

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Kant on the Concept of *Witz*

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The central aim of this essay is to portray Kant's notion of *Witz* as it unfolds from his *Lectures on Anthropology*, in a decisive stage of his intellectual evolution (1772–96). This aim is sub-divided into two parallel objectives: first, to sketch a brief history of the concept of *Witz*, thus showing how *Witz* came to evolve from having a rational connotation to having an imaginative connotation, and how it came to be a pregnant philosophical issue, as well as an aesthetic principle. Secondly, to show how Kant read that singular course in the evolution of *Witz*; how, in his view, *Witz* and the power of judgement, imagination, and intellect are indeed opposed, but also how there is a necessity to unite both opposing parts; a convergence which is not only advantageous for both parts, but serves a greater purpose: to create an unsuspected link between imagination and understanding, as well as between philosophy and poetry.

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**Keywords:** Kant; *Witz*; power of judgement; poetry

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## I. Introduction

Amid the rich palette of topics addressed by Kant in his anthropology lectures (1772–96), there are some which, because they refer to others of a greater span or because they are in some way eclipsed by others of a more critical nature, are left in the shadow, thus being considered as devoid of philosophical interest. As to the justice of such views, or if they are at all real, I leave it to the reader. But at least one of these topics is seen with an indifference that is directly opposed to its true importance: the theme of *Witz*, which is not confined to these lectures, rather is recurring in Kant – in his *Reflections on Anthropology*, in §§55 and 56 of the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, even in the third *Critique*<sup>1</sup> – and is dealt with

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<sup>1</sup> A prior methodological disposition is in order. The main focus of my analysis of Kant's concept of *Witz* shall be, as stated above, his *Lectures on Anthropology*. This focus and object of study requires, of course, due caution, for two reasons. On the one hand, because Kant's *Lectures* have an *indirect nature*, subject to all manner of possible incongruences, as well as references and indications, by the estranged hand of his students. This, of course, does not mean that the *Lectures* constitute any less of a Kantian source, only that one should exert care, inasmuch as the lectures, unlike other works, were not handwritten by Kant himself. On the other hand, one must take into consideration that, precisely due to the indirect nature both of their conception (an academic environment) and their production (oral, and then transcribed), Kant's *Lectures on Anthropology*, and hence his lectures on *Witz*, should be understood as an illustration of the philosopher's position on the topic throughout his published

in its opposition to the power of judgement; a theme which is therefore noteworthy and to which I devote the present essay.<sup>2</sup>

Some years after the lectures, in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), Kant would say that *Witz* is a power aimed at 'discerning similitudes between dissimilar things' (AA, 7:221):<sup>3</sup> an instrument of the imagination, if not of genius, a power to invent and form new images, which thus opposes the power of judgement. Maybe for that reason in his famous comparison of the genius to a tree, in 'Anthropologie-Menschenkunde' (AA, 25.2:1062) and 'Busolt' (AA, 25.2:1496), Kant says that if the power of judgement is the *root* of the tree, then productive imagination, and along with it *Witz*, are the *treetop* 'which do themselves produce new images' (AA, 25.2:1062), whereas the 'flower' of genius is *taste*, and its 'fruit' the *spirit* – an image which clearly stresses the importance of *Witz*, as well as the relevance of the opposing pair for Kant. However, what we do not know is why *Witz* is allowed to appear in such an illustrious image in Kant's thought; that is, what led Kant to identify *Witz* with imagination and separate it from the understanding: a fact whose cause must be beyond the term's *ability to discern similitudes amid difference*, rather may reside in the term's ancient history as well as Kant's singular interpretation of it; and finally, what we do not know is why, despite their opposition, *Witz* and the power of judgement appear together in the image – all the more, in an image of an organic living being such as a tree.

Hence, the following essay has two main objectives:

- 1) First of all, to sketch a brief history of the concept of *Witz* from its retraceable origins to Kant's time. By this I intend to show that *Witz* originally had a *rational* connotation, then an *intellectual*, and finally, around Kant's time, an *imaginative* one; for that is the course followed by *Witz* from an indefinite notion to a pregnant *philosophical concept*, an *aesthetic principle*.

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work; not as his actual, definitive position. This in no way lessens their theoretical relevance, rather places it in a preliminary plane of reflection, to which we should seek validation in a posterior one. The aim of this article, however, is precisely to show Kant's *first* positions on the topic of *Witz*; that is, to assess both Kant's role in a long tradition of litterates and philosophers who devoted themselves to studying the topic, and his role regarding his own posterior evolution as a thinker of the topic, regardless of the more or less indirect nature of such positions – hence our focus on the *Lectures on Anthropology*. As such, and because I wish to annul as much as possible such factors of interference, I propose to if not solve, at least tackle both problems at once, by bearing them in mind at all times and seeking proof leading to their suppression. Namely, to counter these issues, I shall as much as possible attempt to avoid them by means of textual proof from other Kantian works on akin topics, such as his posthumous *Reflections*, or the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), in hope that they might dispel any doubts regarding the legitimacy of the author's lectures on *Witz* and, if possible, show the evolution of the conception in the author's spirit.

<sup>2</sup> Until this day, the topic of *Witz* in Kant was given little importance; or rather, a merely contingent or complementary importance, thereby serving the analysis of other topics. Among the exceptions to this, because they focus primarily on the theme of Kant's approach to the philosophical problem of *Witz*, I underscore: Stanley Corngold, 'Wit and Judgement in the Eighteenth Century: Lessing and Kant', *MLN* 102 (1987): 461–82; Otto F. Best, *Der Witz als Erkenntniskraft und Formprinzip* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), esp. 64–66; Thomas Hecken, *Witz als Metapher: Der Witz-Begriff in der Poetik und Literatur-Kritik des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Francke, 2005); Wolfgang Ritzel, 'Kant über den Witz und Kants Witz', *Kant-Studien* 82 (1991): 102–9; Manuel Sánchez Rodríguez, 'Witz und reflektierende Urteilskraft in Kants Philosophie', in *Kant und die Philosophie in weltbürgerlicher Absicht: Akten des XI. Kant-Kongresses 2010*, ed. Stefano Bacin et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 4:487–96; Joãozinho Beckenkamp, 'Tinha Kant um conceito de espírito?' [Did Kant Have a Concept of Spirit?], *O que nos faz pensar* 21 (2012): 205–25; Gottfried Gabriel, 'Der "Witz" der reflektierenden Urteilskraft', in *Urteilskraft und Heuristik in den Wissenschaften: Beiträge zur Entstehung des Neuen*, ed. Frithjof Rodi (Weilerswist: Velbrück, 2003), 197–210; Robert Nehring, *Witz*, in *Kant-Lexikon*, ed. Marcus Willaschek et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 3:2675–77. See also my own previous work on the subject, namely Fernando M. F. Silva, "'Zum Erfinden wird Witz erfordert": On the Evolution of the Concept of *Witz* in Kant's *Anthropology Lectures*', in *Kant's Lectures/Kants Vorlesungen*, ed. Bernd Dörflinger et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 121–32.

