

THE LAND OF TRUTH OF THE UNDERSTANDING
AND THE THREATENING WATERS OF REASON:
MARITIME SOURCES FOR A KANTIAN METAPHOR¹

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What I am going to share and discuss with you is only a part of a major study that I brought to completion here in Göttingen during a short visit as a Humboldt fellow. Its central issue concerns the roles of imagination in Kant. Imagination engages its figurative power both empirically, unifying the manifold of different perceptions in images, reproducing representations by selecting the way in which they combine together, and transcendently, in both determining and reflective judgments. I begin by considering first imagination as an active function of sensibility, and then examine its role in serving the understanding, before analysing its involuntary play which generates fantasy, daydreams and illusion, and which poses the problem of controlling our power of imagination. Then I consider the interplay between imagination and ideas of reason, note that for Kant reason forms an idea as a *focus imaginarius*, highlighting both the illusory and the regulative sides of their relationship. With these roles in view, I finally turn to appreciate the immanent role played by imagination in the ‘adventures’ of reason. With prof. Bernd Ludwig I agree to focus today on this last section of my paper, which contains the most original results of my research.

If one wants to highlight the relation between the truth of the understanding’s application to experience and the transcendental illusion proper of reason’s nature were imagination certainly plays a role and the problem of its control arises, one of the most striking text is the famous maritime metaphor at

¹ This paper was presented to the Philosophisches Seminar of the University of Göttingen on May 21st, 2013. I wish to thank the Kantian group of graduate and doctoral students who attended for their intense discussion and helpful comments. I extend special gratitude to my host, Prof. Dr. Bernd Ludwig, and to the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung for its financial support during my research stay. The line of thought and much of the content presented here form the last section of a forthcoming major study entitled: *Illusions of Imagination and Adventures of Reason in Kant’s first Critique*; my topic was previewed for an Italian audience as one of the ‘Lunch Seminars’ of the Department of Humanistic Studies of the University of Trieste on 9 April, 2013. All translations from the Cambridge edition of Kant’s *Works* have been checked against the originals.

the beginning of the Phenomena and Noumena describing a land of truth surrounded by an ocean of illusion:

We have now not only traveled through the land of pure understanding, and carefully inspected each part of it, but we have also surveyed it, and determined the place for each thing in it. This land, however, is an island, and enclosed in unalterable boundaries by nature itself. It is the land of truth (a seductive name), surrounded by a broad and stormy ocean, the proper seat of semblance, where many a fog bank and rapidly melting iceberg misrepresents new lands and, ceaselessly deceiving with empty hopes the voyager looking around for new discoveries, entwine him in adventures from which he can never escape and yet also never bring to an end.²

Please note that within this cartography of our cognitive faculties, in the open sea of speculative reason *Schein*, semblance, is referred to the shapes of fog banks *and* broken icebergs which are misleading for their merely apparent similarity to coastlines and mountains. Note the use of the verbs *lügen* (to misrepresent, to dissemble) and *täuschen* (to deceive). Note also that Kant characterizes his voyager as an explorer (*Seefahrer*) involved in a kind of search which suggests the navigation of a ship deviating in many directions as signs of land and circumstances arise, as it is conveyed by the use of the adjective *herumschwärmenden*. Moreover, the whole picture is not presented as a matter of optical illusion or mirage, nor of distinguishing, among phenomena, between veridical experience and empirical semblances. Rather, as is conveyed by the verb *lügen*, the issue at stake is the distinction between assumptions and facts: to take such appearances for ‘what they represent’ in the voyager’s eye; it is a matter of reliability in knowing the external world, which involves accomplished judgment and standard scientific practices.

Was Kant relying on his own imagery to make such a detailed and distinctive picture, or did he draw his metaphor from a source which, once discovered, could disclose the meaning and offer a better understanding of this crucial text?

