

**Entries for the *Kant Lexicon* (Cambridge University Press), ed. Julian Wuerth**  
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**1. imagination (*Einbildung, Einbildungskraft*).** In the pre-Critical period, Kant uses the term '*Einbildungskraft*' in a narrow sense to refer to the fictive or inventive exercise of the imagination in which we produce images out of ourselves and terms like '*Phantasie*' and '*Bildungsvermögen*' to refer to the more general exercise of the imagination in both fictional and ordinary circumstances, e.g., in perception, memory, and anticipation (AF 25:511 [1775-6]/CELA: 80, ML1 28:235 [1777-80]/CELM: 53). However, in the Critical period, Kant adopts '*Einbildungskraft*' as his preferred way to refer to the general capacity of the imagination.

Kant defines the imagination in general as “the faculty for representing an object even **without its presence** in intuition” (CPR B151 [1787]/CECPR 256, see also A 7:186 [1798]/CEAHE: 278, AM 25:1258 [1784-5]/CELA: 383, MD 28:673-4 [1784-5]/CELM: 375). By this Kant does not mean that the imagination is only operative when an object is absent. Although this is sometimes the case, e.g., in memory, fiction, or when we imaginatively represent a concept in our head, Kant is clear that we can also exercise the imagination when an object is present to us, e.g., in perception. However, on his view, even in perception, there is an element of the object’s absence for the whole object is never given to our current perspective, but rather it has sides that are hidden from our point of view, which the imagination can, in turn, intuitively represent (ML1 28:235-6/CELM: 54).

Kant makes two further general remarks about the imagination that help clarify the nature of the intuitive representations it is responsible for. First, Kant describes the imagination as the capacity to ‘form’ [*bilden*] what is given to us through sensibility (AF 25:511/CELA: 80, ML1 28:235/CELM: 53). In the Critical period, he tends to make this point using language of ‘synthesis’, arguing that what the imagination does is synthesize the manifold of intuition that is provided by sensibility (CPR A94, A77-9/B103-4 [1781/7]/CECPR: 225, 210-11). So, on his view, the intuitive representations that the imagination produces are the result of it processing the manifold of intuition.

Second, Kant characterizes the imagination as the faculty of ‘presentation’ or ‘exhibition’ [*Darstellung*] (CPJ 5:232, 244 [1790]/CECPJ: 117, 128). According to Kant, presentation involves “placing a corresponding intuition beside the concept” (CPJ 5:192/CECPJ: 78, see also CPJ 5:351/CECPJ: 225, CPR A240/B299/CECPR: 356). And he claims that it is by means of these presentations that concepts gain sense and significance: “it is also requisite for one **to make** an abstract concept **sensible**, i.e., to display the object that corresponds to it in intuition, since without this the concept would remain (as one says) without **sense** [*Sinn*], i.e., without significance [*Bedeutung*] (CPR A240/B299/CECPR: 341, see also AM 25:1261/CELA: 386). A wide range of different types of representations can count as presentations, including images, schemata, symbols, aesthetic ideas, and ideals. However, what these representations share in common qua presentations is that they are not wholly intuitive; rather they present a concept. It is for this reason that he suggests that the imagination is a capacity that is capable of mediating between sensibility and our conceptual capacities, like the understanding and reason (CPR A124, B151-2/CECPR 241, 256-7).

Remaining still at a fairly abstract level, Kant argues that the imagination can, in turn, be exercised in two ways: reproductively and productively (B152/CECPR: 257, A 7:167/CEAHE: 278, AM 25:1257/CELA: 383). When the imagination operates reproductively, he maintains that it operates as “a faculty of the derivative presentation of the object” and it forms presentations that are ‘derivative’ in the sense that they recall objects we have encountered in the past (A 7:167/CEAHE: 278). He claims that these reproductive operations are guided by the law of association (CPR

B152/CECPR 257, A 7:182/CEAHE: 291). By contrast, in its productive exercise, he suggests that the imagination functions as “a faculty of the original presentation of the object” in which it ‘composes’ presentations in an ‘inventive’ [*dichtend*] or ‘self-active’ way (AM 25:1278/CELA: 398; A 7:167, 174/CEAHE: 278, 284; CPJ 5:240/CECPR: 124). Yet even in these cases, Kant says that the imagination is “not exactly *creative* [*schöpferisch*]” because although the forms it produces are its own invention, the material that is arranged in those forms is not of its making, but rather is drawn from sensibility (A 7:167-8/CEAHE: 278, AM 25:1258, 1277/CELA: 383, 397).