<sup>3</sup> All references to Kant's works are to the standard Akademie Ausgabe (AA). All translations are my own.

- 2) Finally, to show that the aforementioned stages in the evolution of the concept were all but unknown to Kant, who approached *Witz* precisely in the threshold between its intellectual and imaginative phase. This I intend to prove by showing that *Witz* and the power of judgement are indeed *opposed*, but also by suggesting that for Kant there is not only a possibility, but a necessity to unite both opposing parts; a convergence which not only benefits both parts, but serves a greater purpose: to create stronger ties between the imagination and the understanding, and ultimately between philosophy and poetry.

## II. A Brief History of the Term *Witz*

The first references to *Witz*,<sup>4</sup> the ones which show us the term in its oldest retraceable meaning, date from Old High German, namely from the eighth century. At the time, and well before, the word 'Wiz', or 'Wizzi', meant *to see* – as in sight, study – and not just to see, rather *to see with piercing accuracy and depth*, in intimate relation with *the act of knowing, with wisdom and knowledge*. By then divided between the closely related 'sehen' and 'wissen', *Witz* was completely devoid of a stable meaning: for the original *Witz* meant insightful observation, ample cognition, just as well as reason, knowledge, wisdom, consciousness, and science *all at once*; and the one bearing the gift of *Witz* was far-sighted and illuminated as well as wise and rational, if not a sage, a man of science; a philosopher. And so, were we to ascribe it a general origin between those of *knowing and seeing*, the oldest *Witz* would have to be *connoted with rationality in general*, with the act of knowing, even with the rigid systematization of a scientific vision, which in a way pervades the term's broad semantic field. That much is shown by Eberhard Graff, in his *Althochdeutsche Sprachschatz*, who highlights, among others, 'uwizia, sapias',<sup>5</sup> 'uuzinnais, scientike', and 'zi uuzanna uerde, clarescat';<sup>6</sup> by Oskar Schade's *Altdeutsches Wörterbuch*, wherein 'wizî, wizzî, wizze' are designated as 'Wißen, Einsicht [...], Weisheit', and 'wizîg, wizîe, wizzîg, wizzîe' are said to have meant 'kundig, gnarus, verständig, klug, prudens, astutus, weise';<sup>7</sup> and even by Johann Christoph Adelung, in his *Grammatisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch*, who says that *Witz* meant 'Wissenschaft im weitesten Verstande, der Vorrath von klaren Begriffen, welchen ein Mensch hat',<sup>8</sup> and adds in a note:

Das Wort ist alt, und lautet schon von den frühesten Zeiten an Wizzi, ist aber, so wie alle Abstracta, in der Bedeutung sehr schwankend, indem es bald für *notitia*, bald für *intelligentia*, bald aber auch für *ratio* gebraucht wurde.<sup>9</sup>

But with the arrival of Middle High German, there takes place a gradual, hardly perceptible modulation in the concept's scope – namely, a *de-rationalization of Witz*, whereby the term was to lose its previous attributes; namely, from the eleventh century onwards, not only was reason or rationality not the term's sole significance, it was not even its predominant one.

<sup>4</sup> The term seems to have originated from the Latin 'ingenium' (inborn talent, innate gift for spontaneous and individual creation) – not coincidentally, one of the two known origins for the French-influenced German term 'Genie', along with 'genius'. Still today, the word resembles that origin in various Latin tongues: 'engenho' (Portuguese), 'ingenio' (Spanish). See *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm* (1854–1961), s.v. *Witz*, cols. 880–81, <http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemma=witz.Grimm>.

<sup>5</sup> Eberhard G. Graff, *Althochdeutsche Sprachschatz, oder Wörterbuch der althochdeutschen Sprache*, 6 vols. (Berlin: Nikolaische Buchhandlung, 1834–42), 1:1090.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1089.

<sup>7</sup> Oskar Schade, *Altdeutsches Lesebuch: Gothisch, Altsächsisch, Alt- und Mittelhochdeutsch, mit Literarischen Nachweisen und einem Wörterbuche*, 2 vols. (Halle: Waisenhaus, 1866), 2:731.

<sup>8</sup> Johann Christoph Adelung, *Versuch eines vollständigen grammatisch-kritischen Wörterbuches der hochdeutschen Mundart*, 5 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1774–86), 5:266.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

*Witz* had shifted in meaning. Heyse himself notices this, and Benecke corroborates it by saying that from Old High German to Middle High German the term *Witz* had changed, for it had indeed had a purely rational connotation, but now the concept had acquired other traits, namely, others of a more specific nature: ‘im mhd. ist ich wize (ahd. wizu) ich werfe vor, ich strafe, vgl. lat. *animadvertere*.’<sup>10</sup> That is, with time, *Witz* had come to acquire, apart from its already rigorous nature, a different one: *a judicious, more scrutinizing, if not judicial, and in last resort punitive nature*. Sure enough, *Witz* had not thereby lost its rational nature, nor did it renounce to reason. For a judge needs reason to pass judgement. But this trait was now, if not subordinated, at least complementary in the face of *Witz*’s recent intellectualization, which was visible in two regards: first, in the dative use of *Witz*, to impute transgressions, to admonish and rebuke – and thus to enforce law; and second, in the accusative use of *Witz*, to indeed punish.<sup>11</sup> And hence, *Witz*, though not renouncing its legislative, rational nature, now shifted towards a more executive, judicious, and intellectual dimension; and from the world of ideas, *Witz*, as well as its semantic field, descended to an intermediate, somewhat more physical world – as it seems, a world between that of reason and that of the senses. To resort to Kant’s table of faculties, *Witz* was now more and more akin to the *understanding* (*judicium*) in its judicious process of dissociating and classifying representations; and if need be, *Witz*, just like the understanding, would translate notions such as acceptance and refusal, clemency or punishment – and so it would be during the following centuries, to the extent that well within New German, *Witz* was still a synonym of *understanding*. Precisely this confirms not only Christian Gottlob Haltaus,<sup>12</sup> but also Lorenz Englmann, who describes ‘wize’ as ‘Verstand, Weisheit, Einsicht, Bewusstseyn, Besinnung’, but ‘wizen’ as ‘einen Vorwurf machen [...] vorwerfen’,<sup>13</sup> or Adolf Ziemann, who in his *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch* describes ‘wize’ as ‘pein, gewaltsam verursachter schmerz, cruciatus, bestrafung, animadversio’, ‘wizen’ as ‘peinigen, strafen’, or ‘wizaere’ as ‘peinlicher gerichtsdienner (licitor, lanista, carnifex)’.<sup>14</sup>

