

*Kant on the Role of the Imagination (and Images)  
in the Transition from Intuition to Experience*

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**1. Imagination between Intuition and Experience?**

My aim is to clarify the role that Kant thinks the “power of the imagination [Einbildungskraft]” has to play in the constitution of what Kant calls “experience [Erfahrung].” Most readers interested in Kant’s account of experience have focused primarily on the contributions of “sense [Sinn]” and “understanding [Verstand]” – and in particular their acts of “intuition [Anschauung]” and “thinking [denken],” respectively – to the formation of experience as an “empirical cognition [Erkenntnis]” of an object (cf. B165–6). Yet, it would be hard to deny that Kant also means to accord some role to the imagination and its paradigmatic activity of “synthesis” in the formation of experience as well. The imagination shows up right at the outset of the first *Critique*’s treatment of the conditions for the possibility of experience in the “Transcendental Analytic” (cf. B103) and then returns throughout the “Analytic of Concepts,” especially in the “Transcendental Deduction” in Kant’s exposition of the various mental activities (and contents) that must be involved for the act of experience itself to be possible (cf. A94, A97, A100, A115, A119–20; B151–6). The A-edition claims quite explicitly that

the two outer extremes, namely sensibility and understanding, must necessarily be connected together [zusammenhängen] by a transcendental function of the imagination, since otherwise appearances would surely be given, but no objects of an empirical cognition, and hence no experience. (A124)

The same sort of “connecting” role is ascribed to the imagination later in the “Analytic of Principles,” where Kant is concerned to present the specific rules according to which the understanding “applies” its concepts to what is given in intuition (appearances) to make experience possible (cf. B176–7). Here Kant singles out “schemata” as needed to mediate this application, mediating items that themselves are “always only products of the imagination” (B179).

Even so, Kant's readers have recently been of several minds about how best to understand this mediating role for the imagination in experience. Interestingly, two of the most common recent trends in interpretation seem to point in opposite directions. On the one hand, there are those who – despite the textual evidence mentioned above – seek to minimize or even eliminate any role for the imagination to play in the formation of experience. This “minimizing” reading is often motivated by the philosophical worry that any attempt to incorporate the imagination – and especially, what one might expect would be its signature products: “images [Bilder]” – would leave Kant with an overly “representationalist” or “indirect” model of experience, since it would seem to imply that something image-like mediates between our minds and the objects of experience (bodies and our own soul).<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, there are those who seek instead to situate the role of the imagination at the very earliest steps of the constitution of experience, such that its activity (e.g., of “figurative synthesis”) is said to be at work already in the mere *having* of an intuition in the first place. Many of these latter “maximizing” interpreters are motivated by (post-Sellarsian) philosophical worries that something “conceptual” or at least “intellectual” (i.e., involving our understanding)<sup>2</sup> must already be incorporated at the level of intuition if Kant is to have a coherent account of how empirical cognition of bodies and our own soul, on the basis of intuition, could ever be possible. This expansion of the role of the imagination into the original production of intuition is thus often coupled with an argument for the ultimate identification of the activity of the imagination with a certain use of the understanding, an identification that (these readers often claim) Kant himself eventually affirms in the B-edition of the *Critique*.<sup>3</sup> And even some of those who mean to embrace a variety of non-conceptualism (or non-intellectualism) about intuition have found it hard not to accept that synthesis of the imagination is required for intuition to come about.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Compare Young 1988; Collins 1999; Gomes 2014; Allais 2015: 104f; McLear 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Compare McLear's use of “conceptualist” and “intellectualist” in McLear 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Waxman 1991; Engstrom 2006: 17; Ginsborg 2008; Grüne 2009; Williams 2012, 2018; Gomes 2014. See also the contributions in this volume by Gentry and Zöller for alternate proposals concerning the inseparability of imagination from both understanding and sensibility.

<sup>4</sup> Compare Hanna 2005 and Allais 2009. (Allais has since shifted her position on intuition itself so as not to require even the synthesis of the imagination; cf. Allais 2015: 147ff, 2017.) Others sympathetic to non-conceptualist interpretations have remained largely silent on the imagination; compare Watkins 2008.

In this chapter I will argue against both of these interpretations and will begin to develop an alternate account of imagination in experience.<sup>5</sup> Against those who minimize imagination's role, I will highlight the distinctive contribution of the imagination to experience. In particular, I will foreground the specific role that the imagination plays in making possible the distinct mental act, intermediate between intuition and experience, that Kant calls "*perception* [Wahrnehmung]" as the "empirical *consciousness* [Bewußtsein]" of appearances (cf. B207).<sup>6</sup> Because perception involves images essentially (cf. A120), and because Kant understands *experience* itself to be a "synthesis of perceptions" (cf. B218), this strongly suggests (against minimalists) that experience, too, will incorporate images into the manner in which it allows us to cognize physical objects.<sup>7</sup>

By highlighting the contribution of imagination prior to experience, my own account, therefore, overlaps in part with the readings that seek instead to maximize the role of imagination. Against maximalists, however, I will argue that imagination contributes *only* in (and after) the transition from intuition to perception, rather than already being at work in the stage of intuition itself. More specifically, I will argue that Kant takes the activity of imagination to make perception possible by acting on *already-formed* intuitions in order to bring about the *consciousness* of them, rather than to bring the intuitions about in the first place. I will also argue that this synthesis of intuitions should be kept distinct from the activity of understanding.

I will proceed as follows. I will start by focusing on Kant's first extended discussion of the imagination in the early sections of the A-edition's "Analytic of Concepts" (Section 2). I will then turn to Kant's fuller treatment of the imagination and its "synthesis" in the course of the "Transcendental Deduction," both in the A-edition (Section 3) and the B-edition versions (Section 4). This will then let us foreground the way in

<sup>5</sup> The account developed below bears some affinity to the spirit (if not exactly the letter) of Sellars' own interpretation; cf. Sellars 1968; see also the brief but helpful Pendlebury 1996. For more comprehensive analyses of Kant's views on images in particular, see Matherne 2015 and Tracz (in progress).

