

Modern philosophy and the emergence of aesthetic theory: Kant

Self-consciousness, knowledge and freedom

The importance attributed to aesthetic questions in recent philosophy becomes easier to grasp if one considers the reasons for the emergence of modern aesthetic theory. Kant's main work on aesthetics, the 'third Critique', the *Critique of Judgement* (*CJ*) (1790), forms part of his response to unresolved questions which emerge from his *Critique of Pure Reason* (*CPR*) (1781) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1787).¹ In order to understand the significance of the *CJ* one needs therefore to begin by looking at the first two Kantian Critiques.² The essential problem they entail, which formed the focus of reactions to Kant's work at the time, lies in establishing how the deterministic natural world, whose mechanisms are becoming more and more accessible to the methods of the natural sciences, relates to the world in which we understand ourselves as autonomous beings. The third Critique tries to suggest ways of bridging the divide between these apparently separate worlds by giving an account of natural and artistic beauty, relating beauty to natural teleology, the purposiveness of individual organisms and the possible purposiveness of nature as a whole. In doing so, however, it threatens to undermine essential tenets of the first two Critiques. The third Critique is not least significant because of the ways in which it informs subsequent attempts in German Idealism to integrate Kant's philosophy into an overall system, some of which give a major role to aesthetics. The *CJ* has, furthermore, become increasingly important in contemporary discussions of Kant's work, appealing on the one hand to those who wish to question the perception of Kant's enterprise as merely an exercise in legitimating the natural sciences, and on the other to those who see the need to extend the scope of epistemology if it is not to founder on the problems that become apparent in the first two Critiques.

Dieter Henrich regards the crux of Kant's epistemology as the justification of 'forms of cognition from the form and nature of self-consciousness' (Henrich 1982 p. 176). The philosophical problem is therefore how the form and nature of self-consciousness are to be described. Descartes had famously located the certainty which warded off the scepticism generated by the unreliability of empirical perception in the thought that even if I doubt everything I think I

know about the world I must exist *qua* doubter. Doubting the thought of my existence involved an undeniable existential relationship of the doubter to the thought that is being doubted, which therefore provided a minimal point of certainty: I must at least exist as a thinking being. However, Descartes provided very little else by this argument, and he needed God to establish the bridge back to a reliably knowable world outside self-consciousness. Kant tries to extend the certainty about the world to be derived from self-consciousness without using this theological support. How, though, can subjectivity be its own foundation? How can subjectivity itself give rise to *objective* certainty without relying upon the 'dogmatic' assumption of a pre-existing objectivity of the world of nature which the arguments of David Hume about the contingency of our knowledge of causal connections had rendered untenable for Kant?

Kant argues that any linking of perceptions from the multiplicity of what is given to us from the world in 'intuition' (the term is discussed below) requires a *synthesis*, which creates identity from inherent difference. Given that we arguably never receive the same input of perceptual data at any two moments of our lives, and yet are able to establish testable laws of nature, repeatable knowledge must, Kant maintains, rely on identities provided by the continuity of self-consciousness. What we know by synthesis therefore cannot be wholly derived from our receptive, sensuous experience of nature, which, without the forms of identity involved in synthesis, just consists in endless particularity. The crucial issue therefore becomes the nature of the identity of that which synthesises, the identity of the 'subject'. As Henrich shows (pp. 179–83), Kant shifts Descartes's emphasis on the *existence* of self-consciousness, which is only ever certain at the moment of its reflection upon itself, on to the relationship of the thinker to every thought that the thinker could have, believing that if one can show that this relationship itself requires a binding identity there will then be a way of maintaining a cohesion in philosophy which is not derived from an external source. The ability to describe the rules which allow one to move from one case of 'I think' to the next thus becomes decisive. Unless philosophy can give an account of the ways in which self-consciousness is sustained between different cases of 'I think', it will be forced to abandon the only certain foundation it can now have.

Kant is insistent, then, that we can only know the world as it *appears* to us via the constitutive a priori 'categories' of subjectivity which synthesise intuitions into cognisable forms. The world as an object of truth is therefore actively constituted by the structures of the consciousness we have of it, which means that we cannot know how the world is 'in itself'. Instead of cognition following the object, the object comes to depend upon the subject's constitution of it *as* an object by giving it a repeatable identity in a predicative judgement. However, Kant's investment in the distinction between appearances and things in themselves has a further motivation, which does not just derive from his epistemological arguments: the distinction is meant to establish the role of freedom in his philosophy.

Nature, for the Kant of the first Critique, is generally defined 'formally', as

that which is bound by necessary laws constituted by the subject. If the laws of nature were properties of the object world ‘in itself’ they would also apply to ourselves in every respect. In such a view the world, including ourselves, would become a deterministic machine and human responsibility would be an illusion. As a follower of Rousseau and the Enlightenment Kant is, though, most concerned with the fact that human agency involves the ability to follow moral imperatives which cannot be explained in terms of causal laws. His idea is that if I too am subject to the division between how things appear to consciousness and how they are in themselves, my action can be subject to causality as an event in the world of appearing nature but free as something in itself. The will which determines my action is thus inaccessible to cognition – if cognition is understood in Kant’s sense of the synthesising of appearances by categories and concepts – in the same way as the thing in itself is inaccessible. We only have cognitive access to effects of the will, not to the will itself. As a consequence, we seem to exist in two distinct realms. We are determined by the laws of nature as sensuous beings in the realm of appearance, even though these are laws which are ‘given to nature’ by us. At the same time we are also free agents, who can be held to account for our deeds by other free agents.

Such a division raises fundamental problems with regard both to the access we have to our own capacity for cognition and to the capacity of our will to transcend determination by natural laws. The basic question here is: what sort of ‘object’ is this subject when it wishes to ‘intuit’ itself? The difficulty is actually very simple: what Kant wants to describe is not empirical, and what is not empirical is, for Kant, not a possible object of *knowledge*, in the sense of that which is arrived at by the application of concepts to intuitions, at all.³ However, Kant is convinced that we have sufficient warranted knowledge available to us – Newton’s laws, for example – to be able to attempt to see *why* that knowledge is warrantable, without invoking theology or unquestioningly accepting that science represents a pre-existing reality. There can be no doubt about the truth of the propositions of mathematics and their capacity to generate potentially valid scientific knowledge. Neither does Kant doubt the existence of binding moral imperatives. What he wishes to establish is what *in us* makes them possible.

It should already be clear, however, that the explanation of what makes cognition and morality possible will have to be achieved in Kant’s theory at the expense of everything individual in the subject. The point is to establish what is necessarily the case for everyone who counts as a rational being, now that theological foundations can no longer be invoked. What, though, of the new insistence by Baumgarten and Hamann on the value of the particularity of individual experience of the world we observed in the Introduction, which is essential to aesthetic theory? At the beginning of the main text of the second edition of the *CPR* (B p. 36), the ‘Transcendental Aesthetic’, Kant adds a footnote about Baumgarten’s new use of the word ‘aesthetics’ to designate the ‘critique of taste’. He suggests that the attempt to bring judgements of beauty into philos-

ophy will be in vain because such judgements are always based on empirical rules which cannot have the binding force of the rules of a science. In the *CPR* Kant prefers to reserve the use of the word aesthetic for its old meaning of the 'science of all principles of sensuousness' (B p. 35, A p. 21). By the time of the *CJ*, however, Kant will have overtly taken on more of what motivates Baumgarten's conception (in his unpublished 'Reflections' he had already concerned himself more seriously with aesthetics in the new sense). He writes a complex philosophy of aesthetic judgements which aims to establish links between nature in itself and the freedom of rational beings. The reasons for his desire to establish these links relate to difficulties that become apparent in the first Critique.

The unity of the subject

The success of Kant's philosophy depends upon the legitimacy of certain distinctions. However, these distinctions turn out to be hard to sustain. The 'transcendental aesthetic', the account of the conditions of perception, relies, for example, on the difference between 'empirical intuition', and the concepts which judge it. English-language philosophy has come to use the technical term 'intuition' to translate the German word *Anschaung*, which plays a decisive role in the philosophy of the period. The word has several senses, which are not always clear. In everyday usage *anschauen* simply means to 'look at', but in philosophy it is often used to designate various kinds of contact between a subject and its 'other'. Kant regards intuition as the most immediate form of relation of the subject's cognition to an object, which 'only takes place to the extent that the object is given to us' (*CPR* B p. 33, A p. 19), and he equates this with anything being 'real'. As he puts it in the 'Postulates of Empirical Thought':

existence has . . . to do . . . only with the question: whether such a thing is given to us in such a way that the perception of the thing could always precede the concept. For the concept's going before the perception means only its mere possibility; but perception, which gives the material to the concept, is the only character of reality. (B p. 273, A p. 225)⁴

This lays the ground for the distinction between appearances, objects as given to us, and things in themselves, which are not given to us as appearances. The question is how 'inside' and 'outside' relate to each other, and here everything turns on the status of 'intuition'.

A basic example of intuition is the sensation of the hardness of a piece of rock. However, Kant separates empirical intuitions like this from what he terms 'pure intuition', which is concerned with 'extension and form' of the object and is the foundation of geometry. 'Pure intuition' refers to the framework within which we necessarily apprehend things. There are two forms of pure intuition: space and time. We cannot conceive of an object of the *senses* which would exist in a non-spatial and non-temporal form: we can never apprehend all of an object

at once, even though we assume that all the object's aspects do exist at a particular time. We can, though, conceive of functions of thinking which are non-spatial and non-temporal, namely those aspects of thought which are wholly non-empirical, including the categories. Categories are forms of judgement, of synthesis, which are universally applicable to anything that can count as an object (which must be one or many, of a certain size, standing in a certain relationship to other objects, caused by something, etc.). To apprehend a sequence of events as causal, for example, one requires the particular form of synthesis that is designated by the category of causality. One can see *b* follow *a* in time (on the basis of the continuity of the I between the two events), but one cannot see the *necessity* of this occurrence that makes it a causal occurrence rather than a random connection of contingently related events. Categories, then, make possible the syntheses of intuitions which turn intuitions into reliable cognitions. Cognition has two distinct sources: 'receptive' sensuousness, which provides intuitions, and 'spontaneous' understanding, which can think objects as objects of knowledge by applying iterable categories, such as causality, and concepts to different intuitions.