Now, it is our view that such an important shift in *Witz* is best seen in Grimm’s *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, where the history of the concept is described in much more detail than here. Let us then follow it until it enables us to resume the current point, as well as the term’s evolution until Kant’s time.

The Grimm divide the history of the word into different sections. In the introduction, much like the previous authors, the Grimm confirm that the term *Witz* comes from the ‘ahd. wizzi, or wizza’, and so do they acknowledge the various meanings connected to it, such as ‘scientia’, ‘wissen’, ‘conscientiam’, or ‘ratio, prudentia’.<sup>15</sup> *Witz* is said to be ‘Vernunft, Verstand, Klugheit, List’, and in accordance with this, the Grimm add that in times gone by *Witz* meant ‘die von Gott dem Menschen verliehene Gabe des vernünftigen denkens und handelns’.<sup>16</sup> But they too recognize that with time, the word acquires *intellectual, judicious traits*: ‘Witz als intellektuelles vermögen’,<sup>17</sup> and owes this to an important reason; that gradually, along with its marked rationality, a counter-manifestation, that is, the non-occurrence of the term’s

<sup>10</sup> Georg F. Benecke, *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch, mit Benutzung des Nachlasses*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1854–66), 3:781.

<sup>11</sup> ‘1. mit dativ der pers. ich rechne einem etwas als ein vergehen an, verweise es ihm, lasse es ihn entgelten’ (ibid.); ‘2. mit accusativ der pers. bestrafe’ (ibid., 782). Also according to the Grimm, it is a fact that the word occurs in ‘Rechtlichen Bestimmungen’ (*Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s.v. *Witz*, col. 864).

<sup>12</sup> Christian Gottlob Haltaus, *Glossarium Germanicum Medii Aevi*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Gleditsch, 1758), 2:2125.

<sup>13</sup> Lorenz Englmann, *Mittelhochdeutsches Lesebuch* (Munich: Lindauer, 1863), 290.

<sup>14</sup> Adolf Ziemann, *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch zum Handgebrauch* (Quedlinburg: Basse, 1838), 660.

<sup>15</sup> *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s.v. *Witz*, col. 861.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., col. 862.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., col. 861.

rational connotation, begins to emerge in the word *Witz*. In other words, *Witz* simultaneously possessed, and yet lacked rationality; as if, so to say, *Witz* could be reason just as much as its absence.<sup>18</sup> This is a phenomenon which would arise with the Middle German use of the word,<sup>19</sup> and might help explain *the transition from Witz as reason to Witz as understanding*, the word's designation not only of rationality (reason), but more and more of a flaw or transgression due to the absence of rationality, and the subsequent need to punish and suppress that flaw; a transition which the Grimm duly notice in the next subsection of the entry, which reads: 'der Verstand, die natürliche Auffassungs- und Beurteilungskraft'.<sup>20</sup>

In this section, the Grimm resume by once again stressing that in Middle High German, and increasingly so in Early New German, *Witz* progressively loses *some* of its abstraction, to the extent that, from an 'Abstraktum zu wissen',<sup>21</sup> and a purely rational one, *Witz* now confined itself to a more specific knowledge, and thereby simultaneously refined not only itself as censor of that knowledge, but the very act of cognizing. More and more, *Witz* meant the sagacious appreciation of the rationality or irrationality, the legality or illegality of a representation, as well as the due or undue connection between that representation and other representations. And so, there is no doubt that, as is said by Adelung, *Witz* is 'Verstand überhaupt'.<sup>22</sup> But, not only that, in its scrutinizing task, *Witz* now assumed the *intellectual nature* of the understanding, as well as its defining characteristics, such as prudence, sagacity, or acuteness. That is, apart from its various meanings, and in an only apparently paradoxical fashion, *Witz* now devotes itself to being as circumspect as possible, thus claiming the traits of an intellectual force of the soul; and by doing so, it acts if not as the understanding in a strict sense, at least more and more as its *analogon*. *Witz* is no longer wisdom or knowledge in general, rather, as the *analogon* of the understanding, it judges, it accepts and rejects cognitions; and hence, *Witz* confers 'rechter Sinn' to knowledge, and by judging and punishing, it carves the final shape of its domain.<sup>23</sup> More and more, *Witz* determined the 'Begrenztheit des menschlichen erkennens'.<sup>24</sup> Now, perhaps due to all these convulsions, due to the abstract nature of the word or even its yet insufficient delimitation, it is the Grimm's view that by the mid-seventeenth century *Witz* has yet 'keine feste deutsche Bezeichnung'.<sup>25</sup> Nothing but mere *Witz*, the concept was still very different from its counterparts 'esprit' in France, and 'wit' in England. But by the end of New High German – according to them – a final influence would cause a decisive shift in the term, launching in into Modernity.

Regarding that final shift, it relates to a phenomenon indicated by the Grimm, namely, the strong influence that its counterparts, the French 'esprit', and the English 'wit',<sup>26</sup> but especially the English empiricists,<sup>27</sup> would exert upon the German *Witz*. Indeed, up until this point in the analysis of *Witz*, the examples cited display *Witz's* judicious dimension – in a word, its

<sup>18</sup> According to the Grimm, the word even occurred in cases of 'vorübergehenden Zustand der gedankenabwesenheit oder der bewusstlosigkeit' (ibid., col. 864).