<sup>6</sup> For more on perception and its distinctness from both intuition and experience, see Tolley 2013, 2016, 2017, and forthcoming.

<sup>7</sup> On the relation between images and perception, compare Matherne 2015. I should say up front that I do not mean to claim that direct realist interpreters cannot provide their own alternative analysis of experience that would somehow incorporate the imagination and images. Foremost, I mean to challenge these interpreters to show positively how their view can be made to be consistent with this aspect of Kant's views.

which these acts of imagination make possible what Kant calls “perception,” understood as the “empirical consciousness” of what is given in intuition, and will also allow us to begin to articulate Kant’s doctrine of images and their function in perception as well (Section 5). This will set up further investigation of how the imagination and images figure into the step from perception to experience itself (Section 6). This will also provide sufficient resources for giving an alternative reading of certain passages from the B-edition that have most consistently provided motivation for the “maximizing” interpretation of imagination (and understanding) as being already responsible for the production of intuition itself, and in particular the “*pure* intuitions” of space and time (Section 7).

## 2. Imagination between Sense and Understanding: An Introduction

Readers of Kant rightly look to his familiar distinction between sensibility and understanding to provide something of an anchor-point to help get their bearings with Kant’s wide-ranging technical terminology in his critical writings. This distinction helps give orientation to the large-scale structure of the first *Critique* itself (the “Aesthetic” versus the “Logic”; B76). It is encountered on the very first page of the main body – in both editions – precisely in connection with the contribution of each in the bringing about of experience (cf. A1; B1) – and encountered again at the outset of both the Aesthetic and the Logic, again with respect to their respective contributions to “cognition” (B33; B74–5). In each of these early passages, Kant seems to articulate a relatively straightforward two-step picture of what is required for cognition and for “experience” as “empirical cognition” in particular: first, sensibility “receives” representations (“sensations,” “intuitions”) of objects; then, the understanding cognizes these objects by “thinking” of the objects in relation to these representations, using “concepts.”

Even so, shortly into the Logic itself, particularly as the concept of experience (empirical cognition) begins to take a more central stage, Kant begins to articulate a more complicated view of the transition from sensibility and its representations to cognition and the understanding. In the lead-up to the Deduction, Kant introduces two further capacities as also playing a key role in making empirical cognition possible – namely, the “power of imagination [Einbildungskraft]” and “apperception” – with each making their distinct contributions to the process of cognition.

In the sections that mean to provide the “clue [Leitfaden]” to the Deduction, sections Kant left largely unrevised from the first edition (A76f/B102f), Kant describes “what we have to attend to if we wish to judge about the first origin [Ursprung] of cognition” (B103). After reminding us of the “manifold” of representations of sensibility and “the conditions of the receptivity of our mind, under which alone it can receive representations of objects,” Kant then notes that “the spontaneity of our thought requires that this manifold must *first* be gone through, taken up [aufgenommen], and combined [verbunden], in order for a cognition to be made out of it” (B102; my ital.). “Synthesis” is now given as the name for this “activity [Handlung]” that precedes the making of a cognition out of the manifold given in sense (B102), and “synthesis in general [überhaupt]” is here assigned to “the power of imagination,” as its “mere effect [Wirkung],” due to a “blind though indispensable function of the soul” (B103). Synthesis by the imagination is here identified only as a necessary precondition for cognition, one not sufficient on its own to “yield cognition”; in fact, “we are seldom ever conscious [bewußt]” of its activity (B103). Instead, that “by means of which” the mind is “*first* provided cognition in the proper sense” is not mere synthesis, but rather the act of “bringing this synthesis *to concepts*,” which is itself “a function that pertains to the *understanding*” (B103; my ital.; cf. B104).

A still more complex picture is foregrounded in the A-edition introduction to the Deduction itself. Here Kant clearly identifies *three* “capacities [Fähigkeiten oder Vermögen]” besides understanding as the “original sources [Quellen]” of experience (empirical cognition): “*sense*, the *power of imagination*, and *apperception*” (A94). Strikingly, Kant here also claims that these three capacities themselves “cannot be derived [abgeleitet] from any other capacity of the mind” (A94) – presumably also meaning that they cannot be derived from one another either. Kant then assigns to each capacity something that “is grounded [gründet sich]” on it: “the *synopsis* of the manifold *a priori*” is grounded on sense; on imagination, “the *synthesis* of this manifold”; and on what Kant singles out as “*original* [ursprüngliche] apperception,” “the *unity* [Einheit] of this synthesis” (A94). A few pages later, Kant calls these the “three subjective sources of cognition,” which in fact “*make possible the understanding* [Verstand] itself, and through this, *all experience*, as an empirical product of the understanding” (A97–8; my ital.).

What emerges, then, is the following *four*-step account of experience: *sense* gives a “manifold” of representations; *imagination* performs a

“synthesis” of this manifold (B103); *apperception* brings about the “consciousness” that arises through this process (B131f); and only then can the *understanding* achieve a final “cognition” of an object by way of ensuring that the foregoing is “brought to concepts” (cf. B102–5).

### 3. Synthesis as the Activity of the Imagination: The A-Deduction

We can now turn more directly to the consideration of the A-Deduction’s more detailed account of the synthesis of the imagination in particular. The A-Deduction begins by repeating a basic thought from the Leitfaden about the dependence of imagination on sense: Whatever activity (synthesis) the imagination is capable of, it will be something that itself presupposes that a manifold has already been “given” to the mind and is “contained” in it, ready to be synthesized. Kant marks this fact here by claiming that the “receiving” and the “containing” together of a manifold by sense is *not* the result of “synthesis” at all, but instead of what Kant calls “*synopsis*” (A97; cf. A94).

To be sure, mere synopsis is even less sufficient for “anything like cognition to arise”; instead, “*receptivity* can make cognitions possible only if combined [verbunden] with *spontaneity*” in such a way that what results is no longer just a manifold merely present together in sense but otherwise “isolated,” “separated,” and “foreign” from one another, but rather “a whole [Ganzes] of compared [verglichener] and connected [verknüpfter] representations” (A97). It is this “spontaneity” that Kant sees as “the ground of a *threefold* synthesis.” The first two “syntheses” are again assigned to the imagination: the synthesis of “*apprehension*” of the representations present in intuition and the synthesis of “*reproduction*” of these representations into subsequent representations.<sup>8</sup> Beyond these, however, a third “synthesis” is necessary to yield “*recognition*” – or, more simply: “*cognition*,” as he puts it later (A104) – namely, a synthesis involving the use of a “concept” (A97).