The first stage of making coherence out of the multiplicity of sensuous intuitions is the effect of *Einbildungskraft* ('imagination'). Imagination is the power to organise images (*Bilder*) given in intuition into what Kant terms 'schemata' which can then be subsumed under categories and concepts. In version 'A' of the *CPR* the 'imagination' both produces associations which cohere into something cognisable and is able to reproduce intuitions without the object of intuition being present. The imagination in this version seems both productive and receptive, which already suggests an ambiguity concerning the fundamental distinction between intuitions and concepts. Productivity is a function of the understanding, which is necessary for any synthesis of intuitions; receptivity is the characteristic of sensuousness. In the 'B' version of the *CPR* (1787) Kant changes the role of the imagination, in order to sustain the boundary between what we contribute to the world's intelligibility and what the world contributes, by subordinating the reproductive imagination to the functioning of the categories of the understanding. He therefore planned (but did not actually do so) to remove the famous description of the imagination as a 'blind but indispensable function of the soul without which we would have no knowledge' (B p. 103, A p. 78) and replace it with the assertion that all synthesis is based on the understanding.⁵ The problems lurking in the idea of a boundary between spontaneity and receptivity become most apparent in the decisive part of Kant's account of the structure of our subjectivity, the attempt of the I to describe itself.⁶ It is this account, the 'transcendental deduction of the categories',⁷ which will have a major effect on German Idealism and early Romanticism, and thus upon the history of aesthetics.

The problem is that the highest principle of philosophy, the I, cannot be available as an 'intuition' in the sense Kant has so far employed in the *CPR*, for the following reasons. In order to overcome the key problem in Descartes Kant

introduces the idea that ‘The *I think* must *be able* to accompany all my representations’ (B p. 132). This idea Kant terms the ‘synthetic unity of self-consciousness’, because different moments of consciousness are unified by the essential principle. He opposes this synthetic unity to Descartes’s *cogito*, the ‘analytical unity of self-consciousness’, in which the thinking and the being of the subject are immediately identical, albeit only at the moment when I doubt my existence. The immediate ‘Cartesian’ consciousness of myself which can accompany each thought, and which makes it *my* thought, does not link this particular ‘I think’ to any other case of ‘I think’. It is only through a synthesis of different moments of such consciousness that I can become aware of the identity of my own self-consciousness across time and can have a principle of unity for my representations. Synthesis is dependent upon an act of ‘spontaneity’ (B p. 133): it is ‘self-caused’, rather than being caused by something else. If it were the result of something else the task would then be to ground that something else in something else as its cause, and so on, either until one found a first cause, or *ad infinitum*, in which case the synthesis would never happen, and self-consciousness – and knowledge – would become impossible.

The spontaneity in question therefore cannot itself be part of sensuousness, because everything sensuous is part of the causally determined world given in intuition. What is given in sensuous intuition is synthesised by the understanding, according to the rules of judgement – the categories – whose employment Kant is trying to legitimate in the transcendental deduction. This means, though, that the identity of consciousness actually seems to depend upon the multiplicity of intuitions which it synthesises according to the prior rules of the understanding. In the later-added passage on the ‘refutation of idealism’ Kant claims that ‘even our inner experience, which was indubitable for Cartesius, is only possible under the presupposition of *external* experience’ (B p. 275). However, Kant also claims in the Deduction that the synthesising process itself is what enables me to identify myself: ‘only via the fact that I can grasp the manifold [of representations] in one consciousness do I call them all *my* representations, for otherwise I would have a self which is as differently multi-coloured as I have ideas of which I am conscious’ (B p. 134). The problem is, of course, that there is no explanation here of what makes these representations *mine*. The identity of the I must, however, surely be established independently of the endless difference of what is given to it. The I, in Kant’s terms, is a set of linked cognitive rules that process intuitions into the unity of experience and has a ‘synthetic unity’. But what sort of awareness do I have of this self, according to Kant?

Kant’s answer seems to boil down to the fact that access to our self-awareness can only be of the same order as our intuition of objects: ‘Not the consciousness of the *determining*, but rather only that of the self that can be determined, i.e. of my inner intuition (to the extent to which its manifold can be connected in accordance with the general condition of the unity of apperception in thinking), is the *object*’ (B p. 407). But this leads to much the same

problem as the one just mentioned. The synthetic unity of the I is not guaranteed by our empirical perception because it is self-caused, although Kant claims empirical perception is a necessary condition of it. Kant talks of the ‘pure synthesis of the understanding which is the a priori foundation of the empirical synthesis’ (B p. 140) – meaning the I which, even though I am not aware of it in the sequence of differing experiences, must be there to accompany my experiences, thus making them mine – but then does not give any further account of this pure spontaneity. Manfred Frank points out what is lacking in Kant’s account: ‘In order to be aware of its own appearance (in time) the simple being of self-consciousness must always already be pre-supposed – otherwise it is as if the self-awareness were to lose its eye’ (Frank 1985 p. 39), because it would not have any grounds for seeing representations in time as *its* representations. This consciousness must *already* exist in some way if it is to be *aware* of the series of intuitions which constitute its appearance as object to itself as its *own* intuitions.

Kant acknowledges this problem, but does nothing to solve it:

I am conscious of myself in general in the synthesis of the multiplicity of representations, therefore in the synthetic original unity of apperception, not as I appear to myself, neither *as* I am in myself, but only to the extent *that* I am. This representation is *thinking*, not *intuition*. (CPR B p. 157)

The I must, then, have some kind of ontological status which is not exhausted by what can be said about it as appearance in ‘inner sense’. However, nothing can be said about the manner of its existence because it cannot be given in intuition, which, as we saw, is Kant’s criterion for objective existence. Kant later expends considerable effort in refuting the argument that the I is to be regarded as any kind of persistent ‘substance’ to which attributes are attached, but does not get any further with the basic problem.⁸ His problem is acutely summed up by Novalis in 1796: ‘I is basically nothing – Everything has to be *given* to it – But it is to it alone that something can be given and the given only becomes something [i.e. an object in Kant’s sense] via the I’ (Novalis 1978 p. 185). How, though, is the I given to itself? As Novalis puts it: ‘Can I look for a schema for myself, if I am that which schematises?’ (p. 162).

If I wish to *know* myself I need to use the condition of knowing itself, which is self-caused, but I can only use it in relation to my appearing self, to the representations I have of myself and the world, which Kant insists I do not create. Self-consciousness is not ultimately a *cognition* of oneself, because cognition is only possible in relation to what is given as appearance. Even for Kant, then, ‘reflecting’ upon oneself as an object, splitting oneself into subject and object, cannot give a complete account of the nature of self-consciousness. A full ‘cognition’ of oneself would have to be an *intuition* of something which is wholly in the realm of the ‘intelligible’, the realm of spontaneity. This would entail a self-caused intuition of the self-caused synthesiser of intuitions, which requires an ‘*intellectual intuition*’. Kant rejects this notion as applied to the self because it

contradicts his argument that intuitions without concepts are blind and concepts without intuitions are empty, which means that the identity of the I depends upon its having intuitions given to it to synthesise. Kant sees intellectual intuition as the mode of awareness of a deity which creates the objects of its thought, rather than relying on input from outside itself for the material of its thought. Frank sums up Kant's objection to intellectual intuition as follows: 'The whole deduction of the possibility of an objective cognition would become redundant if Kant were to have assumed an intelligence which creates its object from its own powers' (Frank 1985 p. 43). The intelligence Kant thinks he can describe constitutes the objective *truth*, not the existence, of the object, via the use of its synthetic powers in relation to the appearing spatio-temporal world. However, the truth of the *subject* is not adequately articulated in such an account. The highest cognitive point of philosophy cannot know itself, even if it must assume the necessity of its own existence. In the Paralogisms Kant claims that the 'The proposition, I think, or I exist as thinking is an empirical proposition'.⁹ Empirical propositions require intuitions if what they express is to be real, but what kind of intuition does the I have of itself? In a remark whose implications will, as we shall see, be echoed and expanded in key aspects of Romantic philosophy, such as the work of Schlegel and Schleiermacher, Kant claims in the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* that the 'representation of apperception, the I', is in fact 'nothing more than the feeling of an existence without the least concept and only a representation of that to which all thinking relates' (Kant 1989 p. 106; p. 136 of original edition). As we shall see in relation to the *CJ*, this invocation of 'feeling', which probably has its source in Rousseau's 'Profession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar' from *Emile*, will come to have very significant ramifications.

Kant faces a serious problem in using self-consciousness as the highest principle of epistemology, and the same problem recurs in his moral philosophy. When considering the reasons for the separation of law-bound appearances and freedom, we saw that there can be no evidence of freedom, because it cannot be an object of the understanding identifiable by a concept. Freedom is, though, the centre of Kant's enterprise. He talks of a 'causality through freedom' which brings about new states of the world via our ideas of what should be the case. Reason, the 'capacity for purposes', therefore realises something which cannot be empirical – freedom – in the world. But how are we to know this? We shall see in a moment how Kant's aesthetics later tries to respond to the difficulties inherent in the appeal to non-empirical freedom. Reason itself is in one sense 'infinite', because it cannot be determined by anything finite we know about the world. It 'shows a spontaneity so pure that it goes far beyond everything with which sensuousness can provide it' (Kant 1974 BA p. 109). The recurrence of the term 'spontaneity' here is important, because it links the problem of our free will to the problem of describing the existence of our cognitive self-consciousness in a manner which, via Fichte, will be crucial for the whole of German Idealism.

Kant is, as it were, in the position of Moses in Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*:

the most fundamental part of his philosophy cannot be explained, just as Moses is faced with the unenviable task of persuading people to believe in a God they cannot see. As Kant puts it:

For we can explain nothing except what we can reduce to laws whose object is given in some possible experience. But freedom is a mere idea, whose objective reality cannot be shown either according to laws of nature and thus also not in any possible experience. (BA p. 120)

Our will can seem to be motivated by natural drives, which are explicable in terms of the understanding because they are based on biological laws. However, the will can also be seen as motivated by something in the realm of the intelligible, which cannot be explained. We can exercise our rational will in order to bring about changes in the world which are guided by ideas of what ought to be the case and which would not occur if all were ruled by natural determinism. Kant thinks the fact that we can act in ways which are not in accordance with our appetites and which are in accordance with our moral duty reveals a potential for universally binding laws that point to a higher purpose in existence. In his moral philosophy Kant is, however, left once again with the problem that the fundamental principle cannot be articulated. As he does in the first Critique, Kant more than once invokes the spectre of ‘intellectual intuition’. Discussing the categorical imperative – ‘*Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law*’ (BA p. 52) – he says that our consciousness of the imperative is a ‘fact of reason’. Evidence for this fact would, though, require access to freedom, which would entail ‘an intellectual intuition which one cannot in any way accept here’ (A p. 57). In both the theoretical and the practical parts of his philosophy, then, Kant leaves a gap where the articulation of the highest principle should be located.