<sup>19</sup> The Grimm convey abundant examples: 'Du wellest dan kein sin, witz und verstandt haben' (1523), or 'weil sie (die Lappen) mit dem Sack odern narn geschlager oder einen sparn zu viel oder zu wenig haben, dadurch sie von dem rechten mittel der witze irr gehen' (1596) (ibid., cols. 863–64).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., col. 865.

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (Strasbourg: Trübner, 1882), 377.

<sup>22</sup> Adelung, *Versuch*, 5:266.

<sup>23</sup> *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s. v. *Witz*, col. 866.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., col. 865. 'Die grenze des Witzes,' so say the Grimm, 'ist ein auch heute üblicher Ausdruck', as is demonstrated by Goethe's example: 'nun sind wir schon wieder an der gränze unseres witzes, da wo euch menschen der sinn überschnappt' (ibid.).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., col. 871.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., cols. 862, 871–73.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., cols. 873–74.

task as *true judge of the human spirit*. But if one attempts to find equal correspondence in the same historical period of the English 'wit', this proves impossible. For, just like *Witz*, 'wit' is ancient, and their histories even trail a similar course; but from the seventeenth century, 'wit', by then already in a more advanced stage than *Witz*, receives a newer formulation by the hand of several philosophers. Hence, in the *Essays* (1597), more specifically in 'Of Studies', Francis Bacon already approaches the question.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, but even more explicitly, Thomas Hobbes, in 'Human Nature, or the Fundamental Elements of Policy' (1650), is one of the first<sup>29</sup> to establish a clear transition from the previous judicious character of the 'wit' to its new, future character; for, according to Hobbes, man feels pleasure not only in 'discerning suddenly *dis-similitude* in things that otherwise appear the same', but also in 'finding unexpected *similitude* of things, otherwise much unlike'.<sup>30</sup> Hobbes deems the first 'judgement' and the latter 'fancy'; but more importantly, their joint cooperation is designated as '*wit*, which seemeth to be a tenuity and agility of spirits, contrary to that restiness of the spirits supposed in those that are dull'.<sup>31</sup> Finally, in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), John Locke brings this transition to its definitive separation. In 'Of Discerning, and other Operations of the Mind', he says:

For *Wit* lying most in the assemblage of *Ideas*, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant Pictures, and agreeable visions in the Fancy: *judgement*, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully, one from another, *Ideas*, wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by Similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another.<sup>32</sup>

Now it is plausible to say that these statements provide a faithful image of the most important chapter in the history of 'wit', as well as proof of the term's final semantic shift during the seventeenth century. For, according to them and especially in light of their gradual evolution, it is shown that, by the hand of such authors and later of others, such as Shaftesbury or Pope, the English 'wit' gradually sheds its last skin, and abandons its intellectual traits in favour of a whole different appearance, more akin to poets, and not as much to the understanding or reason. This would greatly influence the French 'esprit'. But ultimately, and more importantly, it would alter the German *Witz*, endowing it, to cite the Grimm, with a 'feste deutsche Bezeichnung'. For just like 'wit', the previous traits of *Witz*, such as its subtle perception, its swift ability to notice differences, and its acuity in judging and punishing were returned to the understanding; but not in order to deprive *Witz* of such subtlety, swiftness, and acuity, rather to use them in equal measure *in perceiving similitudes (through imagination)*. That is, *Witz* changed tasks with the understanding; but it preserved its swift and acute perceptive essence, and hence did not cease to be an instrument of discernment (as in Locke), rather it was used with a different, more imaginative purpose: the one of subtly and accurately discerning unexpected, pleasant similitudes (analogies, metaphors) between otherwise different things.

Now what exactly happened to *Witz*? It changed, but not entirely – and here is the decisive twist in its tale. For *Witz* dissociates itself from the understanding, but not because their

<sup>28</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Essays, or Councils, Civil and Moral* (1597; London: Clark, 1706), 135–36.

<sup>29</sup> Along with Baltasar Gracián, *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* (Huesca: Nogués, 1648). Juan Huarte de San Juan's *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias* (Baeza: Bautista, 1575), though related to *Witz*, deals primarily with the topic of *genius*.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, 11 vols. (London: Bohn, 1839–45), 4:55.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:56.

<sup>32</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (1690; London: Awnsham, 1700), 74.

properties were incompatible; rather, having incorporated such intellectual traits, *Witz* found a less rigid, less mechanized, and therefore more pleasant, more imaginative use for them, and thus took in hands a different task – the one of finding unexpected similitude in things by analysing them. How this came to happen, or what its exact moment was, is hard to say. But one thing is clear: *Witz* did not just separate itself from the understanding: it emancipated from it; and by combining its intellectual attributes, which had made it into a force of the soul, and such imaginative ones, such as an ‘agility’ and ‘tenuity’ of the spirit,<sup>33</sup> *Witz* not only rendered the spirit more creative and individual, but the term itself acquired a new form. That is, in the lips of its speakers, ‘wit’, ‘esprit’, and *Witz* were no longer just concepts, but were, each in its time, promoted to a new rank in the human spirit: namely, the one of an actual power, if not even a faculty of the soul, which surely henceforth opposed the power of judgement, but, as its counterpart, was now to endow the spirit with loftiness and individual originality, and thus cause it aesthetic pleasure. And so, ‘wit’, ‘esprit’, and *Witz* were fixed in a single word, a noun, but its meaning, as a recently acquired *aesthetic power or faculty of the soul*,<sup>34</sup> finally transcended its conceptual boundaries and gave them their modern meaning; which is not only visible, but verifiable in many lexicographic sources of the eighteenth century. For example, in England, John Kersey, in his *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum*,<sup>35</sup> designates ‘wit’ as ‘One of the Faculties of the rational soul; Genius; Fancy; Aptness for any Thing; Cunningness’;<sup>36</sup> and Samuel Johnson, in his *Dictionary of the English Language*, says on *wit*: ‘1. The powers of the mind; the mental faculties; the intellects. 2. Imagination; quickness of fancy; 3. Sentiments produced by quickness of fancy [...]; 4. A man of fancy [...]; 5. A man of genius [...]; 6. sense; judgement [...]. In the plural, sound mind.’<sup>37</sup> In France, Denis Diderot, in the *Encyclopédie*, designates ‘esprit’ as:

ce mot, en tant qu’il signifie *une qualité de l’ame*, est un de ces termes vagues, auxquels tous ceux qui les prononcent attachent presque toujours des sens différens. Il exprime autre chose que jugement, génie, goût, talent, pénétration, étendue, grace, finesse; & il doit tenir de tous ces mérites: on pourroit le définir, *raison ingénieuse*.<sup>38</sup>

In Germany, Kaspar von Stieler acknowledges the new meaning of *Witz*,<sup>39</sup> accordingly, Adelung designates *Witz* as: ‘1. Wissenschaft [...] im weitesten Gebrauch; 2. Verstand überhaupt;

<sup>33</sup> Hobbes, *English Works*, 4:56.