This suggests that at least some synthesis is performed by the understanding. What is more, Kant here claims that one and the same “spontaneity” of the mind is the ground of all three syntheses. This might be taken to imply, despite appearances to the contrary, that one and the same

<sup>8</sup> The second synthesis is here assigned explicitly to the imagination (A97), and a bit later, Kant repeats the claim that “apprehension,” too, is the work of “the active [tätiges] capacity of the synthesis of this manifold, which we call the power of imagination” (A120).

*capacity* must be responsible for all three syntheses. What is crucial to note at this point, however, is that it is the spontaneity of mind *in general* that is said to ground all of these syntheses, and not a spontaneity that is limited to any one *particular capacity*. In particular, this need not imply that the spontaneity specific to the third sort of synthesis – namely, what Kant has already called earlier “the spontaneity of our *thinking*” (B102), “the spontaneity of *concepts*,” and “the spontaneity of *cognition*” in particular (B75), all of which he has already assigned to the understanding – is what serves as the “ground” of all of the other syntheses. The reference to spontaneity as such, as what grounds for all three syntheses, instead leaves open that it is a spontaneity that pertains to the power of imagination on its own.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, the A-edition introduction to the Deduction seems to imply just this reading – namely, that it is both the receptivity of sense and a more original spontaneity that instead “makes possible” the understanding, precisely by performing the earlier syntheses associated explicitly with the *imagination* (A97; cf. A115). Rather than the understanding being the agent of *this* spontaneous activity, it would seem instead to be its consequent.

It is this more complex picture that is repeated toward the end of the A-deduction, where Kant gives a nice overview of the progression toward experience as empirical cognition “by beginning from beneath, namely with what is empirical” (A119f). Here Kant again begins with sense: “the first thing that is given to us is appearance” (A119–20). Yet, since “every appearance contains a manifold,” “a combination [Verbindung]” of this manifold “is necessary,” and since the manifold “cannot have this in sense itself,” we must turn first to “an active [tätiges] capacity of the synthesis of this manifold in us, which we call the power of imagination, and whose action . . . I call apprehension” (A120). Imaginative synthesis kicks off the mind’s engaging in “first a running through [Durchlaufen] and then a taking together [Zusammennehmung] of this manifold” – an “action” here said to be “directly directed at intuition [gerade zu auf die Anschauung

<sup>9</sup> Compare Kant’s later claim that both the synthesis of apprehension and that of concepts are the work of the same “spontaneity”: “It is one and the same spontaneity that, there under the name of the power of imagination and here under the name of understanding, brings combination into the manifold of intuition” (B162n). Note that “spontaneity” is Kant’s name for the feature common to both imagination and understanding, and *not* “understanding.” I emphasize the broader scope of spontaneity because it is common to think that Kant assigns all spontaneity and all synthesis to the understanding. The broader scope of spontaneity, however, follows from Kant’s willingness to ascribe it even to “spiritualized” marionettes (*automata spirituale*) (5:97, 101), natural organisms (5:411; 20:235), and everything living (cf. 17:592), even though these categories include beings that don’t possess understanding at all.

gerichtet],” though it is not something that intuition itself “can effect [bewirken]” (A99). Cognition of objects, however, requires not just a one-off apprehension, or even a series of apprehendings, but also a second capacity for “calling back [rufen]” what has been apprehended so that it can be “taken together”; for this “calling back,” Kant identifies the second, “*reproductive* capacity of the power of imagination,” which is also responsible for the ensuing “association” of parts of the manifold with others (A121; my ital.). This second act is the synthesis by means of which

representations that have often followed [gefolgt] or accompanied [begleitet] one another are finally associated [vergesellschaften] with each other and thereby placed in a connection [Verknüpfung] in accordance with which, even without the presence of the object, one of these representations brings about a transition [Übergang] of the mind to the other in accordance with a constant rule. (A100)

The imagination, then, is also what is responsible both for “associating” (“connecting”) representations together and then for bringing back associated representations, even in the absence of their objects. Even apprehension with reproduction, however, is not sufficient to achieve cognition of objects. The final “ground” of achieving the “*recognition* of the manifold” that is constitutive of empirical *cognition* itself (as “experience”) lies not in any of these acts of imagination, but rather in an act that involves the “concepts” or “categories” of understanding (A125).<sup>10</sup> The result of the merely imaginative syntheses (the “taking together,” reproducing, associating of sensations) is thus not yet an experience – though it is also not merely an intuition (this has already been accomplished by “synopsis”).

#### 4. The Synthesis of the Imagination and the “Combination” of Understanding: The B-Deduction

In the B-edition Deduction, the independence of imagination can seem to be severely diminished if not extinguished altogether. More specifically, the new edition can be (and has frequently been) taken to suggest that Kant ultimately decides in favor of viewing the imagination as part of the understanding.<sup>11</sup> For one thing, Kant chooses not to include the explicit

<sup>10</sup> “Actual experience . . . consists in the apprehension, the association (the reproduction), and finally the recognition of the appearances” (A124).

<sup>11</sup> For those who take Kant to identify the imagination and the understanding in the B-edition, see the initial footnotes above, and also Kitcher 1990; Allison 2004.



fourfold differentiation of sense, imagination, apperception, and understanding at the outset of the new edition of the Deduction proper. What is more, though Kant does start the B-deduction by picking up on the Leitfaden's earlier threefold distinction between the manifold, the synthesis, and the unity of the synthesis, the activity of synthesis itself is now no longer straightforwardly ascribed to the power of the imagination (B129–30). Though the manifold is still assigned to “the senses” (B129), and though the unity of the synthesis is assigned to “consciousness” (cf. B131n), synthesis itself is now characterized initially more generally as “an act of spontaneity of the power of *representation* [Vorstellungskraft].” Shortly thereafter, and even more strikingly, synthesis itself seems to be then characterized as something that “*must* be called understanding,” such that “*all* combination [Verbindung], whether it is the combination of the manifold in intuition or of concepts” is “an act of understanding [Verstandeshandlung]” (B130; my ital.). Conversely, once imagination is finally introduced by name much later in the Deduction, its “transcendental synthesis” is said to be “an effect of the understanding” (B152).