The unification of nature

The first two Critiques leave open how the new focus of philosophy, the subject, could give a grounding explanation of its activities in a non-circular, non-theological fashion. Furthermore, Kant’s account of the understanding only explains how it is that we can generate a potentially infinite number of laws of nature. When it comes to the question of whether these laws constitute an overall system Kant claims we can only assert that they do so as a ‘regulative idea’ of reason. He thus acknowledges the need for the *idea* of the universe as a unified totality if the products of the understanding are not to be a merely random series of laws, but he is aware that this does not prove in any way that the universe is in fact such a totality. But without such proof there is no philosophical answer to the questions of *why* we are able to synthesise intuitions in a law-bound manner, or *why* we have a capacity for choosing to act contrary to natural inclination. Has this latter ability a goal which is linked to the ways in which we see nature functioning, or is it completely independent of what we know about nature?

It would seem strange if there were no connection at all, because, for Kant, our cognitive faculty and our freedom are both self-caused and yet can have effects on the natural world. If one cannot find a way beyond this account of our relationship to internal and external nature the consequences can look disturbing. Is our capacity for reason, for example, as Hobbes and La Rochefoucauld had argued, actually just a form of self-interest based on self-preservation? This is, of course, not just a theoretical problem. Kant's separation of the spheres of epistemology and ethics into different aspects of ourselves mirrors the ways in which the spheres of science and technology become separated from the sphere of law and morality in modernity. As the new forms of cognitive relationship to nature produce the ability to manipulate nature to an ever greater extent, nature comes to be seen in terms of regulation and classification, making it primarily into an object which the subject determines. Grounding decisions about what ought to be done with the limitless capacity of the understanding to generate new knowledge thus becomes an unavoidable problem because the understanding itself can offer no indications concerning the desirability of using what it can produce.

The last thing Kant would have wanted are the concrete consequences of the division between what will become reduced in much of the philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to 'fact' and 'value'. What he sought were ways of unifying understanding and reason without falling back into 'dogmatic' rationalism. The actual historical result of the divisions Kant reveals can be seen in terms of the separation of a world of cold scientific objectivity from a world lacking in ethical certainty and intrinsic meaning. However, this separation suggests a way of understanding the importance of a further dimension of modernity, namely the complex and diverse development of modern art, and the development of new philosophical ways of understanding art. Art is often seen as the location where those aspects of the self and the world, which are excluded by the dominant processes of modernity, can find their articulation. It is for this reason that the emergence of aesthetics is an important disruptive factor in the development of modern philosophy. Baumgarten and Hamann had already suggested why: aesthetics attends to that which is not reducible to scientific cognition and is yet undeniably a part of our world. Despite the strictures of the first Critique, Kant himself acknowledges the vital importance of this aspect of philosophy, even at the cost of putting some of his most fundamental ideas into question.

The *CJ* attempts to show that the kind of consensus achievable via the compelling results of the activity of the understanding may be present, at least as a possible aim, in realms in which the understanding has no right of legislation. The need for the results of activity of the understanding to be integrated into the aims of reason becomes urgent when it becomes clear that the rules of the understanding can be applied to anything at all, because traditional constraints on what can or should be known no longer apply. It is no coincidence that attention to the Faust story in this period is so widespread. Divorced from any sense

of the possibility of its goals being integrated into a meaningful whole, the sort of science which reduces nature to being a rule-governed machine can be seen as leading to what Horkheimer and Adorno will term a 'dialectic of enlightenment', in which liberation from theological tutelage creates new forms of imprisonment, despite the massive increase in technical control over nature. Kant's text may seem initially far from such wider concerns, but attention to the detail of his conception can show that it is not.

The basis of the third Critique, the '*power of judgement*' – *Urteilkraft* – is the synthesising capacity which connects the particular to the general. This can happen in two ways. The first is when the understanding subsumes the particular intuition under a general category or concept. Kant terms this 'determinant' or 'determining' judgement. The law exists prior to the individual case and is to be applied to it. It is, though, anything but self-evident how one decides *which* law is applicable in any empirical case without getting into a regress of laws for the application of laws. Kant tried to address this regress in the *CPR* via the schema, which creates empirical equivalents of a priori categories: perceivable existence at all times is, for example, the schema of necessity. The schema also makes concepts sensuous by immediately apprehending different parts of the otherwise inherently particular sensuous manifold as coherent entities of the same kind. In order to see the chihuahua and the Great Dane both as dogs, for example, one needs something which reduces their empirical difference to what can be subsumed into a general concept. The schema therefore connects the two sources of knowledge, sensibility and understanding. The problem of judgement underlying the notion of the schema, which Kant addresses in the *CJ* in the account of the second kind of judgement, 'reflective judgement', will turn out to be one of the most durable in modern philosophy (see Bowie 1997). As we saw with regard to the understanding's relation to reason, no amount of applying determining judgement to nature will demonstrate that the multiplicity to which it applies has any kind of ultimate unity. The establishing of natural laws cannot in any way guarantee a systematic relationship between such laws, because that would require a higher principle which demonstrated that they fitted together. A principle of this kind would reintroduce 'dogmatic' metaphysics because it would cross the boundary of sensuous and intelligible by presupposing that nature is inherently intelligible. How are we to *know* that those parts of nature for which we as yet have no laws are subject to laws at all?

All the laws of nature we think we possess are based on intuitions which fill concepts, thus on what Kant means by 'reality', in the particular sense we examined above, and reality is contingent. We therefore have no *cognitive* grounds in Kant's terms for regarding nature as a unified system. In order to confront this problem Kant introduces the second form of judgement, 'reflective' judgement, whose task is to move from the particular to the general. This entails presupposing a higher principle inherent in nature, as otherwise nature becomes merely a 'labyrinth of the multiplicity of possible particular laws' (*CJ* p. 26).

However, the principle is a necessary *fiction*, which assumes that nature in fact does function in a purposive way, 'as if an understanding contained the basis of the unity of the multiplicity of its empirical laws' (B p. XVIII, A p. XXVI). Kant underpins this position with the crucial claim that natural products are on the one hand mechanical, in terms of the laws which apply to them, but, on the other hand, when seen as 'systems, e.g. formations of crystals, all sorts of forms of flowers, or in the inner construction of plants and animals' they behave '*technically*, i.e. at the same time as *art*' (p. 30). 'Art' here has the Greek sense of '*techne*', the capacity to produce in a purposive way. Natural products *appear* to contain an 'idea' which makes them take the form they do, in the way an artist can realise an idea by making a work of art. It is as if the whole of an organism preceded the parts which we can analyse in the terms of the understanding: '*An organised product of nature is that in which everything is an end and on the other hand also a means*. Nothing in it is in vain, pointless, or to be attributed to a blind mechanism of nature' (B p. 296, A p. 292). Kant here adverts to forms of intelligibility which scientific knowledge can never make accessible and which are fundamental to our comprehension of our own existence.

Although the problems addressed here begin as epistemological ones, it is important to see how they also lead in other directions which are central to the issues of this book. Kant's claims about organisms, for example, echo the second Critique's concern that rational beings should always be ends in themselves, and not just the means for the ends of other beings. If rational beings were solely means and not also ends the result would be a regress in which each being is just the means for another being, and so on, which would mean no being had any purpose in itself at all. The idea of the natural organism, in which nature is purposeful in a manner which scientific knowledge cannot grasp, relates to an analogous problem. In the *CPR* Kant claims that the regress which results from each natural thing simply being conditioned by another thing that had in turn been conditioned by something else, etc., can be circumvented. While *reason* must postulate the 'unconditioned . . . in all things in themselves for everything conditioned, so that the series of conditions should thus become complete' (*CPR* B p. XX), because the understanding restricts *knowledge* to judgements of appearances, rather than trying to gain access to 'things in themselves', the contradiction of seeking what the contemporary writer and critic of Kant, F.H. Jacobi, termed 'conditions of the unconditioned' can be avoided.¹⁰ However, the subject's very ability to stop the regress in judging anything particular (which is the function of schematism) seems, as Fichte would soon argue, to give the subject itself the 'unconditioned' role in determining how nature is to be understood. This seems to be the case even though the ultimate nature of 'things in themselves' involves the whole grounding dimension of nature which is not accessible to our knowledge and though the nature of this subject is opaque in certain key respects.

A significant worry therefore arises here with regard to the status of the subject, which we shall later encounter in Schelling's criticisms of Fichte, and

which now plays a role in contemporary ecological debates. When the subject analyses an organism it usually destroys the integrity of what it analyses. The plant which has become an object of scientific dissection can cease to exist as an organism because it has been taken apart. There is, of course, no inherent limit to how far such destruction can go, as the twentieth century has taught us. Furthermore, scientific analysis of nature cannot make nature into a coherent whole because of the regress we have just encountered. Nature seems therefore to be threatened in two ways, both of which have to do with the lack of a holistic conception of its relationship to our cognitive activity. On the one hand, the cognitive approach to nature threatens to disintegrate it into the endless multiplicity which results from the analytical functioning of the understanding. On the other, for the understanding to do its work, nature must be reduced to general principles based on the *subject's* capacity for abstraction. These principles enable the workings of nature to be predicted and controlled more effectively, but they have no necessary concern with the particularity of their object, and each principle's relationship to all the others is of no concern to the functioning of the understanding itself. The need to establish holistic conceptions that result from awareness of the limitations of cognition is what connects ideas about the organism to theories of society. The highest goals of a society, it is argued, can only be legitimate if they sustain the individual integrity of all their members of as ends in themselves, even as they are incorporated into the whole of society. Analogies between Kant's approaches to the organism and theories of the social world will play a major role in Idealist aesthetics, and the tension between science's need for analysis if knowledge is to increase, and the desire for an integrated relationship with the natural world which is often at odds with such analysis is crucial to the thought of this period, most notably in the work of Schelling and Goethe.

