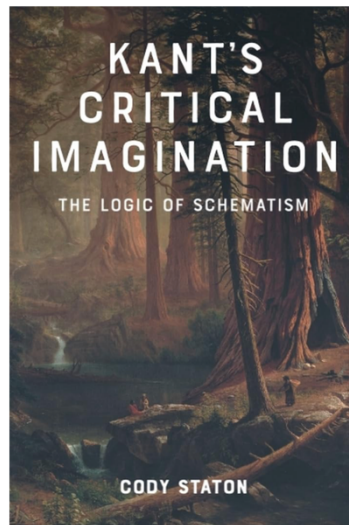


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Cody Staton, *Kant's Critical Imagination. The Logic of Schematism* (Edinburgh University Press, 2025), 240pp. ISBN 9781399554855



Kant's Critical Imagination. The Logic of Schematism by Cody Staton, offers a new perspective on the interpretation and meaning of the use of imagination in different types of schematism. Unlike other studies, which focus on transcendental or mathematical schematism, this book offers a comprehensive overview of the various areas of use of schematism: transcendental, empirical, mathematical, aesthetic, and practical.

The first chapter “Imagination: Critical Beginnings, 1770-1781” explores the philosophical and historical context of Kant’s theory of imagination: by presenting the development of Kant’s theory in dialogue with Wolff, Baumgarten, and Hume, the author is able to reconstruct the genesis of critical thought. The second, “Schematism as a Catalyst for Critical Philosophy”, analyses the origins of Kant’s notion of time and its relationship to imagination and schematism. One of the most relevant theses of this section concerns the historical origin of the schematism: by analysing the *Inaugural Dissertation* and the *Duisburg Nachlaß*, Staton concludes that Kant initially conceived categories as temporal determinations, that is, as schemata. Accor-

ding to this interpretation, Kant changed his mind and decided to make a clear distinction between schemata and pure concepts because of the need to distance his philosophical system from that of Tetens, which was too empirical and focused not on the objective validity of concepts, but rather on their genesis. For this reason, Kant had to separate pure concepts from schemata and develop the transcendental deduction. Furthermore, the author presents the explanation of imagination in the A Deduction—that is, as a faculty of synthesis of representations—in light of the critique of Hume: in this way, it is possible to easily appreciate Kant’s effort to propose a better alternative to rationalism or empiricism, introducing an explanation of imagination that is not merely reproductive-empirical. In the third chapter, “Transcendental Schematism”, the author defines schematisation as the figurative synthesis of the imagination that shows pure concepts in time and sets out the different types of transcendental schemata. While Kant did not present his relationship with categories in detail, Staton does: he presents the schema of number as the method that allows intuitions to be unified in successive series, and the schemas of quality (reality, negation, limitation) express the intensity of intuitions. The author details the schemas of relation (substance, causality, and community), placing Kant in dialogue with Hume and Tetens. Although Tetens had an answer to Hume’s notion of causality, namely that causal relations require an act of thought, he did not explain how the understanding could do this objectively. In other words, Tetens lacked both a transcendental deduction and an explanation of the realisation of categories through schemata. After analysing modality schemata, which focus on whether some representations are temporal and to what extent they are, in the fourth chapter the author goes on to distinguish between empirical and mathematical schematism. Staton’s assertion that it is thanks to the empirical schematism of the imagination that the understanding can construct new empirical concepts is particularly interesting. When we approach an object that is unknown to us, we are still able to compare it through our imagination with one that is familiar to us and find differences and marks that can then be used to construct new concepts.

The fifth chapter, “Imagination and Transcendental Objects”, focuses on another type of schematism, in which the imagination helps reason to project transcendental objects (including the transcendental object = X) in order to guide the work of systematisation of reason. A clear example of this is ideas: reason has a natural tendency to take an internal product (an idea) as if it were an external object. The imagination presents this idea as a unit projected outside of experience. Kant speaks of this in terms of an imaginary focus that directs our faculties towards an illusory object beyond experience.

However, there is a good use for this illusion, namely the regulatory use of ideas: imagining a unity helps to construct a unitary system.

The sixth chapter, “Reflexive schematism: imagination in aesthetics and teleology”, deals with a schematism that acts freely during aesthetic experiences. This free play, which may be independent of the concept of the object’s purpose (in the case of free beauty) or not (dependent beauty), promotes cognition insofar as it prompts us to reflect. When faced with a work of art, we are moved in a way that goes beyond concepts.

Similarly, schematism plays a role in the teleology involved in understanding nature: since nature cannot be fully understood in all its complexity and variety, we need the idea of a presupposed unity to guide us as we approach it.

In the seventh and final chapter, “Moral Schematism: Imagination and Practical Reason”, Staton focuses on the use of schematism in the practical realm, addressing the Typic in the *Critique of Practical Reason*—in which Kant deals with the application of pure moral law—as well as passages from *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, in which the ethical community schematises the idea of a perfect moral community, which has not yet been realised but must be considered realisable. In his conclusions, the author once again highlights the fundamental role played by imagination in Kant’s system: it is what allows understanding and its concepts a meaningful use, and ensures that sensitivity is not blind. The schema, similar to Aristotelian *dynamis*, shows the universality of concepts in intuition and, at the same time, allows for the production of new and more refined empirical concepts.

The book offers a new and comprehensive view of Kant’s theory of imagination in its schematic use, but its contribution is not limited to this. By showing how schematism is present in different areas of Kant’s system (transcendental, aesthetic, ethical, etc.), it provides elements for reconsidering the debates that question the unity of reason in Kant, as well as the discussion on conceptualism and non-conceptualism.

However, there are statements that could spark new debates and that may need further explanation. I will present three of them. Firstly, the author argues that “the transcendental matter that makes it possible for sensations to affect us from the outside is the object = X, which is the noumenal object in itself.” (p.89). However, it is unclear whether, by admitting a matter that corresponds to the object = X, he is defending a certain realism and, if so, how this can be compatible with his assertion that the transcendental object X (as well as other transcendental representations, such as ideas) is postulated by the imagination in order to synthesise intuitions according to categories and is used by reason for systematic purposes (p. 127). Secondly,

the declaration that error in judgement is due to the imagination being “overwhelmed by the content of the intuition” (p. 137) may be misleading, in that it may lead the reader to believe that it is wrong for us to perceive, for example, a stick as bent if it is under water. However, it is not that it is wrong to perceive it that way, but rather that there are reasons why a stick should appear bent if it is underwater. Error in judgement is committed when insufficient reasons are considered sufficient to affirm that something was true, and it does not derive solely from the constitution of our senses or our imagination. Finally, it would be interesting to address the cases of people with aphantasia and delve deeper into Kant’s explanation of images and imagination. If we are unable to reproduce past representations as images and combine them in novel ways, does that mean that there are some limitations in the way we use and produce empirical concepts?

It is to be hoped that these and other questions that readers of this book will raise will generate new debates on a topic that remains highly topical in research on Kant and beyond.

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