<sup>34</sup> The phenomenon would be definitively consummated by Baumgarten’s promotion of the aesthetics to a philosophical discipline, and subsequently of *Witz*, genius, or taste to aesthetic principles. See note 50.

<sup>35</sup> As to the first *lexicographic* references of the *new meaning of ‘wit’*, they are to be found around the end of the seventeenth century. Robert Cawdrey, *A Table Alphabeticall* (London: Weauer, 1604), does not register the term; John Bullokar, *An English Expositor* (London: Legatt, 1616), does so with ‘witty’, and in the modern sense of the term: ‘ingenious’. But Thomas Blount, *Glossographia Anglicana Nova* (London: Newcomb, 1656), and Elisha Coles, *An English Dictionary* (London: Parker, 1676), again fail to do so: a fact which may prove the term’s existence, but not its general use. The first one to acknowledge the word ‘wit’, as well as its modern sense, is therefore Kersey, perhaps already in his earlier *A New English Dictionary* (London: Bonwicke, 1702). I was not able to consult the *Gazophylacium Anglicanum* (London: E. H., 1689), of anonymous author.

<sup>36</sup> John Kersey, *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum; or, a General English Dictionary* (London: Wilde, 1708), n. p.

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Johnson and John Walker, *Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Pickering, 1755), s. v. ‘wit’, n. p.

<sup>38</sup> Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond D’Alembert, *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*, vol. 5 (Paris: Briasson, 1751), 973.

<sup>39</sup> According to the Grimm, the first lexicographic references to the German *Witz* are late: ‘die Wörterbücher des 17. und beginnenden 18. jhs. (Reyher [1668], Widerhold [1669], Kramer [1702], Dentzler [1716], Kirsch [1718]) reflektieren den neuen wortinhalt noch nicht’ (*Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s. v. *Witz*, col. 874). This is true, yet with an exception; for indeed, Simon Roten’s *Teutscher Dictionarius* (Augsburg: Manger, 1571) and Georg Henisch’s *Teutsche Sprach und Weisheit* (Augsburg: Francus, 1616) make no mention of the word; and Justus Georg Schottelius’s *Ausführliche Arbeit von der Teutschen Hauptsprache* (Braunschweig: Zilliger, 1663) does so, but only with regard to the old meaning of the word. But Kaspar von Stieler’s *Der deutschen Sprache Stammbaum*

3. Vermögen der Seele verborgenen Ähnlichkeiten zu entdecken [...], im engsten jetzt noch allein üblichen Gebrauch';<sup>40</sup> and finally the Grimm designate *Witz* in likewise manner, namely: 'die fähigkeit, versteckte zusammenhänge vermöge einer besonders lebhaften und vielseitigen combinationsgabe aufzudecken und durch eine treffende und überraschende formulierung zum ausdruck zu bringen.'<sup>41</sup>

Hence, in England and France, and subsequently in Germany, *Witz*, once 'ratio', profound seeing and knowing, and which in recent centuries had emerged more and more as the judicious analogon of human understanding, was now at last a power of the soul, a 'qualité de l'âme',<sup>42</sup> a 'power of the mind'.<sup>43</sup> But as such, not a power of the soul in general, not something common to all human beings, as it had been in its origins and in a sense still was. Quite on the contrary, *Witz* was now 'persönliche Fähigkeit':<sup>44</sup> a mark of the subject's individuality, and not just of the subject, but, judging by the previous evidence, of special subjects, endowed with fecundity, taste, and talent. That is, from mark of the rationality of men in general, *Witz*, as intellectual force par excellence, had with time moved on to scrutinizing those representations and punishing the ones held as prohibitive for its rationality. But now, once fulfilled this task, *Witz* trailed a different path, not only with regard to its definition but also to the representations with which it laboured. For as the corollary of all the analytical work that was the one of *Witz* as understanding, *there could be only synthesis, similitude* – in a word, the work belonging to imagination and fantasy. And indeed, precisely that happens to the term ever since the mid-seventeenth century and up until Kant: *Witz* becomes more and more... imagination. That is, *Witz*, in plain transition between its former dimension as reason/understanding and its future dimension as imagination, links the best of two worlds: it stands for the analysis of representations, as well as for their sudden transformation into inspirations or spontaneous outbursts of taste ('quickness of fancy'<sup>45</sup>); it stands for rationality and intellectuality, as well as for imagination and ingenuity ('raison ingénieuse'<sup>46</sup>); and if *Witz* is both parties, it is because, according to Samuel Johnson, though they denote 'ingenuity', its representations are also moderated by an intellectuality which *Witz* never loses entirely, and so they indicate 'soundness of understanding, intellect not crazed; sound mind';<sup>47</sup> otherwise *Witz* would be pure nonsense and could not be taken into consideration.

In conclusion, the course of emancipation of *Witz*, now stimulated as one of the instruments of a recently acknowledged aesthetics, fulfils its full circle, and for the very first time it emerges as both a concept and a philosophical problem. For *Witz*, now a power of the soul, would not represent a mere inventive association of similitudes in search of unheard-of representations. By the mid-eighteenth century, according to the Grimm, *Witz* already meant the very 'dichterische Erfindungsgabe', even 'Einbildungskraft schlechthin';<sup>48</sup> and hence, not satisfied with its emancipation as a concept, *Witz* brought upon itself in Kant's time to be of a poetic, literary

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*und Fortwachs, oder Teutscher Sprachschatz* (Nuremberg: Hoffmann, 1691) does in fact present the word and its modern sense, and is perhaps the first one to do so: 'sapientiam, prudentiam denotat [...] astutia, calliditas, ver-sutia [...] sollertia [...] & praesentia animi, acies ingenii, bona indoles, & mentis acumen' (p. 2570). The term then disappears once again as a noun from Georg Liebe's *Teutsches Wörter-Büchlein* (Freiberg: Kuhfuss, 1701), and does not reappear until Steinbach's *Vollständiges Deutsches Wörterbuch*, in 1734; see Christoph Ernst Steinbach, *Vollständiges Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols. (Breslau: Korn, 1734), 2:1006.

