Kant and metaphor in contemporary aesthetics

Clive Cazeaux

University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, UK
ccazeaux@uwic.ac.uk

Abstract
In this paper, I examine Kant’s impact on contemporary aesthetics by focusing on the concept of metaphor. In part one, I give a brief explanation for the popularity of metaphor as a research area, and suggest that much of the thinking behind this research can be traced back to Kant. I also highlight the role metaphor plays in contemporary aesthetics, and identify ways in which the metaphoricity of art contributes to its critical or discursive impetus. Part two locates the origins of this critical, metaphorical aesthetic in the Critique of Judgment. Kant’s argumentation in the third Critique, I show, is heavily dependent on metaphor, to the extent that his philosophy cannot be rendered systematic without it. Acknowledging this dimension of his thought, I maintain, not only draws out the epistemological and cognitive significance of metaphor but also brings to light new points of relevance between Kant and contemporary aesthetics. In the final part of my paper, I show how some of my conclusions regarding the metaphorical aspects of the Critique of Judgment are particularly relevant to the aesthetic theories of Lyotard, Derrida, and Habermas, and suggest how the ‘metaphorical Kant’ proposed here might affect their theses.
Trying to assess Kant’s impact on contemporary aesthetics is by no means a straightforward task, for the simple reason that the subject is saturated with his influence. In all aspects of the theory and practice of art, it is possible to observe concepts and attitudes at work which are either a reflection of or a response to Kant’s thinking. This might seem a rather overblown claim and a difficult one to substantiate but, without going into too much detail at this point, one has only to consider that the central tenets of both modernism and postmodernism can be traced back to Kant’s critical thought. There is the modernist’s interest in the conditions of possibility of representation – as evidenced, for example, by the push towards abstraction in the visual arts and the attempt to paint not the world but the process of painting itself – and, responding to this, the postmodernist’s concern that these conditions of possibility should not become universal absolutes.

If one had to give a reason for the thoroughly Kantian nature of aesthetics today, then, I would suggest, it is the interaction that Kant sets out to achieve between sensibility and thought which has proved to be so fruitful for the development of aesthetics. This interaction is broached by Kant in two related respects: (1) his argument for the necessary connectivity between concept and intuition, and (2) his attempt to show how those aspects of human existence traditionally attributed to the realm of the supersensible, for example, categories of perception, and the origin of moral agency, can interact with the sensible realm. While it is true to say that Hegel also attempts a reconciliation of the sensible and the supersensible by defining art as the sensuous manifestation of the ideal, he nevertheless reinstates idealism’s commitment to supervenient thought standing over and above sensibility. With Kant, however, we are given an architectonic which tries to demonstrate the intersection of thought and sensibility and which, following the _Critique of Judgment_, offers art, beauty, and the
appearance of design in nature as those regions of experience where this intersection is most visible.

In this paper, I propose to examine Kant’s impact on contemporary aesthetics by focusing on a concept that has been pivotal to recent art theory and showing how the way in which it has been put to work either draws upon or can be illuminated by Kant’s philosophy. The concept in question is metaphor. Metaphor has received an enormous amount of attention within the humanities and the philosophy of science over the past few decades. The bibliographies in recent works by Kittay, Ortony, and Lakoff and Johnson are a good indication of the scope and diversity of recent metaphor research. In the first part of my paper, I give a brief explanation for the popularity of metaphor as a research area, and suggest that much of the thinking behind this research can be traced back to aspects of Kant’s philosophy. I also highlight the role metaphor plays in contemporary aesthetics, and identify ways in which the metaphoricity of art contributes to its critical or discursive impetus. Part two locates the origins of this critical, metaphorical aesthetic in the Critique of Judgment. Kant’s argumentation in third Critique, I show, is heavily dependent on metaphor, to the extent that his philosophy cannot be rendered systematic without it. Acknowledging this dimension of his thought, I maintain, not only draws out the epistemological and cognitive significance of metaphor but also brings to light new points of relevance between Kant and contemporary aesthetics. Part three explores some of these points in relation to the work of Lyotard, Derrida, and Habermas.

1. Metaphor and the arts

There are, I propose, two reasons for the recent growth of interest in metaphor, both of which have Kantian elements. Firstly, the linguistic turn in the humanities – following the work of Saussure, Frege, Wittgenstein, and Whorf – has foregrounded awareness of the role our linguistic categories play in the organization of the world into identifiable chunks. This position is of course an extension of Kant’s epistemology and much twentieth century debate on language and perception has returned to the Kantian
question of how one secures objectivity given that the task of organizing the world has been assigned to (subjective) consciousness. As several commentators have observed, metaphor itself raises this question, since it produces meaning which is new yet insightful, creative yet objective. An original, freshly minted trope (the argument runs) is an instance of creative, subjective language yet, far from producing nonsense, a new metaphor offers insight and new perspectives on its subject and, as such, could be said to be objective or to contain an objective component. Thus, to confront metaphor is to confront one of the central themes of Kant’s epistemology and the linguistically-inclined humanities.