In light of such apparent contrasts with the A-edition, it is understandable that the B-Deduction might be read as involving a change of mind on Kant's part. Once we move further into the B-Deduction, however, clear continuities come to the fore. For when Kant finally does speak directly about the imagination, he actually begins by claiming that “the power of imagination” itself “belongs to *sensibility*” (B151). And while it is surely true that the B-edition does not focus so much on what the power of imagination contributes to *empirical* cognition (experience) – rather than as to its ability to be “determined” *a priori* by the understanding in “transcendental synthesis,” so as to allow for *synthetic a priori* cognition (cf. Section 7) – such contributions do receive some mention. For one, Kant continues to refer to the activities of “association” and “reproduction” as distinct from those of the understanding and as *sui generis* to the power of the imagination (B152). Later in a footnote, Kant likewise separates out two moments of “one and the same spontaneity” that both contribute to cognition: one that receives “the name of power of imagination” and is responsible for “the synthesis of apprehension,” another that receives “the name of understanding” and is responsible for “the synthesis of apperception which is intellectual and is contained entirely *a priori* in the categories” (B162n). Here, then, as in the A-Deduction, the imagination is responsible for the syntheses of apprehension, association, and reproduction, while the understanding is responsible only for synthesis involving concepts (categories).

In fact, throughout the rest of the B-edition, the imagination/understanding distinction continues to be upheld – as it does in all of Kant’s later writings. The entire Schematism, for example, presents the imagination as a distinct capacity that must mediate between sensibility and understanding as something “through” which the understanding is able to achieve a rule for application of its categories (cf. B185). Later in the Principles, the imagination and its synthesis continue to be consistently contrasted with the “determination” of this synthesis by apperception or the concepts of the understanding (B194; B234; B257). In a part common to both editions of the later chapter on Phenomena and Noumena (despite revising other parts), Kant again distinguishes between what understanding and the imagination contribute respectively to experience by noting that the understanding “imparts a synthetic *unity* to the *synthesis* of the power of imagination” (A237/B296; my ital.; compare B383).

This same differentiation persists well after the B-edition, in Kant’s third *Critique* and then again even later in the *Anthropology*, as well as in Kant’s lectures from the period. Throughout the last *Critique*, Kant refers to “the power of the imagination as ‘a capacity of intuitions,’” and is interested in what happens when it is “brought into accord [Einstimmung] with the understanding, as the faculty of concepts,” which again both associates the imagination with sensibility and marks its distinctness from understanding (5:190; 5:217; 5:244). What is more, Kant continues to differentiate the respective contributions of sense, imagination, and understanding to cognition along now-familiar lines: The senses “give” an object, the power of imagination acts to effect “the composition [Zusammensetzung] of the manifold,” and the understanding brings “the unity of the manifold into concepts” (5:238).

Similarly, in the *Anthropology* and in later lectures, Kant gives no suggestion that the imagination is instead really just the understanding, continuing instead to identify imagination with one of the “parts [Stücke]” of sensibility (7:153; cf. 24:753; 28:473). Indeed, at least *some* such non-understanding-dependent activity of imagination must be possible, for otherwise it would make no sense for Kant to ascribe imagination to animals who do not possess understanding at all, as he does throughout his career (cf. 28:690f, 277).<sup>12</sup>

The passage that most suggests that Kant might mean to assimilate the imagination to the understanding occurs in the very first section of the B-deduction proper. As noted above, Kant here seems to explicitly characterize all synthesis – or at least “*combination* [Verbindung] (conjunctio)” – as

<sup>12</sup> Compare Naragon 1990: 8f; see also McLear 2011: 8.

an “action of the understanding” (B129–30). Since Kant here even means to include both unconscious combination (“whether we are conscious of it or not”) and also the combination not just of concepts but also of intuitions, this might also be taken to suggest that he is now including even whatever “blind” synthesis of imagination (of which we are seldom “conscious”) he had introduced a few pages back in the Leitfaden (B103). Note, however, that, strictly speaking, Kant here only ascribes *combination* in particular, and not *synthesis* in general, to the understanding. In the earlier Leitfaden passage, Kant contrasts “synthesis *in general* [überhaupt],” which he assigns to the imagination, on the one hand, and “synthesis in the most universal significance [in der allgemeinsten Bedeutung],” on the other hand, which he takes to involve the “*comprehending* [begreifen] of the manifold of different representations in one *cognition*” (B103; my ital.) – and so involving a “concept [Begriff],” as a “universal representation” (cf. 9:91). But then while combination as a *species* of synthesis involving “universal significance” therefore surely involves the understanding, there is no need to read Kant as here claiming that *every* case of synthesis will do so as well.<sup>13</sup>

## 5. The Role of the Imagination and Images in Perception

Having distinguished imagination from both mere sense and understanding, we can now begin to focus more closely upon the specific contribution that imaginative syntheses make to the generation of experience. I will focus first (Section 5.1) on the mental act that Kant takes to be most immediately subsequent to the syntheses of the imagination, but still prior to experience itself (as empirical cognition) – namely, what Kant calls “*perception* [Wahrnehmung]” as the “empirical *consciousness*” of appearances (cf. B207). We will then focus on the specific role played in perception by the “*images*” produced by the imagination, as the representation of what is given in intuition, and therefore as the content of perception itself (Section 5.2).

*5.1 Imagination and perception.* As I have shown at greater length in earlier work,<sup>14</sup> “perception” is Kant’s technical term for the “empirical *consciousness* [Bewußtsein]” of appearances (A119–20; B207; B160–2; B202–3). He also uses the term to describe consciousness of the empirical

<sup>13</sup> The distinction between mere synthesis and “combination” as the “unity of the synthesis” is drawn again later in the B-Deduction (cf. B161); see also B164, where Kant contrasts the understanding as a capacity for “combining [verbinden]” with imagination as a capacity for “connecting [verknüpfen].” (Thanks to Anja Jauernig for discussion.)