If Kant had continued to work solely within the terms of the *CPR* the idea of an object as an integral organism would not have become a major philosophical issue. One reason it does has to do with the conception of the subject in that text. As we have seen, in the *CPR* the world did not just consist in chains of endless random differences precisely because the *subject* is supposed to establish its own identity by the way in which it synthesises the 'sensuous manifold' into something reliably knowable. At this level the later Heidegger's critique of Kantian philosophy's 'subjectification of being', the making of the truth of being into a function of the subject, seems appropriate in certain respects. However, the *purpose* of the subject's syntheses could not be established in the terms of the understanding. The 'spontaneity' which produced the syntheses takes one beyond the syntheses to the founding principle of our capacity for cognition. If we were to have philosophical access to this principle we would know the value of knowledge. The second Critique introduced a further spontaneity, which again pointed, beyond anything we can know, to a higher purpose than can be described in terms of a nature legislated by the understanding: why is it that we can contradict natural causation in ourselves in the name of 'ideas' and

of the moral law? The third Critique tries to link this sense of the higher purpose of rational beings to the *sensuously* based experience of both natural and artistic beauty. Such experience is grounded in the pleasure derived from contemplating how each part of the object contributes to the whole of that object without losing its own value – how each part can be both a means and an end in itself. This contemplation involves both intuition of the object and a relationship to the object which is not based upon reducing the intuition to what it has in common with other intuitions. The coherence of a particular object cannot be reduced to a general law of how things cohere and thus depends upon the *integrity* of that object in relation to the subject's capacity for judgement.

In Schopenhauer's words, the *CJ* consists of the attempt at the 'baroque unification of cognition of the beautiful with cognition of the purposiveness of natural bodies in *one* capacity for cognition' (Schopenhauer 1986 p. 711), namely judgement. Judgement, Kant asserts, is to function here 'according to the principle of the appropriateness of nature to our capacity for cognition' (*CJ* B p. XLII, A p. XXXIX). This appropriateness cannot be definitively legitimated in philosophy, because proof of it would again entail access to the non-appearing intelligible realm. What is required is an account of why there is a congruence between the way we necessarily synthesise intuitions via the understanding and some immanent coherence of nature that gives pleasure in aesthetic judgement. Although Kant generally rejects positive answers to this question, he is aware that without some more developed position than that offered in the *CPR* his philosophy cannot achieve its final aims. Why exactly, then, does the aesthetic become so important in this context?

Aesthetic judgement connects the capacity for cognition and the 'capacity for desire' (which is how Kant describes the will) by judging which objects give pleasure and which do not. The ground of aesthetic judgement is therefore the distinction between feelings of pleasure and non-pleasure. This division is, though, not based on a cognition of the object – which entails the subsuming of it under a rule – but precisely upon whether the object gives the subject pleasure or not. The object of the judgement is therefore not conceptual: it cannot be classified in terms of an identifying rule. What is in question is the 'immediate' *feeling* of the subject which does not rely on a 'mediated' synthesis of intuitions of the object.¹¹ Even in his writings well before the first Critique, Kant thinks it vital to stress that 'sensation' differs from 'feeling'. The former is the sensuous material of cognition which is subsumed under the categories and classified by concepts, and Kant sometimes prefers to term it 'appearance'; the latter is the result of the relation of the object to the subject's pleasure or displeasure. Taste itself 'is not a mere [receptive] sensation but what arises from sensations which have been compared' (Kant 1996 p. 100): it therefore involves judgement, the activity of the understanding. Now this might seem to make aesthetic judgement 'merely subjective' in the manner referred to by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, where he talks of Kant's 'subjectification' of aesthetics. However, Kant's argument cannot be seen in this manner, not least because he

will come to regard the role of feeling as ineliminable even from the theory of knowledge. Objectivity itself, he argues in the *CJ*, must have some kind of ground in feeling. Although we now derive no pleasure from the synthesising activity of the understanding: ‘in its time there must have been some, and only because the most common experience would not be possible without it did it gradually mix with simple cognition and was no longer particularly noticed any more’ (*CJ* B p. XL, A p. XXXVIII). The activity of cognition therefore has a history in which it is motivated by pleasure, and pleasure is not something within the cognitive control of the subject.

It is not surprising, then, as we shall see in a moment, that the pleasure occasioned by the aesthetic object derives precisely from its allowing our cognitive faculties to *play* in a manner that does not entail determination by concepts, thus suggesting that the *ground* of cognition is an activity which, like play, can take place for its own sake. In a further striking claim, Kant even maintains that a ‘common sense’, of the kind ‘required for the universal communicability of a feeling’, is ‘the necessary condition of the universal communicability of our cognition’ (B p. 66).¹² He connects this idea by analogy to music, for which he otherwise does not have a great deal of philosophical time, talking of the ‘tuning/attunement’ (*Stimmung*) of the cognitive powers, which is differently ‘proportioned’, depending on the object in question, and which ‘can only be determined by feeling (not by concepts)’ (B p. 66). Whether this ‘common sense’ is a ‘constitutive principle of the possibility of experience’ or only a ‘regulative principle’, for creating ‘a common sense for higher purposes’ (B p. 68), Kant leaves open. However, he does insist that we necessarily presuppose such a norm if we wish to make valid claims about taste, because such claims depend upon a difference between mere contingent individual pleasure and what we think everyone ought to be able to agree about. As he already claimed in 1769–70: ‘Contemplation of beauty is a judgement, and not a pleasure’ (Kant 1996 p. 109). Kant therefore seems to suggest both that our most fundamental relationship to the world and each other is at the level of the immediate ‘feeling’ which is the basis of the postulate of a ‘common sense’, and that there is a purposive sense in our cognitive capacity which goes beyond its subsumption of intuitions under rules. Given that he also suggests that our representation of ourselves is ‘nothing more than the feeling of an existence without the least concept’, the role of the non-conceptual aspects of the subject in central parts of his philosophy becomes inescapable, and this is why the aesthetic becomes so significant.

There is, however, an important potential danger here, which lies in how one understands the nature of feeling. If feeling is regarded as grounded in libido, for example, cognition can easily come to be seen as essentially motivated by interest in domination, because feeling is conceived of as a lack that must be overcome by bringing the lacking object under the subject’s power. The object thus becomes a source of self-aggrandisement for the subject: as we shall see in Chapter 8, Nietzsche will later draw such a consequence when he claims that

the intelligible basis of ourselves is in fact the 'will to power', and Heidegger will stylise such views into a verdict on subjectivity as a whole in Western metaphysics. Kant, on the other hand, is concerned with a kind of pleasure which cannot be reduced to self-interest because its significance lies, as the notion of the 'common sense' suggests, in its potential for being universally shared across social divisions, without it leading to an appropriative relationship to the object. In this sense the aesthetic relates to Kantian 'reason'. Although aesthetic pleasure is based on the capacity for desire, which does link it to volition, the crucial fact about the will for Kant is, as we saw, that rational beings can desire against their natural inclinations in the name of a higher purpose. The feeling of pleasure upon which judgement is founded derives from the sense of a harmony in nature which the understanding, that activity of the subject which can be seen as in some sense dominating the object, cannot establish. When I see a green meadow the understanding can invoke Newton to tell me about green as a property of refracted light, but I can also derive immediate pleasure from its green aspect. The pleasure in question, Kant repeatedly insists, is solely that of the subject, and provides no knowledge of the object: the capacity to evoke a harmonious play of the (subjective) faculties is not a property of the object because the basis of this judgement is not necessitated in the way judgements based on categories and concepts (as rules for identifying objects) are. This pleasure must, though, involve some sort of effect of the object on the subject (not just any object will occasion it, although the context in which the object is encountered can be decisive), rather than a rule-bound synthesis by the subject, and it does not rely on the subject appropriating the object. Kant's limitation of aesthetic pleasure to the subjective does seem, therefore, to conceal a more extended sense of how subject and object relate, which is linked to the nature of the will.

Despite his repeated insistence upon the subjective basis of aesthetic pleasure Kant himself returns on occasion to the idea that nature may give an indication that 'it contains in itself some basis, a law-bound correspondence of its products to our pleasure which is independent of all interest' (C7B p. 169, A p. 167), and he talks of a 'code through which nature talks to us figuratively in its beautiful forms' (B p. 170, A p. 168). Given our own status as part of nature, the idea of a deeper harmony between ourselves and nature is tempting, especially as Kant sees the fact of agreement over judgements of taste as testifying to the possibility of the *sensus communis*. Saying something is beautiful involves, as we have seen, a *judgement* which can command general assent that perhaps results – and Kant is emphatic about the 'perhaps' – from 'what can be regarded as the supersensuous substrate of mankind' (B p. 237, A p. 234). For the Kant of the *CPR*, remember, nature was almost exclusively that which appears to us in terms of necessary laws, not what will become the living nature of German Idealism and Romanticism. The laws sustained their general validity because they were based on the very conditions of our thinking intelligibly at all, which did not have to be tested every time to see if they were inherent in the endless

multiplicity of things. The *CJ* begins to undermine this view of nature by its attention to the other ways in which the subject can relate to it. The idea of the postulated ‘supersensuous substrate’, in which freedom and necessity harmonise, relies on the possibility, based on feeling, of the ‘subjective purposiveness of nature for the power of judgement’ (B p. 237, A p. 234). What Kant is looking for, then, is an indication of the role of the freedom of rational beings in the system of nature.

The purpose of beauty

Kant’s attempts to come to terms with the ‘supersensuous substrate’ of the subject’s relationship to the object threaten to invalidate the boundary between law-bound nature and the autonomy of rational beings which was essential to the *CPR*. However, a philosophy which aspires to grounding our place in the world via the principle of subjectivity clearly must do more than describe the subject’s ability to legislate nature in terms of regularities and to prescribe ethical limitations to itself. Kant’s problem in extending his conception is that he would seem to need a positive account of the spontaneity involved both in our knowledge and in our ethical self-determination. If he wished to establish a purpose in nature as a whole, any such postulate would have to include *ourselves* in the purpose of nature, which would make our spontaneity an aspect of nature in itself, our purposive productivity being of the same kind as that which results in natural organisms.¹³ Kant’s aim, then, is to link the harmony manifest in aesthetic apprehension of natural objects with the idea of natural teleology, thereby revealing the ultimate connection of nature as a whole to the ways in which we think about it and relate to it. He remains ambiguous as to whether such a link is merely a regulative idea or could actually be constitutive, tending more to the former conception. Subsequent thinkers, like Schelling, will, as we shall see, try to make the link constitutive. Such a strong conception of natural teleology may be hard to defend, but what interests Kant in this question will not simply go away, even if one rejects teleology out of hand as inappropriate for the explanation of natural products.