A second reason for the popularity of metaphor is the volume of interest there has been in the questioning of boundaries – between subject areas and between the wider concepts of the moral, the political, the epistemological, and the aesthetic – as a result of the tension between modern and postmodern thought. Principal concerns in these debates are the status of knowledge and the way in which the concepts of truth and objectivity are understood. Philosophy has been under attack on this score with its history of ‘universal truths’, e.g. Descartes’s cogito, Kant’s table of categories, and Hegel’s Absolute Consciousness. The main arguments against this universalism invoke metaphor on two related accounts: (1) the fact that key epistemological concepts have metaphors at their root, for example, ‘mirroring’, ‘correspondence’, ‘sense datum’, is taken as evidence of the contingent, communal, subjective basis of knowledge, and (2) because metaphor (as a form of dislocated or dislocating predication) works by testing the appropriate with the inappropriate, it is seen as a means of challenging the boundaries whereby one subject defines itself in relation to another.

If we take postmodernism’s critique of philosophy as an example, it is philosophy’s notions of the ‘true’ and the ‘proper’ which are under suspicion. Any univocal claim to truth, the postmodernist argues, will exclude or leave unheard other forms of experience. To combat this, we should undertake the task of reconceptualization, of transforming the identity of an object through adopting a new, unconventional, inappropriate perspective in relation to it. As regards philosophy, it should be encouraged to embrace what is inappropriate to it, its ‘other’. Philosophy should
Kant and metaphor in contemporary aesthetics

become like art. And this is what we find happening in the tradition of continental philosophy, from Nietzsche, through Heidegger, to Adorno, Derrida, and Rorty. In the work of these thinkers, we find, in various guises, the assertion that the concept of truth rests upon the concept of art, where art is defined as the process which brings objects – those things which will go on to be the subject of truth claims – into being. In some cases, notably Nietzsche, Adorno, and Derrida, the form of philosophical prose is itself transformed into art. Language is treated not so much as a linear conveyor of ideas but as a medium which, through metaphorical transgression and manipulation, can let us witness the creation and construction of thought. Kant’s position in this debate is in fact the subject of much discussion, and opinion remains divided over whether or not he is a representative of the Enlightenment tradition contested by postmodernism or the first thinker to theorize knowledge as a construct. Which side one takes usually depends upon whether one interprets Kant’s a priori (with the former) as a continuation of the rationalist’s understanding of the term or (with the latter) as a concept which is being repositioned as a condition of possibility of experience. The interpretation of Kant I give below supports and develops the latter, Kant-as-constructionist view.

These brief accounts go some way towards illustrating the extent to which metaphor has become a major topic for debate across a wide range of disciplines. If we turn our attention now to art and aesthetics, we find that assessments and applications of metaphor are under way with an equal, if not greater, vigour. Not only can it be argued that art itself has become increasingly metaphorical during the last century, but also there is the question of the status of the judgments we make in response to art and, in particular, their more often than not metaphorical nature, e.g. describing a piece of music in terms of emotion, texture or colour.

It is the developments which have taken place within modernism and postmodernism that have promoted the metaphorical dimension of art. Modern art is ‘modern’ in a number of respects, the two most salient perhaps being: (1) its reaction to and manipulation of new, mechanical means of reproduction, and (2) its attempt to exhibit values which are autonomous or which are at least in opposition to the homogenization of meaning threatened by political, economic, or technological forces. What follows
from these two points is a concern to move art away from *mimesis*, i.e. naturalistic or realistic representation, and towards forms of representation which refract or distort the world or to forms of expression which ostensibly surrender representation altogether. These developments can be seen as metaphorical in the sense that they foreground the ‘transformational’ nature of artistic practice: art no longer supplies a literal or conventional rendition of reality but instead defamiliarizes it, presents it in ‘inappropriate’ forms, as a way of encouraging us to reflect upon our sensibilities in a world which is becoming increasingly fragmented through dualistic thought and capitalist ideology. Just as a metaphor invites us to understand its subject in terms of an unfamiliar predicate, so Claude Monet asks us to see Rouen cathedral as an amalgamation of light and shade, where the impressionists’ interest in light, it is worth pointing out, is both stimulated by and a reaction against the arrival of photography. As another example, we might take the emergence of acoustic art (*das Neue Hörspiel*) from experimentations with radio in 1920s Germany. Here the aesthetic and technical properties of the medium prompted directors to montage sounds, e.g. speech, animal cries, natural sounds of wind and water, machinery and the noises generated by radio itself, in a way which thwarted the listener’s stable categorization and placing of the source objects in the world.