² See *KdrV*, A236/B295: Wir haben jetzt das Land des reinen Verstandes nicht allein durchreiset und jeden Theil davon sorgfältig in Augenschein genommen, sondern es auch durchmessen und jedem Dinge auf demselben seine Stelle bestimmt. Dieses Land aber ist eine Insel und durch die Natur selbst in unveränderliche Grenzen eingeschlossen. Es ist das Land der Wahrheit (ein reizender Name), umgeben von einem weiten und stürmischen Oceane, dem eigentlichen Sitze des Scheins, wo manche Nebelbank und manches bald wegschmelzende Eis neue Länder lügt und, indem es den auf Entdeckungen herumschwärmenden Seefahrer unaufhörlich mit leeren Hoffnungen täuscht, ihn in Abenteuer verflechtet, von denen er niemals ablassen und sie doch auch niemals zu Ende bringen kann.

In a footnote, the editors of the Cambridge Edition of Kant's *Works* present this passage as an example of Kant's «geographical imagery»,³ pointing to a parallel note written by Kant a decade before the publication of the first *Critique*. Already in 1772, to express his critical approach to *Metaphysics*, Kant had used an iconographic simile and the geographical vocabulary of exploring, mapping and locating a maritime landscape: the «unknown land» of *metaphysics* was situated in the «hemisphere» of pure reason. Kant claimed to have been able to outline the «island of Knowledge» and to locate where it was connected by bridges to the country of Experience or where it was separated from it by a profound sea. In short, for Paul Guyer and Alan Wood, the source for Kant's metaphor in A236/B295 is his own imagination, as *Reflexion* 4458 seems to show:

In metaphysics, like an unknown land of which we intend to take possession, we have first assiduously investigated its situation and access to it. (It lies in the (region) hemisphere of pure reason;) we have even drawn the outline of where this island of cognition is connected by bridges to the land of experience, and where it is separated by a deep sea; we have even drawn *sourceits* outline and are as it were acquainted with its geography (ichnography), but we do not know what might be found in this land, which is maintained to be uninhabitable by some people and to be their real domicile by others. We will take the general history of this land of reason into account in accordance with this general geography.⁴

However, to my view, this iconographic parallelism to the later text is rather loose, primarily because there *metaphysics* counts as an unknown land and the sea counts as an unbridgeable gulf, not as a seat of illusion. What is more, Kant's geographic imagery does not account for what looks quite distinctive here: the description of a maritime scene of semblance in terms of «fog banks

³ *CrP* p. 732, note 9.

⁴ AA XVII 17, p. 559: Wir haben von der metaphysik als von einem unbekanntem Lande, auf dessen Besitz wir bedacht sind, zuerst die (Lage und) Zugänge fleißig untersucht. (Es liegt in der (Gegend) Halbkugel der reinen Vernunft;) wir haben so gar den Umriss davon gezogen, wo diese Insel der [Erkenntnis] von Erkenntnis [an das] mit dem Lande der Erfahrung durch Brücken zusammenhangt, oder wo sie durch ein tiefes Meer davon abgesondert ist; wir haben so gar den Umriss davon gezeichnet und kennen gleichsam die geographie (ichnographie) desselben, wissen aber noch nicht, was in diesem Lande, welches einige vor unbewohnbar vor menschen gehalten, andre als ihre wirkliche Niederlassung angesehen haben, angetroffen werden möge. Nach dieser allgemeinen Geographie dieses Vernunftlandes wollen wir die allgemeine Geschichte desselben in Erwegung ziehen.

and rapidly melting icebergs» which misrepresent new lands and deceive the explorer who eagerly seeks new discoveries.