<sup>40</sup> Adelung, *Versuch*, 5:266.

<sup>41</sup> *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s. v. *Witz*, col. 874.

<sup>42</sup> Diderot and D'Alembert, *Encyclopédie*, 973.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson and Walker, *Dictionary*, s. v. 'wit', n. p.

<sup>44</sup> *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s. v. *Witz*, col. 874.

<sup>45</sup> Johnson and Walker, *Dictionary*, s. v. 'wit', n. p.

<sup>46</sup> Diderot and D'Alembert, *Encyclopédie*, 973. 'Immer wahr't witz den rein rationalen charakter, auch dort, wo einfluss von esprit vorliegt' (*Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s. v. *Witz*, col. 866).

<sup>47</sup> Johnson and Walker, *Dictionary*, s. v. 'wit', n. p.

<sup>48</sup> *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s. v. *Witz*, col. 877.

nature, thus justifying itself as imagination's very own twin formula. Gradually *Witz* would become poetry, literature (*witz ist das literarische leben, die literatur einer nation*),<sup>49</sup> and therefore *the po(i)etic act par excellence*, not only because it embodied the very act of poetic composition, but because it created unexpected feeling and thinking, attainable not only by the most creative, but also by the most intellectual and rational human beings.

### III. The Concept of *Witz* in Kant's *Lectures on Anthropology*

#### III.1. *Witz and the Power of Judgement*

In section II we concluded that by moving from rational to intellectual, and from intellectual to imaginative, *Witz* had not only completed its full course as a concept, but also attained a noble status as a problem of the human spirit; for now *Witz* was a faculty of the soul, and yet one so singular, that it was crucial to study and define the topic. Accordingly, around the second half of the eighteenth century, the topic begins to draw attention: philosophers such as Alexander Baumgarten,<sup>50</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, or Johann Georg Hamann, and literary theorizers or poets such as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Johann Christoph Gottsched, or Johann Jakob Breitinger, some as admirers of *Witz*, others as users, others even as its theorizers address the phenomenon and, more or less aware of the complex history underlying it, think *Witz* as more than just a curious coincidence of their century.

One who is entitled to the epithet of theorizer of *Witz*, and could just as well be included in the movement, is Immanuel Kant, who would approach the problem in his *Lectures on Anthropology*, between 1772 and 1796, as well as in his *Reflections on Anthropology* and in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*.<sup>51</sup> Kant devotes seven anthropology lectures to the topic; and if not as many as the divisions of the lectures in the *Akademie-Ausgabe*, it is because in 'Parow' Kant devotes two lessons to the topic, whereas in 'Pillau' he only briefly mentions it elsewhere. The first version, dated 1772/73, is entitled 'Vom *Witz* und Scharfsinnigkeit'. The others read, in more or less exact terms: 'Vom *Witz* und von der Urtheilskraft'.<sup>52</sup> The texts are frequently surrounded by lessons similar in content, such as 'Die Stärcke der Phantasie', 'Vom

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., col. 879. According to the Grimm, Germany introduces *Witz* in literature at the onset of the eighteenth century.

<sup>50</sup> It is not here the place to contextualize Kant's opinion on *Witz* within such a broad framework of authors; not even to do so with regard to Baumgarten, who, as was said in note 34, had a key role in discerning the superior, intellectual, as well as scientific potentialities of aesthetic categories such as *Witz*, and who was also a clear influence on Kant, and especially so on Kant the anthropologist. Yet, it is worth mentioning, for the sake of better delineating the positions of both authors on the topic, a scission between both authors, as registered in AA, 25.1:341. Here Kant registers Baumgarten's distinction between *Witz* and 'Perspicacia', and distances himself from it by proposing instead a distinction between *Witz* and 'power of judgement'. See Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* (Halle: Hemmerde, 1739), 136–37. The distancing, however, lies not here, nor in the different designations of the powers, but in the general character and action of each of these powers: for whereas for Baumgarten they are powers of *recognition, or discernment*, of the similar or dissimilar in things, for Kant they are *more powers of a more active nature*: one, *Witz*, of 'invention', the other one, the power of judgement, of 'handling and treatment of an invented thing' (AA, 25.1:341). That is, Kant uses the concept of invention, inventiveness – of subjective, individual creativity – to take a step further than Baumgarten in the theorizing of the topic, one which shows, namely, on the one hand, that Baumgarten too was aware of *Witz's* rationalizing potentialities, but that on the other hand he envisaged such a secluded potentiality not as much in the sphere of *subjective feeling* – as did Kant – but in the sphere of a subjective, yet not so subjective *sensibility* in general. As to the fundamental traits of this proposition by Kant, and its overall conclusions, we shall attempt to expound them in the remainder of this article.

<sup>51</sup> As to the possible connection between *Witz* and the power of judgement in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, see note 66.

<sup>52</sup> Namely, 'Vom *Witz* und Scharfsinnigkeit' (AA, 25.1:132–39); 'Vom *Witz* und von der Urtheilskraft. oder vom Vermögen Aehnlichkeit und Unterschied zu bemerken' (AA, 25.1:310–28); 'Vom *Witz* und von der Urtheilskraft' (AA, 25.1:341–58); 'Vom *Witz* und der Urtheils Kraft' (AA, 25.1:515–20); 'ad §572' (AA, 25.2:754–56); 'Von dem Vermögen unserer Seele, Vergleichen anzustellen' (AA, 25.2:959–74); 'Vom *Witz* und Urtheilskraft' (AA, 25.2:1262–72); 'Von dem *Witz* und der Urtheilskraft' (AA, 25.2:1459–62).

Vermögen zu Dichten', 'Von den eigentlichen Sinnbilder, oder Symbolis', or 'Vom unwillkührlichen Dichten'; themes which promptly frame Kant's reflection on *Witz* between the domains of understanding and imagination, and philosophy and poetry.

