

How Much Geography in Kant's Critical Project?

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Abstract In this paper we will address the following points: (1) we will question the general belief that Kant's philosophical approach has a geographical character, by showing how critical philosophy and physical geography establish, in their respective systems, two inverse relationships between the rational and the aesthetic form of spatiality; (2) we will argue that cartography still plays a role in the realization of a scientific system of cognition, and that this role consists in guiding this very realization; (3) lastly, we will develop the hypothesis that the map of the cognitive faculties, exemplified by the transcendental topic, is part of a device aimed at keeping the subject from the adventures of thought typical of dogmatism.

Keywords Immanuel Kant. Physical geography. System. Spatiality. Transcendental illusion.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Was Kant Really a Geographer of Human Reason? – 3 Mapping the Idea Through the Schema. – 4 Seeing So As Not To *schwärmen*.



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1 Introduction

Kant's philosophical lexicon includes expressions relating to land-forms and, more generally, to space. Especially in critical writings, it is not uncommon to encounter terms such as *Land*, *Feld*, *Sitz*, or *Stelle* to signify something related to the mind, be it the cognitive faculties or the relationships that concepts and objects can maintain. Scholars have already pointed out that Kant "constantly invokes the geographical" and that the critical project, as a whole, should be considered "'geographical' in character" (Malpas, Thiel 2011, 195). More recent studies have explored the intertwining, in Kant, of the semiotic characteristics of the map and the verbal language (see Morawski 2021; 2022). Everything suggests that a geo-spatial terminology plays a metatheoretical role, allowing a cartographic imagination to intervene in the process with which Kant forms some of his major concepts. In this paper, we do not aim to carry out a lexicographic investigation, to which others have already made a significant contribution (see Hohenegger 2014). We will rather try to understand which strategy the geo-spatial terminology serves, i.e. which effects it is intended to arouse in transcendental philosophy, more precisely in that part of the doctrine of the method concerning the discipline of pure reason. The map of the mind drawn by Kant seems to manifest a device within which the subject is called to verify the validity of its representations by recalling and visualizing where these representations come from and where they are currently taking place, so that it can avoid the transcendental illusion from which reason suffers by its very nature.

In order to corroborate our impression, we will first question the geographical character of critical philosophy, which up to now scholars have recognized almost unanimously. We ask, then: to what extent is it correct to say that Kant was a "geographer of reason" (Cassirer 1981, 45; Hohenegger 2012)? Has the project of a physical geography, a subject that Kant taught for forty years, really influenced, if not informed, the project of a critical philosophy? Do the two disciplines employ the same cartographic process? Indeed, one should distinguish at least two types of maps: physical maps and political maps. While the former seems to be the model of physical geography, the latter seems to be the model of critical philosophy. This appears more clearly if we pay attention to the inverse relationship that the rational and the aesthetic form of spatiality have in the two disciplines. As Kant explains in his lectures, what physical geography aspires to is to give the sensibility, the perception involved in the experience of the world the form of a wholeness. On the contrary, what critical philosophy aspires to is, in some measure, to give the whole a sensible, perceptible form. But when a "whole" is "made visible", nothing natural is represented "on a map", but rather "the provinces of a country [...] which lie to the north, to the west, etc." (AA 7:184).

It is beyond doubt that physical geography and critical philosophy share a methodological principle: both are grounded on an idea, i.e. on a representation of the whole, as they aim to realize a system of cognition. However, we argue that these disciplines differ in two main aspects (besides the obvious one given by the difference in their objects): 1) the cartographic practices with which they draw their maps; 2) the specific function of these maps. As for the first point, the cartography of the world aims to localize objects of nature according to their proper places, while the cartography of the mind arranges the places in which cognitive faculties are then located. Physical geography and critical philosophy do not relate to the spatiality of their systems in the same way: the former conforms its system of cognition to the morphologies of the territories and the habitats of the life forms it observes, as “we are concerned with nature, the earth itself, and those places where things are actually encountered” (AA 9:160); the latter, on the contrary, designs *a priori* its own system and then conforms its objects to it, primarily the cognitive faculties. As for the second point, while the world map given to us by physical geography is a travel map, which is used “to anticipate our future experience in the world” (AA 9:157), the map of the mind given to us by critical philosophy is used to keep us within the boundaries of a plot of land, dissuading us from any aspiration of setting off in search of the absolute, the unconditioned.