A more thorough attempt, exegesis and strong claim was made in 1980 by a French scholar, Michèle Le Dœuff. Her book, *Recherches sur l'imaginaire philosophique*, was translated into English in 1989 with the title *The philosophical imaginary* and reprinted in 2002. Her view is that the metaphor elaborated by Kant in the first *Critique* is copied (*soit copiée*) from Francis Bacon's *In Temporis Partus Maximus*. This reading has been endorsed, publicized and made current by Eduardo Mendieta's contribution on Kant's geography, in 2011.⁵ However, a closer examination of this alleged source (originally indicated by Le Dœuff's in French translation) reveals that Bacon's image appears in a work entitled *The Masculine Birth of Time (Temporis Partus Masculus*, ca. 1603) and that the Latin original significantly differs from the free rendering of the text upon which Le Dœuff's claim rests. Consider the following texts from Le Doeuff 1980 and 2002:

En fait, si des conditions et des projets politiques n'avaient pas mis un terme à ces voyages mentaux, bien d'autres rivages de l'erreur auraient été visités par ces marins. *Car l'île de la vérité est entourée par un puissant océan dans lequel bien des intelligences iront encore faire naufrage dans le tempête de l'illusion* (my italics).⁶

Indeed, if political conditions and projects had not put an end to these mental trips, these mariners would have touched on many another shore of error. *For the island of truth is surrounded by a mighty ocean in which many an intelligence will drown in storms of illusion* (my italics).⁷

Compare with Bacon's Latin:

Ac nisi temporum politiae et provisus ejusmodi ingeniorum peregrinationibus adversiores extitissent, multae etiam aliae errorum orae fuissent peragratae. *Immensum enim pelagus veritatis insulam circumluit; et supersunt adhuc novae ventorum idolorum injuriae et disjectiones* (my italics).⁸

Bacon's passage can be rendered in English as follows:

⁵ See MENDIETA 2011, pp. 347-351.

⁶ LE DOEUFF 1980, p. 19.

⁷ LE DOEUFF 2002, p. 9.

⁸ BACON (c. 1603), p. 27.

And if political governance and the views of the future would not have been so adverse to the wanderings of the minds, then many other shores of error would have been visited. *Indeed an immense sea encircles the island of truth; and even now new injuries and disruptions occur by the blustering of the idols* (my italics).⁹

In particular, that passage contains no image of the ocean as a seat of illusion and of the pure understanding as an island of truth. Bacon's program is to emend and purify human understanding from native and inherent superstitions, deceiving fictions, social and cultural prejudices also due to traditional authorities (idols), which alter and twist the sound relation between mind and things of the senses. In this passage, Bacon makes people aware of the persistence, despite the outlook of his modern age, of mental «errors». He presents them as obstacles, damage or injuries to the progressive advancement of learning. He renders this metaphorically, with the image of truth as an island lapped by an immense sea. Its shores are still showing wrecks due to the persistent «blustering» of idols (the Latin word for 'wind' also means 'fable' as is retained in the Italian *folia*, and at one more remove in the English 'folly'). Do we have then to reject Francis Bacon as a source for Kant's metaphor?

As is well known, Kant added to the frontispiece of the second edition of the *Critique of pure Reason* a motto drawn from the Preface of Bacon's *Instauratio Magna* which stated a sort of continuity between Bacon's spirit and Kant's quest for grounding an anti-dogmatic metaphysics. The motto reads: «each may well hope from our instauration that it claims nothing infinite, and nothing beyond what is mortal; for in truth it prescribes only the end of infinite errors, and this is a legitimate end». The motto is featuring Kant's critical metaphysical project to curb the theoretical pretensions of reason with the doctrine of transcendental illusion while at the same time securing the functions of reason to give systematic unity and completion to the knowledge provided by the understanding. Can we then reject Bacon as a source for Kant's metaphor about the land of the truth of the understanding and the stormy ocean of reason only on strict philological reason?