Turning to the reproductive exercise in more detail, Kant claims that our imagination relies on reproduction in forming intuitive representations of objects present, past, and future. With regard to objects that are present to us, Kant suggests that in perception the imagination operates as “the faculty of illustration [*Abbildung*]” and it is responsible for forming an image, which ‘illustrates’ the object from different sides and points of view (ML1 28:235/CELM: 53). In the first *Critique*, he argues that images are formed on the basis of the imagination engaging in two forms of synthesis: the synthesis of apprehension in which it “run[s] through” and “take[s] together” the manifold of intuition and the synthesis of reproduction, which involves it “calling back” representations of the object from the past (CPR A99, A121/CECPR: 229, 239). Meanwhile, when it comes to representing objects from our past, Kant maintains that the imagination functions as “the faculty of imitation [*Nachbildung*]” and here it forms images by imitating what we have encountered before (ML1 28:235/CELM: 53). The voluntary formation of images from our past is what Kant calls ‘memory’ (A 7:182-5/291-4, AF 25:521-4/CELA: 88-90, AM 25:1273/CELA: 394). Finally, with respect to representing objects in the future, Kant suggests that the imagination operates as “the faculty of anticipation [*Vorbildung*]” and he indicates that the images we form in this context are guided either by ‘presentiment’, which does not require knowledge of causes and effects, but only “the remembering of observed events as they commonly follow one another,” or by ‘prescience’, which does require conscious reflection on the law of causality (ML1 28: 235/CELM: 53, A 7:186-7/CEAHE: 394-5, MMr 29: 884 [1782-3]/CELM: 252).

As for the productive exercise of the imagination, Kant distinguishes between two different levels at which it takes place: at the empirical, *a posteriori* level and at the pure, *a priori* level. At the empirical level, Kant differentiates furthermore between productive activities that occur in a voluntary way, when “*we* play with” the imagination and in an involuntary way, when the imagination “plays with *us*” (MMr 29:885/CELM: 253). According to Kant, voluntary activities are crucial for the presentation of concepts. To this end, he delineates three different ways in which the imagination can voluntarily form intuitive representations that present a concept in sensible terms. In some cases, Kant claims that the imagination presents a concept in a ‘direct’ and ‘demonstrative’ fashion in intuition and he calls this kind of representation a ‘schema’, e.g., the schema of the empirical concept ‘dog’ (see below for discussion of other types of schemata) (CPJ 5:352/CECPJ: 226, A141/B180/CECPR: 273, RP 20:279 [1793/1804]/CETP81: 370). At other times, he suggests that the imagination resorts to ‘indirect’ means and presents the concept “by means of an analogy” and he labels this kind of indirect presentation of a ‘symbol’ (CPJ 5:352/CECPJ: 226, RP 20:279-80/CETP81: 370). While we can use symbols to present empirical concepts, e.g., using a handmill as a symbol of a despot, Kant argues that we can also symbolically present ideas of reason, i.e., concepts that are, in principle, not capable of direct intuitive presentation (CPJ 5:352-3/CECPJ: 226-7, RP 20:279-80/CETP81: 370, ML1 28:238/CELM: 55-6). Kant describes some of the imagination’s presentations of ideas of reason as ‘ideals’, which involve a “representation of an individual being as adequate to an idea,” e.g., in the archetype [*Urbild*] of the sage or the perfectly proportionate, moral human being (“the ideal of beauty”) (CPJ 5:232-236/CECPJ: 116-20, A 569/B597/CECPR: 552). Finally, Kant suggests that the imagination can produce signs, which do not share any intuitive relation to the concept they present, but rather serve as ‘designations’, which

the imagination arbitrarily associates with the concept, e.g., words (CPJ 5:351-2/CECPJ: 226, A 7:191/CEAHE: 298, AF 25:536-7/CELA: 99-100, AM 25:1293-6/CELA: 408-10).

The imagination's voluntary productions also play a pivotal role in Kant's account of aesthetics in the third *Critique*. In judgments of taste, for example, Kant describes the free play the imagination engages in as "productive and self-active" (CPJ 5:240/CECPJ: 124). Meanwhile, in his analysis of artistic creation, Kant claims that in genius's imagination is "very powerful in creating [*Schaffung*], as it were, another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it" (CPJ 5:314/CECPJ: 192). Genius accomplishes this by means of a special kind of presentation that Kant calls an 'aesthetic idea', which is an imaginative representation that "aesthetically enlarges" a concept by adding "aesthetic attributes" to it and which is so rich it cannot be exhaustively described through language (CPJ 5:315/CECPJ: 193). Finally, in judgments of the sublime, although the imagination initially contributes to the displeasure we feel as very large or powerful objects force us to recognizing its limits, he argues that the imagination also "acquires an enlargement and power" because it comes to be used as "an instrument of reason and its ideas" (CPJ 5:269-270/CECPJ: 152).