At first glance, cartography seems to play no role in critical philosophy, as the entire plan of the system it aims to realize is already contained in an idea of reason. However, since reason does not perceive its own idea clearly – an aspect of the doctrine of the method often neglected by scholars –, we argue that the realization of the system involves a degree of exploration and discovery, which requires the use of a certain kind of map, as a tool that guides inventiveness. This map is recognizable in the schema of the idea, which treats the steps already taken in the setting-up of the system as suggestions for the next one to take, as if cartography were a practice in which the map maps itself.

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2, we will compare the method of physical geography and the method of critical philosophy in order to determine the specific form of spatiality inherent in ideas of pure reason. In section 3, we will follow the concrete application of the method towards the faculty of the understanding, in order to show the role played by cartography in the realization of a scientific system. Lastly, in section 4, we will develop the hypothesis that the map of the cognitive faculties, exemplified by the transcendental topic, displays a device in which the subject, captured in its own reflection, is held back from undertaking the adventures of thought typical of dogmatism.

2 Was Kant Really a Geographer of Human Reason?

The setting-up of a system is the result of an art called “architectonic” (A832/B860), which Kant discusses in the third chapter of the Transcendental Doctrine of Method. This chapter of the first *Critique* has aroused, in the last decade, the interest of scholars (see Ferrarin 2015; Gava 2023; Ypi 2021), who focused in a particular way on the connection that the systematic, scientific unity of cognitions has with the essential, practical ends of humanity. For what concerns the theme of this paper, in this section, we will compare how the form of spatiality inherent to the concept of system is treated in the first *Critique* and in the physical geography lectures, in order to highlight the similarities and differences.

That physical geography relates in a privileged way to space is quite obvious, although Kant still underlines it in his lectures: “Geography concerns phenomena that occur simultaneously in space” (AA 9:160).¹ It is not at all obvious, though, that reason has some kind of relationship with space, and that the idea implies a form of spatiality of some sort, especially if we consider that an idea cannot be adequately exhibited in an intuition. However, it is Kant himself who suggests the presence of this form, when he compares the features of an idea to those of an aggregate, a concept that, in other contexts, he uses to represent the synthesis of the manifold in a spatial intuition (see, for instance, A412/B439).

According to Kant, while the unity that constitutes an aggregate is “heaped together” (*gehäuft*), the unity that constitutes a system is “articulated” (*gegliedert*) (A833/B861). These two different determinations are indicative of two different processes underlying these unities: the growth of an aggregate is quantitative, i.e. it occurs through the increase of the number of parts, which are added to each other externally, while the growth of a system is organic, i.e. its parts, whose number remains unchanged, grow internally. Indeed, Kant compares a system to the body of an animal, “whose growth does not add a limb but rather makes each limb stronger and fitter for its end without any alteration of proportion” (A833/B861). If the size of an aggregate can grow indefinitely in extension, the size of a system has determined boundaries that do not change as its body grows.²

1 Kant gives this definition in order to differentiate geography from history, which narrates the temporal succession of events. On how this differentiation is problematic and not always respected by Kant himself, see Marcuzzi 2011.