This is what I contend, on the following grounds. Against the background of

⁹ My translation. Cf. BACON 1964, p. 69: «In fact, had not political conditions and prospects put an end to these mental voyages, many another coast of error would have been visited by those mariners. *For the island of truth is lapped by a mighty ocean in which many intellects will still be wrecked by the gales of illusion*» (my italics).

the paralogisms of reason, consider an interesting and often neglected passage of the 1781 edition, in which Kant more explicitly refers to products of imagination which enter the realm of fictions and give rise to rational psychology as a pseudo-doctrine, an «imagined» (*eingebildete*) science, through reification and hypostatization:

Thus every dispute about the nature of our thinking being and its conjunction with the corporeal world is merely a consequence of the fact that one fills the gaps regarding what one does not know with paralogism of reason, making thoughts into things (*Sachen*) and hypostatizing them; from this arises an imagined science (*eingebildete Wissenschaft*), both in regard to affirmative and negative assertions, in that everyone either presumes to know something about objects about which no human being has any concept, or else makes his own representations into objects (*seine eigene Vorstellung zu Gegenstanden macht*), and thus goes round and round in an eternal circle of ambiguities and contradictions.¹⁰

Kant then presents dogmatic semblances (*dogmatischen Blendwerke*) correlated to «imagined» happiness (*eingebildete Glückseligkeit*), which only a severe criticism can keep under control, by mapping and delimiting the speculative cognition of reason:

Nothing but the sobriety of a strict but just criticism can liberate us from these dogmatic semblances [...] and limit all our speculative claims merely to the field of possible experience, not by stale mockery at attempts that have so often failed, or by pious sighing over the limits of our reason, but by means of a complete determination of reason's boundaries according to secure principles, which with the greatest reliability fastens its *nihil ulterius* on those Pillars of Hercules that nature has erected, so that the voyage of our reason may proceed only as far as the continuous coastline of experiences reaches, a coastline that we cannot leave without venturing out into a shoreless ocean, which, among constantly deceptive prospects, forces us in the end to abandon as hopeless all our troublesome and tedious efforts.¹¹

Accordingly only through rigorous criticism can the power of imagination lose its deceptive speculative effect as the trap into which theoretical reason 'necessarily' falls, «making us think that we are capable of knowing beyond the

¹⁰ *KdrV A*, p. 395.

¹¹ *KdrV A*, pp. 395-6.

limits of possible experience».¹² Kant's instances of transcendental subreption and deceptive prospects (*trüglichen Aussichten*) involve reference to a (mistaken) reified use of the power of imagination to produce representations of objects beyond real nature, thus being able even to replace empirical references, resting on the analogy between its inventions and material drawn from senses and real perceptions, often inadvertently.

Indeed, in the second edition of the *Critique of pure Reason* (1787), Kant specifies that the power of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) is the capacity (*Vermögen*) to represent an object even without its presence in intuition¹³ and another feature, clearly stated in both editions of the first *Critique*, is that for itself it has no proper guiding principle of unity, it is a «blind» function of the *Gemüth*.¹⁴ Therefore, when a synthesis occurs, which draws material from the senses, this operation does not necessarily require that we *think about it*: in Kant's terms, imagination, not as merely reproductive, but as responsible for the synthesis of sensations, empirical intuitions and sensory images,¹⁵ without which we would have no cognition at all, is a function «of which we are seldom even conscious».

Note that Kant employs a maritime metaphor to visualize his quest for a rigorous criticism to free us from the captivating illusions of ungrounded metaphysical doctrines and how the ocean lures us on by deceitful promises and is the proper seat of illusions for the voyagers of reason because it is shoreless. Here Kant states that without remaining in sight of the coastline, which represents instruction from experience, our thought remains without any reliable orientation, gets lost and is forced to renounce its journey, since it is deceived about the right way to go. Note that Kant does not appeal to the external supreme authority of God's illumination and providence to help us in a shoreless ocean: the voyage of exploration on the high (boundless) seas turns out in the end to be a hopeless effort. Moreover, his reference to the Pillars of Hercules, here invoked as boundaries imposed by blind natural necessity, carries no collective invitation to transgress them to increase our knowledge.

The frontispiece of the 1620 Bacon's *Instauratio magna*, the book from which in 1787 Kant drew the motto, figures a ship that transgress the boundaries of the pillars of Hercules (FIG.1). Note that just below the ship in the foreground passing through the pillars of Hercules there is the motto: *multi pertransibunt at augebitur scientia* (many will pass through and knowledge will

¹² LORD 2011, p. 46.

