surpass past works, goes against nature’s preference for individuality, and makes one overly proud of accomplishments without being inspired to think.<sup>87</sup> Imitation, often a product of education, suppresses the potential of originality; genius,

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

however, is only expressed and able to be recognized by creating original works.

Young's work is distinguished from the other essays in this chapter because it is less explicitly about the genius and instead focused directly on artistic composition. However this focus on original composition leads him to extensively gloss the idea of the genius, indicating his opinion that the genius is the agent of production of artistic compositions. The *Conjectures* illustrates the prevalence of discourse on genius while closely aligning genius specifically with artistic production. Taking this as evidence of a complete alignment of genius and the production of artistic beauty would wrongly ignore the intention of the letter. However, the work does present genius and the arts as close allies to the public mindset. The *Conjectures* thus illustrates that genius is a topic of concern external to aesthetics that is beginning to foster strong links to artistic production.

### **Duff: The Art of Genius**

In line with Young, and also in direct contrast to Sharpe, William Duff contends in his 1767 "Essay on Original Genius" that while education can increase the natural powers, learning will never be capable of creating those powers where they are nonexistent or destroying powers that are already present. For Duff, a Scottish Presbyterian minister known in the philosophic world wholly for his contribution to ideas of genius and creativity, the genius's realm is that of inventing designs and perfecting art. This definition

casts the arts, categorized as philosophy, poetry, and other plastic fine arts, as the privileged sphere of genius. Genius is dependent on the three mental faculties of imagination, taste, and judgment. Amongst these, imagination, as the faculty of reflection and association that is able to create through new associations, is the “quality of all others most essentially requisite to the existence of Genius.”<sup>88</sup> However, in order to advance the imagination, it must be disciplined by judgment and be corrected and justified by taste. When all three of these faculties are possessed in sufficient quantities, the possessor has the natural potential to be a genius.

To interpret Duff’s assertion that the principal role of the genius is to invent or create, it must be understood that he does not mean the creation of representations. Rather, he means the creation of something new through novel associations. Such novel association is achieved by the imagination, which Duff defines as the

faculty whereby the mind not only reflects on its own operations, but which assembles the various ideas conveyed to the understanding by the canal of sensation, and treasured in the repository of the memory, compounding or disjoining them at pleasure, and which by its plastic power of inventing new associations of ideas and of combining them with infinite variety, is enabled to present a creation of its own, and to exhibit scenes and objects which never existed in nature.<sup>89</sup>

While specifying this form of invention as the defining role of the genius, he further argues that mere creation of representations of the natural world is for those with wit or humor or skill in the mechanical arts. Creation of representations of already apparent associations does *not* constitute

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<sup>88</sup> Duff, *An Essay on Original Genius*. 6.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

imaginative invention, which is only applied to original and novel associations.

Not limited to merely production of beauty in the arts, the genius's task is creating novel associations in every field. Original genius is the highest form of human capacity, superior even to ordinary genius. Duff defines such original genius as "that native and radical power which the mind possesses, of discovering something new and uncommon in every subject on which it employs its faculties."<sup>90</sup> The original genius is not limited to skill, talent, or ability in a specific field. Rather, through the possession of unique levels of imagination, taste, and judgment, the genius has the power to effectively create something new in any field if dedicating the time to contemplate it.

The role of education for Duff serves only to open up technical possibilities for the production of genius or to purify the judgments of taste, not to provide genius where the requisite imagination is lacking. While education can foster a greater understanding of mechanical skills or conventions that allow the original genius to succeed more fully in a specific field, with experience and time invested in any field the original genius will successfully create works of genius. Taste, on the other hand, though operable "without the assistance of the reasoning faculty" and forming its judgments "by its own arbitrary verdict," *can* have its judgments refined through education.<sup>91</sup> The role of education here is seen in context of Duff's

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 11.

definition of original genius as a natural capacity, something that is inborn, that has the potential to be cultivated but not to be provided or removed.

Seemingly antithetical to the claim that the genius has domain over every field is Duff's ensuing delineation, and therefore limitation, of the categories of genius. After arguing that genius is a general aptitude for original thought, Duff distinguishes between the types of original genius and the specific ratios of mental faculties required in order to attain each of these types. These types of genius are determined primarily from differences in the imagination, with judgment and taste also weighing in. Specifically, he notes the philosophic genius, the poetic genius, and the artistic genius. The way these fields are cast as the *proper* realm of genius, despite genius's ability to also excel in *any* realm, explains this apparent contradiction.

Such a provision for multiple categories of genius again defies the attempt of aesthetic historians to appropriate genius as a topic of discourse relegated to aesthetic theory. Instead, Duff's work indicates that genius was a topic of discourse by its own theoretical and practical virtue. Duff's genius is not limited to only producing beauty or art, despite that production being a particularly privileged role for the genius. Since his genius is not limited to the arts, however, it also cannot be limited to aesthetic theory.

## **Conclusion**

While the preceding chapter established that genius was not present in aesthetic theory, the above discussion expounds that genius was definitely

developing within its own tradition since the beginning of the eighteenth century. Scholars tracing genius commonly cite Addison's essay in the *Spectator* as the first eighteenth-century British text that begins to cogitate on the concept, placing this in the cultural mindset by 1711. Obliquely, Addison almost concurrently publishes his seminal essay on the "Pleasures of the Imagination." These discrete essays, while thematically tangent, illustrate the clarity with which the early eighteenth-century mindset separated the two concepts.

The concept of the genius, then, was not "originated in the field of aesthetics" and thus that origin cannot explain why "genius is, therefore, chiefly related to the production of a work of art."<sup>92</sup> Indeed, the genius initially cast in its autonomous tradition specifically references the ubiquity of fields the genius can master. Addison's anecdote of the juggling genius as well as Duff's insistence that the genius is naturally capable of discerning something new in every subject contemplated signify this potential for the genius to achieve mastery over any subject

It was not until late in the century with Duff that genius became increasingly restricted to production in the arts, an inception that can only be understood in terms of the increasing role of original production.<sup>93</sup> More specifically, Duff contends that the principle role of the genius is to invent or create and maintains that this natural capacity will allow access to creation in

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<sup>92</sup> Tonelli, "Early Theory of Genius (1770-1779)." 4.2. 222.

<sup>93</sup> Young can also easily be argued to have an emphasis on artistic production, however this link is problematic because his intention for writing the work is to specifically address the role of the genius in composition, not explore the role of genius generally.

any field contemplated. However, while allowing for philosophic genius as well as poetic and artistic, he asserts inventing designs and perfecting art as the privileged realm of the genius's creation. While Duff does not go to the extent of restricting genius to art, he does take steps to more closely shackle them together by establishing the highest form of genius as the artist.

The conventional academic approach couples genius with aesthetic theory, but looking at the sources suggests that genius developed of its own accord. Not only did genius *not require* a connection to aesthetics to sustain it, but, because it was cast as an agent of production in a variety of fields and not just of artistic beauty, genius *could not* be fettered to aesthetics. Aesthetic origins cannot explain why "genius is, therefore, chiefly related to the production of a work of art."<sup>94</sup> Rather, it is clear that this early discourse on genius developed externally to aesthetics and cast the genius as the agent of production not just of beauty, but also of truth and knowledge. This independent maturation of genius was conveniently percolating in eighteenth-century dialogue at the very moment when aesthetic theorists began to scratch their heads at a difficult realization: Their theory failed to address an agent of artistic production that was becoming fundamentally necessary to enable their precious faculty of taste to operate.

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<sup>94</sup> Tonelli, "Early Theory of Genius (1770-1779)." 4.2, 222.

## Chapter Three

### Gerard's Coalescence: A Primed Transition

So bold an adventurer will come at last  
to regions inhabited only by  
monsters...<sup>95</sup>

Alexander Gerard (1728-1795) was a licensed minister of the Church of Scotland who became a professor after the man he was substituting for perished in a shipwreck. Gerard was used to doing things before others. He matriculated from Marischal College in Aberdeen at the age of 12 and was awarded his M.A. by 16, demonstrating precociousness perhaps encouraged a bit too severely by his father. At an age when today's students are just starting their undergraduate education, Gerard was teaching a course which "started with logic, followed on with ontology and pneumatology, began the descent to the world of concrete fact with morals and politics, and concluded with natural science." Not content with teaching the prescribed course, however, Gerard initiated an educational reform that was adopted throughout the

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<sup>95</sup> Alexander Gerard, "An Essay on Genius." (London--Edinburgh: Chadwyck-Healey, Literar Theory Full-Text Database, 1774). 105.

college, reversing the trajectory of coursework to instead start with concrete knowledge and then progress to the abstract.<sup>96</sup> It makes a certain sense that Gerard would be the figure that also initiates a transformation in aesthetic theory that has ripples even in today's aesthetics.

The preceding intellectual history reviewing both the aesthetic tradition and the genius tradition of eighteenth-century Britain established that genius was not a topic of discourse that was definitive of aesthetics in the eighteenth century. However, while not disproving that revelation, Gerard is a unique test case for the use of genius. His *Essay on Taste* (1758) is the only aesthetic text to extensively discuss the genius, both as a term and topic. Almost twenty years later, he authored an additional work expanding on the topic of genius in *Essay on Genius* (1774). When interpreting these works, however, the intellectual historian discovers that Gerard still conceives of genius as a related but independent topic from aesthetics. Despite Gerard's apparent conflation between the idea of genius and the field of aesthetics, his extensive incorporation of genius in his aesthetic work actually serves to define aesthetic theory as its own field. While the genius is increasingly related to this field, his overlapping incorporation does not prove that genius is a mere subset of aesthetic theory. By virtue of this extensive incorporation and its resulting implications, however, Gerard lays the groundwork for the necessary fusion of genius into aesthetic theory.

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<sup>96</sup> Introductory essay to Gerard, *An Essay on Taste (1759), Together with Observations Concerning the Imitative Nature of Poetry*.

## Gerard: On Taste, not Genius

In 1755, the Edinburgh Philosophical Society, proposed “a gold medal to the best Essay on Taste,” and, not receiving an entry worthy of the honor, extended this offer into 1756.<sup>97</sup> Gerard submitted an abbreviated version of his *Essay on Taste*, and upon earning the award was encouraged to publish the entire essay in 1758. This *Essay on Taste* is the first from the aesthetic canon that deals extensively with the genius.<sup>98</sup> Years later, Gerard also publishes an *Essay on Genius* (1774) in which he strives to define the factors that contribute to genius, the ways these factors function in the genius, and the specificities of the different forms in genius in greater detail. In his *Essay on Taste*, however, he deals with genius only in regards to the way it interacts with judgments of taste, establishing it as a related but subsidiary, not central or necessary, concept to taste’s experience of beauty.

In *Essay on Taste*, Gerard posits that all humans have a natural inclination for a certain vein of genius, implying not that everyone is a genius but rather that genius has the potential to excel in a variety of fields. For Gerard, one can be a genius in both artistic and other fields, be it music, painting, poetry, oration, philosophy, or mathematics. The particular bent of the genius can result from “original constitution, education, example, or

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<sup>97</sup> The Edinburgh Philosophical Society was an organization for the improvement of arts, sciences, and natural knowledge that was eventually succeeded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh. Ibid., advertisement.

<sup>98</sup> *An Essay on Taste* earned Gerard a spot on most aesthetic historians list of eighteenth-century aesthetic theorists, and therefore I include it here. However, I additionally include him in the following chapter on the genius tradition due to his later work, *An Essay on Genius* (1774).

study”<sup>99</sup> but Gerard notes that it is impossible to excel fully in everything.<sup>100</sup> He clarifies that “every one has a predominant turn of genius and taste, by which his relish is more adapted to some one species of excellence, than to others,” and this will define the particular expression of one’s genius.<sup>101</sup> The genius is a natural propensity for production, but the specific type of production is not just for objects of taste but rather for a broad range of things.

However, Gerard quibbles with the notion of genius for a variety of fields by qualifying the original genius as a counterpoint to the mere genius. Gerard introduces this idea of the original genius early in the work, claiming, “To strike out a new track, to execute what was not attempted before, displays original genius, which we always observe with pleasure.”<sup>102</sup> This claim necessitates “novelty in the works of genius and art” and attributes the pleasure derived from works of genius to “the ingenuity which it shews.”<sup>103</sup> He goes to the extent of propounding that “no natural scene, no production of art or genius can please us long, except every new survey discovers beauties unobserved before, or gives us additional assurance of it's perfection.”<sup>104</sup> Gerard reasserts this view when claiming that defects in genius arise from

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<sup>99</sup> Gerard, *An Essay on Taste (1759), Together with Observations Concerning the Imitative Nature of Poetry*, 175.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* 11.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

imitating an original.<sup>105</sup> By virtue of such claims, Gerard makes originality a definitive quality for this elite type of genius.

The most successful works of genius, therefore, do not merely achieve an exactness of resemblance that could be learnt through the rules of taste but rather provide some original shade on the method used to express the resemblance. Using the intention of the work as a guideline that “directs the author in the choice, disposition, and embellishment of the parts,” the author discerns the proper method of expression for a specific work.<sup>106</sup> Due to this process, “it is from the end and design of works of genius that their peculiar rules can be deduced” and “by this the critic must regulate his judgment.”<sup>107</sup> The process of production is not infallible and can lead to mistakes in a work of genius, mistakes that do not undermine the overall splendor of the work but should nevertheless be identified by the critic and not mistakenly propagated. Gerard warns of the risks of blindly imitating a recognized genius without the beacon of taste, as such imitation

...of an admired genius will procure approbation even to faults, from one whose taste is languid. He is unable readily to detect them; and their being committed by so great a master, and intermixed with many beauties, will keep him from even suspecting that they can be wrong; and consequently prevent his scrutiny. Like the spots of the sun, which cannot be discovered by the naked eye, the faults of an eminent genius require something more to enable us to discern them, than the elements of taste which nature bestows: till these are invigorated by culture, they will disappear in the general splendor.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 143.