2 On the organicity of the system, see Dörflinger 2000, 5-50; Ypi 2021, 57-78. La Rocca (2013) has highlighted how the Kantian concept of system differs from the Wolffian in that the organic connection between the parts is not a logical-deductive connection between premises and conclusions. Baum (2001, 25 ff.), on the other hand, pointed out that Wolff already used the animal body as an analogous of the system. However, for

But the most important characteristic of the form of spatiality inherent to an idea is that it consists in an arrangement of a set of positions given before the things that will occupy them. In an idea of pure reason, “the extent [*Umfang*] of the manifold as well as the position [*Stelle*] of the parts with respect to each other” (A832/B860; transl. mod.)³ is determined *a priori*. An idea contains the “order of the parts” (A833/B861) even before these parts are actually given. This order is an arrangement in which everything is assigned the place it must occupy. Systematizing does not mean worrying about knowing *where* this or that thing should be put, but rather knowing *what* should be put in this or that place. In realizing a system, “there can be no contingent addition” (A832/B860). One does not proceed by collecting the manifold of parts haphazardly, depending on how one encounters them, and assembling them on the basis of “similarity” (A833/B861). This would be a contingent and arbitrary way of putting together a whole, which would result in a “patchwork” (*Flickwerk*) (AA 24:400; Author’s transl.). Instead, one must proceed by selecting the parts on the basis of “affinity” (*Verwandschaft*), or, better said, kinship, which pertains to the parts as they derive from “a single supreme and inner end” (A833/B861). What differentiates similarity from kinship is that similarity connects the parts together due to particular aspects or properties that individually belong to each one of them, while kinship connects the parts due to the belonging of all to the same idea which has established in advance on their arrangement. Just as the cause at the origin of an animal body, understood as a natural purpose, “deposits [matter] in its appropriate place [*Stelle*]” (AA 5:377), reason prepares the arrangement in which it will place the knowledge to be included in a system.⁴

Like the first *Critique*, physical geography constitutes a treatise on the method. Kant talks about this discipline in terms of a “propaedeutic”, although for the “knowledge of the world” (AA 9:157).⁵ The aim of physical geography is to carry out a “general survey”, thus giving us a “pre-formed conception [*Vorbegriff*] of everything” (AA 9:157). Also, Kant explicitly claims the systematic, i.e. the architectonic character of this discipline: “[It] is not an aggregation but a system; for

Wolff, an organic body is still something that can be explained in mechanistic terms and is therefore an aggregate, although an infinitely complex one.

3 From here onwards, any translations that have been slightly modified by the Author will be indicated as ‘Transl. mod.’.

4 Only if we keep in mind this rational form of spatiality, in which places have ontological priority over the things that occupy them, can the two ‘metaphors’ of architecture and organism cohere. Various literature has been produced on the two metaphors – especially on that related to architecture (see, among others, Manchester 2003, 2008) –, which, however, has not identified and thematized this form.

5 For the critique of pure reason as a propaedeutic, see A11/B25.

in a system the whole is prior to the parts, while in an aggregation the parts have priority": then, "[w]hat we are doing here is making an architectonic concept for ourselves, which is a concept whereby the manifold parts are derived from the whole" (AA 9:158). In this way, a possible traveller will not prepare themselves to gather partial cognitions on the basis of what they will encounter by chance, but will know in advance where to direct their gaze and what to expect to encounter, since they have a "plan": "Anyone who wants to derive benefit from a journey must make a plan [*Plan*] in advance, and not regard the world merely as an object of the outer sense" (AA 9:157).

Tanca (2012, 15-48) has underlined that Kant's approach to geography is holistic and not chorographic, as Hettner and Hartshorne claimed.⁶ The same can be said of critical philosophy. The boundaries of reason cannot be found through an improvised "perception" (A759/B787) of the occasional applications of the cognitive faculties, as in Hume's skeptical empiricism: this would place us on "an indeterminate extended plane" (A762/B790) where the "*facta* of reason" (A761/788) would be following one another like the parts of an aggregate. On the contrary, we must start from an idea, a representation of the whole, that gives reason a spheroidal shape with a determined "volume" (*Inhalt*) and a determined "boundary" (*Begrenzung*) (A762/B790), as for the planet earth.