¹³ *KdrV* B, p. 151.

¹⁴ *KdrV* A, p. 78/ B, p.103.

¹⁵ *KdrV* A, p. 120-1.

be augmented). However, Kant does not seem to encourage ignoring the ancient warning *nec plus ultra*, and go further beyond. His concern is how speculative reason can avoid the danger of erring in a world of fables. Though omitted in the second edition of 1787, there is no reason to regard the omission of the passage quoted above as any change in Kant's view on the relation between discipline through critique and metaphysics. My conjecture is that Kant omitted the 1781 reference to the Pillars of Hercules to avoid any apparent contrast with his anti-Baconian endorsement of the *nec plus ultra* and his Baconian endorsement to put an end to the cognitive errors of a speculation which ventures beyond the finite.

Reason is burdened by a dialectic or logic of illusion or semblance, mistaking the necessity with which it forms an idea as a *focus imaginarius* (sic) for a real object. The theoretical illusions of reason according to the wish of metaphysics to reach beyond the boundaries of all possible experience are thus supported by an uncontrolled use of the power of imagination. In my view this happens because in the case of metaphysics, the understanding has removed the constraints of the application of its a priori concepts to experience; therefore it inevitably fails to hold imagination within the limits of possible experience. In the *Prolegomena* Kant writes an important note in this regard:

The imagination may perhaps be excused if it daydreams every now and then, i.e., if it does not cautiously hold itself inside the limits of experience; for it will at least be enlivened and strengthened through such free flight, and it will always be easier to moderate its boldness than to remedy its languor. That the understanding, however, which is supposed to think, should, instead of that, daydream – for this it can never forgive; for all assistance in setting bounds, where needed, to the revelry of the imagination depends on it alone. The understanding begins all this very innocently and chastely. First, it puts in order the elementary cognitions that dwell in it prior to all experience but must nonetheless always have their application in experience. Gradually, it removes these constraints, and what is to hinder it from doing so, since the understanding has quite freely taken its principles from within itself? And now reference is made first to newly invented forces in nature, soon thereafter to beings outside nature, in a word, to a world for the furnishing of which building materials cannot fail us, since they are abundantly supplied through fertile invention, and though not indeed confirmed by experience, are also never refuted by it. That is also the reason why young thinkers so love metaphysics of the truly dogmatic sort, and

often sacrifice their time and their otherwise useful talent to it.¹⁶

If so, how can Kant hold that this semblance need not deceive us; how can it be prevented from leading us astray and we may succeed in avoiding its pitfalls? My questions are: Can we assume that the revelry of an imagination uncontrolled by an understanding which innocently slides to the ill-grounded assumption that the unconditioned is a given object, play a role in affecting speculative reason? Does imagination support the inevitable temptation of metaphysical cognitions which strive to attain the unconditioned completeness of the ideas of reason independently of and beyond all experience¹⁷? More importantly, how can the self-knowledge and criticism of reason hinder and prevent this sort of abuse?

Against this background it becomes relevant to look in another direction, that is, Kant's lectures on physical geography, recalling the *pragmatic* task Kant ascribed to his lectures, which he regularly offered for 40 years, from 1756 to 1796. Informing students about the advantages of following his course, he explained:

It is not to be taken as a small advantage, that the gullible admiration of the caretakers of unending extravagant lucubrations (*unendlicher Hirngespinnste*) has made way for a cautious examination, through which we are in a position to acquire sure knowledge from credible witnesses, without the danger of erring in a world of fables.¹⁸

As one commentator recently wrote, if it contains a careful, reliable, scientifically tested and controlled account of natural causality, physical geography «can teach students to exercise their judgment and critically distinguish between a true account of the world and fairy tales, not only those brought forth by religion, but also by those brought forth through ungrounded metaphysics».¹⁹ If, as Tonelli put it, the *Critique of Pure Reason* is primarily a work on the «methodology of metaphysics», the role played by physical geography cannot be underestimated.²⁰

Kant never left Koenigsberg physically, but mentally he certainly was a great traveller. We have studies on his command of the relevant contemporary

¹⁶ *Prolog.* § 35, AA IV, p. 317.