However, in the empirical context, Kant indicates that imaginative productivity can also be exercised in an involuntary way and he calls this 'fantasy' (MMr 29:885/CELM: 253, AM 25:1258/CELA: 384). On his view, fantasy occurs in a healthy fashion when we dream while we are asleep (A 7:189-90/CEAHE: 297-8, MMr 29:885/CELM: 254, AM 25:1283-5: 402-3). However, he claims that it can also take place in an unhealthy way and here he distinguishes between two types of fantasizing: in "**delusion of sense**" we either mistake a self-created image for an actual sensible object ('madness', 'hypochondria') or treat ideals, like patriotism or friendship, as if they were real ('enthusiasm'), and in "**delusion of mind**," we mistake a self-created image for a spiritual object ('visionary rapture' [*Schwärmerei*]) (CPJ 5:275/CECPJ: 156-7, AF 25:528/CELA: 93-4, AM 25: 1283-9/CELA: 402-5, DSS [1766]/CETP70: 301-359).

Setting the empirical exercise of the productive imagination aside, at the *a priori* level, Kant argues that the imagination operates in a productive way in both a mathematical and transcendental context. According to Kant, mathematical cognition depends on the 'construction' of concepts, which he, in turn, glosses in terms of exhibition [*Darstellung*]: "to **construct** a concept means to exhibit [*darstellen*] *a priori* the intuition corresponding to it" (CPR A713/B741/CECPR: 630). This presentation can either be formed in "mere imagination" or in empirical intuition, e.g., drawing on paper or counting on one's hand, but in both cases, he claims that the construction is *a priori* because we do not "borrow the pattern for it from any experience" (CPR 713/B741/CECPR: 630). Instead, the pattern that we follow is to be found in the schema, e.g., the schema for the concept 'triangle' involves a "general procedure" that exists "in thought," which we can follow in producing images of triangles (A140-1/B179-180/CECPR: 273).

In addition to its use in the mathematical context, Kant argues that the productive imagination has a transcendental use insofar as it contributes to the conditions of the possibility of experience. In the A Deduction, Kant maintains that the imagination has a 'transcendental function': "its aim in regard to all the manifold of appearance is nothing further than the necessary unity in their synthesis" (A123/CEPR: 240). He claims that it is through this function that we bring together sensibility and the manifold of intuition, on the one hand, and the understanding and the necessary unity of apperception, on the other. According to Kant, by mediating between sensibility and understanding in this way, the transcendental function of the imagination makes experience possible: "Both extremes, namely sensibility and understanding, must necessarily be connected by means of this transcendental function of the imagination, since otherwise the former would to be sure yield appearances but no objects of an empirical cognition, hence there would be no experience" (A124/CECPR: 241). In the B Deduction, Kant describes this transcendental function in terms of 'figurative synthesis' [*synthesis speciosa*], which, he asserts, involves the "effect of the

understanding on sensibility and its first application (and at the same time the ground of all others) to objects of the intuition that is possible for us” (B151-2/CECPR: 256-7).

In specifying how this application takes place, in the A Deduction Kant emphasizes the idea that the imagination makes possible the *a priori* ‘affinity’ of appearances, i.e., the status of all appearances as “associable in themselves and subject to universal laws of a thoroughgoing connection in reproduction” (A122/CECPR: 240). Meanwhile further elucidating this process in the Schematism, Kant argues that when the imagination applies the understanding to sensibility, it produces a special type of representation called a ‘transcendental schema’ (A138/B177/CECPR: 272). According to Kant, a transcendental schema is an *a priori* representation of a category in temporal terms, which he calls a ‘time-determination’ [*Zeitbestimmung*] (A138/B177/CECPR: 272). Emphasizing the importance of transcendental schemata, Kant claims that they are “the true and sole conditions for providing [the categories] with a relation to objects, thus with **significance**” (A145/B185/CECPR: 276). For Kant, then, the transcendental exercise of the imagination not only makes experience possible, but also provides the categories with significance.

**Related terms:** aesthetic idea, art, categories, concept, enthusiasm, genius, idea, ideal, image, intuition, judgment of taste, manifold, perception, reason, representation, schema, schematism, sensibility, sublime, synthesis, understanding

**2. image (*Bild*).** According to Kant, an image is a type of intuitive representation that is produced by the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*). More specifically, he claims that images are the result of the imagination ‘forming’ or ‘synthesizing’ the manifold of intuition (AF 25:511 [1775-6]/CELA: 80, ML1 28: 235 [1777-80]/CELM: 53, CPR A120-1 [1781]/CECPR: 239, CPR B151-2 [1787]/CECPR: 256-7).