Having established the commonality of this holistic approach, one wonders whether reason systematizes itself just as it systematizes the natural phenomena of the terrestrial globe. As Tanca has pointed out (2012, 33), properly speaking, physical geography is not a science, but a "description" (*Beschreibung*) (AA 9:160). Now, the kind of description theorized by Kant is undoubtedly different from a merely empirical one, which does not have a "plan" behind it and which simply records what the observer sees from time to time. Indeed, it is a systematic, an architectonic description. Nonetheless, it is not itself a system, an architectonic, since the spatial arrangement of cognitions must conform to the current spatial arrangement of natural phenomena: "As far as the plan of arrangement is concerned, all our knowledge must be allocated to its proper place", but – and this constitutes the differential element –, in physical geography knowledge has to be allotted "according to the time and place where it is actually found" (AA 9:159). In this discipline, that is, "things are considered in terms of the places they occupy on earth" (AA 9:160). Thus, the rational form of spatiality in which physical geography arranges cognitions of the world must perfectly overlap with the aesthetic form of spatiality of the world itself, understood as a whole of phenomena. It is not the same for critical philosophy, in which it is the aesthetic

⁶ See also Church 2011.

spatiality acquired by cognitive faculties (in their topographical representation) that must conform and ideally overlap with the rational spatiality determined *a priori* in the idea.

Given this fundamental difference, to what extent is it still appropriate to speak of Kant as a geographer of human reason? Even if we thought of the geographer as someone who does not limit themselves to observing and cataloging according to similarities, but as someone who identifies the proper place of each thing and who considers the *locus natalis* the principle of the kinship between things, such a geographer would still be different from the critical philosopher, whose aim is to draw the map of an engineered space. When instead of localizing things in their proper place, I willfully arrange the places in which I then locate them, I am no longer depicting a territory, but rather reshaping it, and the corresponding map will not be so much a physical map as a political map.

In the next section, we will argue that critical philosophy involves a cartographic practice that is not carried out by the idea towards the world, but by the schema towards the idea. If in the idea of the earth as a sphere lies the *a priori* of physical geography (see Tanca 2012, 44-8), in the sphere as such lies the *a priori* of the idea itself. As a whole, the idea constitutes a world that needs to be mapped to be realized, since it is not fully clear to the same faculty of reason that devises it.

3 Mapping the Idea Through the Schema

In the first *Critique*, we read that “the uncritical dogmatist [...] has not measured the sphere of his understanding and thus has not determined the boundaries of his possible cognition in accordance with principles” (A768/B796). The verb used by Kant, “to measure”, *mesen*, risks misrepresenting the activity of critical philosophy. Reason does not address the understanding as a natural object that already has defined contours, which only need to be measured. Indeed, a few years before the critical turn, in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Kant wrote that “the frontiers [*Grenzen*] between folly and understanding are so poorly marked that one can scarcely proceed for long in the one region [*Gebiet*] without occasionally making a little sally into the other” (AA 2:356). From then on, the aim of reason became that of securing these frontiers. The understanding is a terrain that has to be squared through a sort of geotechnical engineering. Its measurement should be thought of as an activity that establishes distances and positions between its parts, as the *mensores* did in ancient Rome, when they had to prepare a military camp.

Thus, reason devises an “idea” (A64-65/B89) of the faculty of the understanding, “by means of which the place [*Stelle*] of each pure concept of the understanding and the completeness of all of them

together can be determined *a priori*, which would otherwise depend upon whim or chance" (A67/B92). But having devised an arrangement of these concepts does not make their effective mutual positioning immediately achievable. Indeed, the idea is somewhat obscure to us and some means to orient ourselves towards it is necessary. This means is provided by the schema, which, having an intrinsic figurativeness, can suggest the direction to take to occupy all the places of the system and thus "fill up [*ausfüllen*] the entire field [*Feld*] of pure understanding" (A64/B89; transl. mod.).