What is most significant here is the fact that in aesthetic contemplation of nature the object can be said to affect us, instead of our determining it in terms of general rules. This does seem to point, as Hartmut Scheible indicates, in the wake of Adorno, to a ‘mimetic’ side to the imagination which suggests we can indeed in some sense harmonise with nature. We do not in this case wish to order nature in any other way than it is already constituted when we feel the disinterested pleasure it gives to us by appearing to be formed in terms of ideas. We can, furthermore, be said to have a kind of access to a possible non-deterministic aspect of nature, via our freedom to initiate new states of affairs, according to ideas of what we would wish to be the case and of what we ought to do to fulfil our duty. Neither of these can be said to be causally determined, and they cannot be derived from observation of the empirical world. Whether

this access is any more substantial than that we cannot *know*. Neither do we *know* how it connects to nature as an object of cognition. The tendency in the Enlightenment is to see ourselves as the potential ‘lord and master of nature’, thereby ignoring the question of what, so to speak, nature might ‘think’ of this. Given our own inability, for Kant, to give a definitive account of what our thinking *is*, beyond its being a capacity for synthesis, and given that thinking itself relies on natural processes (while not being reducible to them), this is not a mystical question. The fact is that in these terms our capacity for manipulation of nature depends on something which is as *cognitively* inaccessible to us as nature is in itself.

Kant’s attention in the *CJ* to trying to link our cognitive and ethical capacities via a third way of relating to the world also points to his awareness of the dangers that may result if we cannot make such a link. In Western history, attention to natural beauty for its own sake generally arises at the moment when nature ceases to be perceived as predominantly a threat to human survival. Those areas of society which develop their powers of technological control over nature, to the point where they can come to more real than mythical terms with it, can also become concerned with nature’s beauty and integrity.¹⁴ It is at this point, therefore, that nature’s value *in itself* as the object of contemplation can emerge: the secularisation of nature, which had previously been seen in terms of its manifestation of the magnificence of God, is inextricably linked to this development. At the same time, however, the question also arises as to whether modern science’s continuing destruction of the mythical and the theological elements in our relationship to nature means that the role played by myth and theology will be wholly abolished. From Schelling and the early Romantics, to Marx, Nietzsche, Weber, Heidegger, and beyond this will be a central issue both in aesthetic theory and in theories of modernity – the tendency of certain aspects of ecological movements towards mythical ways of thinking is, for example, not fortuitous. The key issue here is the nature of the imagination.

For Kant, as we saw, aesthetic judgements rely upon the fact that the object is received in the subject in terms of ‘feeling’ and in terms of a harmonious play of understanding and imagination. We already began to see, though, how Kant gets into difficulties in the first version of the *CPR* with the imagination, as the faculty which links sensuousness and understanding. Scheible argues that the problem of the relationship between differing ways in which we relate to the natural world is bound to persist because Kant ‘brought the imagination temporarily into play as a capacity whose function exhausted itself in providing for the understanding’ (Scheible 1984 p. 118), thereby restricting the relationship to one of classification. For something to become an object of knowledge the subsumption by the imagination in schematism must be added to by a further subsumption, in which the understanding discovers, as Scheible puts it, ‘the *one* characteristic which allows a replacement of the intuitive synthesis of the imagination by the abstract unity of the conceptual system’ (p. 120). The object becomes reduced to the terms of the subject via which, in Kant’s account, it

becomes an object at all. The working of understanding can consequently be regarded both as entailing a possible repression of my particular imaginative relationship to the object and as failing to integrate its products into a systematic whole.

However, in the *CJ*, as we have seen, Kant highlights the importance of what the imagination does which *cannot* be subsumed under categories and concepts. He acknowledges that in cognition the imagination is limited by the ‘compulsion of the understanding’ – a fact that was already implied by the objections of Baumgarten and Hamann to theories which fail to take account of pleasure in the particularity of perception. The term ‘compulsion’ points to its counterpart: freedom. In the aesthetic relationship to the object: ‘the *imagination* is free, beyond every attunement to the concept, *yet* uncontrivedly, to provide extensive undeveloped material for the understanding, to which the latter paid no attention in its concept’ (*CJ* B p. 198, A pp. 195–6). Kant makes it clear both that the sciences can exclude vital aspects of ourselves from their view of nature, and that these aspects must be accounted for in other than cognitive terms. The freedom of the imagination not to be bound by existing concepts enlivens the powers of cognition, enabling them to develop further, thus suggesting the possible purpose of these powers in human self-development as part of the purpose of nature itself. Furthermore, Kant introduces a notion, freedom, which for him belongs in the realm of the supersensuous, into our sensuous relations to the world. The very fact that Kant now begins to use the term ‘aesthetic ideas’ suggests how far he has moved beyond key restrictions in the *CPR*. The ‘Aesthetic’ there provided the ‘rules of sensuousness’, which constituted the framework for the intuitions judged by the understanding. ‘Ideas’ were the basis of reason’s attempts to unify the endless diversity of the products of the understanding into a whole, and could not be available to intuition because they would then have to be objects of the understanding. Ideas can, in contrast, now become aesthetic. Kant defines an aesthetic idea as: ‘that representation of the imagination which gives much to think about, but without any determinate thought, i.e. *concept* being able to be adequate to it, which consequently no language can completely attain and make comprehensible’ (*CJ* B p. 193, A p. 190). This leads to a vital issue in my overall argument.

The perceived inadequacy of language to aesthetic ideas makes other thinkers, particularly the early Romantics and Schopenhauer, look for a ‘language’ which *is* adequate to such ideas. The language in question is, however, the *conceptless* language of music, to which some thinkers will even grant a higher philosophical status than to conceptual language. Although music is manifested in sensuous material, it does not necessarily represent anything and may in consequence be understood metaphorically as articulating or evoking what cannot be represented in the subject, namely the supersensuous basis of subjectivity which concepts cannot describe, where necessity and freedom are reconciled. Music’s reliance on mathematical proportions, its links to biological rhythms in the body, and the relation of the feelings it can involve to the freedom inherent

in non-conceptual judgements of taste already begin to suggest reasons for such claims.

Furthermore, the way music comes to be understood at this time also helps put into question the notion that verbal language itself primarily represents pre-existing objects, rather than constituting what things are understood to be. Such questioning of the representational nature of language is already implicit in the fact that if, as Kant claims, our cognitive activity actually constitutes objects *as* objects in judgements, it cannot be said to imitate something that is already there. The move in conceptions of language away from the idea of representation involves a two-way process. The development, by Herder, Hamann and others, of the view of language as primarily 'disclosive' or 'constitutive', rather than representational, means that forms of articulation, like music, which are not understood as being linguistic if language is conceived of in representational terms, can be considered as linguistic if they disclose otherwise inaccessible aspects of the world. The 'language' of music can thus itself in turn come to change the way verbal language is understood. Here a further vital dimension of the notion of 'feeling' becomes apparent. As Anthony Cascardi suggests in relation to the *CJ*: 'Feeling nonetheless remains cognitive in a deeper sense [than in the sense of 'cognitive' involved in the correspondence theory of truth as correct representation of the pre-existing object]; affect possesses what Heidegger would describe . . . as "world-disclosive" power' (Cascardi 1999 pp. 50–1). Critiques of metaphysics based on the rejection of the idea of language and concepts as primarily or inherently representational, which lead from their roots in the Romantic reactions to Kant, to Nietzsche, and to post-structuralism, are therefore importantly linked – despite the antagonism of many of those theories to role of the subject in modern philosophy – both to the 'feeling' of the subject and to the development of music and ideas about music towards the end of the eighteenth century.

Kant himself actually follows aspects of the Enlightenment tradition of understanding music and objects, by seeing music as a 'language of emotions' (*CJ*B p. 220, A p. 217). Music represents feelings, in much the same way as language supposedly represents ideas or objects. Johann Mattheson talked in 1739, for example, of how an '*Adagio* indicates distress, a *Lamento* lamentation, a *Lento* relief, an *Andante* hope, an *Affetuoso* love, an *Allegro* comfort, a *Presto* eagerness, etc.' (ed. Strunk 1998 p. 699). However, Kant does not adopt this literalist conception in every respect. Music also communicates aesthetic ideas, but these are 'not concepts and determinate thoughts', though their purpose is solely to 'express the aesthetic idea of a coherent whole' (*CJ*. B p 220, A p. 217), the pleasure in which is generated by the mathematical proportions upon which the whole is based. Because it just plays with feelings music is not the highest form of art. This status is confirmed by music's dependence on time and its inherent transience. What Kant sees as music's empty formalism will, however, soon become crucial to new conceptions of art. The divorce of music from representation is the vital step in the genesis of the notion of aesthetic autonomy,

the idea that what is conveyed by the work of art could not be conveyed by anything else.¹⁵ This autonomy will entail a break with the direct connection proposed by Kant between aesthetic ideas and ethical ideas. Given his intention to link beauty and morality – beauty is a symbol of morality for Kant – his suspicion of music follows from the aims of the third Critique. However, even though the idea of aesthetic autonomy is not part of the argument of the *CJ*, the *CJ* does help open up the possibility of its emergence.