Blind imitation, rather than reproducing a work of genius, propagates a “disagreeable servility” that becomes increasingly condemnable in the imitation because of taste’s failure to identify and genius’s failure to rectify such errors.<sup>109</sup>

The wrongful propagation of faults that taste must annihilate indicates that Gerard prioritizes taste in creating beauty. The work of the genius is permissibly at risk for fault; taste, on the other hand, has the capacity to “acquire so great refinement...that we conceive in idea a standard of higher excellence, than was ever in fact produced.”<sup>110</sup> Gerard emphasizes taste’s potential for discerning the proper standard of excellence despite genius’s inability to produce at that standard, thereby privileging taste over genius. In relation to genius, taste is critical. Gerard claims that “genius will always throw a peculiar brightness upon taste” and “it is so evident, that it has almost past [sic] into a maxim, the ablest performers are also the best judges in every art.” Despite these claims, taste is able to perfect the *standard* of work even when genius is unable to attain it.<sup>111</sup> Gerard therefore acknowledges taste as having greater practical relevance than genius.

The reader should not mistake this greater practical relevance of taste as entirely subverting the genius’s role. For Gerard, it is daring of attempt, not perfection of work, that most warrants admiration for the genius:

... the greatest critics allow the chief merit, not to the greater number, but to the higher rank of beauties; not to that precision and constant

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 180, 173.

attention to every trifle, which produces a cold and languid mediocrity, but to that noble boldness of genius, which rises to the height of excellence, with a kind of supernatural ardor, that makes it negligent with regard to numberless minutiae; in fine, not to that faultless insipidity, which escapes our blame, but to that daring exaltation, which, however shaded by inaccuracies, or even debased by the mixture of gross transgressions, forces our admiration.<sup>112</sup>

Taste can predict a level of perfection that the genius cannot execute, but the work of genius is not and should not be judged on its perfection. Genius is not inferior to taste then; rather, the criterion for evaluating each faculty is distinct.

For Gerard, the genius strives to attain not perfection but admiration. Since genius is not the main topic of this essay, Gerard does not delineate what constitutes the “height of excellence” that “forces our admiration,” but he does clarify that it has something to do with originality and skill. The “genius is the grand architect, which not only chooses the materials, but disposes them into a regular structure” to create a work of excellence.<sup>113</sup> To achieve this, the genius must have the capacity for invention, an eye for design, and the mechanical ability for expression, without which genius “would not only be imperfect, but would for ever lie latent, undiscovered, and useless.”<sup>114</sup> While the “height of excellence” is reserved for the genius, taste alone is capable of perfection.

Gerard begins to construct a connection between genius and the arts in this essay but this should not undermine the claim that his primary focus in

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 175.

this writing from the aesthetic canon is taste, not genius. He allows for genius in a multitude of fields that are not limited to the arts. Additionally, he establishes the genius as the creator, not the critic, of work and asserts that it is the genius's job to discover the rules to follow when creating. These rules can be discovered "from the end and design of works of genius."<sup>115</sup> While it may seem like this implies that the rules of taste restrict the genius, they merely direct, not demand, the decisions of the author.

Gerard's incorporation of the genius in an essay intended to explore taste is a philosophic prodding of genius unparalleled in the aesthetic canon. Only here can one start to justify the claim of aesthetic historians that genius is a part of aesthetic theory. However, while Gerard may be contributing to a complex web connecting genius to aesthetics, he allows each concept its philosophic independence, restricting only the original genius, not the mere genius, to the faculty of taste. He includes genius only as an external topic that is incidentally germane to his primary topic of taste.

### **Gerard: Inventions of a Taste Theorist**

The same precocious professor who penned the award-winning *Essay on Taste* was later inspired to write an *Essay on Genius*. Not published until 1774, his work should be evaluated as a later progression of the genius theory compared to the flurry of mid-century discourse. He mentions in the introduction to his work, however, that he started and would have continued

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 40.

writing the essay in 1758 after his *Essay on Taste* was published and well-received, but time did not permit him to complete it. Signaling an early motivation reveals that his inspiration for exploring genius was derived from the same cultural climate as Sharpe, Young, and Duff. Out of the works included to this point, Gerard's *Essay on Genius* is by far the most developed exploration of genius. His lengthy work deals with discerning the factors contributing to genius, the way these factors function in relation to the genius, and the different types of genius. His more philosophically rigorous approach is due partially to the form of the work. Addison's musings are mixed in short intellectually driven articles that were intended to be more popular than philosophic, while Young's genius is presented in a letter to an author primarily about composition. Despite that Sharpe and Duff write in forms more conducive to a high level of intellectual rigor, neither of their works attain a very elevated status. Gerard's essay, similarly to his *Essay on Taste* of 1758 has a high standard for the development of ideas, which strengthens his theory and classifies it as arguably the most developed presentation of genius from writers of the eighteenth century.

Gerard's concept of genius, like Young's, depends on the cultivation of natural capacity in the interest of original production. However, Gerard posits an original production that is applicable to both the arts and science. Genius is defined as the "faculty of *invention*; by means of which a man is qualified for making new discoveries in science, or for producing original

works of art.”<sup>116</sup> This emphasizes originality as a necessary facet of invention. Invention for Gerard is the “capacity of producing new beauties in works of art, and new truths in matters of science; which can be accomplished only by assembling ideas in various positions and arrangements, that we may obtain uncommon views of them,” or, in other words, the ability to establish new mental associations that produce original ideas or expressions.<sup>117</sup> He argues that varying degrees of genius exist as a result of varying “degree of novelty, difficulty, or dignity of invention.”<sup>118</sup> The invention associated with creating an entire new genre or form of expression requires a higher degree of genius than merely inventing an original way of realizing a pre-established form.

By stressing that the capacity for genius and invention is dependent on a set of intellectual powers, namely sense, memory, imagination, and judgment, Gerard aligns his view of genius with subjective experience of sensory stimuli, a basis of aesthetic theory. Gerard understands sense as perceiving objects that corporeally exist and are directly presented to the mind, while memory is a review or recollection of those objects that were once presented to the mind through sense. Sense provides the foundation for ideas while memory is the faculty that enables us to recall those sensory stimuli in order to incorporate them in new associations. All men have the capacity for sense and memory in relatively equal proportions, however there are intrinsic variations that cause differences in genius. Sense and memory

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<sup>116</sup> Gerard, "An Essay on Genius." 9.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 10.

also function differently in different forms of genius; for example, memory is more decisive for a genius of science than for a genius in the arts. Such discussion of sense and memory's basis for subjective experience is reminiscent of concurrent aesthetic theory and predicts the conflation of the two traditions.

To appreciate that conflation, one must look to Gerard's relationship between genius and taste in terms of his parallel relationship between imagination and judgment. Imagination for Gerard is the rudimentary faculty constituting genius. Since it is able to create new associations of the ideas we obtain through sense and remember through memory, imagination is the basis for the power of invention. Judgment, the faculty in which we comprehend reason and discover novel relations from the comparison of ideas is critical when functioning with imagination in the process of invention. The fundamental relationship between the two faculties is that imagination invents while judgment then scrutinizes and edits those inventions.

Both imagination and judgment are necessary for invention but it is imagination that remains prime, a primacy unheard of in the aesthetic tradition. In his own words, "Without judgment, imagination would be extravagant; but without imagination, judgment could do nothing."<sup>119</sup> And in the genius, there is "such *comprehensiveness* of imagination as enables a man, on every occasion, to call in the conceptions that are necessary for executing the

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 39.

designs or completing the works in which he engages."<sup>120</sup> In order to achieve this, the imagination must be both diverse and fertile and susceptible to constant activity. The principles of association are affected by several factors, such as vicinity of objects, presence of inherent similarities or contrariety, habit or custom present in human nature, and situational or environmental factors. However, since "imagination will be often led by slight and incidental associations, to suggest ideas which, when canvassed by judgment, are discovered to be foreign and improper," it is judgment's responsibility to tame and edit the inventions of the imagination.<sup>121</sup> Traditionally, aesthetic theorists including Gerard had privileged taste to the extent of propounding taste's potential to predict levels of perfection unrealizable by the genius. Gerard's reversal of this traditional privilege is a marked shift from prior aesthetic theory.

It is only by recognizing Gerard's claim for the potential of varying degrees of imagination and judgment that one can comprehend the hierarchy of genius that privileges artistic genius. The specific expression of genius depends on the individual composition of the intellectual powers of sense, memory, imagination, and judgment. Certain forms of genius require more of one faculty than another. The artistic genius, for example, is more dependent on a strong sense while the scientific genius is more dependent on strong memory. Similarly, the powers operate differently in different forms of genius, evinced in the way judgment is more important for producing ideas in

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 81.

the sciences as opposed to merely editing or selecting ideas in the arts. The most comprehensive imagination constitutes the artistic genius and while genius can take many forms, it is the artistic genius who depends the most heavily on imagination. By giving the artistic genius his prized faculty of imagination, Gerard implicitly bestows the highest rank of the genius hierarchy to the artist.

Taste is not salient in Gerard's theory of genius because taste is relevant to only one of several types of genius; however, the operation of taste is dependent on that genius. He argues that *taste* is necessary for judgment specifically for scrutinizing and editing in the arts, while it is *reason* that is needed for judgment in the sciences. He summarizes his idea of the relationship between taste and genius:

By acting upon imagination in these several ways, by checking, by instigating it, by giving it regularity, taste has very great influence on genius, and the varieties of taste contribute much to diversify the form of genius. A person's genius and his taste are correspondent. What he approves, and what he can produce, are of the same kind, and marked with the same character.<sup>122</sup>

Taste can be refined and made elegant through education and cultivation, however this is not a substitute for genius and can rather hinder it. For Gerard, while "It is an imagination uncommonly bright and vigorous, that can bear all the restraints which a correct taste lays it under,"<sup>123</sup> unmitigated correctness in taste combined with a weak imagination has the counter-effect of preventing any production at all. In diametrical opposition to aesthetic

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 400.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 410.

theorists writing before this work (including his own aesthetic work), Gerard necessitates the genius for any operation of taste. While Gerard still considers genius to be a separate field from aesthetic, a claim that will be considered more fully below, it is here that the foundations are laid for the fusion of genius into the aesthetic tradition.

### **A Primed Transition**

If Gerard helped expropriate genius into aesthetics, it was not intentional. To his mind, they were separate topics of discourse. Like Addison, the most compelling proof for this is the presence of two distinct treatises, one specifically dedicated to taste and the other to genius. This mental separation is explained by his understanding of the associated components of each that do not overlap. Genius is not just a faculty for the agent producing beauty for taste to judge in art; it also operates to invent truth in science. Likewise, despite having no role in science, taste is not sequestered to artworks of human production in the critique of beauty; its faculty of critique also applies to the realm of nature. As each topic contains discrete interests, neither can be fully inducted into the other. Gerard neither wants to nor could explicitly fuse taste to genius or vice versa. However, I suggest that by extensively addressing genius in his *Essay on Taste* and through specific developments in his understanding of genius in *Essay on Genius*, he forges a link that empowers later aesthetic theorists to realize such a fusion.

In 1758, Gerard's *Essay on Taste* is fully engaged with the British intellectual climate of taste. The essay's motivation hinged on a contest by the Edinburgh Philosophic Society specifically soliciting essays on the topic of taste, evincing the mainstream popularity of taste at the time. Within the work, Gerard demonstrates his dalliance with British discourse on taste both thematically as well as by direct citation in footnotes.<sup>124</sup> Incorporating genius into his aesthetics only to the extent to which it relates to taste is in accord with the habit of British aesthetics. Attempting to delineate the factors inciting the experience of the sublime or beautiful, as the first half of the treatise does, mimics the intent of Burke's *Inquiry into the Origins of the Sublime and Beautiful*, just as his exploration of the role of virtue for taste hearkens back to Hutcheson and Shaftesbury. In the latter case, Gerard demonstrates his familiarity and disagreement with Shaftesbury's views on morality's parallel to taste by citing him directly in a footnote and then mentioning that "experience will scarce support this opinion."<sup>125</sup> In other instances, Gerard's footnotes signal that "Mr. *Hutcheson* was the first who considered the powers of imagination as...*internal* senses" and that Hogarth established the way proportion derives its influence on beauty through the concept of fitness.<sup>126</sup> Such mentions unambiguously illustrate his liaisons with British aesthetics. As a final example, Gerard references Addison twice in thematically-irrelevant

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<sup>124</sup> Beyond the British aesthetic theorists, Gerard also cites Longinus, Baillie, Locke, Aristotle, Plato, an unnamed French Critic, and Brown.

<sup>125</sup> Gerard, *An Essay on Taste (1759), Together with Observations Concerning the Imitative Nature of Poetry*, 202.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, fn. 1, fn. 22.

contexts that nonetheless prove Gerard's familiarity with Addison's work. A third citation on how the "operation of genius, in designing it's productions, is described with all the beauties of poetical expression" in Addison's essay 'The Pleasures of the Imagination' is thematically relevant.<sup>127</sup> It is undeniable that Gerard was fully aware of the British aesthetic tradition concerning beauty and taste.

The topic of concern in *Essay on Taste* is, unequivocally, taste, indicating that genius is *not* more central than taste to his overall purpose of describing the elements of beauty, sublimity, and the responses to each. While this may seem axiomatic, it is necessary to keep in mind while I argue that genius does have a role in the treatise despite not being central. While genius as both term and topic is more prevalent in *Essay on Taste* than it had been in any preceding work identified in the aesthetic tradition, it is neither fully integrated in nor constitutive of Gerard's aesthetics.

Gerard's 1758 essay casts taste as an editor to genius, indicating that genius is subsidiary to taste rather than taste being dependent on genius. Their association is made clear:

TASTE may be considered either as an essential Part, or as a necessary attendant of genius; according as we consider genius in a more or less extensive manner. Every one acknowledges that they have a very near connexion. It is so evident, that it has almost past into a maxim, that the ablest performers are also the best judges in every art.<sup>128</sup>

Gerard argues that taste is an essential part of genius, but this is not meant to imply that taste is *merely* a part of genius; rather, that taste is a *necessary* part of

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., fn. 80.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 173.

genius. Genius cannot exist without a scaffolding of taste. Further, Gerard contends that genius requires taste but that, on the reciprocal end, taste does not require genius:

...taste often prevails where genius is wanting; they may judge, who cannot themselves perform. The operations, that depend on the imagination, may be vigorous enough to form a high relish, though it be destitute of that brightness and extension, which is necessary for a comprehensive genius.<sup>129</sup>

Gerard thereby constructs a hierarchy of imagination where a certain level of imagination is sufficient for establishing taste's capacity for critique and a higher level can produce genius. However, while the genius is the "grand architect" that has the capacity to execute the work, it must be remembered that genius "it not able to finish it by itself. It needs the assistance of taste, to guide and moderate its exertions."<sup>130</sup> In Gerard's aesthetic theory, genius is subsidiary to taste.