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Tolley 2016b and forthcoming.

intuitions in which appearances are contained (8:217; cf. 20:274) and the consciousness of the sensations that contribute to the matter of appearances (cf. A120; B376).<sup>15</sup> Perception thus goes beyond both mere sensation and also empirical intuition by including consciousness constitutively, whereas intuition and sensation can be present in the mind without consciousness (cf. 7:135; A120), as “blind” representations (cf. B75). Kant understands perception (in his sense), by contrast, to essentially involve a kind of reflective awareness of these sensible representations, such that our minds “take [nehmen]” this sensible representation “with awareness [wahr],” to give a more etymologically literal rendering of the German “*wahr-nehmen*.”<sup>16</sup>

Crucially, what enables perception to go beyond the mere “having” of an intuition (or sensation) in mind is precisely the activity of the imagination sketched above: The consciousness of intuition that is added in perception depends specifically on the activity of imagination already having been “directed at” the intuition. This dependence is affirmed in both editions of the Deduction. In the A-edition’s discussion of the synthesis of apprehension, Kant claims that the result of the imagination’s activity (taking up, distinguishing, running through, taking together what is already contained in an intuition) is to “represent appearances empirically *in perception*” (A115; my ital.). A few paragraphs later, Kant emphasizes even more sharply that there is a step involved from having an appearance in mind to perception itself: “the first thing that is given to us is appearance, which, if it is combined with consciousness [mit Bewußtsein verbunden], is called perception” (A119–20). Note Kant’s “*if* [wenn]” here, which implies that an appearance *per se* is given (in intuition) *whether or not* it is subsequently “combined with consciousness” and thereby taken up in a perception. And it is exactly here that Kant explicitly claims that “the power of the imagination is a necessary ingredient of perception itself” (A120). (Note: “perception” and *not* “intuition.”)

In the B-edition, Kant continues to distinguish perception from intuition and again emphasizes the same dependence of perception on “apprehension” (and hence, imagination), as a synthesis “through which perception, i.e., empirical consciousness of it (as appearance), becomes possible” (B160): “Thus if, e.g., I make the empirical intuition of a house

<sup>15</sup> Due to its essential relation to sensation, Kant does not use the term “perception” in relation to the consciousness of pure intuition, claiming instead that space and time “cannot be perceived in themselves” (B207; cf. B219).

<sup>16</sup> So, the term does not, in this period, have primarily the connotation of “taking-true” or “taking-to-be-true” (the latter is instead connoted by “Fürwahrhalten”).

into a perception through apprehension of its manifold . . .” (B162). Note, again, Kant’s use of “if [wenn]” here, which implies that an empirical intuition *per se* is what it is *whether or not* it is “made into a perception through apprehension.” Note also the means by which such consciousness (i.e., perception, *not* the original intuition itself) comes about: the synthesis of the imagination (cf. B162n).

5.2. *Images and perception.* If this helps to clarify Kant’s claim that the *activity* of the imagination makes possible perception (in his sense of the term), we can now turn to the task of specifying what new kind of *content*, if any, is involved in perception as the “empirical consciousness” of what is given in intuition. One general idea Kant puts forward about the consciousness of a representation is that it is or involves the *representation of* this other representation (cf. 9:333; 24:701). Perception, then, as the empirical consciousness of an empirical (sensation-involving) intuition, should likewise involve the *representation of* this intuition in some form or other. What I want to show now is that Kant appears to identify “*images* [Bilder]” as what function as the contents of perception, i.e., the means by which perception (empirical consciousness) represents intuitions.

In intuition itself, we are simply “given” an appearance as an object (B33). This object (appearance) itself contains a manifold of sensory qualities organized according to the form of space or time (B34). In the transition to perception, the power of imagination acts “to *bring* the manifold of intuition into an *image*” (A120). The result of the imagination’s acts (of taking-up, running-through, distinguishing, taking-together, etc. the empirical intuition toward which it is “directed”) is that an image is formed *of* the intuition, and a new content is thereby introduced into the mind. Perception itself contrasts with intuition because perception has as its immediate object an image that *represents* the appearance that was first simply *given* in intuition. For this reason, perception itself should be understood to represent the objects of intuition (appearances) only *mediately*, by way of forming images of them (cf. B15, B156, B179–82, B496).<sup>17</sup>

What does this image-formation out of an intuition look like? Student transcripts from Kant’s mid-1770s lectures on metaphysics provide the following suggestive discussion of the process. Here, Kant speaks of the “illustrative [abbildende] capacity” of the mind “forming [bilden]” images (“illustrations”) out of intuition:

<sup>17</sup> Compare Pendlebury 1996: 134, though Pendlebury seems ultimately to want to downplay any ontological distinction between image and intuition.

My mind is always busy with forming the image [Bild] of the manifold while it goes through [durchgeht] it. E.g., when I see a city, the mind then forms an image of the object which it has before it while it runs through [durchläuft] the manifold . . . This illustrative [abbildende] capacity is the formative [bildende] capacity of intuition. The mind must undertake many observations [Beobachtungen] in order to illustrate an object [einen Gegenstand abzubilden] so that it illustrates the object differently from each side. E.g., a city looks [sieht aus] differently from the east than from the west. There are thus many appearances of a thing according to the various sides and points of view [Gesichtspunkten]. The mind must make an illustration [Abbildung] from all these appearances, when it takes [nimmt] them all together [zusammen]. (28:235–6)

By “taking together” several appearances of that object, each of which provides a “look” at the object from a certain “side and point of view,” our mind forms an image of it. The complex image in question thus is a composite involving the holding together of the many “looks” of an object into one representation that comprises the whole of them. As in the *Critique*, then, individual appearances do not yet count as images (in Kant’s sense), though they contribute to images of objects by giving the material for them, the partial (perspectival) views on the object.<sup>18</sup>