If modernism is art’s response to the shifts in sensibility wrought by modernity, then postmodernism is a drawing attention to the contingent, constructed nature of the forms of representation generated within modernity. Emphasis is placed on contingency and construction in order to prevent the forms of modernism being claimed for any dialectical or teleological concept of truth. One of the distinctive characteristics of postmodern practice, according to Fredric Jameson, is a complexity of conceptual borrowing and intermingling which frustrates any simple or straightforward assimilation of that practice in the name of a given or predicted end. As a result, in the context of art, the postmodern aesthetic, in Jameson’s words, has a ‘schizophrenic’ effect on its audience, that is to say, the audience is completely and utterly disoriented when, instead of being presented with a familiar, shared narrative, they are confronted by a network of competing styles. He cites as an example the Bonaventure Hotel built in the new Los Angeles downtown by the architect and developer John Portman. The various spatial
and stylistic disjunctions in the building’s construction, Jameson declares, make it impossible to have any immediate sense of the building’s volume or to plot a clear, purposeful trajectory through it.\textsuperscript{10}

This schizophrenic character, I aver, also possesses a metaphorical quality, but in an ‘diaphoric’ as opposed to a transformational sense. ‘Diaphor’ and ‘epiphor’ are the contrast terms Aristotle uses in his analysis of metaphor.\textsuperscript{11} The former refers to the unprecedented or even disruptive nature of the juxtaposition of terms in a trope, whereas the latter is the more measured or focused transference of a name from that which it normally describes to some other object carried out in order to express a noted similarity. Diaphor seeks impact and plurivocality whereas epiphor aims for meaning and univocality, and it is the diaphoric multiplication of concepts in the absence of any epiphoric rationalization that, I suggest, characterizes postmodern aesthetics. With the postmodern work, the emphasis is on different aesthetic forms or styles conflicting with one another in the same work. Instead of art being understood as a transformation in our perception of the world, it is here taken as a practice which sets out to create contradiction and instability between the two or more modes of representation that are quoted or referred to in the work’s own production.

As another illustration of this diaphoric schizophrenia, we might briefly look at the ready-made. This is the kind of artwork (primarily in the visual arts) that is ‘made’ by taking an object from an everyday setting and presenting it in an art context. The original and most infamous example of this is Marcel Duchamp’s placing, in 1914, of a urinal in a gallery and giving it the title \textit{Fountain}. More recent extensions of the genre include the series of rectangular brick sculptures exhibited by Carl Andre (\textit{Equivalent I-VIII}, 1966)\textsuperscript{12} and Tracey Emin’s unmade bed (\textit{My Bed}, 1999).\textsuperscript{13} Works such as these are diaphoric, I maintain, in that they throw the realms of the routine, the functional, and the manufactured into conflict with those realms which constitute our expectations about art, e.g. intention, authenticity, and the aesthetic. Arthur Danto hints at this connection in \textit{The Transfiguration of the Commonplace} when he observes that a ready-made or any work which quotes heavily from other forms of representation always involves an ‘increment of [interpretive] activity in excess of merely communicating the facts’;\textsuperscript{14}
that is to say, there is a diaphoric increment over and above the epiphoric communication of fact, where the fact in question might be ‘this is a urinal’ or ‘this is an unmade bed’.

2. Metaphor in the *Critique of Judgment*

These then are some of the ways in which metaphor is active in contemporary aesthetics, where the metaphorical nature of the art contributes directly to the critical dimension of aesthetics outlined above; the conceptual realignments which make up our attitudes to art are recognized to occur within a wider context of conceptual reappraisal which can inform thinking in moral, political, and epistemological debate. My claim in this paper is that the importance of metaphor for aesthetics can be illuminated by an assessment of the role metaphor plays in Kant’s critical system. Understanding the position metaphor occupies in the formulation of Kant’s arguments will help to bring out the architectonic significance of the trope itself, and thereby create a Kantian perspective on metaphor which can elucidate the metaphorical aesthetic outlined above.

The length and detail of my exposition might seem at odds with the brief or general descriptions of art and aesthetics given so far, but the exegetical apparatus is necessary in order to disclose the significance of the moves made by metaphor in Kant’s system, and to appreciate the moral and epistemological significance which the trope acquires as a result.

Although Kant does not speak of metaphor directly, he does nevertheless address analogy, the kind of metaphor (following Aristotle’s definition) which, instead of comparing one thing with another, compares one relationship with another in the form A is to B as C is to D. Analogy is vital to Kant’s architectonic because, as a creator of relationships, it allows him to explain how the key terms in his system interact with one another. The main gulf which has to be bridged is between the sensible and the supersensible. The supersensible in this context refers to human reason and, in particular, its capacity for going beyond what is given in immediate (sensible) experience. While Kant maintains the philosophical tradition (following Aristotle, Aquinas, and
Descartes) of defining reason as the ability to think creatively and act according to principles which are independent of nature, he nevertheless departs from tradition with his claim that the objectivity or validity of these supersensible principles lies not in themselves, in their own terms, but in their application to sensible reality. This is the relationship which has to be explained. As a result, Kant faces the question of the interaction between the sensible and the supersensible on two accounts, since reason goes beyond the given in both theoretical (or cognitive) and practical ways, as argued in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* respectively. The questions which arise are: theoretically, how do (supersensible) pure, transcendental concepts projected in advance of experience accommodate (sensible) empirical intuitions; and practically, how can a (supersensible) universal moral imperative supplied by reason in advance of experience serve as a principle for showing us how we ought to act in (sensible) particular situations?