While genius is not paramount to taste in Gerard's 1758 aesthetics, genius does *enhance* taste and the experience of beauty. Gerard allows for this mutually beneficial relationship between the two faculties, as genius will "always throw a peculiar brightness upon taste," qualitatively enhancing the experience of beauty.<sup>131</sup> Genius achieves this enhancement by enabling one, "by a kind of contagion, to catch the spirit of an author, to judge with the same disposition, in which he composed, and by this means to feel every beauty with a delight and transport, of which a colder critic can form no

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 180.

idea.”<sup>132</sup> On the other end, mutual interaction between genius and taste increases overall qualitative levels of the perfection of beauty, to the extent to which "It is possible to acquire so great refinement, especially when taste is accompanied with genius, that we conceive in *idea* a standard of higher excellence, than was ever in *fact* produced.”<sup>133</sup> This excessive elevation of taste can even risk paralyzing production:

*Lionardi da Vinci* is said to have conceived so high a standard of perfection, that, from despair of reaching it in the execution, he left many of his pictures unfinished. When imagination is inflamed and elevated by the perfection exhibited to it, it goes on of its own accord to fancy completer effects, than artists have found means actually to produce; by reason of some unpliableness in the materials employed, the *execution* seems always to fall short of our *conception*.<sup>134</sup>

Taste’s interaction with genius establishes that both genius and taste are necessary for genius’s production; however, taste can both exist and excel without the practical execution of the genius.

As a final and perhaps elementary point, this non-mutually dependent despite mutually beneficial relationship can perhaps be understood by Gerard explicitly referencing genius as different from art. Reference to taste’s exertion on “the subject of art or genius” is prolific in the text. This repeated distinction between art *or* genius suggests Gerard’s bisected categorizations, which, as distinct categories, serve distinct functions in aesthetics.

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 125. Gerard appears to have particularly liked this anecdote, as he also references it in his *Essay on Genius*.

Almost twenty years later, Gerard's 1774 *Essay on Genius* betrays a transformation in his approach to genius. Before closely exploring his later conception of genius, three things ought to be noted. First, Gerard claims that scrutinizing genius in such a way has never before been done, revealing that in 1774 his engagement with aesthetic theory has convinced him that genius is an undeveloped topic. He straightforwardly states that "Genius itself, the leading faculty of the mind, the grand instrument of all investigation, has scarce ever been examined with care."<sup>135</sup> Even "In the writings of those who treat with greatest accuracy of the intellectual powers," presumably including such treatment by aesthetic theorists, he claims that "we find only a few incidental observations concerning Genius."<sup>136</sup> The outlined trajectory of the genius tradition in the last chapter is proof enough that this claim is inaccurate. However, I already established that Gerard was familiar and engaged with the British aesthetic theorists of his time. Thus, contending that genius is an unaddressed topic further substantiates that being familiar with aesthetic theory would not necessarily expose one to discourse on genius.

Incidentally, this evokes the second point: while in *Essay on Taste* Gerard openly cited authors conventionally identified as aesthetic theorists, in *Essay on Genius* these references are absent. He uses Hogarth, one of the critical aesthetic writers, only as an example of artistic and philosophic genius. Additionally, Addison is cited both for entertaining and exemplifying

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<sup>135</sup> Gerard, "An Essay on Genius." 4.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

anecdotes as well as his views on imagination, but not as extensively as in his *Essay on Taste*. Reference to his own aesthetic work, *Essay on Taste*, occurs on multiple occasions, but this is the extent of reference to aesthetic theory. The brevity of references, especially in contrast to the frequent citations in his *Essay on Taste*, signals that Gerard does not consider genius as a subtext to aesthetics.

Finally, while arguing that genius is a new topic in the public sphere of discourse, he concurrently contends that it is *not* a new topic in his own thought, implying that he was tangentially aware of genius when writing his aesthetic work yet did not incorporate it as a subsection to aesthetics. Indeed, he maintains that genius specifically came to his attention when writing his earlier *Essay on Taste*:

The Author of the following Essay had occasion, in writing on Taste, to consider its connexion with Genius. The attention which he bestowed on this latter faculty, in that one point of view, convinced him, that its Nature and its Principles admitted and required a fuller investigation than had ever been attempted, and determined him to enter on that investigation immediately after finishing his former work. Accordingly his plan was formed, the first part composed, and some progress made in the second part, so long ago as the year 1758.<sup>137</sup>

Genius had occupied Gerard's mental space since 1758, perhaps partially due to his own unintentional steps to fuse genius and taste, and he claims that he had hopes of "completing the design in a short time" but was prevented by situational factors.<sup>138</sup> However, had he been successful at composing the work at the younger date, it almost certainly would have manifested

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., iv.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., iv.

differently, a prediction supported by comparing what we can glean of the views he takes in 1774 to the view as analyzed from 1758 and his own claims that “Intervals of such leisure have put it in his power to reduce his thoughts to the form in which they now appear.”<sup>139</sup>

The 1774 essay posits a redefinition of genius that elevates it from subsidiary to taste to a prerequisite for taste’s function. The first tenet of a definition of genius in 1774 is “the faculty of invention.”<sup>140</sup> Invention is then stipulated as the “capacity for production” with an emphasis on its role in “executing the designs or completing the works in which he engages.”<sup>141</sup> The active production of work is the crux of the genius. This production is not relegated to objects of taste; rather it serves both science and art. In the former realm, genius qualifies one “for making new discoveries” or producing “new truths in matters of science.”<sup>142</sup> The genius of art, on the other hand, is qualified “for producing original works of art,” or more specifically, “producing new beauties in works of art.”<sup>143</sup> This necessarily prevented genius, which produces both truths beyond the realm of taste and beauties dependent on the faculty of taste, from being utterly bound to taste.

Nevertheless, Gerard’s contention that the genius of the arts fulfills an exceptional function for man can only be understood through taste’s operation in experiencing works of beauties produced by the artist. The

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., iv.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 28, 43.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 9, 28.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 9, 28.

produced truths of science have “in their nature a certain sedateness, gravity, and austerity.”<sup>144</sup> On the other hand, when producing beauty, the genius “operates with a kind of sprightliness, gaiety, vivacity, or impetuosity” unheard of in the truths of science.<sup>145</sup> Whereas in science the “perception of *truth* is an indifferent feeling,” in the arts “the sentiments of *taste* are not indifferent.”<sup>146</sup> As a byproduct of producing works of beauty, the genius thus experiences personal satisfaction and improvement:

...the work of the artist, in the several steps of his progress, is continually gratifying his taste, giving him sensations of delight, and by means of these elevating his mind and enlivening his temper.<sup>147</sup>

As truths of science are “indifferent” by nature, the genius can only serve to produce them; he does not reciprocally gain benefit or growth by experiencing those truths that he has created. In the case of art, on the other hand, the artist is continuously “enlivened” and “elevated” by the very process of exerting genius, indicating an aspect of personal improvement not found in scientific genius.

An understanding of this elevating function of the art of the genius enables us to appreciate Gerard’s claims about the role of the genius in communicating both ideas and feelings. As “genius for the arts implies, in every case, not only the power of invention, but also the power of execution” the physical manifestation of *works* of artistic genius is indispensable to the presence of genius. Works of genius can and should possess the “power of

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 413.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 413.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 415.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 415.

expression” which “consists perhaps entirely in a capacity of setting objects in such a light that they may affect others with the same ideas, associations, and feelings, with which the artist is affected.”<sup>148</sup> The enlivenment of the artistic genius is not limited to the genius’s experience; indeed, it is the function of the artistic genius to enable others to experience that same enlivenment. Taste, as the faculty for receiving and appreciating that beauty, has now become the capacity for *interpreting the communicative expression of the artistic genius*.

Diametrically opposed to this is the necessity for taste to enable the presence of genius as Gerard posits in 1758; instead, the associative imagination becomes the requisite condition. Gerard is not abstruse about the imagination’s role for genius: “It is imagination that produces genius” and “genius of every kind derives its immediate origin from the imagination.”<sup>149</sup> It does so principally “by the tendency which it has to associate different perceptions, so that one of them being present, it may introduce others to our view without our being conscious of any design or our needing any effort to call them up,” a process understood as the associative power of assembling ideas.<sup>150</sup> Thus,

Diligence and acquired abilities may assist or improve genius, but it is only a vigorous imagination that can produce it. Whenever mere labour is substituted in the place of this, it can but mimic genius: the work will always bear evident traces of unnatural force and awkward straining.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 422.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 37, 38.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 241.

A vigorous imagination capable of assembling ideas in new combinations, not an underlying faculty of critical taste, is unequivocally the essential component for genius.

Taste, as unprecedented in the aesthetic tradition, is cast in a subsidiary light in Gerard's 1774 essay. While imagination produces genius, taste and the other intellectual faculties merely "lend their assistance to rear the offspring of imagination to maturity."<sup>152</sup> Flexibility of imagination has the potential to enable genius, but because it "will be often led by slight and incidental associations, to suggest ideas which, when canvassed by judgment, are discovered to be foreign and improper," it is also at risk for creating fools if not combined with taste.<sup>153</sup> Taste thus operates only as an attendant to genius.

However, it must not be misunderstood that this supports Gerard's 1758 view that genius *needs* taste for its existence; indeed, this is the key transformation in Gerard's conception of genius from 1758 to 1774 that in turn helps explain how aesthetic theory was able to annex genius. I previously established that in 1758, Gerard's genius needed taste as a composite part. However, in 1774 the landscape of genius has reversed: Gerard now claims that "A bright and vigorous imagination...will produce genius, incorrect, it may be, but fertile and extensive."<sup>154</sup> On the other hand,

the nicest judgment unattended with a good imagination, cannot bestow a single spark of genius. It will form good sense, it will enable

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 81, 236.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 39.

a man to perceive every defect and error in the discoveries of others; but it cannot qualify him for supplying these defects, or for being himself the author of any new invention.<sup>155</sup>

As a result of the differences between the faculties, “A man of mere judgment, is essentially different from a man of genius. The former can employ his reason only on subjects that are provided by others; but the latter can provide subjects for himself.”<sup>156</sup> Taste is useful for the genius in order to tame and edit the work of the genius. However by 1774, Gerard claims that “Without judgment, imagination would be extravagant; but without imagination, judgment could do nothing.”<sup>157</sup> Taste is merely *beneficial* to genius while it is *nullified* without genius, demonstrating an underlying but fundamental shift in the theoretical foundation of Gerard’s conceptions about genius between 1758 and 1774.

This fundamental transformation in Gerard’s thought has consequences for both taste and genius that resonate throughout aesthetic theory. By hinting at a fusion between genius and taste, establishing genius as operable in realms beyond objects of taste, and then relegating taste’s actuality to be dependent on the precondition of genius, Gerard effectively changes the fundamental tenets of aesthetic theory as understood in Britain in the eighteenth century. Whereas aesthetics had previously been concerned with describing how taste critiques beauty in nature and art, Gerard changes taste to be solely dependent on beauty created by the human agent of production,

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 39.

or the genius. In order for aesthetic theory to remain a viable field, it thus necessitates the incorporation of the genius. While British theory necessitates this incorporation, it will only be realized by Kant. The next chapter will use Kant as an example of British influence to further evidence the role of genius in British aesthetics and to explore the ramifications of the required aesthetic annex of genius.

## Chapter Four

### A Kantian Illustration

"I openly confess, the suggestion of David Hume was the very thing, which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber, and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy quite a new direction."<sup>158</sup>

"We have all heard, perhaps rather too often, that it was Hume who awoke Kant from dogmatic slumber..."<sup>159</sup>

Traversing to the continent and looking at an influential German's aesthetics further substantiates the view that genius was not present in eighteenth-century British aesthetic theory, despite becoming increasingly necessary to sustain the field. While Kant is perhaps most well-known for his *Critique of Reason*, his aesthetic work, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, is often considered *the* defining text for aesthetic theory. In addition, he wrote a short aesthetic work titled *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* in 1763 that illustrates his younger views. If convinced of the British roots of Kant's

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<sup>158</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Paul Carus (Chicago : Open Court Pub. Co.: London, 1902).

<sup>159</sup> E. F. Carritt, "The Sources and Effects in England of Kant's Philosophy of Beauty," *The Monist* 35, no. 2 (1925).

aesthetic writings, his two aesthetic works operate as proof of the changing British emphasis on genius. In this chapter, I first suggest that a close reading for his use of genius indicates that it was not a topic central to aesthetic theory when Kant was writing *Observations* in 1763, but had become necessary to include by the time he published the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in 1790. This inclusion has drastic consequences for the idea of genius. Kant annexes genius so fully into his aesthetics that he has relegated it to being a dependent subtheme. However, in the process, he grants an unprecedented socially pragmatic role to the genius by limiting it to artistic production.<sup>160</sup>

### **The British Influence on Kant**

It requires little mental strain to find evidence of British aesthetic theory influencing Kant's aesthetics. The relationship is well-established in aesthetic historiography.<sup>161</sup> Despite Kant's inability to read English, he was well-versed

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<sup>160</sup> Using Kant as a test case to illustrate my argument is fundamentally troublesome. As Zammito points out, "Kant could not read English. That makes the question of Kant's assimilation of the British Enlightenment problematic on the most basic level." The complications with using Kant do not end there either: writing in German, Kant's terminology in translation cannot be blanketed as identical to English terms; due to the plethora of Kant's writings, I have been forced to limit myself to predominantly dealing with his two explicitly aesthetic works, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1763) and *The Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), which risks ignoring his use of genius in other texts that illuminate steps in the transformation of his aesthetic use of genius; finally, the two works I use, *Observations* and the third *Critique* cannot merely be seen as an evolution of one philosophic problem for Kant, but rather as an indication of an overall systematic transformation of his theoretical approach, a transformation that could have had greater influence on his transfigured use of genius than the changing British thought did. However, as Kant's aesthetics has become seminal to the field of aesthetic theory and his British influences have been well-established in extant scholarship, I maintain his usefulness in serving as external evidence for British transformations in thought as diffused through the works they influenced.