Kant's initial position towards the problem has as much in common, as it is unique with regard to other commentators of *Witz*. Common to all is the need to understand *Witz*'s intellectual and sensual phenomenon. Kant himself does not reject this line of investigation. But faced with the yet indefinite definition of *Witz*, that is, faced with a *Witz* that seemed to be at once reason, understanding, and imagination, and was now on the threshold between intellectuality and inventiveness, Kant, by then occupied with the emergence of his *Critiques* and hence with the need to delimit the various powers and fields of knowledge, approaches the problem somewhat differently. Namely, in view of *Witz*'s transitive stage, Kant once and for all strips *Witz* of its former intellectual robes, or of what was left of these, and replaces them with completely different, warmer ones, made of imagination and fantasy; and hence, just like Hobbes or Locke before him, and also like many of the contemporary commentators of *Witz*, Kant returns said robes, which had long been worn by *Witz*, to its rightful owner, the understanding. For Kant, very much aware of the present state in the evolution of *Witz*, is certainly one of many who acknowledge *Witz* not as a power of faint contours, but as *a faculty of the soul in its own right*, and one which had to be identified as such precisely through its dissociation from understanding and reason. But it is my view that, in so doing, Kant does not merely try to purify *Witz*, or to restore the understanding to its normal shape, nor does he wish to merely reconfigure the faculties of the spirit. Quite on the contrary, because he was aware of the potentialities, old and new, of *Witz*, Kant rather intends to unravel new powers in *Witz*, powers which initially set in opposition, but eventually set in harmony with those of the understanding, would ultimately reveal the concept's true character, thus revealing its correct meaning and field of action – and in this sublimation of *Witz*, as well as in the possibility of a union between *Witz* and the power of judgement, lies Kant's unique vision of the problem.

Hence, Kant's reflection on the topic begins with a *fundamental opposition*: the one between *Witz* and the power of judgement: 'Witz is opposed by the power of judgement' (AA, 25.1:132).

Kant's first words on the theme are in 'Anthropologie Collins', and read: 'The *Witz* is the faculty to compare, the power of judgement is the faculty to associate and separate things' (AA, 25.1:132). The reason for the opposition ensues; for, according to Kant, things are naturally, per se, not in the least similar, and if there is one thing that naturally characterizes things, it is their dissimilitude, their mutual differences. In a word, things are naturally diverse. But, Kant adds, this does not necessarily mean that there are no similitudes between things, nor that the latter cannot be discerned, or even created, and brought about either to be associated, or separated amongst themselves, by the power of judgement. Quite on the contrary, such similitudes do exist, and they can and should be perceived. Namely, it is up to the power of judgement's opposite faculty, *Witz*, to search for and gather such materials, and in face of those materials to discern and invent similitude in things<sup>53</sup> – a similitude which may be almost imperceptible to the common eye,<sup>54</sup> but which *Witz* notices and forms into images or representations which are to be ultimately accepted, or rejected, by the power of judgement. For only through this *imaginative process*, that is, through the simultaneous formation of the representation through similitude, by *Witz*, or its deformation, through dissimilitude, by the power of judgement, may the new creation be submitted to the final deliberation of the understanding (AA, 25.1:355), and incorporated, or not, in the treasury of human knowledge.

<sup>53</sup> 'The task of "Witz" [is] in inventing' (AA, 15.2:194).

<sup>54</sup> 'Ein Original *Wiz* ist der, der Aehnlichkeiten *bemerkt* die nicht jedermann in die Augen fallen' (AA 25.2:1461).

And hence, one concludes, *Witz* and the power of judgement serve as true mediators between the faculty of imagination and the understanding;<sup>55</sup> the former, however, by embodying the analogical act of imagination, the latter, as *iudicium discretivum*,<sup>56</sup> by expressing the discriminating act of the understanding: 'The faculty of the spirit to show consonance between things, is the "Witz"; the faculty to notice difference, the power of judgement (perspicacy)' (AA, 25.2:959). And: 'Yet, it is better to oppose *Witz* and the power of judgement; to invent one needs *Witz*, to handle and deal with a new-found thing one needs the power of judgement [...]. *Witz* does not judge, rather it brings about new materials which will then be judged' (AA, 25.1:341).<sup>57</sup>

From this point, in the *Lectures*, as in his *Reflections* (see AA, 15.2:191–97), Kant proceeds to etch an image of opposition between *Witz* and the power of judgement: *Witz* is active, free; it is 'positive, in order to be able to create new concepts' (AA, 25.2:1459), and therefore it has a 'positive utility, namely, to expand our cognitions' (AA, 25.2:1263); whereas the power of judgement is passive, it restricts; it is 'negative, and serves the purpose of correcting our cognitions and detaining the errors of our concepts' (AA, 25.2:1459), and therefore it has a 'negative utility' (AA, 25.2:1263). And hence, 'through *Witz* we discover the Genera, through the power of judgement the Species' (AA, 25.2:1459), in a simultaneous and ever opposing counter-balance in which each of the parties prevents the other's positive or negative perfection, and so that they end up either in folly, or in nothingness.

Furthermore, the opposition between *Witz* and the power of judgement is far from being one between merely opposing powers. It is rather one between different *natures*, to the extent that both assume in Kant organic, if not human-like features: '*Witz* sets forces in motion. The power of judgement, in turn, benumbs them and holds within limits the unbridledness of *Witz*' (AA, 25.1:135); for '*Witz* opens up a field of prospects, it pairs things, it gives an idea the force to set into motion a whole group of other ideas, and creates new ideas; the power of judgement is to prevent the irreflective excesses of *Witz*, and to bring them to order' (AA, 25.1:135). But the opposition does not cease here. *Witz*, just like a living being, 'is mutable, curious for novelties and is rendered impatient when it is detained' (AA, 25.1:345), to the point that a poet would rather hang himself than to smother *Witz* in its birth (AA, 25.1:133), whereas the power of judgement, in similar fashion, is sober, cautious, and prudent ('He who possesses the power of judgement is circumspect in judging'; AA, 25.2:1264); and therefore, the power of judgement is linear and constant, *Witz* is spontaneous and surprising, and 'lies upon an original disposition of the spirit' (AA, 25.2:1264).<sup>58</sup>

The list of examples could go on. But in light of the ones cited, it is plausible to say that *Witz* and the power of judgement are indeed two different powers of the spirit – in Kant, one could almost say two different living entities. For by stimulating the imagination, *Witz* finds the hidden similitude in the shape of a new and unheard-of inspiration (*Einfall*) – something which the power of judgement, thus forced by the understanding, attempts to refrain and annul through violence. *Witz*, which just like the imagination is ephemeral but violent, stimulating but also possibly inebriating, invents: it creates and thus generates thinking and feeling – something which the power of judgement, which is cold and rigid, tries to wane,

<sup>55</sup> "'Witz" and the power of judgement are faculties [aimed at] applying the power of imagination at the service of the understanding' (AA, 15.2:197).