On Kant’s view, the imagination produces different kinds of images in different contexts and relies on both reproductive and productive means to do so. In perception, he argues that we form an image of the object that is present to us, which ‘illustrates’ [*abbildet*] the object from different sides and points of view (ML1 28:236/CELM: 54). In the first *Critique*, he maintains that the images involved in perception result from the imagination engaging in two forms of synthesis of the manifold of intuition: the synthesis of apprehension and of reproduction (A120-1/CECPR: 239). However, he argues furthermore that image formation depends on schematism: “the **schema**... is that through which and in accordance with which the images first become possible” (CPR A142/B181/CECPR: 273). Kant describes a schema as “a rule for the determination of our intuition in accordance with a certain general concept” and he maintains that it is this schema-guided synthesis that ultimately results in an image (CPR A140-1/B179-181/CECPR: 273). Yet though it is possible to produce images in this way in accordance with both mathematical and empirical concepts, Kant asserts that the schemata associated with the categories “can never be brought to an image at all” (CPR A142/B181/CECPR: 274).

In addition to the images that arise in perception, Kant claims that the imagination forms images in other ways that rely on reproduction. We reproduce images of objects we have encountered in the past through a process he calls ‘imitation’ [*Nachbildung*], e.g., in memory or when we form a ‘normal idea’, i.e., an image that represents the average for a species (AF 25:511-514, 521-4/CELA: 80-2, 88-90; AM 25:1273/CELA: 294-5; ML1 28: 236/CELM: 54; CPJ 5:233-4 [1790]/CECPJ: 117-18). Meanwhile, when we form images of objects in the future by means of a process labeled ‘anticipation’ [*Vorbildung*], Kant indicates that here too we rely on reproduction because we remember what we have encountered in the past and project it into the future (AF 25:511, 531-536/CELA: 8096-9; ML1 28:236/CELM: 54; A 7:185-7/CEAHE: 294-5 [1798]).

The imagination, however, can also form images in a productive, i.e., ‘inventive’ or ‘self-active’ way and when it does so it produces images from out of itself (AF 25:524-525/CELA: 91-2, ML1 28:237/CELM: 55, MMr 29:884-7 [1782-3]/CELM: 253-5, A 7:167-8, 172-182/CEAHE: 278-9, 278-91, CPJ 5:240/CECPJ: 124). Sometimes this productivity occurs voluntarily. With regard to space and time, we can voluntarily form an image of time as a line and of space as three-dimensional and as the “pure image of all magnitudes” (CPR A142/B182/CECPR: 274, see also B154-156, A140-141/B179-180/CECPR: 258-9, 273). In mathematics, we also voluntarily generate images of shapes and numbers (CPR A713/B741/CECPR: 630). We can also voluntarily produce what Kant labels an ‘ideal’, which he describes as an ‘archetype’ [*Urbild*] that represents “an individual being as adequate to an idea” (CPJ 5:232/CECPJ: 117, see also CPR A569-70/B597-598/CECPR: 552). Meanwhile, in the case of the pictorial arts (*bildende Kunst*), the genius freely produces an image in space that represents her aesthetic idea (CPJ 5:322/CECPJ: 199). And in the activity of ‘correlation’ [*Gegenbildung*] or ‘designation’ [*Bezeichnung*], Kant suggests that we can voluntarily produce symbols and signs, which involve intuitive representations that serve as “a means for producing the image of another thing” (ML1 28:237-8/CELM: 55-6, AF 25:536-7/CELA: 99-100, AM 25:1293-6/CELA: 408-10, A 7:191-3/CEAHE: 298-300). Yet at other times he indicates that the invention of images happens in an involuntary fashion. This occurs in a healthy way when we form images in dream (A 7:189-90/CEAHE: 297-8, MMr 29:885/CELM: 254, AM 25:1283-5: 402-3). However, Kant claims that this can also occur in an unhealthy way in ‘fantasy’, which can either involve “**delusion of sense**,” e.g., in madness or enthusiasm, or “**delusion of mind**,” e.g., in visionary rapture [*Schwärmerei*] (CPJ 5:275/CECPJ: 156-7, AF 25:528/CELA: 93-4, AM 25: 1283-9/CELA: 402-5, DSS [1766]/CEIP70: 301-359).

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