<sup>161</sup> For more thorough proof of his familiarity, see: Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*.

with British thought.<sup>162</sup> The similarity of thematic topics and theoretical resolutions in British and Kantian aesthetic theory has resulted in an academic convention where “few modern interpreters would dispute the importance of British thinkers for the Kant of the 1760s.”<sup>163</sup>

How exactly that influence manifested itself has proved more controversial, with contrary claims spanning the extremes. From one perspective appears the position that Kant “borrowed little from the writings of his predecessors.”<sup>164</sup> From the other are scholars who contend that there are “few original ideas in Kant’s aesthetic” and that, rather, he merely “systematized and hardened distinctions and oppositions current in English for the preceding eighty years.”<sup>165</sup> Perhaps the most convincing opinion remains the intermediate view that “the truth is somewhere between these extremes.”<sup>166</sup> This argument applies not just to aesthetics broadly but directly to the genius, with one scholar representatively arguing that:

...we may remark that hardly any of Kant's ideas on genius may be called original in its superficial cultural formulation...Yet, the particular choice and assemblage made by Kant from the often diverging traits of genius in the theory of genius as stated by his contemporaries, must be accounted for on the basis of Kant's personal development and cannot be explained by a simple statistical polling of the prevalent traits given it in his milieu. Furthermore, the systematic structure given by Kant both to the whole and to each one of such traits goes, in its

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<sup>162</sup> His lecture notes indicate that this familiarity extended to French and German writers on aesthetics as well as British, yet the focus here remains on the British. Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics (II)," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13, no. 1 (1952). 42.

<sup>163</sup> Zammuto, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*. 29.

<sup>164</sup> J.H. Bernard in the introductory essay to Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. J.H. Bernard, Hafner Library of Classics (New York: Hafner Pub. Co., 1951).

<sup>165</sup> Carritt, "The Sources and Effects in England of Kant's Philosophy of Beauty."

<sup>166</sup> Gracyk, "Kant's Shifting Debt to British Aesthetics."

depth, very far beyond that of his contemporaries and is mainly original.<sup>167</sup>

Kant undeniably appropriated British themes when constructing his aesthetics. If this is not made transparent within the theory, it is merely a result of contemporary conventions where "In his own day these sources, and others like them, would be so familiar to most readers that to acknowledge them specifically, even had it been the custom of the time, would be unnecessary."<sup>168</sup> Whatever perspective is taken on precisely how Kant utilizes the influence of British theory, it remains clear that whether or not Kant posits original *arguments* about the thematic content of his aesthetic theory, the thematic content itself is unequivocally British.

An extensive effort to trace British genealogies of Kantian ideas would be gratuitous to prove my argument but it is nevertheless pertinent to verify that other scholars have demonstrated that such a genealogy is possible. After investigating such roots, one scholar claims that "in 1763 Kant was... a disciple of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson,"<sup>169</sup> a claim corroborated by another scholar's insistence that Hutcheson was "one of Kant's favorite authors."<sup>170</sup> Another propounds the sway of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume as of paramount leverage.<sup>171</sup> Irrespective of what specific influences these scholars suggest, what the reader should take away is that there is extant scholarship

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<sup>167</sup> Tonelli, "Early Theory of Genius (1770-1779)."

<sup>168</sup> Carritt, "The Sources and Effects in England of Kant's Philosophy of Beauty."

<sup>169</sup> Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy; Kant and His Predecessors* (Cambridge: Mass., Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969).

<sup>170</sup> Carritt, "The Sources and Effects in England of Kant's Philosophy of Beauty." 317.

<sup>171</sup> James Meredith in the introductory essay to Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, ed. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

finding ample evidence for constructing genealogies of Kantian theory in British thought. However, the intention of this chapter is not to prove that the British influenced Kant; rather, the intention it is to make an argument about what that influence indicates.

I do not want to bore the reader by overstating redundant evidence that British aesthetics influenced Kant, thus the remarks here should be sufficient to demonstrate the general acceptance of that influence. With the existence of British influence accepted, it becomes possible to do a textual analysis of Kant's work to discern how he uses genius in order to illustrate the overall prevalence of the idea of genius at two moments in the eighteenth century, namely using the *Observations* of 1763 as indicative of its minimal mid-century presence and the *Critique* of 1790 as an example of later demands for its incorporation.

### *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*

Kant's first work identified as aesthetic theory *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1763) provides useful leverage as a counterpoint to the later and more-renowned *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) for regarding the role of genius in aesthetic theory. The work, cited as "the epitome of Kant's pre-Critical thought," is his only work devoted to the "feeling of the

beautiful and sublime” other than the third *Critique*.<sup>172</sup> *Observations*, however, is characteristically distinct from the *Critique*, both in content and form.

*Observations* focuses on beauty and sublimity as manifested in man, thus delineating a type of moral psychology as opposed to a characteristic found in nature or art. Influence of British theory is immediately thematically evident in the title’s parallel to Burke’s *Inquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*.<sup>173</sup> Divided into four sections, Kant addresses (1) “the distinct objects of the feeling of the beautiful and sublime,” (2) “the attributes of the beautiful and sublime in man in general,” (3) “the distinction of the beautiful and sublime in the interrelations of the two sexes,” and (4) “national characteristics so far as they depend upon the distinct feeling of the beautiful and sublime.” These section headings, like the phrasing “objects of the *feeling* of the beautiful” as opposed to “objects of beauty,” illustrate an emphasis both on exploring how beauty and sublimity are exhibited in man as well as on the basis for beauty and sublimity being a feeling they evoke in a subject, not a characteristic intrinsic to an object. The *Observations*, while classified as an aesthetic work, is more entrenched in the psychology of man’s beauty than either British aesthetics or Kant’s later aesthetic work.

The term “taste” as it is used in *Observations* must be interpreted as unrelated to the taste of both British theory and Kant’s later theory. Taste terminologically is used here merely in the sense of having a liking or

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<sup>172</sup> John Goldthwait in the introductory essay to Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait, 2nd paperback ed. (Berkeley, Calif.: London, 2003). 1.

<sup>173</sup> This influence is cited as originating from an essay on Burke by Mendelssohn.

preference for something. For example, one can have a “taste for something because it is very *artful* and laborious—verses that can be read both forward and backwards, riddles, clocks in finger rings, flea chains, and so on,” or for something because it is “rare—Epictetus’ lamp, a glove of King Charles the Twelfth.”<sup>174</sup> This is not the taste of British aesthetic theory defined as a faculty of mind for judging beauty.

Nevertheless, Kant is irrefutably engaged with the same idea of taste used in British aesthetics and the apparent incompatibility is merely terminological. In *Observations*, Kant ascribes the term “finer feeling” to the idea that the British refer to as “taste.” Finer feeling is “chiefly of two kinds: the feeling of the *sublime* and that of the *beautiful*.”<sup>175</sup> This definition is bracketed with British thinkers as early as 1711, with Addison’s definition of fine taste as that which is able to discern beauty in a work with pleasure and imperfections with dislike, and as recent as Burke’s suggestion that taste is “affected with, or [forms] a judgment of the work of imagination and the elegant arts.”<sup>176</sup> Additionally, noting that “even if the mind is not completely without a univocal finer feeling, the degree of its sensitivity are still very different” reminds of Hume’s argument for variability in taste based on education opportunity for refining its degree of sensitivity.<sup>177</sup> Perhaps the strongest evidence for “fine feeling” being analogous to taste is found in a footnote:

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<sup>174</sup> Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*. 71.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>176</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. 39.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

One will see that a true fineness of feeling is counted as a merit in a man. If someone can down a good dinner of meat or sweets, and then sleep incomparably well, we will indeed count it as a sign of good digestion, but not as a merit. On the other hand, whoever can devote a part of his mealtime to listening to a piece of music or can absorb himself in a pleasant diversion with a painting, or who likes to read some witty piece even if it be only a poetical trifle, has in almost everyone's eyes the position of a more refined man, of whom one has a more favorable and laudatory opinion.<sup>178</sup>

Kant uses fineness of feeling to refer to those elements similarly regarded as components of taste in British aesthetic writings. The thematic aesthetic topic of taste, terminologically identified as fine feeling for Kant, is thus unambiguously present in *Observations*. Deriving directly from British aesthetic theory, this presence is sufficient evidence that Kant's pre-Critical aesthetic work engaged specifically with this major aspect of British aesthetic theory.<sup>179</sup>

In contrast to the undeniable role of taste in *Observations*, the idea of the genius is notably absent, indicating either that Kant intentionally chose to ignore it despite being a topic of interest in the works influencing him or that genius was not, in fact, a topic in those influences. The three references to genius in *Observations* are sparse enough to address on a quote-by-quote basis:

(1) "*The Italian genius has distinguished itself especially in music, painting, sculpture, and architecture.*"<sup>180</sup> Genius here is used in the common eighteenth-century sense of "talent" or "natural predisposition for greatness." This usage

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>179</sup> Additionally, maintaining that we can "compare the dispositions of men, so far as one of these three kinds of [fine] feeling governs in them and determines moral character... [and] find that each one of them stands in a closer relation with some one of the temperaments as ordinarily classified," (*Observations*, 62) Kant harkens to Hutcheson expounding that individual taste will be determined by an inborn composition of the internal sense. For more on Hutcheson, see the appendix.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 98.

is colloquial enough that it should be ignored for the purposes of an argument about philosophically significant changing roles of genius.

(2) *“The taste of the Dutch nation for a painful order and a grace that stirs one to solicitude and embarrassment causes one to expect little feeling also in regard to the inartificial and free movements of the genius, whose beauty would only be deformed by the anxious prevention of faults.”*<sup>181</sup> This use of genius points to the idea of genius that is fully developed in the genius tradition, specifically by its emphasis on free movement that is hindered by education, indicating that Kant was aware of the intellectual sphere of discourse surrounding this type of genius.

Relegating his discussion of this idea of genius to only one sentence of slight importance to the overall argument of the work, however, actually further testifies to his lack of acknowledgment of this idea of genius as a main theme of his work, which remains the finer feeling’s experience of beauty and sublimity.

(3) *“The loftiest flight that human genius made, in order to ascend to the sublime, took the form of adventures...Finally, after the human genius has happily raised itself anew from an almost complete destruction by a palingenesis, as it were, in our own days we see the sound taste of the beautiful and noble blossoming forth both in the arts and sciences and in respect to morals.”*<sup>182</sup> The notion of genius performing “lofty flight” propelling culture to beauty and nobility strongly predicts the view of genius Kant expands in the *Third Critique*. While not fully addressed until *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, the germs of this conception are clearly sown here.

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 114-115.

However, once again, the idea of genius is merely touched upon. While his brief “exposition of genius takes its terms from the ‘conventional wisdom,’” genius has not become problematic enough within aesthetics to require Kant to further expand on the topic.<sup>183</sup> The presence of this notion of genius references already established thoughts on genius from Sharpe and Young. By not exploring the topic, Kant contends that genius is not yet a topic within the terrain of aesthetic theory.

The *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* verifies that genius is not a major topic for Kant’s aesthetic theory in 1763. Due to the proven British influence on this work, such an absence signifies that genius was also not a topic in British aesthetic theory at the time. Rather, current scholarship identifies both the British aesthetic tradition and Kant’s early aesthetic work as aesthetic writings because they engage with themes of taste and the subjective experience of beauty and sublimity. The role of the agent of artistic production, even in a work particularly focused on the individual subject, does not contribute to defining their aesthetics. However, almost three decades later in *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant remodels his aesthetic landscape to fully annex genius under aesthetic theory, a transition that sheds light on why aesthetic historians insist on claiming that the genius was a major theme in eighteenth-century aesthetics.

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<sup>183</sup> James Meredith in the introductory essay to Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*.

### *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*

By 1790, Kant had changed from the youthful observer of 1763. Not only had his systematic form evolved, the content of his aesthetic theory was notably distinct from his pre-Critical aesthetic work. Instead of engaging with beauty and sublimity as moral psychology, the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* establishes an elaborate system of aesthetic theory dealing with subjective feelings of beauty and sublimity and the mental faculties. In contrast to *Observations*, the third *Critique* has fully appropriated the genius as a central theme in aesthetic theory.

The need to prove that genius is a major philosophic problem in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is almost superfluous due to its palpable presence. A mere survey of the section headings indicate a substantial engagement with genius: §46: Beautiful Art is the Art of Genius; §46: Elucidation and Confirmation of the Above Explanation of Genius; §48: Of the Relation of Genius to Taste; §49 Of the Faculties of the Mind that Constitute Genius; §50: Of the Combination of Taste with Genius in the Products of Beautiful Art.

Kant not only inducts genius into aesthetics, he does so in a way that attributes pragmatic ends to fine art that are only achievable through the genius. This original development in Kant's aesthetics was enabled by the metamorphosis of British aesthetic theory that demanded an agent of artistic production. Here, I analyze Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* to argue that an unrivaled social role for the genius is evident in his text. This interpretation

will demonstrate not only the incorporation of genius, but also the ramifications for the role of genius in response to the British demand for an agent of production in aesthetic theory.

My argument first defines fine art in order to establish that the identification of fine art is based on its ends and that those ends are socially pragmatic. I then establish the relationship of the genius to fine art as the only one capable of advancing fine art's practical social ends. This relationship leads me to conclude that the genius alone allows for life to earn value by virtue of enabling the communication of sensation. Such a role of the genius is unimaginable in previous British thought, however it is nonetheless a direct product of that tradition.