The most originary sort of image-formation, however, should accompany what might be called the initial “*simple* apprehension” of what is given in intuition – in a single look, as it were – either as to its parts or as to the whole. The example of the city also involves the syntheses of reproduction (retention), and results from the holding together of several previous moments of consciousness (previous “perceptions”). What this example covers over is the more originary initial “taking up [aufnehmen]” of any one sensation (“impression”) into an initial perception in the very first place. Kant indicates awareness of this difference by offering two characterizations of the synthesis of apprehension: first, as transforming an intuition into a perception and so first “making” perception “possible” (cf. B160); second, as an “action exercised immediately *upon* perceptions” (cf. A120).<sup>19</sup> Insofar as the former involves a more immediate “taking up”

<sup>18</sup> For earlier discussions of this passage (Makkreel 1990: 16–17, and 22f) and especially Matherne 2015, compare Tracz in progress. Compare also Kant’s own example of “placing five points in a row” to form an “image” of five (B179). The sheer having (intuiting) of a manifold (appearance) that includes five points in a row would not yet be an *image*; this is only achieved when the manifold *is itself represented* via an act – and, in particular, represented so as to include the series of looks on the five points that track the “placing” of them (by the mind).

<sup>19</sup> A related dual use of “perception” itself is found in the Second Analogy, first to describe the result of “synthesis” of *appearances* and then to describe a “connection” of *perceptions* (B233).

of an intuition, prior to any further “connecting” with a second “taking up,” this very first “taking up” or apprehending should yield a more originary “imaging,” i.e., a first immediate representing of a single intuition itself – an *apprehensio simplex*.

To be sure, once these initial “takings-up” (first simple “looks”) have occurred, our imagination can *then* form more complex images by connecting the initially formed images together through an “action exercised immediately upon perceptions” themselves – i.e., by collecting the succession of initial perceptions (consciousnesses) of the parts of what is contained in the manifold (A120; my ital.). The result of this further imaginative act (involving reproduction, association, etc.) will be a more complex perception of a more complex image, like that ultimately judged to be of the city. What is crucial, however, is that there must already have been earlier simple apprehensions (viz. imagings) of the parts themselves in order for there to be something “reproduced” and “taken together” in the first place.<sup>20</sup> Already at this originary, “simple” level, then, the imagination is “a necessary ingredient in perception itself” (A120n). (Note again: in perception, *not* in intuition.)

## 6. From Imagination and Perception to Experience

We can now turn to the *further* step from *perception* (empirical *consciousness* of our *representations*) to *experience* – i.e., the “empirical cognition” of existent *objects*, such as substances, causes, and so on (B217) – in order to clarify the role of imagination and images in the constitution of experience itself. Recall that experience itself is defined by Kant as “a cognition that determines an object *through perceptions*,” and in fact is “a synthesis of *perceptions*” (B218). Hence, however exactly the transition to experience should be understood, there is little reason for thinking that images will somehow get fully *eliminated* in experience itself, as the recent spate of anti-imagist, “direct realist” accounts of Kant would have it.<sup>21</sup> In fact,

<sup>20</sup> This also suggests that what is ultimately being “reproduced” is not the original sensation or intuition (since this is now absent), but rather a representation (consciousness) of it – i.e., a perception of it, or an image of it.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. again the works of Allais, McLear, Gomes, and Collins cited above. Allais, for her part, has recently admitted that “imagination presents an image immediately” (cf. Allais 2015: 147n4). What is not yet made clear in Allais’ account is why Kant would consistently introduce the detour through the imagination and images (apprehension, perception, empirical consciousness, etc.) on the road to experience in the first place, if the relevant object judged in experience (e.g., a body in physical space) were itself what was already “immediately” present to mind in intuition (cf. *ibid.*) – rather than a *sensation* being present “in” intuition, an *image* as the subsequent object of *consciousness* in

I will now argue that the flow of Kant's analysis suggests precisely the opposite: Far from being an "immediate" relation to things like physical bodies, experience comes about through an *even further mediation* than is involved in perception itself – namely, the representation of *perceptions* (and their contents: images) as being a certain way *because the object* that their intuitions represent is itself a certain way.

We have already noted several places where Kant denies that the synthesis of the imagination on its own can achieve everything required for cognition: In addition to the provision of a manifold by sense, and the synthesis of this manifold by the imagination, this synthesis itself must be "brought to concepts" by the understanding for cognition to arise (cf. B103–4). Kant also describes this further act as the use of concepts by the understanding to "give unity" to the synthesis, something that consists in "the representation of this necessary synthetic unity" by way of these concepts (B104). In the A-edition, Kant characterizes this concept-involving act as representing "the unity that the *object* makes necessary" – i.e., representing the synthesis our imagination has performed as making us conscious not just of something subjective about our representations but about something "*distinct from* all of our representations" – namely, an object that "corresponds" to these representations (A105; my ital.). We use concepts of these further objects to "effect [bewirken] synthetic unity in the manifold of intuition," by representing the synthesis of intuitions by the imagination as necessary because of what is represented by these intuitions (rather than some whim of the imagination itself); in this way, "we *cognize* the object" itself (A105; my ital.).

This subsumption of imaginative synthesis under concepts thus results in a still more "mediate" representation. Though images are already representations of representations (intuitions), they do not represent these representations as being the way that they are *because of further objects* that they represent. The way that an intuition is represented in an image by the imagination is not itself further represented as being the way that it is because of the object that "corresponds" to the intuition itself (A104) – e.g., because of the physical body (e.g., ship, city) that is represented by the intuition in the first place. The latter happens only

perception, and so on. Nor is the mechanism clarified by which we move from the mere "consciousness" of sensations in perception via *images*, back to a (immediate?) "cognition" of *objects* in experience via *concepts*. (Again, this is not to say that such a direct-realist-friendly account of intuition and experience cannot be given, but is simply a request for such an account to be given or even its possibility clearly sketched.)



when, in addition to the imagination's apprehending and connecting-together of the representations *with one another*, the understanding introduces "the determinate relation of given representations *to an object*" (B137; my ital.). It is only with the understanding's concepts of objects that we are able to "judge" about this determinate relation and thereby "to say that these two representations are *combined in the object* [im Objekt verbunden], i.e., regardless of any difference in the condition of the subject, and are not merely *together in perception* [in der Wahrnehmung beisammen] (however often as that might be repeated)" (B142; my ital.; cf. 4:298).