In the Architectonic, Kant claims: "For its execution the idea needs a schema" (A833/B861). The term "execution" gives the impression that we are dealing here with a technical procedure, while in reality a schema of an idea differs from a schema of an intellectual concept precisely due to its non-technical nature. The schema of an intellectual concept is the representation of a "method", of a "general procedure" (A140/B179) through which the imagination synthesizes the manifold of an intuition. As is known, an intellectual schema does not have any figurative character that would lead it to resemble an image, given that it is what "through which and in accordance with which the images first become possible" (A142/B181). On the contrary, a rational schema represents both the "outline" (*Umriß*)⁷ of the whole, and "the division of the whole into members" (A833/B861), i.e. the distribution and position of the manifold according to its arrangement. In a literal sense, an "outline" is the result of a drawing and the term in itself is an indication of the cartographic practice with which the schema allows us to envision the idea. What Kant means by "outline" is not a summary concept of the whole, but the drawing of its contours, as when drawing the borders of a country. It is possible to recognize the schema in what Kant calls, in Refl. 4991, *Generalcarte*, where he claims that more than the truth or falsity of cognitions, it is crucial that "they are thought according to the proper method and that they have their proper place in the whole of knowledge, as in the general map [*Generalcarte*]" (AA 18:53; Author's transl.).

At first sight, it seems paradoxical that an idea, which cannot be exhibited, has a schema that resembles a drawing, while a concept, which can and indeed must be exhibited, does not have a schema of this sort. This depends on the role played by the object in the two cases. Since a concept has an object other than itself, the understanding needs a schema that instructs it on how to determine this object through the determination of sensibility. On the contrary, an idea does not have an object other than itself: "It makes a big difference whether something is given to my reason as an object absolutely or is given only as an object in the idea" (A670/B698). The difference

⁷ See also BXXIII.

lies in the fact that the object given in the idea is not really an object, but a *focus imaginarius* to which cognitions must be referred in order to be included in the system. The schema provides a map that leads towards this *focus* lightened up on the horizon by reason. We would say that the schema is an orientation means rather than an "operative means" (Ferrarin 2015, 41), since it cannot really provide "clear directions, orders, commands" (40): at most it can provide hints, suggestions, allusions. Indeed, "in its elaboration the schema [...] seldom corresponds to the idea" (A834/B862).

It seems that the schema can easily draw the outline of the system, i.e. it can circumscribe the "extent" (*Umfang*), the entity, the abstract unity of the system, or, to put in another way, the "essential manifoldness" (A833/B861) of the manifold that is presumed to belong to it.⁸ The schema can, on the basis of the synthetic *a priori* judgments, draw the boundaries of reason just as, on the basis of the diameter, one can know the "magnitude" of the "circumference" (*Umfang*) (A759/B787; transl. mod.) of the terrestrial globe. In this respect, schematism plays the role of geodesy, or, as Kant calls it, mathematical geography (AA 9:164). In contrast, a schema cannot so easily show the "order of the parts", the topography of the idea, since the "parts" of the idea "still lie very involuted and are hardly recognizable even under microscopic observation" (A834/B862). The idea is like folded in on itself and so is its schema. Thus, how can the latter serve as a map and guide us in realizing the system if not even a magnifying glass allows us to see how its places are arranged?

We could say that the map unfolds as the territory is traversed. We figure out how to realize the system in the same process as we try to realize it. Since the idea is "lying hidden within us", the articulation of the system appears "only after we have long collected relevant cognitions haphazardly like building materials and worked through them technically" (A834-835/B862-863), i.e. with a high degree of improvisation and constantly challenging contingency, making adjustments as necessary. But the kinship of the parts comes to our aid. Each of them carries, so to speak, the aura of the whole to which it belongs, so that we can guess the direction to take by looking at the path that has already been traversed. Kant claims: "The unity of the end, to which all parts are related and in the idea of which they are also related to each other, allows the absence of any part to be noticed in our knowledge of the rest" (A832/B860). The occupied places indicate those still to be filled. Another passage that clarifies this strategy is found in § 10 of the *Analytic of Concepts*. Kant is discussing here the possibility of providing a definition for each category, thus compiling a sort of "lexicon" (A83/B109). In his opinion,