### Fine Art Defined

In order to interpret Kant's definition of fine art, it must be understood that art is limited to the production of man. He defines art generally as "production through freedom" and emphasizes the "capacity for choice that grounds its actions in reason" as the prerequisite factor distinguishing art from nature.<sup>184</sup> This capacity for choice must be based on rules. As a result of basing the distinction for art in reason, all art must "always be understood a work of human beings" as the only beings capable of such choices.<sup>185</sup> This general definition of art immediately precludes science and handicraft. Not

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<sup>184</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant; Variation: Kant, Immanuel; 1724-1804.; Works.; English.; 1992. (New York, 2000). S43, 182.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, §43, 183.

content with this level of exclusivity, however, Kant proceeds to further pare down his qualifications for fine art.

Kant redefines the general category of ‘art’ by stipulating two broad sub-categories: mechanical art and aesthetic art. While mechanical art is distinguished from handicraft by virtue of possessing spirit, it nevertheless “merely performs the actions requisite to make it actual” without having “the feeling of pleasure as its immediate aim.”<sup>186</sup> Such works of mechanical art are based on a clear and determinate concept of what is to be produced. Examples of mechanical art could be any artifice as purposeful action, such as the production of illustrations or portraits that, while requiring a certain level of technical ability on the part of the artist, are created not to evoke pleasurable responses but to represent some definite event or individual.

Kant’s definition of the second category of art, aesthetic art, to be art that is produced with the immediate aim of inciting the feeling of pleasure, is dependent on the existence of differing ends for the work. Aesthetic art is further sub-divided into two narrower categories: agreeable art and fine art. Agreeable art is art which is produced in order to elicit feelings of pleasure but only in so far as “that pleasure accompany the representations as mere sensations.”<sup>187</sup> This genre of art aims “merely at enjoyment; of this kind are all those charms that can gratify the company at a table, such as telling entertaining stories, getting the company talking in an open and lively manner,

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., §44, 184.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., §44, 184.

[and] creating by means of jokes and laughter a certain tone of merriment.”<sup>188</sup>

Agreeable art is practically beneficial because it encourages pleasant experience, yet it does not advance the mental faculties or induce the free play associated with beauty. That effect is reserved for works of fine art.

As opposed to mechanical and agreeable art, Kant sets fine art apart by attributing cognitive, not just pleasurable, ends.<sup>189</sup> Indeed, fine art’s demarcating criteria is that “its end is that [pleasure] accompany [the representations] as kinds of cognition.”<sup>190</sup> While agreeable arts “involve no interest beyond that of making time pass unnoticed,” fine art, in contrast, “is a kind of representation that is purposive in itself and, though without an end, nevertheless promotes the cultivation of the mental powers for sociable communication.”<sup>191</sup> Mere “production through freedom” is not enough to constitute fine art; that production must have its basis in the reflective power of cognition in order to qualify as this most elite category of art.<sup>192</sup>

Two themes from this definition of fine art ought to be reiterated before continuing the analysis. First, Kant is distinguishing between the various categories of art primarily by dint of their ends. While still maintaining that art is intrinsically devoid of an end, he is lending enough primacy on the extrinsic ends that they can serve as a solid base to define categorization.

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., §44, 184.

<sup>189</sup> In the Guyer translation, he uses the term “beautiful art” where other translators have used “fine art.” I have chosen to use the term fine art in my analysis but retain his use of beautiful art in quotes from the text. The reader should thus acknowledge that fine art and beautiful art should be understood as one and the same.

<sup>190</sup> Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. S44, 184.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., §44, 185.

<sup>192</sup> For more on Kant’s conception of fine art, see Paul Guyer, “Kant’s Conception of Fine Art,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52, no. 3 (1994).

Second, the specific ends of fine art are cognitive with practical ends. Such ends not only “promote the cultivation of the mental powers,” but also do this for the express purpose of “sociable communication.” The pragmatic social implications of this are unprecedented but were hinted at in Burke and Gerard.

### The Genius’s Relation to Fine Art

Kant flaunts the close association of genius and fine art to the extent that he limits fine art to genius. A survey of §46 suffices to glean ample evidence of this, starting with the title of the section: “Beautiful art is the art of genius.” Kant defines genius here in its simplest form as “the talent (natural gift) that gives the rule to art” and clarifies that such a talent should be understood as “the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art.”<sup>193</sup> From the outset he asserts that genius is an innate faculty and relegates it solely to the realm of artistic production.

If all art has a rule as its basis, it may seem as though genius provides this rule to all art without a particular relationship with fine art, but Kant’s rule for fine art is peculiar in its basis in method of expression. Art in all categories requires a rule as its base: “without a preceding rule a product can never be called art.”<sup>194</sup> However, fine art is unique in that it “does not allow the judgment concerning the beauty of its product to be derived from any sort of rule that has a concept for its determining ground, and thus has as its

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<sup>193</sup> Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. §46, 186.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.* §46, 186.

ground a concept of how it is possible.”<sup>195</sup> In other words, the rule for fine art must be for defining the way it is made possible, or the method of expression of the work. Genius, as naturally capable of providing this rule, thus becomes the talent for providing *new methods of expression*. Fine art is the only category that requires its rules to be indeterminate and based in the method of expression. Therefore it is the only category of art in which the genius is applicable. Genius gives the rules to fine art and as a result “beautiful art is possible only as a product of genius.”<sup>196</sup>

Kant resolves the problem of originality by relegating the name fine art to only those works of genius that contain such a rule. His first clause of genius is that it “is a talent for producing that for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition of skill for that which can be learned in accordance with some rule, and therefore “originality must be its primary characteristic.”<sup>197</sup> Defining the genius as capable of giving the rule to art necessitates that this rule be originally produced by the genius, removing the possibility of genius residing in any application of solely imitative learning. Fine arts are the art of genius; the genius however, is defined not merely by producing works of art but by producing the rule governing art, or the method of expression. The implication of this is that only works that reflect an original method of expression can be considered works of genius and therefore works of fine art.

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., §46, 186.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., §46, 186.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., §46, 186.

Kant's notion of exemplariness is crucial for interpreting his explanation of schools of art and imitation in art. Kant concedes that the products of genius "must at the same time be models, i.e., exemplary, hence, while not themselves the result of imitation, they must yet serve others in that way, i.e., as a standard or a rule for judging."<sup>198</sup> This explains why movements in art are prevalent. When the genius derives a new rule for producing art, "his example for other good minds give rise to a school, i.e., a methodical instruction in accordance with rules" which imitate the exemplary work of fine art produced by the genius.<sup>199</sup> These works of imitation that fit into a school following a prederived rule or method of expression are, however, not products of the genius because they are not originally furnishing their own rule. To the extent that they are works of art, they are still dependent on the genius for providing the rule to which they adhere, albeit in an indirect manner by following the genius's rule as an example. Art can only be successfully viewed as fine art if done "without showing any sign that the rule has hovered before the eyes of the artist and fettered his mental powers,"<sup>200</sup> a taste difficult to execute if abiding by the conventions of a school of art. Imitation is useful in fine art to convey aesthetic ideas, but the work of genius is an elite primordial iteration of art that is truly creative by virtue of producing a new method of expression.

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., §46, 186-7.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., §49, 196.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., §45, 186.

It can thus be argued that Kant contends that it is the genius's responsibility to increase the methods of expression available to the rest of humanity. At first, these methods of expression are derived specifically for the communication of aesthetic ideas. Kant defines such aesthetic ideas as "a representation of the imagination associated with a given concept, which is combined with such a manifold of partial representations in the free use of the imagination that no expression designating a determinate concept can be found for it, which therefore allows the addition to a concept of much that is unnameable," or in other words a concept with so many incidental associations that it cannot be easily resolved into a determinate idea.<sup>201</sup> The term "expression" itself is bracketed with the aesthetic idea, as it emphasizes the relationship of the vehicle of communication with the specific content, or aesthetic idea, that it is especially suitable for conveying.<sup>202</sup> In Kant's words,

Thus genius really consists in the happy relation, which no science can teach and no diligence learn, of finding ideas for a given concept on the one hand and on the other hitting upon the expression for these, through which the subjective disposition of the mind that is thereby produced, as an accompaniment or a concept, can be communicated to others.<sup>203</sup>

Genius requires both superior access to the content of aesthetic ideas and to the creation of the form that is especially successful at expressing that content in order to communicate it to others.

The work of genius is produced for its suitability of conveying specific aesthetic ideas as accomplished through fine art; nevertheless, it is a short leap

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., §49, 194.

<sup>202</sup> Again, this relationship is well-glossed in Guyer, "Kant's Conception of Fine Art."

<sup>203</sup> Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. §49, 194-5.

to realize that these methods of communication are then disseminated throughout human communication to convey all types of concepts and sensations. This is easily seen when looking at the kinds of fine art Kant delineates in his division of the arts, namely “the art of speech, pictorial art, and the art of the play of sensations.”<sup>204</sup> While speech initially exists as an example of fine art in rhetoric and poetry, the use of language created by such art is then diffused into daily communication without “the feeling of pleasure as its immediate aim” that is thus not aesthetic art. Language is perhaps the most commonly used method of expression employed specifically for communication, a commonality that mimics Kant’s hierarchy which claims that the “art of poetry (which owes its origins almost entirely to genius, and will be guided least by precept or example) claims the highest rank of all.”<sup>205</sup>

The genius, while initially defined by Kant as the “talent that gives the rule to art,” must be reevaluated to be defined as the talent for giving the rule to sociable communication broadly. The genius creates methods of expression for conveying aesthetic ideas in fine art. Fine art is then imitated and reproduced by following the rules provided by the genius. Eventually, these imitations of fine art lose the primary aim of aesthetic art, inciting the feeling of pleasure, and instead serve first as communication, not the evocation of pleasure. Kantian scholars who claim that Kant adamantly does not provide a pragmatic end for the role of genius or fine art may refute such

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., §51, 197.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., §53, 203.

an argument. The following exploration of the ends of art, however, aims to convince that this implication is overtly present in the text of the *Critique*.

#### End of Fine Art: Social Communication

Despite the title of this section, it must be established from the outset that Kant does not believe that there is an intrinsic end or interest to art. Taste, as “the faculty for judging *a priori* the communicability of the feelings that are combined with a given representation (without the mediation of a concept)” must “have no interest for its determining ground.”<sup>206</sup> However, while art has no intrinsic interest as its determining ground, or the reason for its existence, that does not preclude the possibility for indirect combinations of extrinsic interest bound up in art.

Kant makes it clear that such associated ends for art are not merely incidental. Indeed, he makes these ends the defining factor when determining categories of art, thereby revealing that these associated ends are integral to the understanding of art beyond the most general sense. In the case of fine art, one such extrinsic interest is social communication.

Kant constructs a powerful connection between fine art and communication, indicating an unprecedented emphasis on sociability as a pragmatic aim of art. The interest in communication in society is explicated when Kant defines fine art: “Beautiful art, by contrast, is a kind of representation that is purposive in itself and, though without an end,

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., §40-41, 176.

nevertheless promotes the cultivation of the mental powers for sociable communication.”<sup>207</sup> While clarifying that this refinement of the cognitive faculties in the interest of social communication is not an *end* for art, it is an associated interest for art. In response to the previous analysis concluding that genius is responsible for enabling fine art and, further, that genius lies in the talent of producing new methods of expression, Kant’s assertion that fine art “promotes the cultivation of the mental powers for sociable communication” signifies that the genius’s production is also done in the interests of sociable communication.<sup>208</sup>

The limited reference between genius, fine art, and the primacy of communication can only be explained in context of Kant’s views on universal communicability. In the context of the genius, Kant limits himself in explicit associations between genius and the primacy of communication. However, when evaluating the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* as a whole, the idea of universal communicability permeates the work. Kant contends that “the drive to society is admitted to be natural to human beings, while the suitability and the tendency towards it, i.e., sociability, are admitted to be necessary for human beings as creatures destined for society,” clearly indicating that he believes society instinctive for humanity.<sup>209</sup> Humanity is naturally intended to crave and organize itself into society. It is reasonable to evaluate the natural faculties and talents of humanity in terms of such a primal inclination.

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., §44, 185.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., §44, 185.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., §41, 176.

According to Kant, without the social community, there would be no use for beauty or its production. Kant expands on the human inclination towards society in order to propose that taste, as the faculty for judging fine art, “should also be regarded as a faculty for judging everything by means of which one can communicate even his feeling to everyone else.”<sup>210</sup> It is society that creates the need for art to utilize methods of expression to communicate ideas:

For himself alone a human being abandoned on a desert island would not adorn either his hut or himself, nor seek out or still less plant flowers in order to decorate himself; rather, only in society does it occur to him to be not merely a human being but also, in his own way, a refined human being (the beginning of civilization).<sup>211</sup>

Without society, there would be no need to advance the culture of the beautiful. On the other hand “this is how we judge someone who is inclined to communicate his pleasure to others and is skilled at it, and who is not content with an object if he cannot feel his satisfaction in it in community with others.”<sup>212</sup> It is in the desire to communicate one’s own feelings of pleasure to others in a community that humanity derives its inclination towards the production of beauty, which in turn leads to the production of fine art. With no community, there is no need for production of fine art because fine art is relevant only in the extent to which it is able to communicate socially.

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., §41, 176.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., §41, 177.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., §41, 177.

Kant contends that it is sensation that requires communication, a claim that depends on his definition of sensation. Sensation is used as a counterpoint to cognition throughout the work and comes closest to being defined as “the merely subjective aspect of our representations of things outside us...[which] expresses the material (the real) in them (through which something existing is given).”<sup>213</sup> Sensation is explicitly identified by Kant as “the real in perception” and thus takes on a pivotal role to the individual’s experience of empirical reality.<sup>214</sup>

The primacy of the genius is thus only understood in terms of Kant’s claim that communication is required in order to confer value to the individual’s experience of sensation. In Kant’s words, “sensations have value only to the extent that they may be universally communicated.”<sup>215</sup> Man experiencing sensations of the world without a neighboring hut with which to share it lives an existence devoid of value. On the other hand, when society enables it, “the idea of [a sensation’s] universal communicability almost infinitely increases its value.”<sup>216</sup> This explains why each individual for Kant “expects and requires of everyone else a regard to universal communication, as if from an original contract dictated by humanity itself.”<sup>217</sup> Society demands communication of subjective sensation in order to infuse value to

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., Introduction, Pt. VII, 75.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., §39, 171. Sensation is dealt with more thoroughly in Kant’s other Critical works.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., §41, 177.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., §41, 177.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., §41, 177.

the individual's experience; this communication is only advanced through the operation of the genius.