The project of uniting the sensible and the supersensible ultimately leads Kant, in the *Critique of Judgment*, to the problem of reconciling two concepts of the supersensible: the supersensible substrate of all appearances in accordance with the laws of nature, and the supersensible substrate of our freedom to act in accordance with the moral law; or in other words, the supersensible as the substrate of nature and as the substrate of our freedom to act in ways which are not determined by nature. The one debate (the reconciliation of sensible and supersensible) leads to the other (the reconciliation of two supersensibles) for two reasons. Firstly, the supersensible in Kant’s epistemology is the source of the conditions of possibility which allow sensibility to come into being, that is to say, it is the origin of the conditions of possibility of nature appearing to the experiencing subject through sensibility.

Secondly, accounts of sensibility lead to discussions of supersensibility because of the terms in which these debates are set in the history of philosophy and, in particular, the spatial or ‘realm’ metaphors which are used to mark philosophy’s central distinctions, for example, the material and the ideal, the sensible and the intelligible, the immediate and the transcendent. Philosophical argument traditionally locates metaphysical absolutes, such as identity, truth, and reality in itself, behind or above our physical
dimensions; this applies to both rationalism and empiricism. Kant’s project throughout his critical writing is to show how these binary domains can intersect but, in the Critique of Judgment, it culminates in the question of how such intersection is possible when the two principal source domains – the supersensible as moral autonomy and as nature in itself – would seem (adopting the spatial metaphor again) to entertain no overlap whatsoever. Kant uses a similar image: ‘The concept of freedom determines nothing with regard to our theoretical cognition of nature, just as the concept of nature determines nothing with regard to the practical laws of freedom; and to this extent it is not possible to throw a bridge from one domain to the other’ (Ak 195).16

How then does analogy serve Kant in his attempt to reconcile the supersensibles of nature and freedom? Firstly, it is by means of analogy that Kant identifies our power of judgment as the principle to which we should turn in order to achieve the desired resolution. He does this in his second introduction to the Critique of Judgment. Reviewing his work from the first two Critiques, Kant observes that the concepts of nature ‘which contain a priori the basis for all theoretical cognition, were found to rest on the legislation of the understanding’, and similarly that the concept of freedom ‘was found to contain a priori the basis for all practical precepts that are unconditioned by the sensible, and to rest on the legislation of reason’ (Ak 176). On this basis, he argues,

we have cause to suppose, by analogy, that [judgment] too may contain a priori, if not a legislation of its own, then at least a principle of its own, perhaps merely a subjective one, by which to search for laws. Even though such a principle would lack a realm of objects as its own domain, it might still have some territory; and this territory might be of such a character that none but this very principle might hold it. (Ak 177)

An important metaphorical theme is introduced here: namely, the absence of a domain. Once again we have thought perceived in spatial terms, although in this instance it is the applicability of a concept which is represented spatially. 17 Kant distinguishes between realm, territory, and domain in his account of whether or not there are objects corresponding to concepts. ‘Realm’ represents the region of objects covered by a
concept as an abstract possibility. Within this, the part of the realm ‘in which cognition is possible for us’, Kant avows, ‘is a territory… and that part of the territory over which these concepts legislate is the domain of these concepts’ (Ak 174). But the point here isn’t that metaphors are being employed. Rather, it is that, according to Kant, the principle he seeks does not have its own domain. Metaphor (of which analogy is a form) is introduced precisely because it is the disrespecer of domains, the cognitive principle which, lacking a domain of its own, operates by rupturing the conceptual landscape and placing two formerly incongruent semantic fields side by side.

While this first instance of analogy merely suggests that judgment itself might be the ‘territory’ to turn to for answers, subsequent analogies are introduced to form the key concepts in Kant’s theory of judgment. In order to appreciate the role they play, it will be helpful to provide some exposition of his theory. Kant’s examination of our power of judgment consists of a critique of aesthetic judgment and a critique of teleological judgment. This can give the impression that the Critique of Judgment is a book of two halves, and it is certainly true to say that the greater part of Kantian scholarship has concentrated on the account of aesthetic judgment given in the first half. However, there is a very good reason why the third Critique is a combined study of aesthetics and teleology: both forms of judgment, Kant avows, go beyond intuition by invoking concepts which cannot be explained in terms of their application to intuition.

Aesthetic judgments or judgments of taste are those utterances where we describe something as beautiful or as having special significance, for example, ‘This is a beautiful landscape’, ‘This is a powerful work of art’. These judgments go beyond the given in that, while they are a description of a personal feeling in response to an object, they nevertheless extend beyond this subjectivity to make a claim about its beauty or aesthetic merit which arguably should hold for everyone. In other words, they claim a level of universality normally attributed to conceptual determination, yet it cannot be the case that determination is taking place since it is a personal feeling which is being expressed. How is this universality to be accounted for?
Teleology also goes beyond what is given in intuition, albeit in a different context. Teleology asserts that complex or living systems, such as plants, animals, people, can best be explained in terms of ends or aims or purposes. Whereas a causal account explains behaviour as an aggregate of mechanical events, one leading ‘blindly’ to another, a teleological explanation projects an end in advance of experience which allows various elements to be seen to be working together as an organic whole in pursuit of the end. Thus, in a teleological judgment, there is the assumption of a concept which allows us to perceive unity in a situation for which there is no basis in the mere causal structure of events as observed through intuition.