⁸ For the connection between the *Umriß* and the *Umfang*, see also AA 16:537.

this work goes beyond the main purpose of the *Critique*. Nonetheless, he claims:

The headings [*Fächer*] already exist; it is merely necessary to fill them out, and a systematic topic, such as the present one, will make it easy not to miss the place [*Stelle*] where every concept properly belongs and at the same time will make it easy to notice any that is still empty. (A83/B109)

Knowledge of the parts contains indications on the missing ones, just as the filled places contain indications on those still vacant. It is as if just by inserting one piece the place in which to insert the next appears: "There are still gaps [*Lücken*] and empty compartments [*Fächer*], but there is no harm" (AA 24.1, 400; Author's transl.)⁹ Only while we are assembling the system, we can, at a certain point, "glimpse" the idea and "draft" (*entwerfen*) (A834/863; transl. mod.) its articulation. A draft, an *Entwurf*, is different from an outline, an *Umriß*, since it does not concern the contours of the territory, but its morphology, its internal conformation.

In sum, the figurativeness of the schema appears from these three elements: the outline, the draft, the topography. All three contribute to "mak[ing] visible" the "whole" (AA 7:184), to translating a rational form of spatiality into an aesthetic one.

As we have seen, physical geography prescribes not to travel without a plan. However, in the journey that leads first to the draft of the system and then to its full mapping, a degree of uncertainty cannot be completely eliminated. Indeed, in order to localize the place for each concept, Kant had to "travel" (*durchreisen*) and to "inspect" (*durchmessen*) the "land of pure understanding" (A235/B294). The juxtaposition of these two verbs suggests that the travel was not planned in every part, but that it was to a certain extent an exploratory travel, precisely to the extent that the idea of the faculty of the understanding was an obscure idea that had to be mapped step by step.

4 Seeing So As Not To *schwärmen*

The map is not only a means to develop the idea in each of its parts: it can be considered as one of the purposes of this same development. Critical philosophy, using a geo-spatial terminology, aims to make the idea visible, so that one can have a plastic representation

⁹ Zöller, commenting on this passage, significantly says that the empty places are "sichtbar" (2001, 62), visible, and rightly observes that they indicate the missing parts of the whole.

of the cognitive faculties and their respective territorial boundaries: "Now our critique must, to be sure, lay before us [*vor Augen legen*] a complete enumeration of all the ancestral concepts that comprise the pure cognition in question [the human cognition *a priori*]" (A13/B27). Putting the system of the faculties before our eyes as it were drawn on a map: this is what critical philosophy "must" do. But, one wonders, for what purpose?

If we go back to the physical geography lectures, we can see that this discipline encourages travel, or at least reading travel reports, as it is a tool for expanding our knowledge of the world and making ourselves *Weltbürger*: "By travel we extend our knowledge of the external world, which is, however, of little use unless one has previously had a suitable preparatory exercise" (AA 9:158). The study of physical geography, as well as the study of anthropology, constitutes the preparation that Kant speaks of here. With an idea of the world we can transform the natural perception of things into a process of schematization that localizes them according to a rational order: "We are then in a position to allocate to every experience its class and its place within the whole" (AA 9:158). The simplest utility that physical geography has is, for instance, that of being indispensable for identifying where the events reported in the newspapers occur:

For many people, newspaper reports are a matter of complete indifference. The reason for this, however, is that they are not able to situate the news in its proper context. They have no conception of the land, the sea or the surface of the earth as a whole. (AA 9:163)¹⁰