It is explicit in the text that Kant requires universal communicability via communication within a society in order to bestow value on life. The implication of this is that the genius, or the individual capable of producing new methods of expression, is also the individual capable of providing life with value. This is accomplished through producing new methods of expression in the work of fine art.

## **Conclusion**

Kant's theory of genius is not only philosophically problematic in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, I argue that it has become present to such an extent that it is integral to the overall understanding of aesthetics and sociable communication. Kant's use of genius is different from both the genius tradition and the aesthetic tradition of the British in the eighteenth century. Genius has certainly become a major theme addressed in his aesthetics, as contrasted to the scarcity of serious attention it earns in British aesthetics. However, it is annexed so fully that it is a subtheme to his aesthetics more broadly, which distinguishes his use from the British tradition that contends with genius as a topic worthy of its own field.

Kant is able to make this conceptual induction of genius into aesthetics because he has limited the genius to being the agent of production specifically for fine art. It is this limitation that I suggest was enabled by the

prerequisites constructed by British aesthetic theory. Whereas previous theories of genius had consistently maintained that the genius was applicable to a variety of fields, Kant swiftly relegates genius to producing the method of expression for fine art and fine art alone. Incidentally, such a conception of the genius meets aesthetic theory's demand to incorporate an agent of production. However, by limiting the genius to being the agent of artistic production, the concept of the genius simultaneously expands to incorporate unprecedented socially pragmatic ends.

When noting that this prevalence of genius is absent from Kant's earlier aesthetic work *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, it becomes apparent that the theme of genius did not become central to his aesthetic theory until late in the 1700s. As Kant was thematically-influenced by the British aesthetic writings of his time, this forces a reevaluation of the conventional acceptance of genius as a topic equitable to taste, beauty, and sublimity in eighteenth-century British aesthetic theory. Such a reevaluation requires further corroboration of the changing conception of genius in Kantian aesthetics as it related to British aesthetics.

Addison's writings on imagination and genius demonstrate that Kant selectively adopted topics from the British based on which themes he understood as appropriate to the aesthetic realm. In 1712, Addison published his essay "On the Pleasures of the Imagination" dealing extensively with the development of fine taste through the imagination. The work is standardly cited as propelling the trajectory of aesthetic thought through Britain and into

Germany, with the conventional encyclopedic summary proceeding as follows:

In the eighteenth century, however, an alternative response to Plato was introduced, namely, the idea that our response to beauty, whether in nature or in art, is a free play of our mental powers that is intrinsically pleasurable, and thus needs no epistemological or moral justification, although it may in fact have epistemological and moral benefits. This line of thought was introduced in Britain in Joseph Addison's 1712 *Spectator* essays on "The Pleasures of the Imagination," and developed by subsequent Scottish writers such as Francis Hutcheson, Henry Home (Lord Kames), and Alexander Gerard. It was only slowly received in Germany ... but then quickly [became] central to the aesthetic theories of Kant and Schiller in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) and the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* (1795).<sup>218</sup>

What is clear is that Addison's essay established imagination and its role in our response to beauty as a major theme in aesthetic theory at the beginning of the eighteenth century and that this served as an influence to ensuing thought leading to Kant.

To offset this, Addison's essay on genius in *The Spectator*, appearing in the previous year, 1711, reveals that genius did not become comparably relevant in Kant's aesthetic theory of 1763. The adjacent publication dates indicate that the ideas of taste-based aesthetics and genius were available to the public discourse at the same moment. *The Spectator* had been translated into German by 1745 and each essay would have been available to Kant when writing the *Observations* of 1763. While the ideas of the response to beauty and its moral or epistemological benefits are clear in this pre-Critical aesthetic work, the genius does not have a central role. Similarly, theories with taste as

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<sup>218</sup> Paul Guyer, "18th Century German Aesthetics," Stanford University, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetics-18th-german/>.

the central question of aesthetics continue to be developed in Britain while the idea of the genius fails to be philosophically addressed within these theories. This neglect provides strong evidence that genius was not on the landscape of British aesthetic theory.

Despite the tendency of British aesthetic historian to ignore this distinction of genius in aesthetics, scholars of Kant's aesthetics, in part, acknowledge the late incorporation. In one scholar's words, "the issue of 'genius' did not become philosophically significant for Kant until the 1770s, the related issue of 'imagination' did, a good deal earlier."<sup>219</sup> Another scholar notes, "Before 1770 Kant rarely uses the term *genius*. The corresponding notion has not yet a clearly defined place in his theories about the 'empirical psychology' (or 'anthropology') and 'aesthetics.'"<sup>220</sup> Paul Guyer specifically corroborates my argument that Gerard was a key figure in this transition, claiming that "the discussion of genius was considerably enlarged after the 1776 German translation of Alexander Gerard's *Essay on Genius* on 1774."<sup>221</sup>

The attempts scholars make to trace specific influences of Kant's theory of genius often cite British aesthetic theory. This indicates a teleological excavation for ideas not yet present in British theory, not a valid basis of genius foundations in these predecessors.<sup>222</sup> Looking at these genealogies of Kant's aesthetic theory reveals that Kant had allowed the

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<sup>219</sup> Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*. 33.

<sup>220</sup> Tonelli, "Early Theory of Genius (1770-1779)." 4.2 109.

<sup>221</sup> Paul Guyer in the introductory essay to: Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. xvi-xvii, fn. 16.

<sup>222</sup> See: James Meredith's introductory essay to: Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*.; Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*.; Tonelli, "Early Theory of Genius (1770-1779)."

British considerable influence, or in on scholar's words, what "is clear, in any event, is that Kant had closely read the existing literatures."<sup>223</sup> Dissecting this claim, however, reveals that the writings identified as influential are predominantly from late in the century or draw from the genius, not aesthetic, tradition of thought. Indeed, one scholar relies on Gerard, Duff, and Young as the most likely sources for Kant's theory of genius; another scholar's substantial genealogy of Kant's idea of genius tries to sort out of a host of sources, French and German as well as English, and does cite Addison, Shaftesbury, and Hume from the earlier portion of the century but traces substantially more specific components to the later theories of Young and, especially, Gerard. Again, this testifies to a valid presence of British influence on Kant's overall aesthetic thought; however, the specific influence of genius as it relates to aesthetics does not factor in until after his 1763 work.

In the interim before publishing his Critical works, Kant's notes indicate how his thoughts about beauty evolve between 1763 and 1790 as they become decreasingly focused on man's moral actions and instead centered on art. Various notes sketched between the 1760s and 1790s contain commentary both hinting at and outlining outright the views he posits in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Overall, these notes include more discourse on art and specifically introduce the genius in the context of arts. He flagrantly predicts the *Third Critique* when he speculates that "All art is either that of instruction and precept or of genius: the former has its *a priori* rules and can

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<sup>223</sup> Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*.

be taught. Fine art is not grounded on any science and is an art of genius.”<sup>224</sup> Additionally, during this interim he has already begun sketching the contours of the fundamental distinction between taste and genius, claiming that “Taste is the basis of [~~crossed out criticism and~~] judging, genius however of execution.”<sup>225</sup> The silhouette of views we garner from these notes, however, has not fully matured. Whereas in the *Critique* he demands that genius be sacrificed for the benefit of taste, in 1769-70, he maintains that unrestrained genius is worthwhile, surmising that while “Taste without genius brings dissatisfaction with oneself. . . in contrast, much genius and little taste brings forth crude yet valuable products.”<sup>226</sup> This useful commentary gives insight into how Kant’s views developed while increasingly revolving around beauty in art.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant’s definition of the contemporary meaning for aesthetics reveals that it was limited to taste. He claims that the German use of the word “aesthetics” applies to what other nationalities, including the British, call “the critique of taste.”<sup>227</sup> Kant’s notes gloss that “the science of the beautiful. . . is an attempt to explain the *phaenomena* of

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<sup>224</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant : Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*, ed. Patrick R. Frierson and Paul Guyer, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy; Variation: Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. (New York, 2011). Note 621 1769? (1764-68?), 308.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., Note 671 1769-70, 317.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., Note 671 1769-70, 317.

<sup>227</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant; Variation: Kant, Immanuel,; 1724-1804.; Works.; English.; 1992. (New York, 1998). 173.

taste.”<sup>228</sup> In a later note he clarifies that if taste is based in beauty, “then no discipline is possible, and even less science, but merely criticism.”<sup>229</sup> On the other hand, production can have a discipline: “Architecture (in the general sense)(the art of horticulture, etc.) is a discipline, likewise music” because they are capable of instruction.<sup>230</sup> Kant defines that “Taste is the basis of judging, genius however of execution.”<sup>231</sup> The discipline of the genius is categorically different than the critique of taste. If aesthetics is the critique of taste, the field is notably distinct from the genius as the agent of execution. By defining aesthetics for the British as the critique of taste and separating taste from genius, Kant makes a strong deposition that genius was not a core issue in eighteenth-century aesthetics.

The confirmed reliance on British influence for both of Kant’s aesthetics works combined with the realization that genius only becomes problematic in the later work confirms that genius was not a major topic of discourse in British sources. In typical fashion however, Kant does more than merely demonstrate an incorporation of genius into aesthetic theory. Indeed, this annex of genius into aesthetics allows Kant to make a new interpretation of fine art that casts the artistic genius as responsible for enabling social communication. By expanding arguments established by British theory and bringing them into new realms with practical and social consequences, Kant

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<sup>228</sup> Kant, *Immanuel Kant : Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*. Note 670 1769-71, 317.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., Note 626 1769? 1765-68? 1771?? 1775-77??, 311-12.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., Note 626 1769? 1765-68? 1771?? 1775-77??, 311-12.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., Note 671 1769-70, 317.

shakes the core foundations of aesthetic theory, the idea of genius, and the operations of society as a whole.

## Conclusion

# The Formative Framework of Theory

I am all that is, and that was, and that shall be, and no mortal hath raised the veil from before my face.<sup>232</sup>

Conventional tendencies of intellectual historians writing on British aesthetic theory through the eighteenth century attribute genius as a key theme, alongside taste, beauty, and sublimity. However the sources themselves fail to support this claim, challenging the accepted allegation with the suggestion that British aesthetic theorists did not conceive of genius as a factor in aesthetics. External verification for this absence of genius in British aesthetics is unearthed in Immanuel Kant's two aesthetic writings by virtue of their thorough display of British influence on German aesthetics, first in 1763 and later in 1790. The transformed treatment of genius in Kant's later aesthetic work manifests the trend Gerard and other aesthetic theorists unintentionally

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<sup>232</sup> Inscription upon Temple of Isis (Mother Nature), i.e., the most sublime utterance ever made according to Kant. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. 194.

instigated for genius in British thought, and Kant's later theory demonstrates the ramifications of the aesthetic remodeling of the artistic genius.

What remains unresolved, however, is how such a seamless transition was possible without the awareness of the participating agents. If the genius was not part of the aesthetic school of thought from the start, why were the terms, questions, and thematic topics of each tradition so similar? Similar enough, indeed, to enable overlapping conclusions, the relatively easy discovery of roots for genius within aesthetic theory, and the covert insertion of genius into generic assumptions for intellectual histories of British aesthetic theory?

I contend that this annex of genius into aesthetics was able to occur so stealthily because of an overall intellectual climate that independently permeated both traditions. Each tradition concluded in related results because they had each been conditioned by this pervasive intellectual climate to construct similar approaches to parallel questions. Influenced by the same intellectual infrastructure of the Enlightenment, genius theory adopted the same questions and terminology percolating in aesthetics; simultaneously, a taste-based aesthetic theory evolved and created an unresolved void requiring the incorporation of an agent of production that was primed to adopt genius. Appreciating this more accurate and textured trajectory of genius's relationship with aesthetics exposes risks inherent to intellectual history and hints at the significance of these underlying intellectual infrastructures in defining cultural iterations of philosophy more broadly.

## Aestheticizing Genius

The developing discourse on genius, particularly in its mid-century apex, must be understood in terms of its adoption of the same questions pervading aesthetic theory at the time. Examples of this adoption saturate genius theory, but here I delineate only three to illustrate the point: the role of education as opposed to native capacity; the cultivation of the superior man; and the centrality of imagination. This is not to accuse the genius tradition of merely copying these topics as already extant in aesthetics; rather, each of these examples is a discrete topic for discrete traditions. In order to accept this autonomy, intellectual historians must be acknowledge that aesthetic theory, while perhaps more prevalent early in the century and thus potentially mistaken for owning such topics, is not *defined* by these topics; indeed, it is defined by the search for the origins of beauty and sublimity and taste's role in that search. These three topics of discourse, therefore, comparably appear in and belong to both genius and aesthetic theory.

The popular essayist Joseph Addison establishes the dichotomy between educated and native characteristic early in the century for both aesthetic and genius theory. In his 1711 *Spectator* essay on genius he introduces those great geniuses who “by the meer Strength of natural Parts, and without any Assistance of Art or Learning, have produced works that were the Delight of their own Times and the Wonder of Posterity.”<sup>233</sup> However, he

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<sup>233</sup> Addison and Steele, *Addison and Steele: Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator*. 166.

also allows that a “second Class of great Genius’s are those that have formed themselves by Rules, and submitted the Greatness of their natural Talents to the Corrections and Restraints of Art” but contends that these are placed in a “second class, not as I think them inferior to the first, but only for distinction’s sake as they are of a different kind.”<sup>234</sup> Indeed, he makes sure to further clarify that the “Genius in both these Classes of Authors may be equally great” and their distinction subsists merely because it “shews it self after a different Manner.”<sup>235</sup> The distinction of the natural versus educated genius is apparent in Addison’s early understanding of the genius, to the extent that one scholar argues it is the main aim of Addison’s writing on genius.<sup>236</sup>

Simultaneously, Addison differentiates between educated and native taste. This differentiation is independent from the parallel distinction in genius theory, however, because he has sculpted the genius and the aesthetic tradition as autonomous conceptual fields. In *Spectator* No. 409, Addison argues that the faculty of taste “must in some degree be born with us” yet allows for the existence of “several Methods for Cultivating and Improving it...without which it will be very uncertain, and of little use to the Person that possesses it.”<sup>237</sup> Amongst other tactics, “Conversation with Men of a Polite Genius is another Method for improving our Natural Taste.”<sup>238</sup> Genius’s

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>236</sup> Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*.