¹⁷ LORD 2011, pp. 46 ff.

¹⁸ AA II, p. 3.

¹⁹ WILSON 2011, p. 165.

²⁰ TONELLI 1994, p. 4.

geographical literature and on his keeping himself up to date with the most recent publications. We know he read all his main sources in German translation,²¹ including a host of accounts of voyages around the world: e.g. Hawkesworth (German trans. 1774), de Bougainville (German trans. 1772), Forster (German trans. 1778-80), likely Phipps (German trans. 1777), etc.

At first, I was following the standard view that Kant's metaphor of the stormy and vast ocean with icebergs and fog banks looking like land was figuring the Northern Sea, so I first went across the accounts of the scientific expeditions towards the Spitzbergen that Kant quotes in his lectures on physical geography.

It was not long before we saw something on the bow, part black and part covered with snow, which from the appearance we took to be islands and thought that we had not stood far enough out; I hauled up immediately to the NNW and was soon undeceived, finding it to be ice which we could not clear upon that tack.²²

I took this text for a possible source only for a while. Despite the attractive similarities with Kant's metaphor, two aspects did not fit at a second thought: first off, in A236/B259 Kant speaks of fog banks and icebergs which misrepresent lands, whereas Phipps describes a situation where fog banks make icebergs looking like mountains, moreover Kant speaks of explorers who are over eager to discover new lands, whereas the Phipps expedition, like other Arctic expeditions, was looking not for new lands, but for a north-eastern passage to India.

I do hope I have now properly paved the way for a convincing alternative, which draws from the maritime culture of the XVIII century, in particular to the account of these polar expeditions aimed at discovering new lands. At the time, the main issue at stake was to mapping the *terra firma* of an alleged Antarctic continent, 'deduced' by the speculative reasoning of the geographer to the French King, Philippe Buache, since 1757. As mentioned, maritime culture was familiar to Kant as material for his lectures on physical geography. I wish to draw attention to a page from Georg Forster's *Voyage towards the South Pole and Round the World* in the years 1772-75 with Captain James Cook. Forster originally published the text in English (1777) and then translated it into his native German, the first vol. in 1778, the second in 1780, with some variants, after that his father, the famous naturalist Johann Reinhold Forster was

²¹ STARK 2011, p. 98, note 5.

²² PHIPPS 1774, Entry of July 5, p. 36.

prevented to do so by a contract with the British Admiralty. Being himself a naturalist, the young George could well provide that kind of expertise and training in objective verification of empirical data which meets the requirement of sure knowledge based on reliable testimony, advocated by Kant for the content of his lectures on Physical Geography.²³ Georg Forster was also charged by the astronomer of the expedition, William Wales, to be not the real author, the book actually being the work of his father to avoid any contrast with the Admiralty. In any event, Forster appears to be so methodologically alert to approach nature scientifically, that is, with a previously designed plan, his *Leitfaden* in Kant's sense, or «thread of Ariadne» through the «labyrinth of human knowledge». In his Lectures on Geography Kant cautioned that «there is more to knowledge of the world than just seeing the world»²⁴ and then that «through travel one can broaden one's knowledge of the external world, but this is of little use if one has not already received a certain preliminary exercise through instruction».²⁵ In a similar vein, in the Preface to his book, Forster criticizes the contradictions in the accounts of different travelers, he criticizes the presentation of a simple collection or a confused heap of disjointed, accidental facts from all parts of the world «which no art could reunite into a whole», and which do not increase knowledge.²⁶ Finally, he points to the regulative use of general consequences deduced from the combination of different facts, in order to orient oneself in observation and research.