Kant's aesthetic ideas are non-conceptual, but this does not exclude them from consideration in philosophy: instead, they 'strive towards something beyond the boundary of experience' (B p. 194, A p. 191) – 'experience' being understood here as the realm of possible true judgements of the understanding. He gives the example of how poets attempt to make the ideas of 'the invisible Being, the realm of the blessed, hell, eternity, the creation' (B p. 194, A p. 191) into sensuous images. Aesthetic ideas are the 'pendant' to ideas of reason, because the ideas of reason, such as goodness, cannot be manifested empirically. Soon after the writing of the *CJ* Schiller will come to regard art as a means for the 'aesthetic education' of the people on the basis of his interpretation of Kant's conception: art is to make morality available through pleasure by sensuously conveying ideas, instead of trying to compel people in terms of abstract imperatives. Kant himself opposes 'the pure disinterested pleasure in the judgement of taste' (B p. 7, A p. 7) to a judgement based on an 'interest' in an ulterior purpose of the kind generated by sensuous appetites. To begin with, then, aesthetic pleasure does have an autonomous status of its own: it serves no other purpose beyond its own immediate existence, which, crucially, is not reducible to the ways it may subsequently be analysed in general terms. This view of the status of artistic beauty is, in different forms, essential to many versions of subsequent aesthetic theory. Aesthetic objects can be seen as irreplaceable and without price in terms of their aesthetic value, however much they may have a price in the marketplace which can make them useful for buying something else. Kant's role for the aesthetic is, though, more substantial than this.

Aesthetic pleasure must be able to be universally shared if the object is to be *beautiful* rather than the source of random individual stimulation. For a judgement of taste to be universalised it must therefore entail rules that enable it to be legitimated to others. Here we encounter one of the most productive and problematic tensions in Kant, which resonates throughout the subsequent history of aesthetics. In the *Reflections* of the 1760s Kant already points to the essential problem, when he notes that 'Beauty ought to be unsayable (*müsse unaussprechlich sein*). What we think we cannot always say' (Kant 1996 p. 62). The 'sayability' of anything in this sense depends upon shareable rules which enable it to be communicated. Beauty is supposed to be potentially universal, but seems to rely on something radically particular, that is resistant to subsumption under rules, namely the feeling of pleasure in the form of the object on the part of the individual as 'an irreducibly particular centre of affectivity' (Cascardi 1999 p. 48). Kant claims in reflections from the time of his writing of the *CJ*

that: 'The general validity of pleasure [in beauty] and yet not via concepts but in intuition is what is difficult' (Kant 1996 p. 137). Intuitions, as we saw, are regarded by Kant as inherently particular: how, then, are they supposed to be the basis of something universal that is grasped in a judgement? The answer has to do with the question of feeling and its links to the possibility of a *sensus communis*.

Perhaps the best way to approach this issue is via the implicit role of verbal language, as the rule-based means of communicating the general truths which constitute the realm of the 'sayable', in the difficulty to which Kant refers. The early Romantic writer, Friedrich Schlegel, formulates this question most effectively in 1805 in relation to Kant's notion of the aesthetic idea. Schlegel was familiar with the work of Kant, and he takes up the indications we have observed concerning the nature of self-consciousness, such as the suggestion from the *Prolegomena* that the representation of the I is 'nothing more than the feeling of an existence without the least concept', linking it to music:

if feeling is the root of all consciousness, then the direction of language [towards cognition] has the essential deficit that it does not grasp and comprehend feeling deeply enough, only touches its surface. . . . However large the riches language offers us for our purpose, however much it can be developed and perfected as a means of representation and communication, this essential imperfection must be overcome in another manner, and communication and representation must be added to; and this happens through *music* which is, though, here to be regarded less as a representational art than as philosophical language, and really lies higher than mere art. (Schlegel 1964 p. 57)

In this perspective the very nature of language qua representational means of communication excludes it from being able to get in touch with the particularity of subjective existence grounded in 'feeling'. Even though feeling is non-conceptual it is, however, clearly not randomly subjective, because, as Schlegel suggests, the means via which it is grasped has claims to general validity: hence the idea that music is 'philosophical language'. The assertion that something is music rather than noise requires a judgement of taste. Such a judgement cannot be based on a *concept* of music: concepts can only identify the physical aspects of the piece, the pitches and durations of the sounds of which it consists, not establish whether the piece is music. Now it is evident that Kant would not have accepted the more unexpected consequences of this view of feeling. However, the idea that a vital dimension of the existence of the subject is only accessible as a non-conceptual feeling and that this feeling is best articulated by music is not inherently at odds with key aspects of Kant's conception. Subsequent thinkers, like Schlegel and Schleiermacher, will, in consequence, come to regard the exploration of the relationship between the conceptual, which can be understood via rules, and the non-conceptual, which cannot be understood via rules, as the crucial philosophical issue revealed in aesthetics. This theme will recur throughout the present book.

The strange links between the new understanding of music and the concerns of Kant's philosophy become further apparent in the following. The initial way in which we constitute a world of rule-bound objects in the imagination is, as we saw, via schematism. In relation to the categories, Kant terms schemata 'nothing but determinations of time a priori according to rules' (*CPR* B p. 184, A p. 145). We need these determinations in order to be able to apprehend things in terms of the categories of, for example, causality, which relies on temporal succession; reality, which relies on presence at a specific time; necessity, which relies on presence at all times, etc. For these forms of apprehension to function one also, as we saw, requires the continuity of the subject between the different moments. This requirement is what leads Schlegel to his idea of the irreflexive sense of self given in 'feeling' – which, as Novalis puts it, 'cannot feel itself' – that connects the differing moments without itself being accessible to cognitive determination. The point in the present context is that the schemata of time are also part of what is essential for hearing music as music, but, as we saw, establishing whether something is music also relies on a judgement of taste based on feeling that is not determined by rules. The role of musical rhythm, with its links to processes in nature, to somatic pleasure, and to the cognitive functioning of schematism, suggests a further way in which the borderline between the realms of nature and spontaneity begins to dissolve in perhaps more ways than Kant himself intends in the *C7*.

The nature of this borderline plays a role in the question of how natural beauty relates to the beauty of art. Kant sees natural beauty, which pleases the subject without the need for a conceptual determination, as prior to the beauty of art. If the priority were reversed and artistic beauty were primary, the rules of art, as products of the subject, would be simply another way in which we 'give the law' to nature. As we shall see in a moment, Kant insists that in art it is the other way round: nature gives the law to us (via the genius), so that 'beautiful art is an art insofar as it at the same time appears to be nature' (*C7* B p. 179, A p. 177). Art should be seen to be art but 'the purposiveness of its form must appear as free from all compulsion by arbitrary rules, as if it were simply a product of nature' (Kant 1996 p. 137). He goes on to claim, though, that 'Nature was beautiful if at the same time it looked like art' (p. 137), which is the basis of reflective judgement and the notion of the organism: in both cases the point is that the whole, the 'idea', precedes the parts. In the case of nature the argument leads to the question of whether the idea is to be understood theologically, as the intention of a creator, or as a productivity immanent in nature as a whole, of the kind soon to be suggested by Schelling. In the case of art the point is that the artist must not appear to have worked according to a pre-existing rule of the kind provided by the understanding for a scientist, which merely subsumes a particular under a concept. Instead, the artist should appear to have spontaneously produced something which has the self-sufficient coherence of a natural organism.

The natural organism's capacity to evoke pleasure is not limited to the plea-

surable effect of its form upon the subject. Kant in fact insists that in natural beauty the 'existence' (*Dasein*) (B p. 167, A p. 165) of the object pleases, independently of any appeal to the senses or to any purpose of the object. The next stage of Kant's argument, where he introduces the notorious concept of 'genius', is perhaps the most instructive. Gadamer claims that genius is introduced into the *CJ* simply in order to give works of art the same status as natural products. This would make the link between aesthetics and teleology constitutive, but Kant is often more circumspect than Gadamer's claim would imply. Kant describes genius as follows: '*Genius* is the talent (gift of nature), which gives the rule to art. As talent, as an innate productive capacity of the artist, itself belongs to nature, one could also put the matter as follows: *genius* is the innate aptitude [*ingenium*] through which nature gives the rule to art' (B p. 181, A pp. 178–9). In the modern period rules in artistic creation are supposed to be the basis of *individual*, particular products. Particularity and rules are inherently opposed to each other, as we have seen. Kant's notion of genius is therefore also intended to explain 'the general validity of pleasure [in beauty] and yet not via concepts'. Kant argues (once more employing the musical metaphor of 'attunement') that judgements about artistic products cannot be based on rules derived from concepts:

Thus art [*schöne Kunst*] cannot devise the rule for itself, according to which it is to produce its product. As, nevertheless, a product can never be called art without a preceding rule, then nature must give the rule to art in the subject (and through the attunement [*Stimmung*] of the subject's capacities), i.e. art is only possible as a product of the genius. (*CJ* B pp. 181–2, A p. 179)

The particular product's coming into existence therefore cannot be described theoretically: Kant claims that the genius cannot tell how the work came into existence, let alone tell anyone the rules which would enable them to emulate the genius. This seems appropriate, for example, in some areas of music, when Beethoven changes the canon of musical rules. One can describe this change retrospectively in terms of the new theoretical canon, but this will not explain what made Beethoven make the new moves, nor will the description enable any person who knows the old and the new rules to produce music as great as Beethoven's.

Here we again reach a point in Kant's philosophy where the essential principle is self-caused in ways which philosophy cannot articulate. Genius can be regarded as a 'spontaneity'. The difference from the spontaneity of understanding and of ethical self-determination is that this spontaneity produces empirical products, which are available to intuition and which themselves symbolise what belongs in the intelligible realm, and the spontaneity derives in Kant's terms from 'intelligible' nature. It is therefore not hard to see why the early Schelling will be tempted to see art as the 'organ of philosophy', precisely because it is supposed to make the highest point of philosophy available to intuition. If nature gives rules to the free productivity of the genius, the division of

sensuous and intelligible is no longer absolute, and this threatens the whole edifice of Kant's previous philosophy. The artwork of the genius seems to be where the subject can intuit itself in terms of its spontaneous, intelligible capacities, and can therefore objectify itself, something which Kant had consistently denied was possible in relation to the capacity for knowledge, or in relation to freedom.