<sup>237</sup> Addison and Steele, *Addison and Steele: Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator*. 203.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 204.

ability to help cultivate taste indicates that Addison approaches the two faculties as their own entities; in order for genius and taste to interact with each other, Addison must conceive of them as separate concepts. However, he establishes the native versus educated dichotomy for both genius and taste. Such a parallel dichotomy is not indicative of genius and taste justifiably being considered part of the same field, but rather that the dichotomy itself pervaded several philosophical fields.

Further, the question of educated as opposed to innate capacity persists beyond Addison in both traditions. In aesthetics, Hume's establishment of the standard of taste is dependent on the potential for cultivating a naturally present strong sense, which "united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character."<sup>239</sup> Hutcheson's "internal sense" is treated similarly, as a certain given propensity capable of then being refined. Traversing to genius theory, the same persistence is evident: Sharpe's subtitle elucidates that genius is not "fundamentally, the Result of Nature, but the Effect of Acquisition"; one of Young's major aims is the contrast between "adult" and "infantive" genius; and in opposition to Sharpe, Duff's central aim is to establish that "education, as it is well or ill directed, may invigorate or weaken the natural powers of the mind, but it cannot produce or annihilate them."<sup>240</sup> From the beginning of the century,

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<sup>239</sup> Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste, and Other Essays*. 17.

<sup>240</sup> Sharpe, *A Dissertation Upon Genius (1755)*. Title page.

Duff, *An Essay on Original Genius*. 4.

both the aesthetic and genius traditions were, independently, preoccupied by an interest in the role of educated versus innate capacity because this preoccupation was an essential question of the Enlightenment, not, as intellectual historians have suggested, because genius and aesthetics were inherent allies.

Similarly, the question of what constitutes a superior man must be interpreted not only as present in each tradition, but with an acknowledgment of their fundamentally disconnected resolutions to the question. In aesthetic theory, “*the fine Taste, as the utmost Perfection of an accomplished Man*” is a postulation that Addison contends is “very often recommended.”<sup>241</sup> This common recommendation informs aesthetic theory with the belief that, in Hume’s words, “the perfection of the man, and the perfection of the sense or feeling, are found to be united.”<sup>242</sup> Thus for aesthetic theory the perfection of *taste* is the perfection of man. In contrast, the genius tradition presupposes that the genius is, by definition, the superior man. This superiority is taken for granted by Sharpe, who in his subtitle alludes to the “Superiority in the human Genius” and by Duff when he focuses the discussion of “the unequal distribution of natural talents among mankind” on the superior combination of those talents in the genius.<sup>243</sup> While each tradition is engaged with the question of what constitutes a superior man, the aesthetic tradition resolves the question with taste and the genius tradition with genius. This related but

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<sup>241</sup> Addison and Steele, *Addison and Steele: Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator*. 203.

<sup>242</sup> Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste, and Other Essays*. 12.

<sup>243</sup> Duff, *An Essay on Original Genius*.

diametrically distinct resolution highlights the idiosyncratic theoretical landscapes and requires recognition of genius and aesthetics as separate files, as it would be paradoxical for the same field to posit both views. Again, this thematic similarity actually refutes the relationship between taste and genius rather than substantiating the conventional association between them.

Finally, both genius theory and aesthetics hold imagination as central, yet this centrality is utilized for individual purposes in taste and genius.<sup>244</sup> In aesthetics, the imagination is necessary in order to experience the sensory pleasure that fosters taste. Thus, Addison initially defines the pleasures of the imagination that “all proceed from the Sight of what is *Great, Uncommon, or Beautiful.*”<sup>245</sup> In a more nuanced way, Burke defines the imagination as

a sort of creative power of its own; either in representing at pleasure the images of things in the order and manner in which they were received by the senses, or in combining those images in a new manner and according to a different order.<sup>246</sup>

In Burke’s view, imagination and taste work together to critique *and* produce beauty. Although imagination is a productive element, its creative potential is “incapable of producing anything absolutely new.”<sup>247</sup> This limitation on imagination explains why it functions differently in aesthetics than for the genius. While for aesthetics imagination is central to enable critique, since it is

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<sup>244</sup> The concept of imagination has been historically considered in its own right; see McFarland, *Originality & Imagination*; Engell, *The Creative Imagination : Enlightenment to Romanticism*; J. M. Cocking and Penelope Murray, *Imagination : A Study in the History of Ideas* (London: New York, 1991).

<sup>245</sup> Addison and Steele, *Addison and Steele: Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator*. 209.

<sup>246</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. 16.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

not operationally unlimited it is unable to fulfill the function of original production attributed to it in the approach of the genius tradition.

Imagination's centrality in the genius tradition is thus diametrically opposed to the aesthetic centrality when interpreted as the faculty enabling the genius's original production primarily through the associative power of ideas. Within genius theory, "That Imagination is the quality of all others most essentially requisite to the existence of Genius, will universally be acknowledged"<sup>248</sup> as it is the imagination that empowers the very possibility of creative production. For the genius, imagination is defined as the faculty

whereby the mind not only reflects its own operations, but which assembles the various ideas conveyed to the understanding by the canal of sensation, and treasured in the repository of the memory, compounding or disjoining them at pleasure, and which by its plastic power of inventing new associations of ideas and of combining them with infinite variety, is enabled to present a creation of its own, and to exhibit objects which never existed in nature.<sup>249</sup>

Gerard confirms this by contending that the imagination's inventive capacity can present ideas not just as copies but also as originals. Whereas imagination can only *facilitate* taste in the aesthetic tradition because of its inability for original creation, the genius tradition pitches imagination as *necessary* for the production of new ideas that anticipate production of works of genius. Both traditions incorporate imagination, but their specific uses of imagination fundamentally differ. Their use of imagination should thus be interpreted as each incorporating a popular philosophic idea of the time period, not as an indication of overlapping groundwork arising from their theoretical allegiance.

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<sup>248</sup> Duff, *An Essay on Original Genius*. 6.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

While thinkers focusing on genius and aesthetic theory were preoccupied by the same questions, such a preoccupation is less an indication of their characteristic similarity than of the overall contemporaneous intellectual climate. This climate had the effect of establishing the same intellectual infrastructure sculpting each tradition's framework of approach. This framework established the questions of interest: Are characteristics of man educated or innate? How does man attain superiority? What constitutes and what is the role of the faculty of imagination? When posed in these terms, even the most basic familiarity with the Enlightenment recognizes these questions as generic concerns.<sup>250</sup> Identifying the framework that structures the approach of two discrete traditions confirms that genius did not have an inherent bond to aesthetics despite the ease with which intellectual historians can discover similar tenets manifest in each tradition.

As a result of the underlying framework that structured both traditions, both later aesthetic theorists and intellectual historians were equipped to adopt genius seamlessly into aesthetics. Such a claim is justified by establishing that aesthetics, through its evolving discourse, had ensnared itself in a paradoxical situation necessitating an agent of production to fill a theoretical vacuum, with the concept of genius an apt candidate for the job. Established on the premise of observing the origins and experience of beauty, eighteenth-century British aesthetics answered these questions about

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<sup>250</sup> See writings of Locke, Descartes, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Vico. These ideas are also summarized in Philip P. Wiener, *Dictionary of the History of Ideas; Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*, 5 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1973).

experiencing beauty with the concept of taste. However, while taste initially enabled production, it became increasingly critical as the century progressed. Simultaneously, aesthetic theory furthered the potential for man, not just nature, to produce beauty at the same time as its discourse focused increasingly on beauty in art rather than landscape. By the 1760s the field had constructed an inextricable situation which necessitated man's capacity for production of beauty while concomitantly forbidding the function of production to the prized faculty of taste. The conditions were set for aesthetics to adopt genius as their agent of production. Aesthetics had a void to fill, a void for which the genius tradition had spent the past sixty years preening.

To understand this trajectory, it is necessary first to establish that aesthetic theory differentiates between the roles of critique and production. Inspired by the experience of beauty in both nature and man-made artworks, theorists realize even in the early stages of aesthetics that the agent of production has an active role in the practical application of their taste-based theory. Despite this, aesthetic theorists fail to address genius as philosophically problematic in their works. The colloquial usage of genius in aesthetic writings indicates that when aesthetic theorists think about taste and genius, they conceive of them as conceptually distant ideas. Thinkers would not remissly use the term genius if they were counting the genius as an idea integral to understanding their theory as a whole. Nevertheless, when constructing a theory of beauty pivoting on critique, a logical, subsequent

mental stride is towards questioning production. Initially, aesthetics resolves the need for production with the faculty of critique. Shaftesbury maintains that critique is necessary for production, and Hutcheson uses the term genius analogously to taste.<sup>251</sup> However by the time Hume writes in the middle of the century, the standard of taste has become exclusively critical.<sup>252</sup> As aesthetic theory focuses on the experience of beauty and not its production, the faculty of taste loses the capacity for production.

Concurrently, emphasizing the criteria of originality for a work to be judged highly, aesthetics fashions the prerequisites for a theory of human creativity that depends on the agent of production. From the outset, Addison contends, “Everything that is *new* or *uncommon* raises a pleasure in the Imagination,” a view that Burke expands when he claims the “first and simplest emotion” derives from “whatever pleasure we take in novelty.”<sup>253, 254</sup> In its most elementary form, pleasure, or the satisfaction of taste, requires novel originality. The aim of Hogarth’s *The Analysis of Beauty*, on the other hand, is to define the qualities of beauty in order to instruct the production of art. Aesthetic theory attempts to define beauty qualitatively for the purpose of guiding production that will satisfy taste while basing the first prerequisite for that satisfaction in novelty, a characteristic that requires original creativity. Indeed, the “linkage of the strong feeling within the subject with imaginative

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<sup>251</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001). 127; Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue : In Two Treatises*.

<sup>252</sup> Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste, and Other Essays*.

<sup>253</sup> Addison and Steele, *Addison and Steele: Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator*. 210.

<sup>254</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. 29.

responsiveness to grandeurs in the outer world of nature provided all the elements of a theory of human creativity,<sup>255</sup> and this linkage necessitated the induction of an agent of original production into aesthetics. The operation of creative originality had already been forbidden to taste; saving aesthetics the labor of erecting that agent from scratch was the already matured tradition of genius.

Genius thereby rescued aesthetics from a looming paradox. This paradox induced a theoretical annexation that was capacitated by the presence of a pervading intellectual substructure panoptic in molding theoretical discourses. As a result of the underlying formative framework, genius and aesthetics are easily mistaken as having overlapping thematic topics because they have overlapping inquisitive approaches. The independent theoretical traditions have parallels that enabled a covert induction of genius into aesthetics when aesthetics was at risk of falling victim to a paradoxical ensnarement. While necessitated by British thinkers, it is only Kant that fully realizes this induction. Kant's *Critique of the Power or Judgment* (1790) quickly became the work that defined eighteenth-century aesthetics for later historians. Once his aesthetic theory had fully seized genius, it was easy for intellectual historians to teleologically disguise it as ever-present in prior aesthetic theory due to the underlying framework that had established essential similarities. In diametrical opposition to the conventional academic identification of genius as one of the key themes in eighteenth-century British

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<sup>255</sup> Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*. 28.

aesthetic theory, genius was actually not at all a part of aesthetics in British theory. Rather, it suffered a stealthy incorporation into aesthetics' history due to the teleological search for theoretical roots after Kant inducted genius, roots that can easily be discovered as a result of the cultural permeation of a single theoretical substructure.

## Epilogue

Like the spots of the sun...they will disappear in  
the general splendor.<sup>256</sup>  
-Gerard, *Essay on Taste*

This test case for intellectual history intimates implications for the broader phenomenon of how ideas evolve and become integrated into academic and historical conventions at the risk of annihilating those ideas' texture. These broader implications surpass any interest just in aesthetic theory. Indeed, the relevance of whether or not genius was always a part of aesthetic theory is admittedly slight. However, my argument for the annexation of the previously autonomous idea of genius into a prevalent intellectual tradition of aesthetics implies that the framework forming and informing a theory can be of greater instrumental interest than the content of the individual ideas composing a tradition.

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<sup>256</sup> Gerard, *An Essay on Taste (1759), Together with Observations Concerning the Imitative Nature of Poetry*, 143.

This conclusion broadly challenges conventional approaches to intellectual history. It signifies that perhaps intellectual history should aim at identifying and analyzing frameworks molding thought more ardently than tracing the evolution of specific unit ideas.<sup>257</sup> Additionally, it highlights the teleological risks that accompany such an attempt at tracing unit ideas, as the prevalence of a framework easily enables the discovery of intellectual roots for ideas in diverse theoretical fields. Similarly, it suggests that it is necessary not to mistake the presence of a framework for the presence of an idea, as easily could have been done in this example by noting the parallel appearance of something like the role of imagination or issues of education in both genius and aesthetic theory.

A useful consequence of these underlying intellectual frameworks is its ability to explain the cultural pervasiveness of tendencies of thought, such as the eighteenth-century preoccupation with genius beyond the realm of philosophy. An example of this preoccupation in music is the widespread perpetuation of the myth of Mozart (1756-91) as child genius, which resonates with the theoretical discourse questioning the need for education to nurture genius.<sup>258</sup> In literature, Goethe's popular novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) evinces the new focus on genius as a superior character that is

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<sup>257</sup> The term "unit idea" is intended to invoke the seminal intellectual historian Arthur Lovejoy. My approach is more comparable to Quentin Skinner's methodology for intellectual history. See: Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: a Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Mass., Harvard University Press, 1936).; Quentin Skinner, *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: New York, 1985).