The full expression of the judgment that constitutes an experience (empirical cognition) would thus seem to be: the determination of an object *by means of* the representation *of the synthesis of the imagination*, as *itself* being "unified" in the way that it is *because of* the object. To use the example from the previous section: In experience, we move from being conscious, e.g., of one of the "looks" on a city, or from the consciousness of one "illustration" that results from several looks being connected, to the recognition in a judgment that all of these looks (and the synthesized illustration itself) are the way that they are *because of* some further object that is distinct from these representations themselves – e.g., the city itself. This gives sense to Kant's claim that judgment is "the mediate cognition of an object, hence the representation of a representation of it" (B93).

## 7. Conclusion: Imagination, Images, and Pure Cognition

In the foregoing I have tried to foreground the systematic contribution of imagination to empirical cognition, against the minimizing readings, and to highlight the specific site of its activity, against the maximizing readings. I have singled out *perception* (empirical consciousness), rather than *intuition*, as the initial site of the imagination's contribution to experience (empirical cognition). *Via* its syntheses of apprehension and reproduction, the imagination forms images of intuitions by taking them up and connecting them together. I have also argued that the imagination performs these syntheses prior even to the *consciousness* (perception) that they make possible, insofar as synthesis *per se* is "blind," and (a fortiori) prior to the involvement of the *understanding* (which "brings" these syntheses "to concepts").

In conclusion, I would like to address what I take to be the primary motivation for the maximizing readings, which in fact does not lie primarily in Kant's account of the constitution of *empirical* cognition, but instead

in the way Kant's treatment of the imagination is thought to fit into the Transcendental Deduction's argument for the possibility of *pure* cognition. In the Deduction, Kant means to establish *a priori* the "objective validity" of the pure concepts ("categories") of the understanding (cf. B122) and thereby demonstrate the possibility of pure cognition by way of these concepts (cf. B118–19). For many, Kant's argument has seemed to require that it is the understanding, after all, that is responsible for producing the original *pure intuitions* of space and time in the first place, in order to guarantee that they, along with everything given within them (and hence every *empirical* intuition), will necessarily stand under its pure concepts. It is argued, further, Kant himself ultimately describes this pure productive activity as being performed by the understanding (qua the imagination) as engaging in a "pure," "transcendental" synthesis (cf. B151f).<sup>22</sup>

Now, Kant surely does mean to single out a "pure" synthesis by the imagination as contributing something crucial to the argument of the Deduction (A115–16), and he surely takes this to be "productive" rather than "reproductive," not least because it occurs *a priori* (A118). More specifically, the imagination's capacity for a "pure" synthesis of apprehension *a priori* is said to "generate [erzeugen]" certain "representations" of space and of time that are not possible on the basis of sensibility alone (A99–100). In fact, Kant even goes so far as to claim that "not even the purest and most fundamental representations [reinste und erste Grundvorstellungen] of space and time could ever arise [entspringen]" without the synthesis of apprehension and reproduction (A102). All of these remarks have been taken to support versions of maximizing interpretations, based on the assumption that Kant here must have in mind the pure intuitions of space and time that Kant had also called "original" representations in the Aesthetic (B40; B48).<sup>23</sup>

What is less clear, however, is *which* representations exactly this act of pure productivity on the part of the imagination actually produces. Given the model we have sketched concerning *empirical* intuition, we might expect that what the imagination would contribute via the *pure* synthesis of apprehension is not the production of the pure intuition itself but instead a *pure image* of this pure intuition. In fact, in the Schematism, Kant does single out products of pure imaginative syntheses by the name

<sup>22</sup> Compare especially Ginsborg 2008; Matherne 2015; Williams 2018.

<sup>23</sup> As is argued by Waxman 1991, Longuenesse 1998 and 2005, Grüne 2009, among others; see also Rosefeldt this volume. (More recently, however, Grüne now seems more open to the idea that the mere "having" of pure intuitions does not require any synthesis; cf. Grüne 2016.)

of “pure *images*,” i.e., “pure images” of space and time (B182).<sup>24</sup> What is more, as with the empirical case, the images themselves are said to result from “the apprehension of the intuition” – even as they are in turn something whose “unity” can subsequently be represented in a concept of the understanding (B182).<sup>25</sup> But then, once the distinction between pure intuition and pure image has been more clearly brought to the fore, it is open to us to see Kant here as claiming that what is thereby generated by the pure synthesis of apprehension by the imagination is not the original pure *intuitions* of space and of time after all, but instead the first, most “original” *representations (images) of these pure intuitions*.<sup>26</sup>

The same distinction between originary intuition and pure image can also be kept in mind when considering a second text, now from the B-Deduction, that has been taken likewise to imply the “maximizing” reading. In the course of noting that the Aesthetic has already indicated that “space and time are represented *a priori* not merely as *forms* of sensible intuition but also as *intuitions* themselves” (B160), Kant then immediately adds a footnote that suggests that a synthesis is in fact first responsible for the representation of space and time “as intuitions” (B160–11n). This, in turn, has been taken to imply that synthesis *produces* the original pure intuitions in the first place.<sup>27</sup>

Against this we can interpret the passage, alternatively, as drawing on just the distinction noted above: Whereas the original pure *intuitions* of space and time only represent space and time “as forms,” the imagination via synthesis is able to produce the *representation of these intuitions* “as intuitions.”<sup>28</sup> Again, the pure *images*, and not the pure intuitions themselves, are exactly well-suited to play the role of the “fundamental representations” of *these intuitions* “as intuitions.” The footnote makes this shift of topic even more evident by further clarifying what is involved in the representation of something “as intuition,” noting that this is equivalent to “representing” space (the pure intuition) “as *object*” (B160n). The pure

<sup>24</sup> Later in the “Stufenleiter,” Kant again refers to the “pure image of sensibility” (B377).