Kant formalizes the problem posed by this ‘beyondness’ in aesthetics and teleology as the antinomy of aesthetic judgment and the antinomy of teleological judgment respectively. The antinomy in both cases is the conflict between, on the one hand, a judgment (whether aesthetic or teleological) seeming to be about what is personal (aesthetic) or what is determined in intuition (material things produced in accordance with ‘blindly’ mechanical laws) and, on the other, the same judgment also seeming to employ a concept (universal agreement in aesthetics, and organic unity in teleology) for which there is no empirical warrant.

In order to solve these antinomies, Kant draws a distinction between determinative and reflective judgment. ‘Judgment in general’, he writes, ‘is the ability to think the particular under the universal’ (Ak 179). Determinative judgments, on the one hand, subsume a particular under a universal or, in a more Kantian idiom, an intuition under a concept, and determine an object to be a certain kind of thing, for example, ‘This is a tomato’. Reflective judgments, on the other, do not assign properties to an object. They are attached to experiences where no determining concept is available or where an available concept is inadequate to the experience. Aesthetic and teleological judgments are reflective in this sense: to describe a landscape as ‘beautiful’ or a piece of music as ‘sad’ or to claim that a series of events is the product of a purpose is not to ascribe empirically determinate qualities to an object. However, since judgment, by Kant’s own lights, always requires a concept, what reflective judgment does in these circumstances, he argues, is not categorize its object but produce a concept which reflects its own capacity to
form a judgment, to get a purchase on the phenomenon before it which is posing this challenge to categorization. The concept that is produced is ‘nature’s subjective purposiveness’, the concept that nature appears as if it were designed for our awareness. As Kant defines the term, purposiveness is the a priori principle that what to human insight is contingent in the particular (empirical) natural laws does nevertheless contain a law-governed unity, unfathomable but still conceivable by us, in the combination of what is diverse in them to [form] an experience that is intrinsically \( an\ s\ ich \) possible. (Ak 183-4).

Purposiveness is the appearance of design or purpose in nature that is necessary for our faculties to obtain a unified, coherent purchase on the world; it is the ‘harmony of an object… with the mutual relation of the cognitive powers… that are required for every empirical cognition’ (Ak 191). Thus purposiveness represents not the presence of a particular order in nature (this would mean that the concept of purposiveness was being exercised determinatively) but the possibility of order in nature, not the determination but the determinability of nature (Ak 196). Purposiveness is also therefore the subjective principle belonging to judgment hinted at above, the principle ‘by which to search for laws’, the principle which defines the territory ‘in which cognition is possible for us’ (in Kant’s technical sense of ‘territory’).

Claiming aesthetic and teleological judgments as reflective therefore removes their respective antinomies, since their universal character is shown to follow not from the determinative application of a concept (which would conflict with the subjectivity of aesthetic judgment and the mechanical determination already exercised in teleological judgment) but instead from reflection on the purposiveness of nature for our judgment. But how does this excursion into aesthetics and teleology help Kant unite the supersensibles of nature and freedom? The answer to this lies in the analogy at the heart of the concept of nature’s subjective purposiveness. The possibility that the mind can intersect with a determinable nature, Kant argues, is one we cannot fathom directly but only conceive of indirectly by analogy to an understanding other than our own. As he admits, in order to think of nature being determinable by us, we need to view the
particular empirical laws of nature ‘in terms of such a unity [as they would have] if they
too had been given by an understanding (even though not ours) so as to assist our
cognitive powers by making possible a system of experience in terms of particular
natural laws’ (Ak 180). Kant’s most forthright statement along these lines is the
following:

The purposiveness that we must presuppose even for cognizing the inner
possibility of many natural things is quite unthinkable to us and is beyond
our grasp unless we think of it, and of the world as such, as a product of an
intelligent cause (a God). (Ak 400)

To be the product of an intelligent cause here means to have one’s being or actuality
determined by a concept held by an *intellectus archetypus* or *intuitive understanding* or
supreme being (Ak 406-8). This is an understanding which is *archetypal* in the sense that
it is the origin of its own reality. It can be called *intuitive* (in Kant’s sense) on the grounds
that the intuition of reality is self-present to it; all objects cognized by it simply exist (Ak
403). Or as Kant puts it in the first *Critique*, an intuitive understanding is ‘an
understanding through whose [spontaneous] presentation the objects of this
presentation would at the same time exist’ (B 139). In other words, it is an
understanding which can theoretically legislate not merely the universal but the
particular as well.