In critical philosophy, as we have seen, it is not a question of converting the aesthetic form of spatiality into a rational one, but of converting the rational form of spatiality into an aesthetic one. But this has the opposite of travelling as its purpose. The map of the system of cognitive faculties aims at dissuading thought from any kind of adventurous journey, or, to put it in more philosophical terms, to divert reason from the transcendental illusions that dazzle it. Kant describes the faculty of the understanding, the "land of truth" (A235/B294), as an island

surrounded by a broad and stormy ocean, the true seat of illusion, where many a fog bank and rapidly melting iceberg pretend to be new lands and, ceaselessly deceiving with empty hopes the voyager looking around for new discoveries, entwine him in adventures

¹⁰ On the socio-cultural, pragmatic value that Kant attributes to physical geography, see Morawski 2018, 135-40.

from which he can never escape and yet also never bring to an end. (A236/B295)

Ferrini (2014, 168-83) highlighted how at the origin of this passage of the first *Critique* there is a maritime culture of which Kant was well aware. The primary source appears to be J. Georg Forster, who reported in his travel diary (see Forster 1777) the difficulties in sighting Cape Circumcision, a land mass spotted for the first time on 1st January 1739, by Bouvet de Lozier. An aspect of this passage that scholars have not sufficiently highlighted is that the danger in setting sail from the shores of the understanding lies in the fact that the space external to it is a fluid space that would keep us in an endless journey, since it gives rise, with the complicity of the imagination, to the illusion of non-existent lands.¹¹ In his lectures, Kant defines water as an "immeasurable space" and claims that it "has actually no shape" (AA 9:190; transl. mod.).¹² In this kind of environment, looking around in search of new discoveries, which Kant expresses with the verb *herumschwärmen*, is equivalent, in a philosophical perspective, to *schwärmen*, an almost untranslatable expression which brings together in its semantic spectrum religious fanaticism, madness, dogmatism, and, for what concerns space, the disoriented movement of a swarm. Thus, having the map of the system of the cognitive faculties before our eyes, especially the map of the understanding, has no other function than to keep our feet firmly on the safe ground of the possible experience, to remind us of the well-being that this piece of land assures us and how we should be content with it. Kant claims, dissuasively, that, before venturing into the ocean of illusions,

it will be useful first to cast yet another glance at the map of the land that we would now leave, and to ask, first, whether we could not be satisfied with what it contains, or even must be satisfied with it out of necessity. (A236/ B295)

Of course, the latter is the conclusion that he would not hesitate to draw.

11 In the Vollmer edition of Kant's lectures on physical geography, we can read a passage that recalls the description of the "seat of illusion" made in the first *Critique*: "At least he [i.e. the onlooker] sees mountains suddenly arise, valleys curve, gulfs widen, grottos take shape, towers rise high, and what the eye is only used to seeing on solid land, these strange plays of nature represent to it with an unheard-of boldness. [...] In short, what only the most fiery and daring, but not ruleless, imagination could expect from a fairy land is realized here, where only the vagueness, which seems to have set up his kingdom here, leads a few mortals for a short moment" (Vollmer 1801, 16-17; Author's transl.).

12 Interestingly, Kant concludes by saying: "rather it [i.e. water] gives shape to the land" (AA 9:190). This sentence could inspire some speculations on the relationship between truth and illusion, which, however, we do not have the opportunity to carry out here.