Can Forster's account, or *philosophische Beschreibung* as Wieland regarded it, also provide the pragmatic tools for venturing out onto the shoreless, illusory sea of theoretical reason, able to discern semblances from truth, and thus becoming certain whether there is anything in it for which to hope? If our reconstruction of Kant's theory of imagination as responsible for both the illusory and the regulative aspects of reason is correct, we should find in Forster, the skilled naturalist and reliable empirical scientist, a model of what we need to curb the misleading and reifying role of imagination and to make it work for a sound, thinking understanding that properly holds itself within the limits of our possible experience, thus setting bounds to any imaginary free flight. Note that in a 1778 issue of *Der Teutsche Merkur* Wieland portrays Georg Forster as a man of outstanding capabilities, a man of knowledge, which put him in a

²³ On Forster 1778 as source for Kant's reference to Irving's method of desalination of sea water in his Lectures on Geography, see ADICKES 1911, p. 99.

²⁴ AA IX, p. 157.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

²⁶ FORSTER 1777, p. 9.

position to see things better, more perspicacious in comparisons and correct in conclusions than a common voyager.²⁷

Thus, I invite you to consider the following page pertaining to the quest to certify the discovery of Cape Circumcision. In his second voyage, Cook had been instructed to travel to the unexplored part of the Southern hemisphere to determine whether it was merely an immense extension of water or contained another continent (and, if so, to take possession of it for the maritime power of Britain). Years before, on January 1st, 1739, Bouvet de Lozier had spotted a land mass South of the 44th parallel and called it *Cape Circumcision*. He was unable to land due to dense fog, but he believed it was a promontory of the *Terrae Australis*. Buache had used Bouvet's discovery to promote his own speculative theory of continental balance to posit the existence of a Southern Continent as massive as the Asiatic continent. Cook was to find the Cape again and determine whether it was part of the presumed new land. Here is Forster's account of a page of history of deceptive hopes and endless efforts to rediscover Bouvet's land and discover a new Antarctic mainland:

The latitude we were now in, was that in which Captain Lozier Bouvet had place his pretended discovery of Cape Circumcision, and our longitude was only a few degrees to the eastward of it: the general expectation of seeing land, was therefore very great [...] *every one was eager to be the first to announce the land. We had already had several false alarms from the fallacious conformation of fog banks, or that of islands of ice half hid in snow storms*, and our consort, the Adventure, had repeatedly made the signals for seeing land, *deceived by such appearances*; but now, the *imagination warmed* with the idea of M. Bouvet's discovery, one of our lieutenants [...] acquainted the captain that he plainly saw the land [...] We saw an immense field of flat ice before us, broken into small pieces on the edges, a vast number of islands of ice of all shapes and sizes rose beyond it as far as the eye could reach, and some of the most distant considerably raised by the hazy vapours which lay on the horizon, had indeed some appearance of mountains. Several of our officers persisted in the opinion that they had seen land, till Capt. Cook, about two years and two months afterwards (in February 1775) [...] sailed over the same spot and found neither land nor even ice there at that time [...] We passed through quantities of broken ice in the afternoon, and saw another extensive ice-field, beyond

²⁷ See WIELAND 1778, p. 63: «[...] ein Mann von vorzüglichen Fähigkeiten [...] von Kenntnißen die ihn in den Stand setzen besser zu sehn, scharfsinniger zu vergleichen, richtiger zu schliessen als gemeine Seefahrer».

which several of our people still persisted in seeing land, taking fog-banks for land (my italics).²⁸

In Forster's own German reading of this passage, note the expression *trügliche Gestalt* for the «fallacious conformation» of fog banks and the icebergs, the reference to a stormy weather, the use of the substantive *Täuschungen* (illusions, for «appearances» in the English version) and the verb *täuschen* (to deceive), for a description of the Antarctic Ocean as nothing but a Kantian seat of illusion, and the use of the terms *Einbildungskraft* and *Idee* associated to the verb *erhitzen* to convey the same excited searching around for land of the Kantian *herumschwärmenden Seefahrer*.²⁹

Note also the different attitude of Forster, a more detached observer because he was not professionally involved in Cook's mission, in contrast to the eagerness of the crew to announce land. Forster records how deceptively may appear the shapes of fog-banks and icebergs, though his skilled and informed judgment does not take those appearances to represent coastline or mountains. Moreover, he is aware of the overwhelming power of imagination on the senses when fired by mental presumptions.