However, the problem with our reliance on the concept of an intuitive understanding is
that is a form of understanding for which there is no contingency, that is, no distinction
between the possible and the actual (Ak 402). Our form of understanding, in contrast to
the intuitive form, Kant describes as *discursive* or as an *intellectus ectypus*, which signifies
that it relies on perceptions gained through sensibility (Ak 408). This means that, for a
discursive understanding, there is always a contrast between how things *might appear* and
how things *actually appear* in intuition. Against this, an intuitive understanding neither has
nor requires this contingency since, as stated above, all objects cognized by it simply
exist.
This becomes a problem for Kant when it comes to the question of what each of the two types of understanding takes to be the basis for the perception of organisation in nature, the perception of how various parts fit together to make a whole. As far as an intuitive understanding is concerned, the relationship of the parts to the whole in an organized natural product necessarily follows from or is already contained in the concept which the understanding has of it. However, Kant observes, we, as discursive individuals, cannot present the possibility of the parts as dependent on the whole because of the ‘peculiarity of our understanding’ which requires that our concepts have to work on the particulars given in intuition, that is to say, our concepts have to work up from the parts to the whole. ‘We, given the character of our understanding’, he declares, ‘can regard a real whole of nature only as the joint effect of the motive forces of the parts’ (Ak 407). To suggest that our discursive understanding through its theoretical legislation could determine organization on a ‘top down’, ‘whole to part’ basis, Kant insists, ‘would be a contradiction’ (Ak 407). Yet discursive understanding requires this teleological projection of unity for judgment to take place. How then is it possible to have a concept of the purposive determinability of nature which does not involve a contradiction between, on the one hand, the contingency with which discursive understanding works up from the parts to possible wholes and, on the other, the necessity with which the parts follow from the wholes characteristic of intuitive understanding?

Kant’s solution is to argue that the theoretical legislation exercised by intuitive understanding can be thought by us in terms of the practical legislation of reason, and that this can be achieved by analogy to the concept of a purpose. An intuitive understanding, Kant observes, working as it does from the whole to the parts, ‘has no contingency in the combination of the parts in order to make [an empirically] determinate form of the whole possible’ (Ak 407). However, if we think of the connection of the parts (required to make the form possible) as an effect which is determined ‘merely on the basis of the presentation of that effect’, that is to say, if the connectivity and the whole which supplies it are seen as products, then we are regarding the whole as a purpose, that is to say, as a product of practical reason. A purpose, for Kant, refers to a thing whose form
The causality that only reason can have is the causality of freedom or, in other words, the kind of causality ‘that confines nature to a particular form for which nature itself contains no basis whatsoever’ (Ak 422). By introducing the concept of purpose through the analogical ‘as if’, Kant is able to show how discursive understanding can borrow a notion of determinability from the concept of an intuitive understanding, where that notion allows us to think of determination over and above the order of mechanistic cause and effect which generates empirically contingent outcomes. The concept of practical reason can supply this sense of contingency because of the distinction it admits between moral necessity and causal necessity. The objective necessity of a moral, duty-bound action is of a quite different kind from the necessity that the act would have if it were an event with its basis in nature. An action ‘that morally is absolutely necessary’, Kant writes, ‘is regarded as quite contingent physically (i.e. [we see] that what ought necessarily to happen still fails to happen on occasion)’ (Ak 403).

By overcoming the seemingly contradictory aspects of teleological judgment (relating to discursive and intuitive understandings), this mode of analogical reasoning also completes Kant’s account of the reconciliation of the two supersensibles. The mediating condition produced by judgment, we recall, is the concept of nature’s subjective purposiveness. The concept allows us to think of the two supersensibles ‘occupying the same space’ so to speak, because it represents the idea of the supersensible substrate of nature in terms of, that is, by analogy with, the supersensible substrate of freedom and its contingent effects in the physical world. The analogy is confirmed by Kant when he considers the forms of causality which are attached to the two supersensibles: ‘the causality of nature in its universal lawfulness [and the causality of] an idea that confines
nature to a particular form for which nature itself contains no basis whatsoever’ (Ak 422) or, to give another characterisation of the causality of freedom, a causality that is ‘the ability to act according to purposes (i.e. a will)’ (Ak 370). From this perspective, Kant suggests, we might think of the causal mechanism of nature ‘as the instrument, as it were, of a cause that acts intentionally’ (Ak 422). Thus, mediation between the two supersensibles is conveyed by thinking of the causality of nature being used as a tool by the causality of freedom.

What this account has shown so far is that Kant’s theory of judgment is structured by a series of nested analogies. The first analogy, with the legislative capacities of reason and the understanding, prompts Kant to work on the basis that judgment too has its own principle by which to search for laws. The principle Kant arrives at is the concept of purposiveness, and this is devised by a second analogy to the idea of an understanding other than our own, an intuitive understanding. A third analogy, to the concept of practical reason, allows us to think of the effects of the intuitive understanding having the contingency that is appropriate for our discursive power of judgment.

Beyond these, however, there is a further respect in which analogy figures in Kant’s argumentation, one which brings his account of teleology back to his aesthetic theory. If we return to the ‘instrument’ metaphor given above, it would seem that this particular metaphor makes the supersensible of nature subservient to the supersensible of freedom. Kant himself admits that ‘in view of the character of our cognitive power... we must regard mechanism as originally subordinated to a cause that acts intentionally’ (Ak 422). However, there are good grounds for exercising caution when it comes to interpreting the metaphor and therefore assuming we can assign a definite predicate to the interaction between the two supersensibles. And Kant makes this quite plain, for there are several declarations at this point in the Critique to the effect that ‘it is beyond our reason’s grasp how this reconciliation of the two kinds of causality is possible’ (Ak 422; cf. Ak 411, 412). Even though the concept of purposiveness unites the two supersensibles, our possession of that concept does not mean we are able to cognize the supersensible theoretically; we cannot perceive the relationship between nature and freedom with the determinative exactitude which follows when a concept has an
intuition corresponding to it. The reason for this is that the concept of purposiveness is what Kant terms a ‘rational idea’: an idea which ‘can never become cognition because it contains a concept (of the supersensible) for which no adequate intuition can ever be given’ (Ak 342).