Kant's use of the notion of 'genius' is, though, significantly ambiguous. On the one hand, genius points to something that is constitutive of being an autonomous human being: the ability to express oneself in ways which cannot be prescribed in advance or reduced to someone else's way of expressing themselves. On the other hand, it is also a capacity limited to a few individuals. The fact that, for Kant, aesthetic products in which 'nature gives the rule' are only produced by a few people, Scheible maintains: 'is necessary in a society in which the potential for alienation has already grown so much that the ability to help nature express itself uninfluenced by pre-given rules and norms is already limited to a few individuals' (Scheible 1984 p. 127). The danger of this argument lies in its assumption that the self-expression of nature in the artist is necessarily repressed by social forms. This does not allow for the possibility that the positive 'natural' potential in subjectivity may actually only emerge via engagement with socially generated forms. The simple invocation of nature as the positive term in opposition to society as the negative misses the complexity of this relationship, in which ideas about the positive potential of nature themselves cannot be separated from social developments, as the historical emergence of the idea of self-legitimising natural beauty in the second half of the eighteenth century suggests. The real issue here is a dialectic which is inseparable from modern art. At the same time as the objective conditions for the liberation of individual subjectivity from myth, theology and tradition come into existence, not least via the technological application of the generalisable results of science, the conditions which contradict the potential of individual freedom are also produced, via the new division of labour and the forms of regulation it involves.

It is, then, not fortuitous that the association of art and madness, encountered in such figures as Lenz and Hölderlin, becomes a major issue in this period. Scheible suggests that the notion of genius reveals why, in modernity, the aesthetic of the autonomous work of art becomes more significant than the hopes for collective aesthetic production in a community. The fact is that modern societies often fail to create adequate space for forms of individual self-realisation which are not based upon appropriative interest. The availability of more and more aspects of the object world as commodities develops the consuming subject at the expense of the productive capacities of the subject. One can re-read Hegel's account of 'Lordship and Bondage' in the *Phenomenology of Mind* in these terms. In modern capitalism it is more and more possible to be in the position of the consuming, unproductive lord and not to be in the position of the bondsman who can develop into the genius. In modernity art can express what is repressed by our cognitive and economic control of nature, and by our

disciplining of ourselves under the division of labour. However, the increasing domination of our self-descriptions by the discoveries of the natural sciences and by the imperatives and pressures of the economic system make this articulation more and more problematic, as the ability of the advertising industry to assimilate avant-garde aesthetic production makes clear. The importance of music in subsequent aesthetic theory therefore lies not least in its link to the aspect of the subject which resists assimilation into the terms of the representable world. Because music is a predominantly non-representational medium, its rules seem in one sense to have no validity beyond the constitution of the medium itself, and this sustains music's autonomous status, as well as linking it to the unrepresentability of the subject. At the same time, the medium is not seen as devoid of meaning, for the reasons suggested above in relation to the development of non-representational conceptions of language. Furthermore, as we shall see, music's meanings are evidently affected by precisely the developments in modernity against which music often tries to react by avoiding representation. The more general movement of modern art away from representation – which occurs most obviously in visual art and which relates both to the attempt to avoid commodification and to the development of technological forms of representation such as photography – is, then, importantly prefigured in music, with philosophical consequences that will be central to the rest of the story being told here.

The limits of beauty

Much of the debate that results from Kant's re-thinking of our place within nature in relation to aesthetics revolves around whether there can be a reconciliation of our subjectivity with a nature which is both in us and outside us, and around the implications of this issue for the development of modern societies. Kant is fully aware that nature can appear, as it will do to Schopenhauer, Darwin and others, as an endless chain of eat or be eaten.¹⁶ He takes the example of plants, asking what they are there for, which leads into the chain of their existing for the animals that eat them, and those animals existing for the animals that eat them, etc. Only rational beings can attempt to transcend this situation, by seeing nature as a 'system of purposes', rather than as a 'purposeless mechanism'. This idea of nature leads Kant to the notions of happiness and of culture, the latter of which can be seen as the final purpose that 'one can attribute to nature with regard to the human species'. The need to discipline our natural inclinations in order to achieve the higher forms of culture means that there is a 'purposive striving of nature which makes us receptive to higher purposes than nature itself can provide' (CJ B p. 394, A p. 390). The dual use of the word nature makes the problem clear.

The essential problem is that in Kantian terms we do not, and cannot, *know* what our nature is. Kant insists that our 'nature is not of the kind which will stop and be satisfied somewhere in the midst of belonging and enjoyment' (B

p. 389, A p. 385), thus refusing to see the nature in us as solely appropriative and consequently determined by natural drives. This raises the question once more of the 'supersensuous substrate' in which conditioned nature and freedom can be reconciled. Kant's aim is to find a way of showing how the existence of rational beings who can transcend nature is the final purpose of creation, an idea he infers from the independence of moral self-determination from the chain of natural causality. Attempts of this kind to show the meaningfulness of existence in terms of human freedom will, as we shall see, be central to German Idealism. Once again it is important to remember that these issues are not merely abstract. The metaphysical ideas evidently relate to more concrete aspects of modernity, in which the relationship between science's capacity to reduce more and more of existence to deterministic explanation can come into conflict with the expression of human freedom in aesthetic production that can give meaning to individual existence.

For Kant both art and science are means for the development of reason. However, the way in which Kant attempts to explain them also reveals much about why the project of a self-legislating modernity will prove so problematic. In Kant's conception science alone can provide no orientation, even in terms of the relations between its own laws. It is, then, somewhat unexpected when Kant claims that the scientist is more important than the genius, even though he is excluded from being a genius by the fact that what he does can be reproduced by others following the rules he produces. This is because the scientist contributes to the 'ever-progressing greater completeness of cognitions and of all usefulness that depends on this' (B p. 184, A p. 182). Kant has, therefore, to depend here upon the aesthetically conceived postulate of reflective judgement, namely that there *is* a system that could notionally be completed inherent in what the scientist can only investigate in a piecemeal way – the postulates of reflective judgement were, remember, founded upon seeing nature as art. Nietzsche will attempt to revoke such postulates in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1871), claiming in the (unacknowledged) wake of Jacobi (see Bowie 1997 Chapter 1) that the principle of sufficient reason leads only to an endlessly regressing abyss of explanations with no cohering principle. Nietzsche thereby gives an even more emphatic role to aesthetics as a means of creating coherence in human existence, but for him the conviction that such coherence is a fiction is not, as it is for Kant, accompanied by the claim that it is a regulative idea which might also be constitutive. Kant's prioritisation of the scientist over the artist, which the early Nietzsche will invert, seeing science itself as just a kind of art, is historically explicable in terms of the importance of the public communicability of scientific knowledge and of its potential for reducing the misery of feudal life: scientific knowledge is seen by Kant in this respect as inherently emancipatory. Its potentially repressive side, which will sometimes be highlighted by Nietzsche, is, however, already present in what Kant has said in the *CJ* about the imagination's need for the possibility of escaping from the compulsion of the understanding.

Kant backs up his contention that science has prior importance by maintain-

ing that art ‘somehow stands still by having a limit beyond which it cannot go, which has also presumably been reached and cannot be further broadened’ (*CJ B* p. 185, *A* p. 182). This reveals something crucial for subsequent thinkers. Kant is here not making a historical claim, because he evidently regards art as a static category, rather than, as it will already be for Schlegel and others, an essentially historical category. The genius, Kant argues, cannot be relied on, because his talent dies with him, and there is no saying when nature will endow someone with the talent to give the new rule to art. Because of the way in which he conceives of nature’s relationship to art Kant does not make any significant link between socio-historical conditions and the emergence of the major artist. His argument for the priority of the accumulation of knowledge in science over what art can communicate points, though, to the difficulties in the sphere of artistic production suggested earlier, which result from the speed of scientific and technological change. In modernity the relationship between the experience of the meaningful particularity of sensuous existence and the ways modern science explains the mechanisms of nature becomes increasingly distant. What is involved in this process can lead to the very notion of art being questioned. Questions about the status of art will famously emerge in Hegel’s view of the ‘end of art’, and in Marx’s puzzlement over the continuing appeal of ancient Greek art despite the scientific and technological developments in subsequent history. Hegel’s and Marx’s positions derive from the awareness of a crisis in art which results from the advance of science and of modern forms of rationalisation, an advance which depends on the continuing elimination of the kind of particularity characteristic of mythical stories in the name of what can be universally validated.

In Kant the assumption that art has a ‘limit beyond which it cannot go’ leads to a final important aspect of the *CJ* – the ‘sublime’ – which must be considered before moving on in the next chapter to some of the reactions to Kant’s philosophy in German Idealism and early Romanticism. The point of objects of natural beauty and art was that they made something ‘infinite’, reason, sensuously available as a symbol. If art has a limit, however, this means that the ways in which it can connect the sensuous and the intelligible are also limited. The sublime relates mainly to nature, though Kant does refer to some art works in connection with it. Whereas beauty relates to the form of the object, the sublime is concerned with what is unlimited or even formless, to the extent to which it makes us able to feel in ourselves ‘a purposiveness which is completely independent of nature’ (*B* p. 79). The sublime cannot, therefore, rely on the pleasure generated in judgement’s sense of the purposiveness of the natural, or aesthetic object. As such, the sublime is only significant to the extent to which it reveals a purposiveness in ourselves with regard to our capacity to transcend nature by reason. The question remains, though, as Schelling and others will point out, whether a conception of self-determining nature which avoids Kantian dualism might not still be able to link such purposiveness in ourselves to the purposiveness which brings about natural forms.

The sublime has to do with things which are so big that they initially make

us feel small. The bigness in question is not empirical because it depends upon an idea: ‘*something is sublime in comparison with which everything else is small*’ (B p. 84, A p. 83). This idea has to result from that which allows us to think beyond any quantity the senses could measure, so the idea is excluded from the understanding’s capacity for rules. It does, though, involve intuition: ‘Nature is sublime in those of its appearances the intuition of which carries the idea of its infinity within it’ (B p. 93, A p. 92). What the sublime does, then, is to remind us of the limitations of our *sensuous* relationship to nature and actually to give us aesthetic pleasure via the initial *lack* of pleasure generated by this reminder itself: ‘Something is *sublime* if it pleases immediately by its resistance to the interest of the senses’ (B p. 115). The argument is dialectical: the sense of limitation entails the sense of its opposite, the fact that we also have a capacity for reason not limited by sensuousness. The ‘mathematically sublime’ is concerned with the aesthetic (thus subjective) apprehension of quantity and with the fact that, however large something in nature is, it is small in relation to the totality whose idea is provided for us by reason. The ‘dynamically sublime’ is experienced at those moments when we are confronted with natural powers which are beyond our power to control, such as lightning, volcanoes, hurricanes, the ‘boundless ocean’, but from a position of safety. This confrontation provokes in us a resistance which makes us wish to measure ourselves against nature because we realise that our moral feeling transcends anything we can experience in nature. Our capacity for reason can thus be heightened by the physical threat of nature. The potential of reason’s non-finite relation to the laws of nature is, then, actually generated by the way in which nature reveals its irreducibility to our interests as sensuous beings in the experience of the sublime. The basis of Kant’s argument will be central in post-Kantian philosophy. Because we feel our limits of our imagination we must *also* feel what is not limited in ourselves: otherwise we would have no way of being *aware* of a limit. Freedom emerges from a situation which seems empirically to be nothing but constraint.