To conclude, I contend that this primary source of maritime culture is the proper source of Kant's metaphor of the sea in the first *Critique*, which is neither the invention of his own geographical imaginary, nor a copy from Bacon, nor even a repetition of his own earlier simile, as scholarship as held

²⁸ FORSTER 1777, pp. 102-3.

²⁹ See FORSTER 1778, pp. 97-8: «Wir waren jetzt gerade unter eben der Polhöhe, in welcher der Capitain Lozier Bouvet das Cap Circoncision gefunden haben will, und der Meereslänge nach befanden wir uns nu rum wenige Grade davon, weiter gegen Osten. Jedermann erwartete daher mit grosser Ungeduld Land zu erblicken [...] jedweder wollte gern der erste sein, Land! auszurufen. Die trügliche Gestalt der Nebelbänke, oder der in Schneegestöber gehüllten Eisinseln hatte schon manchen falschen Lärm veranlasst, und die Adventure, unser Reisefährte, ward durch solche Täuschungen oft erleidet uns Signale zu geben, dass sie Land sähe. Unter andern hatte die Idee von Bouvets Entdeckung die *Einbildungskraft* eines unsrer Lieutenants dergestalt erhitzt [...] er sehe ganz deutlich Land. Diese Neuigkeit brachte uns alle aufs Verdeck. Wir sahen aber nichts weiter also in ugeheures flaches Eisfeld vor uns, das am Rande in viele kleinere Stücke gebrochen war; und eine grosse Menge von Eisinseln aller Gestalt und Grösse stiegen, so weit das Auge nur reichen konnte, hinter demselben empor. Einige der entferntern schienen, vermittelt der Strahlenbrechung in den Dünsten des Horizonts, weit höher als sie in der That waren, und sahen wirklichen Bergen ähnlich. *Dieser Anblick war so täuschend*, dass viele unsrer Officiere dabei blieben, sie hätten hier Land gesehen, bis endlich Capitain Cook zwei Jahre und zwei Monate nachher (nemlich im Februar 1775) [...] gerade über denselbigen Fleck wegsegelte, wo es hätte liegen müssen, wo aber damals weder Land noch Eis mehr zu sehen war. Am Nachmittage kamen wir durch viel gebrochenes Eis und sahen ein zweites grosses Eisfeld, jenseit dessen verschiedne unsrer Leute noch immer Land zu sehen behaupteten, ungeachtet auch dies, so wie das vorige im Grundeaus nichts als Nebelbänkenbestand» (my italics).

heretofore. Moreover, to draw upon the maritime culture of his age had the essential significance of training the mind of one who judges critically. Critical training means learning to check one's own aspiration against the test bench of sensed and shared experience, to achieve sure and empirically confirmed knowledge, it means fostering self-knowledge, studying the nature (laws, extension, limits) of our reason, «by which reason may secure its rightful claims while dismissing all its groundless pretensions»;³⁰ ultimately, it means to learn prudence to orient ourselves in thought pragmatically. If I am right, if the attitude of the officer of the *Adventure* – the tender of the flagship *Resolution* – casts light on Kant's metaphor of the ocean as seat of illusion for speculative reason and dogmatic metaphysics, then we must consider how to have one's own imagination excited by an idea (of Bouvet's discovery), and to fall into the trap of presuming to see what one hopes, deceived by a natural scene fantastically arranged by nature's free play of shapes, fog and colors, functions as a warning and a lesson within the economy itself of the first *Critique*.

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FIG. 1