<sup>25</sup> This is so, even though (to repeat) Kant does not allow for “pure” *perception* in the strict sense (cf. B207).

<sup>26</sup> Compare Kant’s reply to Eberhard, where he insists on keeping pure images of space and time sharply distinct from the original pure intuitions from which these images are formed and which “make possible” images in the first place (8:222).

<sup>27</sup> If this reading is then combined with a reading according to which “synthesis” and “combination” mean the same thing, then this footnote will be taken to imply a kind of intellectualism if not conceptualism about pure intuition itself. Compare Onof and Schulting 2015; cf. Messina 2014.

<sup>28</sup> This is, in turn, the basis for the representation of the “unity” of this synthesis, “through which the *concepts* of space and time first become possible” (B160–11n; my ital.).

intuition itself does not represent space “as object”; it simply contains space as a “mere form” in which sensations will be ordered (B34–5). The representation of this form “as object,” by contrast, comes about only *after* the pure synthesis of apprehension, after a “grasping-together [Zusammenfassung]” (B160n).<sup>29</sup>

Still, though the interpretation we have been developing here can help illuminate much of the basic structure of this infamous footnote, it must be acknowledged that we have not yet addressed one last complication: Kant actually uses the term “formal *intuition*,” rather than “pure *image*,” to name the representation of pure intuition “as intuition”, i.e., what comes about through synthesis of imagination (B160n). Taken out of context, this surely might suggest that the imagination produces intuitions after all – at least “formal intuitions,” and perhaps others as well.<sup>30</sup> Here, however, we can note that, in the *Prolegomena*, Kant explicitly aligns the expression “formal intuition” in particular with “the *image* [Bild] we form” of the form of sensibility, rather than with the originary intuition of this form (4:287; my ital.). This terminological alignment, of course, is just what our reading would predict.

In general, then, none of the main texts cited as motivation for the maximizing reading actually require that we take Kant to be claiming that the imagination is able to ontologically generate or bring the original pure intuitions themselves into existence. Rather, these can all be read in such a way that what is newly produced by the imagination is the *representation* of the pure intuition, an intuition previously had but now represented (“determined”) in a certain way – e.g., with a certain shape “traced” or a certain number of points “placed” in space. Nothing has changed about the underlying intuition of space *itself* or the pure sensory manifold that it contains; it has simply been *represented* by me in a new way.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> The distinction between pure intuition and pure image also allows for an alternative, non-maximalist reading of remarks to the effect that space and time as “forms of intuiting” are associated with certain “entia imaginaria,” despite not being themselves “objects to be intuited” (e.g., B347). (Waxman 1991 makes much of these passages; compare Longuenesse 2005.) While the forms of intuiting do provide the contents of the pure intuitions of space and time, and, consequently, the objects of the pure images, the forms themselves need not be identical with these images or any other “entia imaginaria.”

<sup>30</sup> Earlier in the B-edition itself, Kant describes imagination as “the capacity to represent an object in intuition without its presence,” and, more specifically, the capacity that can “give a corresponding intuition to the concepts of understanding” (B151). See also Stephenson 2015: 496–7.

<sup>31</sup> E.g., when I “apprehend” an intuition as to a figure present in the manifold (e.g., a series of dots), and thereby “apperceive” it and “make it into a perception,” I “as it were draw its shape [Gestalt]” (cf. B162) – and yet do so without actually “producing” an entirely new manifold in such an act. This is even more clear in the case of reproduction qua *memory*: I do not make up or constitute the

This, then, provides at least the sketch of a parallel analysis of the pure synthesis of the imagination, which supplies pure images (via “pure” apprehension) of pure intuition, rather than producing these intuitions themselves. To fully complete this parallel with empirical synthesis, however, we would need to show, first, that the pure synthesis of the imagination is *also* something that can occur prior to the pure activity of the understanding, and perhaps even “blindly” (without consciousness); second, that the addition of (pure) consciousness yields a new mental act that involves a representation of pure intuition; and finally, that it is only with the still further addition of understanding and its concepts that pure cognition via pure (images of pure) intuition can occur.

Concerning the first two points, there are not many direct textual anchors available, as Kant’s remarks about “pure synthesis” in the Deduction are focused almost wholly on what pure cognition the understanding is capable of achieving by acting on the imagination to effect a “transcendental” synthesis (cf. B151) – rather than on what the pure imagination might be capable of on its own. Concerning the last point, however, the text is fairly clear: It is only after we have “the consciousness of the *unity* of the synthesis” that is involved in the making of an image of five, of a triangle, etc., i.e., once we have or use the relevant “*concept*,” that we can be said to “*cognize*” the number being imaged (cf. A103). This, in turn, suggests that the pure imagination can, in fact, perform syntheses of pure manifolds and thereby represent them “in” a mind, prior to any consciousness that this is happening because of any object to be cognized, and (a fortiori) without any further objects thereby actually being “cognized” – though certainly more work needs to be done to fully establish what the imagination is and is not capable of entirely on its own.<sup>32</sup>

intuition in question; I recall it to mind by *representing* it even though it is now absent. The same would seem to be true of the *a priori* case as well: I do not produce a new pure manifold; rather, I determine it in a specific way by again using my imagination to “draw” shapes in the pure intuition of space, or to perform a parallel “figurative synthesis” in time to provide a “determination of time [Zeitbestimmung],” not by producing a whole new pure intuition of time itself but by using my imagination to represent the original intuition of time as delimited in specific ways (cf. B184f). Indeed, it is the prior presence of the “manifold of sensibility” – something the mind “has lying before it” *a priori*, as “the manifold of pure *a priori* intuition” that is “contained” in the pure intuitions of space and time (B102) – that allows the imagination to have something on which to perform the “pure” version of its syntheses (cf. A115), and *then* to produce its own additional content.

<sup>32</sup> Thanks to audiences at Ohio State University and Universität Mainz for their feedback on earlier drafts of this chapter. Thanks also to Lucy Allais, Stefanie Grüne, Scott Harkema, Tobias Rosefeldt, Lisa Shabel, Brian Tracz, Eric Watkins, and Marcus Willaschek for comments on earlier drafts.