<sup>258</sup> For more on this connection, see Peter Kivy, "Child Mozart as an Aesthetic Symbol," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28, no. 2 (1967).

consequentially isolated and tortured, a theme resounding with enough of its audience to set off a string of “Werther Suicides.”<sup>259</sup> In the visual arts, the new preference for untrained and natural genius led to the decline of the Academy and is illustrated in Theodore Gericault’s *Portrait of an Artist in his Studio* (1820), a work that focuses on the artist as an individual (and more specifically a brooding, intellectual individual) with the plaster models of the works of past genius cast off to the corner, obscured in shadows.<sup>260</sup> These testimonies to the cultural diffusion of the ideas disseminated in theoretical discourse on aesthetics and genius are explained by the societal saturation of this underlying framework. Rather than viewing these examples as exemplifying, evincing, or informing aesthetic theory or genius theory, they should be interpreted as a tribute to a pervading cultural mindset preoccupied with the same fundamental questions that, as a result, incite artistic works attempting to resolve the same issues as philosophical works.

An intellectual history that acknowledges how scholarship has conventionally ignored the autonomous development of each of these fields both warns us of the risks of over-simplifying complex and textured ideas and helps inform an understanding of how frameworks operate in contemporary theoretical discourse as well. As the underlying intellectual infrastructure of a given cultural climate continues to dictate theoretical approaches, future ideas

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<sup>259</sup> For more on this connection, see Clark S. Muenzer, "Goethe's Werther and Kant's Aesthetics of Failure," *Mln* 98, no. 3 (1983).

<sup>260</sup> For more on the effects of genius in the visual arts, see William L. Pressly, *The Artist as Original Genius : Shakespeare's "Fine Frenzy" in Late-Eighteenth-Century British Art*, The University of Delaware Press Studies in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Art and Culture (University of Delaware Press, 2007).

are certain to abscond from or seek refuge in ambiguously-defined schools of thought. As these wanton ideas continue to dart between traditions, it will remain possible to misidentify or fabricate teleological roots of an idea in philosophic predecessors. This tendency to take advantage of such categorical ambiguity applies not only to aesthetic theory, but to any field of philosophy. The intellectual historian's job must be to continuously dissect such theoretical gallivanting.

## Appendix

The Horse alone can never make the Horseman;  
nor Limbs the Wrestler or the Dancer.  
-Shaftesbury, *Soliloquy*

This thesis includes only one aesthetic writing from early in the century in the intellectual history of British aesthetics. This is because early writings, while not refuting the argument, are nuanced test cases that would risk confusing the argument right at the beginning of the thesis. However, those familiar with eighteenth-century aesthetic history may question how these scholars factor into my argument. I have therefore included an analysis of two of the most often cited early aesthetic writers here. Lord Shaftesbury and Frances Hutcheson each, in their own way, support my overall argument, albeit in slightly different ways than the mid-century writers focused on in the body of the thesis.

## Shaftesbury: Philosophical Sea-Cards

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) was one of the most influential philosophers of the early eighteenth century and is often credited with originating the moral sense theory. He also must be the first thinker to address in any intellectual history of eighteenth-century British aesthetic theory. He published a collection of his mature work in 1711, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* and its immense popularity is demonstrated in the fact that “Other than Locke's *Second Treatise*, Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks* ... was the most reprinted book in English in the [eighteenth] century.”<sup>261</sup> Spanning topics ranging from morality, politics, religion and culture, it is almost uniformly cited as containing the first prominent aesthetic work of the century due to its treatment of arts and aesthetics.

Arguing that a definition of genius can be garnered from *Characteristicks* is tenable only because of the breadth of writings included in the anthology. Such a definition is not found because Shaftesbury intentionally incorporates genius into his aesthetic philosophy.<sup>262</sup> Additionally, because Shaftesbury writes early in the century, his theory has characteristic

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<sup>261</sup> Douglas Den Uyl in the forward to Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, vii.

<sup>262</sup> Similarly, it can be argued that he was not intentionally constructing an “aesthetic philosophy” at all and that this statement is also anachronistic. However, what I mean by his aesthetics is the body of thought that has been used to describe his views on beauty and taste, such as disinterestedness, that have been identified by aesthetic historians. See: Glauser, Richard, 2002, “Aesthetic Experience in Shaftesbury,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelians Society*, Supplement, 76: 25–54; Stolnitz, Jerome, 1961, “On the Significance of Lord Shaftesbury in Modern Aesthetic Theory,” *Philosophical Quarterly*, 11: 97–113; Townsend, Dabney, 1982, “Shaftesbury's Aesthetic Theory,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 41/2: 205–213.

distinctions from later aesthetic theorists that opted not to expand on some threads of discourse that Shaftesbury posits. Many of his aesthetic contributions are pieced together from the works *Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour*; *The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody*; *Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*; and *A Notion of the Historical Draught of the Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules*. Here, I expose his view of genius using *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author*. While this exegesis of genius can be found in Shaftesbury's work, the reader must keep in mind that it is oblique to his aesthetic contributions.

Nevertheless, it is only possible to understand Shaftesbury's conception of the genius in terms of its relationship to taste. No matter how capable the genius is, "Such Accuracy of Workmanship requires the CRITICK'S Eye."<sup>263</sup> The genius's inability to independently produce work is explained by the way Shaftesbury contends the critic and the artist interact in a mutual genesis and ensuing evolution:

When the persuasive Arts were grown thus into repute, and the Power of moving the Affections become the Study and Emulation of the forward Wits and aspiring Genius's of the Times; it wou'd necessarily happen that many Genius's of equal size and strength, tho less covetous of publick Applause, of Power, or of Influence over Mankind, wou'd content them-selves with the Contemplation merely of these enchanting arts. These they wou'd the better enjoy, the more they refin'd their Taste, and cultivated their Ear. For to all Musick there must be an Ear proportionable. There must be an Art of Hearing found, ere the performing Arts can have their due effect, or any thing exquisite in the kind be felt or comprehended. The just Performers therefore in each Art wou'd naturally be the most desirous of improving and refining the publick Ear; which they cou'd no way so well effect as by the help of those latter Genius's, who were in a

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<sup>263</sup> Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times.*, 145.

manner their Interpreters to the People; and who by their Example taught the Publick to discover what was just and excellent in each Performance. – Hence was the Origin of CRITICKS; who, as Arts and Sciences advanc'd, wou'd necessarily come withal into repute; and being heard with satisfaction in their turn, were at length tempted to become Authors and appear in publick.<sup>264</sup>

In this view, the production of art is dependent on an interaction with the reception and judgment of that art. As a result, the critic, as representative of taste, and the artist, as representative as genius, not only simultaneously evolve, but are in fact mutually dependent on each other to capacitate that evolution.

An imperative consequence of this view is that genius is and must be guided by rules, implying not that rules are restrictive to the genius, but rather that they are necessary to steer the genius to enable successful production. Shaftesbury maintains an ineluctable role for “those Rules of Art, those Philosophical Sea-Cards, by which the adventurous Genius’s of the Times were wont to steer their Courses, and govern their impetuous Muse.”<sup>265</sup> These rules cannot be entirely discovered within the self or imitated from fine art, but require critical engagement. Indeed,

The Horse alone can never make the Horseman; nor Limbs the Wrestler or the Dancer. No more can a Genius alone make a Poet; or good Parts a Writer, in any considerable kind. The Skill and Grace of Writing is founded, as our wise Poet tells us, in Knowledg and good Sense: and not barely in that Knowledg, which is to be learnt from common Authors, or the general Conversation of the World; but from those particular Rules of Art, which Philosophy alone exhibits.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 120-1.

The prerequisites for the artist are not just genius or familiarity with great works, but a knowledge of the “rules of art” gleaned from the contemplative critic. While it is nevertheless possible to be “so happily form’d by nature herself” to excel even when lacking proper education, it is “undeniable” that the best examples

can be found only among the People of a liberal Education. And even among the graceful of this kind, those still are found the gracefullest, who early in their Youth have learnt their Exercises, and form’d their Motions under the best Masters.<sup>267</sup>

Shaftesbury’s productive artist must have genius, but the formative education provided by the critic, that in turn develops critique, is of greater weight.

Crucial to this understanding of the role of education in the work of genius is Shaftesbury’s emphasis on imitating the critic as an individual as opposed to imitating the works that are conventionally exalted. The artist who blindly imitates work does nothing to improve his or her self:

There is this essential difference however between the Artists of each kind; that they who design merely after Body’s, and from the Graces of this sort, can never with all their Accuracy, or Correctness of Design, be able to reform themselves, or grow a jot more shapely in their Persons. But for those Artists who copy from another Life, who study the Graces and Perfections of Minds and are real Masters of those Rules which constitute this latter Science; ‘its impossible they shou’d fail of being themselves improv’d, and amended in their better Part.<sup>268</sup>

Only through exercising and challenging the mind by imitating another individual, not merely the works of that individual, can the artist achieve any personal progression. This emphasizes the risks of blindly imitating successful

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 118-9.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 128.

works of established geniuses. Indeed, Shaftesbury contends that the artist who fails to be familiar with his self is incapable of producing worthwhile work:

For having had no opportunity of privately conversing with themselves, or exercising their own Genius, so as to make Acquaintance with it, or prove its Strength; they immediately fall to work in a wrong place, and exhibit on the Stage of the World that Practice, which they shou'd have kept to themselves; if they design'd that either they, or the World should be the better for their Moralitys.<sup>269</sup>

Imitation of past works and personal genius are sufficient neither for producing original great work nor improving the self or others; it is only through knowledge of the rules of art learned via taste that great works are created.

Despite the appearance of genius in Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks*, this cannot be assumed as introducing genius as a philosophically problematic topic for British aesthetic theory more broadly in the eighteenth century because it remains a tangential topic to taste. When placing Shaftesbury in the context of aesthetic history, the above analysis of his genius becomes mostly irrelevant; instead, his contributions are conventionally credited as disinterestedness and the internal harmony of beauty.<sup>270</sup> Despite the substantial incorporation of genius in *Advice to an Author*, neither later aesthetic writers nor aesthetic historians have identified this particular discourse as integral to his aesthetic theory. Genius is not a part of his

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>270</sup> Michael B. Gill, "Lord Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury)," Stanford University, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/shaftesbury/>.

aesthetics; rather, it is its own topic that is coincidentally related to similar topics associated with aesthetics. While reflecting that genius is an attribute of a “real poet,” it is an attribute comparable to “power and excellence,” not a singularly distinguished talent of great significance for aesthetic theory.<sup>271</sup> Where his conception of genius as extraneous to aesthetics is present, it remains subservient to taste, a theme that, in contrast to genius, gains increasing primacy in aesthetic discourse throughout the eighteenth century.

### **Hutcheson: The Internal Sense**

1725 witnessed the publication of *An Inquiry into the Originals of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* by Francis Hutcheson, a major Scottish philosopher known principally for his views on moral philosophy and aesthetics. The work’s major aim is to explore the way man perceives beauty. He resolves the experience of beauty by the existence of an internal sense specifically capable of perceiving pleasure, as opposed to the external senses that perceive direct sensory stimuli.

The internal sense defines Hutcheson’s idea of genius, but this philosophical definition is only a synonym to taste, not its own thematic concept. Explicitly defining genius at all is unprecedented in the aesthetic tradition. However, rather than validating the academic tendency of including genius as a major theme for eighteenth-century British aesthetics, this definition turns out to be only a synonymous capacity as taste. He situates

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<sup>271</sup> Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. 129.

both in an acute internal sense which provides “This greater Capacity of receiving such pleasant Ideas we commonly call a fine Genius or Taste.”<sup>272</sup> Not only are genius and taste philosophically defined using the same terms, Hutcheson’s exemplification of the definition favors what would later be identified simply as taste. This is seen when he describes the internal sense as the capacity for receiving and evaluating sensory stimuli:

In Musick we seem universally to acknowledge something like a distinct Sense from the External one of Hearing, and call it a good Ear; and the like distinction we should probably acknowledge in other Objects.<sup>273</sup>

Defining genius as a capacity to hear, not produce, music clearly indicates a parallel to the faculty of fine taste as it is generally used in aesthetic theory. In contrast, the idea that genius is enabled by a naturally finely attuned sense for *reception* of “such pleasant ideas,” not the *creation* of them is counter to the general definition of genius as a faculty of production, not a faculty of critique. Hutcheson’s use of genius, then, must be evaluated in context of this equivalence to taste and not be mistaken as constituting genius as a major theme in his aesthetics.

The role of education in relationship to the inborn internal sense helps explain why Hutcheson uses genius and taste synonymously. Aware of the common debate on the role of education for the refinement of faculties, Hutcheson contends that “there is a natural Power of Perception, or Sense of

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<sup>272</sup> Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue : In Two Treatises*. 23.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

Beauty in Objects, antecedent to all Custom, Education, or Example.”<sup>274</sup> This does not preclude the potential for cultivation:

When we have these natural senses antecedently, Custom may make us capable of extending our Views further, and of receiving more complex Ideas of Beauty in Bodys, or Harmony in Sounds, by increasing our Attention and quickness of Perception.<sup>275</sup>

Hutcheson argues that “fear of contempt as void of Taste or Genius often... restrains those who have naturally a fine Genius, or the internal Senses very acute, from studying to obtain the greatest Perfection.”<sup>276</sup> However, it is clear that when he claims that genius can attain perfection, this perfection is a perfection of reception, not of production of beauty.

Hutcheson’s aesthetic work again corroborates my view that genius was not its own philosophically relevant topic of concern for eighteenth-century aesthetics. Hutcheson equates genius with taste instead of incorporating genius on its own terms. The *Inquiry* is yet another example of a work that is categorized as aesthetic because it approaches the experience of beauty. Like the other aesthetic theorists, Hutcheson resolves this question with taste, this time cast as a critically-based internal sense. Genius as a faculty of production has once again been unable to lodge itself as a central theme in aesthetic theory. This failure further substantiates my argument that it has been misidentified as a theme in eighteenth-century aesthetics.

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 73.

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