Nevertheless, while rational ideas cannot be evidenced or realized in intuition, a ‘content’ can nevertheless be provided for them, Kant suggests, by analogy. Our interest here is in the adequacy of the concept of purposiveness for cognition and, in particular, the question of the thinkability of the concept raised by the analogy it contains between the causalities of nature and freedom. The demonstration that a concept is not empty but adequate for cognition Kant refers to as the ‘exhibition’ (vorstellen) or ‘hypotyposis’ of the concept. All hypotyposis, he announces, ‘consists in making [a concept] sensible, and is either schematic or symbolic’:

If we provide the concept with objective reality straightforwardly (geradezu) (directe) by means of the intuition that corresponds to it, rather than [indirectly or] mediatly, this act is called schematism. But if the concept can be exhibited only [indirectly or] mediately, in its implications (Folgen) (indirecte), this act may be called the symbolization of the concept. The first we do for concepts of the sensible, the second is an expedient we use for concepts of the supersensible, which as such cannot actually be exhibited, and given in any possible experience... The symbol of an idea (or rational concept) is a presentation of the object by analogy: i.e. we present the object of the idea [e.g. God] in terms of the relation [which some other object, e.g. man, has] to its [effects or] consequences [Folgen] and which is the same relation that we consider the object itself as having to its consequences, and we do this even though the [two] objects are quite different in kind. (Ak 351)

Thus rational ideas are not exhibited directly by the schematization of an object but are exhibited indirectly through the symbolization of a relation between objects. What is important here, as regards the concept of purposiveness and the metaphor of nature as
an instrument, is that the symbolization of the relation by analogy necessarily displays a
degree of unresolvability, an unresolvability which comes from there being a lack of
correspondence between concept and intuition. Not only does this unresolvability act as
a ‘buffer’ preventing any determinate predicate from being drawn out of the analogy (in
this case, the ‘instrument’ metaphor), but it also represents a region of creative, critical
thought, a region in which the various possible mappings between relations are
generated, the ‘thickness’ or density of these possibilities constituting the buffer effect.

This line of interpretation is supported by the fact that rational ideas, for Kant, are the
counterpart of aesthetic ideas. Discussion of aesthetic ideas forms part of Kant’s
account of the genius of the artist; Kant in fact defines ‘genius’ as ‘the ability to exhibit
aesthetic ideas’ (Ak 313). Whereas a rational idea is ‘a concept to which no intuition
(presentation of the imagination) can be adequate’, an aesthetic idea, Kant writes, is ‘a
presentation of the imagination which prompts much thought, but to which no
determinate thought whatsoever, i.e. no determinate concept, can be adequate, so that
no language can express it’ (Ak 314). As such, aesthetic ideas ‘strive towards something
that lies beyond the bounds of experience, and hence try to approach an exhibition of
rational concepts (intellectual ideas)... [so that these concepts] are given a semblance of
objective reality’ (Ak 314). Just how aesthetic ideas might assist the exhibition of the
concept of purposiveness is hinted at by Kant when he considers the aesthetic ‘attributes
of an object... whose concept is a rational idea and hence cannot be exhibited
adequately’ (Ak 315). The examples he gives are ‘Jupiter’s eagle with the lightning in its
claws [as] an attribute of the mighty king of heaven, and the peacock [as] an attribute of
heaven’s stately queen’ (Ak 315). These aesthetic attributes (the eagle, the peacock and,
in our case, the instrument) do not represent the determinative content of their
respective rational ideas (sublimity, the majesty of creation and, in our case,
purposiveness) but instead present something different,
exhibition, but its proper function is to quicken \textit{[belieben]} the mind by opening up for it a view into an \textit{immense realm} of kindred presentations. (Ak 315; emphases added)

‘Spread’, ‘multitude’, and ‘realm’ all hint at the density or ‘thickness’ of analogy. In other words, they indicate that analogy functions not by applying concepts directly or determinatively but instead \textit{by opening up a space} in which a wealth of cognitive possibilities (left ‘undeveloped’ by the understanding in its singular, determinative application of concepts) is available for consideration (Ak 317). This means there is a very good reason why it is impossible for us to be clear on how the reconciliation of the two kinds of causality is possible: the impossibility is an aspect of the necessarily analogical nature of judgment. In order for there to be determinability between our faculties and the world, there must be, in between them, an analogical middle-ground of possible presentations which is not itself a domain where theoretical or practical legislation takes place. This is what purposiveness, exhibited as the meeting of two causalities, represents.