If the nomad, i.e. the skeptical empiricist, is the figure from which the critical philosopher must differentiate himself, as far as the method is concerned, the adventurer, i.e. the dogmatist, is the antagonist to whom the critical philosopher owes his very existence. The adventurer is driven by the desire for geographical discoveries, just as the dogmatist is driven by the desire for metaphysical discoveries, which Kant significantly calls a "schwärmende Wißbegierde" (A10). The inclination for adventuring is for Kant a congenital and incurable human disease that must be remedied. The essence of the critical project can be captured in this *Reflexion* dated 1777: "The critique of pure reason is a precaution against a malady of reason that has its germ in our nature. It is the opposite of the inclination that binds us to our fatherland (homesickness). A longing [*Sehnsucht*] to lose ourselves outside our circle and to aim at other worlds" (AA 18:79-80; Author's transl.). This fragment helps us to clarify what it really means to set sail from the island of the understanding. The journey that would be undertaken is very different from that envisaged by physical geography: it is a journey towards *another world*, towards a place which, however, despite what the image of the stormy and icy ocean might lead one to believe, is not exactly unmappable, since Kant, indeed, also puts the transcendental, illusory ideas of the uncritical reason into a systematic form, like many maps of as many Never Lands.¹³ In *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, these lands are called "imaginary worlds" (*Gedankenwelten*), and the philosophers who designed them "those who build castles in the sky" (*Luftbaumeister*) (AA 2:342). This agrees with the assertion that reason is "by nature architectonic" (A474/B502), although before critique it projected nothing but mirages.

That the critique has a disciplinary, negative nature is certainly nothing new. However, one wonders how Kant thought he could concretize this non-negligible aspect of his doctrine of method. Is there something in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that exceeds the media support of writing and that allows the device to materialize beyond the text? In the last paragraphs of this section we will present some considerations in order to develop the hypothesis that the critique materializes its precautional device in the "transcendental topic" and that it exploits the inherent perceptibility of maps to cut short any form of desire for an Elsewhere, turning this latter into a Nowhere.

At the hearth of the first *Critique*, the "transcendental topic" is presented as the "doctrine that would thoroughly protect against false pretences of the pure understanding [driven by an uncritical reason] and illusion arising therefrom..." (A269/B324). If knowledge is obtained through judgement, which compares different representations,

¹³ On the systematicity of transcendental ideas see König 2001, 46-7.

it is essential for the subject to know how to identify *where* this comparison is taking place, whether in sensibility or in understanding: "The first question prior to all further treatment of our representations is this: In which cognitive faculty do they belong together?" (A260/B316). Kant calls sensibility and understanding "transcendental places" (A269/B324) and the action of locating representations in one place or another "transcendental reflection" (A261/B317). The transcendental reflection is "a determination of the place where the representations of the things that are compared belong, thus of whether they are thought by the pure understanding or given in appearance by sensibility" (A269/B325). The lack of reflection – or, we could say, the blindness of the subject – and a consequent misplacement of the representations produce the so called "amphiboly". It can happen, thus, as in cosmological ideas, that an object that is "merely in your brain", such as the absolute, the unconditioned, is transposed externally and subjected to the conditions of space and time, giving rise to an "amphiboly that would make your idea into a putative representation of something given empirically..." (A484/B512).

Thus, the transcendental topic gives appearance, phenomenality to a device that wards off the illusions of reason through the localization of representations in one of the two *topoi* of the sensibility and the understanding. How does this device work? How can visualizing the mind on a map have any effect on the processes in which the mind itself is engaged? Transcendental illusion seems to be somewhat an optical problem, as it involves a sort of deterritorialization of the eyes. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant defines the *Schwärmerei* as "a delusion of being able to see something beyond all bounds of sensibility", or, to put it in another way, "to dream in accordance with principles (to rave with reason)" (AA 5:275). Furthermore, in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Kant calls "optical deception" (*optische Betrug*) the failed location of concepts in the "true positions [...] they occupy relatively to the cognitive faculty of human nature" (AA 2:349). These passages lead us to think of the systematic organization of cognitive faculties as the assembly of a device which has the aim of correcting sight, of discerning the visible from the non-visible, of establishing what is right and what is not right to see, preventing the harmful alliance of understanding, reason, and imagination (the *Schwärmerei*) from reaching sensibility and dragging it beyond itself towards the supersensible. Now, to get to our questions, it seems that this vision corrector, this orthoptic device, only works if it is itself subjected to vision. Territorializing the eyes on the eyes, making them the overseers of themselves: this could be the role of the transcendental topic, which is a map that serves not so much to see where things are, but to monitor where they are happening, after giving them a place to happen.

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