In the sublime, therefore, the idea of the supersensuous emerges from the realisation that reason’s attempts to grasp the totality are empirically unrepresentable. This realisation involves ‘a feeling of the privation of the freedom of the imagination by the imagination itself’ (B p. 117, A p. 116), the effect of which is to ‘broaden the soul’ (B p. 124, A p. 123) by taking one away from the finite sensuous world. Kant’s argument takes a strange but significant turn when he cites the ban on images in Jewish theology as being the most sublime passage of the law book. He claims that the ban explains the enthusiasm for religion during the period of its institution. If the senses have nothing left as their object ‘and the inextinguishable idea of morality still remains’ (B p. 125, A p. 123), the idea’s motivating force can be increased rather than diminished. Kant maintains that governments which surround their religion with sensuous representations therefore do so to limit the subject’s capacity to ‘extend his spiritual forces over the barriers which one has arbitrarily set up for him’ (B p. 125, A p. 124), and thus to render him more passive. We saw above that in the first two Critiques

Kant himself was in a situation rather analogous to that of Moses, trying to use the supersensuous, unrepresentable idea of freedom as the foundation of our place in the world. In the first two Critiques he was unable to do more than postulate what would have to be available to us in an 'intellectual intuition' if it were to provide a constitutive ground of our place within things.

The very fact that there is a third Critique is not least a result of the insufficiency of the first two Critiques with regard to the characterisation of the relationship between human freedom and the rest of nature. The crucial difference of the sublime from the beautiful is that in the sublime the *'unfathomability of the idea of freedom'* completely cuts off any positive representation of it' (B p. 125, A p. 124). In the aesthetic products of the genius ideas of reason were made sensuously available. The sublime does not represent ideas sensuously, because it reminds the imagination that the sensuous is not ultimately adequate to ideas anyway. On the one hand, then, Kant limits the significance of the sublime to the subjective realm, on the other the sublime would seem at the same time to suggest the limits of the beautiful, which is tied to the sensuous, even though Kant sees the pleasure in the sublime as merely negative and that in the beautiful as positive. This ambiguous position suggests why the status of the particular arts will become so significant in the reactions to Kant. Music, to which Kant himself does not grant an elevated aesthetic status, is, of course, the form of art which most immediately suggests transcendence of the sensuous. Although music is manifest as sensuous sound, it can only be music if one moves beyond the sensuous to its significance as ordered sound that cannot be described in physicalist or representational terms.¹⁷ As we have already seen, music in this period comes to be regarded as the highest form of art precisely because of its distance from representation. Furthermore, like the sublime, music's significance also lies in its relationship to feeling rather than concepts, which, in terms of Kant's arguments considered above, connects it to the most essential, 'immediate' aspect of the subject. We shall return to these issues in later chapters.

For the moment the main issue is the following. Kant's characterisation of the sublime in terms of the limitations of the sensuous and of the capacity for representation points to a decisive alternative in modern aesthetics, which has to do with the change in the status of music that takes place in Romanticism. The notion of the unrepresentability of the most essential aspect of our existence compels one to ask whether art can ultimately only sustain itself at the expense of any substantial relationship to the empirical content of social life, because the truth it can convey could otherwise be equally well or better communicated in other forms. What, for example, does the realist historical novel tell us that cannot be more reliably communicated by the right kind of narrative historiography? If art is to have a more committed function in the political life of the community the problem suggested in Kant's observations on using sensuousness as a political tool in religion arises, because the specific significance of art seems likely to become lost. Modern art is therefore located in an uneasy

tension – of precisely the kind played out in Schoenberg’s opera – between the ‘aesthetic’ demand for representation (Aaron) and the ‘sublime’ sense that representation ultimately destroys the real supersensuous point of the aesthetic (Moses), because ideas are fundamentally unrepresentable and only accessible via the negation of everything empirical. In Hegel this suspicion of the empirical will be part of what generates his claim that, because it is tied to the sensuous object, art has ceased to be a means of communicating the essential truth in modernity, this role having fallen to philosophy. On the other hand, art itself, particularly in the form of music, becomes increasingly wary of sensuous representation, and philosophy’s own role clearly diminishes in the second half of the nineteenth century in the wake of the success of the natural sciences.

It is evident that these issues were very much part of the perception of the modern era in Kant’s time. Hamann’s theology relies, for example, upon the endless revelation of the divine *within* the sensuous. Kant, in contrast, rejects the suspicion that the power of the supersensuous involved in the ‘merely negative representation of morality’ might lead to the danger of what he terms *Schwärmerei*, roughly translatable as uncontrolled fantasy or religious ‘enthusiasm’. *Schwärmerei* is described as a sort of madness which ‘*wishes to see something beyond every boundary of sensuousness*, i.e. to dream in terms of principles (to rave with reason) [*mit Vernunft rasen*]’ (*Cf* B p. 125, A p. 124). Unlike Hamann, Kant regards the fact that the sublime is only a reminder of the failure of representation to be adequate to the supersensuous as a reason not to spend one’s time seeking something which is more than sensuous within the sensuous. The fact is, however, that early Romanticism will be based precisely on questions about how it is that the sensuous seems by its inherent incompleteness to point beyond the sensuous – in certain ways that was, of course, the point of the *Cf* anyway. Given Kant’s lack of success in convincingly establishing the nature of the division between the sensuous and the intelligible it is hardly surprising that some subsequent thinkers will try to revoke Kant’s dualisms of appearances and things in themselves, of sensuous and intelligible, nature and freedom, often doing so in relation to music.

Art in the nineteenth century will itself tend to be located between two extremes. One is best embodied in the Naturalist attempt to collude with the advance of science, the other is exemplified by the rise of absolute music and the related development of the notion of ‘pure poetry’, an art devoid of representation, which is an idea Novalis will be one of the first to propose. Kant limits the sublime to nature, but as nature becomes more and more an object of scientific manipulation the attempt to reveal a non-sensuous truth not available to science often tends to be transferred into art. This truth is no longer representable in any other medium than the particular work of art concerned, which therefore becomes an attempt to say the unsayable. Furthermore, once the importance of language to these issues has been realised they will lead to essential questions that still concern philosophy today (on this see Bowie 1997).

The distinction of the beautiful and the sublime can also be regarded as the

basis of the tension in post-Kantian philosophy between the desire for a ‘new mythology’ and the idea of the autonomy of the aesthetic work. The ‘new mythology’ – an idea developed in relation to Schiller’s aesthetic letters – would sensuously present ideas of reason in order to communicate the advances brought about by autonomous subjectivity to all levels of society. It would thus integrate science and art into a unified collective project. In contrast, the idea of the superiority of the autonomous work of art over science and philosophy relies upon the conviction that the highest principle of philosophy is unrepresentable and must therefore be preserved from being used as a means for scientific and political ends. This distinction will occur in some form in all subsequent debates about aesthetics and politics, from Marx, to Lukács, to Brecht, to Adorno and beyond. It was the baroque honesty of Kant’s attempt to ground truth in subjectivity which opened up the conceptual space for exploration of these issues in modernity. The further work of exploration is carried on at an often remarkable level of sophistication in German Idealism and early Romanticism, to which we now turn.

Notes

- 1 All page references to the three Critiques are, as is now standard, to the A and B versions of the Academy edition.
- 2 Kant wrote reflections on aesthetics from very early in his career onwards which suggest his awareness of the importance of the topic for his philosophy that culminates in the *Cf*.
- 3 Kant accepts that there is knowledge based on ‘pure intuition’ in mathematics, but knowledge of anything *real* has to involve perceptual input. See the discussion of ‘real’ below.
- 4 Kant employs this conception of ‘reality’ in order to refute the so-called ontological proof of God’s existence.
- 5 See Makkreel 1990 pp. 28–9.
- 6 An influential recent attempt to suggest a way of obviating this problem is John McDowell’s *Mind and World*, which argues, following Kant in a manner which echoes certain Romantic arguments (see Bowie 1996), that ‘the deliverances of receptivity already draw on capacities that belong to spontaneity’ (McDowell 1994 p. 41).
- 7 ‘Deduction’ in the sense at issue here means ‘legitimation of the use of’.
- 8 Dieter Henrich has recently argued that this may indeed be all that can be done with the problem.
- 9 My thanks to Manfred Frank for pointing this out to me.
- 10 I have dealt at some length with the implications of this important issue in Kant in relation to Jacobi, who most effectively highlighted the issue: see Bowie 1997 chapter 1. It would take too much space to outline the significance of Jacobi here.
- 11 What is at issue here also appears in debates in the analytical philosophy of mind over the nature of, for example, the immediate sensation of pain. The idea that there is in such cases an infallible, non-conceptual aspect to my self-knowledge – for which, as we shall see, the early Romantics and Schleiermacher used the term ‘feeling’ – is now widely accepted in the analytical philosophy of mind.
- 12 See Welsch 1996 pp. 490–5.
- 13 This is one way of understanding how Schelling sees nature in his ‘philosophy of nature’ (see Chapter 4).

- 14 This is one reason why the emergence of aesthetics, as Terry Eagleton argues (1990), is linked to the rise of the bourgeoisie who break with the feudal world-picture. The Savoy peasant still thinks Baron de Saussure's desire to climb Mont Blanc is crazy, as Kant reports (*CJ B* p. 111).
- 15 On this see Neubauer 1986.
- 16 As Marx points out, this can be interpreted as a projection of the ruthless capitalism of the period on to nature, thereby again suggesting the danger of certain attempts to characterise nature 'in itself'.
- 17 It is worth remembering that, as Hamann suggested, something similar applies to language: the material of language is in itself not significant, and only becomes so via its relation to other material and to consciousness. Language is, though, generally regarded as, in some sense at least, inherently representational.