Thus, analogy, as well as being the means by which Kant arrives at the concept of nature’s subjective purposiveness, is also \textit{the procedure by which the concept of purposiveness operates in Kant’s system}. Otherwise put, the concept of purposiveness is not only constructed by analogy but represents or embodies the performance of analogical thought itself. This is in effect to assert that reflective judgment – the form of judgment which brings the concept of nature’s subjective purposiveness to the fore – is fundamentally analogical. What is reflected upon is the capacity of our cognitive powers to apply concepts to intuitions and to entertain the possibility that alternative concept-intuition mappings are available; the idea of transferring a concept from one object to another is, of course, one of the defining characteristics of metaphor. In terms of the supersensible, analogy becomes not only the ‘opening of possibilities’ which allows the two supersensibles to be combined in a coherent concept, but also the form of thinking which lets us see freedom intersecting with nature, which lets us explore how objects \textit{ought} to be conceptualized. This is in accordance with Kant’s definition of beauty as the symbol of morality. The metaphors we utter in response to a work of art are motivated
by the question of how we ought to describe the work; examples given by Kant here include buildings characterized as ‘majestic and magnificent’ and colours as ‘humble or tender’ (Ak 354). This is essentially another way of saying that aesthetic judgment makes a claim to everyone’s assent. Aesthetic judgment, as reflective judgment, Kant explains, ‘legislates to itself’ and, he continues:

because the subject has this possibility [of judgment] within him, while outside [him] there is also the possibility that nature will [purposively] harmonize with [the judgment], judgment finds itself referred to something that is both in the subject himself and outside him, something that is neither nature nor freedom and yet is linked with the basis of freedom, the supersensible, in which the theoretical and practical power are in an unknown manner combined and joined into a unity. (Ak 353)

Isn’t there though the danger of a regress in Kant’s thought? His account of reflective judgment not only makes use of metaphor but also demonstrates that our aesthetic (and teleological) judgments are inherently metaphorical in that they invite us to consider how we apply or ought to apply concepts to experience in general. Isn’t this tantamount to using a form of reflective judgment (metaphor) to explain reflective judgment? Or to put it more explicitly: is Kant guilty of referring judgments (aesthetic or teleological) which can’t be explained in terms of concepts determining intuitions to a concept that is the product of a judgment (about purposiveness in nature) which itself cannot be accounted for in terms of concepts determining intuitions? I would argue that Kant is not guilty of this. By affirming that the possibility of our faculties engaging with the world depends upon a purposive state of conceptual freeplay or ‘thinking more’, Kant is effectively confirming the appropriateness of metaphor for scientific and philosophical discourse. As a result, argument by analogy is legitimized as the means by which conceptual enquiry seeks to reconcile seemingly opposite or contrasting notions. Thus a process (analogy) is not being used to explain itself (an explanation couched in analogical terms) because the process in question is actually being claimed to be constitutive of the condition (nature’s subjective purposiveness) which allows any cognition and therefore any explanation at all to take place. Hence no regression is involved, since what we
understand by the name ‘aesthetic judgment’, far from being something that is merely reproduced in an explanation of itself, is in fact newly defined as the form of judgment which brings purposiveness to the fore.

3. The implications of a ‘metaphorical’ Third Critique for contemporary aesthetics

What this leaves us with is an account of aesthetics which shows that our experience of art is tied to the question of how we apply or ought to apply concepts to experience in general. It therefore gives us an aesthetic theory which goes some way towards elaborating the capacity of art as metaphor to test or challenge existing conceptual schemes. As I indicate in the first section of this article, central themes in recent aesthetic debate have been the construction of thought through language and the challenging of conceptual boundaries. For example, poststructuralism and feminism examine the constructedness of epistemological and political values and demonstrate the possibility of their inversion or subversion by focusing on the images and tropes at work in argumentation, and studies of art and interpretation within hermeneutics and critical theory draw out the way in which art prepares us for encounters with otherness. Let us briefly, in this final section, look at three particular examples – from Lyotard, Derrida, and Habermas – of how the metaphorical dimension of art in the third Critique is broached by contemporary aesthetics.

Two thinkers who have recently drawn attention to the role analogy plays in the Critique of Judgment are Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida. Lyotard’s work on the third Critique concentrates on the sublime. This concept is important for him since it denotes moments of indefinability which test the limits of representation, and therefore stands as a key component in his thesis that a fundamental incommensurability exists between the world and the judgments we make about it. Lyotard’s interest in analogy in the context of the sublime follows from Kant’s use of analogy as a mediating term between our cognitive powers, and Lyotard’s assertion is that it is the sublime, as opposed to taste or beauty, which displays this analogical structure. Both beauty and the sublime, he admits, demand to be communicated, but the nature of the demand in each
Notes


9 Jameson, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’, The Cultural Turn, p. 3.

10 Ibid., pp. 11-16.


13 This was one of the works which represented Tracey Emin as a nominee for the Turner Prize in London, 1999.


15 Aristotle, Poetics, pp. 34-35.

16 Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987). This and all subsequent references to the third Critique follow the pagination of the original Akademie edition and are given in parentheses in the main text.

17 The first instance of the applicability of a concept being pictured in spatial terms is the ‘container’ trope in Aristotle’s account of syllogistic reasoning, where ‘for so-and-so