<sup>56</sup> "'Witz" and the power of judgement (serve the understanding, inasmuch as the materials of the former are applied before the understanding) (iudicium discretivum, non comparativum)' (AA, 15.2:195).

<sup>57</sup> 'The "Witz" creates the matter to be thought and expands it through similitude and association. The power of judgement uses this and ascribes it unity' (AA, 15.2:191).

<sup>58</sup> "'Witz" is vivacious or subtle, power of judgement thorough or perspicacious. Novelty of the "Witz", the old or conformity to law of the power of judgement. "Witz" pleasures, power of judgement satisfies' (AA, 15.2:191).

if need be even to suppress. *Witz* opens, the power of judgement restrains; *Witz* does, the power of judgement undoes.<sup>59</sup> So much so, and so acute is the separation herein portrayed, that one might even think that upon being elevated to a power of the soul, *Witz* would fall in a situation of total reclusion in relation to the power of judgement; that, upon being elevated to an aesthetic principle, *Witz* surely acquired noble competences; but in being so elevated, *Witz* would also separate itself completely from the intellectual-rational character that was its own, and seek refuge next to imagination, thus assuming an exclusively fanciful character which forever divided it from the other powers of the spirit and further fed its alienation. In a word, it would seem that, through such a one-sided distinction between *Witz* and the power of judgement, Kant would rather aim at safeguarding the power of judgement, and thus more quickly consummate *Witz's* transition from understanding to imagination, so as to isolate *Witz* and abandon it at the hands of imagination.

Now not only is this not the case, but I intend to show that, once the problem of *Witz* is seen in its true dimension, Kant rather aims at the exact opposite of this; and so, let us ponder on Kant's opinion on the simultaneous procedures of both entities, not only with regard to their differences, as previously, but henceforth with special regard to what unites them.

### III. 2. *Witz, the Poetic Gnawing of Worms*

When we speak of *Witz* and the power of judgement, and of the faculties of imagination and understanding, we refer to the process of imagination (*Einbildung*) – or, to be more precise, to the act of summoning images either to create a singular image, worthy to be accepted (*Witz*), or one which is deemed unacceptable (power of judgement). The question is thus of a human faculty of representation which proceeds now by comparing, *Witz*, now by associating and differentiating, the power of judgement. But, let it be duly stressed: be it comparing or differentiating, the human faculty of imagination is one and the same; and also in Kant's view, though they are different, *Witz* and the power of judgement are ultimately two parts of one and the same representative faculty; and so, one of them will naturally have to commence the process, by comparing, so that the other may scrutinize and accept or refuse that comparison – but throughout this, and despite their constant dissociation, they operate as such in one and the same power: 'That representation which offers [...] the representations of the faculty of imagination to the understanding is the power of comparing. This [force] is double: 1.) the power of comparing representations is called *Witz* 2.) *the power to associate representations is called the power of judgement*' (AA, 25.2:1262). Now the question is: how to conceive of an imaginative process in which *Witz* and the power of judgement are in mutual opposition, yet also in a possible mutual concurrence?

Kant himself answers: the human imaginative process is not a process expressed 'in presence of things, which is deemed an intuition' (AA, 25.1:305); in which case the image would be useless. Nor is it a process of pure creation, a creation from nothingness, which instead would render *Witz* divine. No; the opposition between *Witz* and the power of judgement takes place through a singular and hybrid process of *reproduction* and *production* of images (*Nachbildung* and *Einbildung*). Namely, both *Witz* and the power of judgement work with 'repeated, once had' (AA, 25.1:305) intuitions, and therefore with a pictorial, as well as cognitive treasure, which ensures both of them not only an inexhaustible source of materials, but also that their action is understood by all. In other words, the generation of images, which *Witz* incarnates and in which the power of judgement must take part, must depart from a *common past*; and even though it is possible to 'imagine something even if the thing never

<sup>59</sup> 'The actions and missions of the comparative "Witz" are more play; those of the power of judgement are more task' (AA, 7:221).

appeared to us previously', *Witz*, Kant says, can only 'copy' (*copiren*), reproduce materials for new images, not purely invent them; 'for no image is totally original, only the composition occurs to one's own liking'. For this is, according to Kant, the very process of 'imagination [*Einbildung*], which is the fundament of all which is invented' (AA, 25.1:305): a process of reenacting, and re-producing old images, surely in order to create new ones, but thereby resorting to a common ground that prevents *Witz* from pure exacerbation, and the power of judgement from simply rejecting *Witz*: a common ground that in the lectures is named *memory* (*Gedächtnis*), and whose procedures also depend on comparing and dissociating.

Now, we might therefore assume that the imagination is to some extent memory – such as memory is to some extent imagination. But then again, so is the understanding; and so is reason, perhaps because no operation related to these three faculties of the spirit may operate without the aid of remembrance, just like no imaginative function may operate without it, and no cognition can stand isolated. In this interdependency, all inferior faculties of the spirit are one; but what distinguishes the real operation of these faculties, and hence ultimately that of *Witz* and the power of judgement, is not this, but the fact that there are three different kinds of memory, and therefore three kinds of (re-)imagination, one for each of the faculties.

For, according to Kant, there is a *mechanical (rational) memory*, also designated repetitive memory, upon which rests the fate of sciences and the phenomenon of erudition; but also, and especially, two further kinds of memory: a judicious memory and an ingenious memory. *The judicious, or intellectual memory*, works in the same field as the mechanical memory; only its use differs, inasmuch as it 'consists in the association of representations, through the similitude of images, through the familiarity of the representations, and through the affinity between cause and consequence' (AA, 25.2:1463). That is, just like reason has a manner of remembering, the understanding, and hence the power of judgement, have their own too, and all their work is based thereupon; for when it associates and dissociates, accepts and refuses representations, the understanding is after all remembering, that is, resorting to the truth of the treasury of knowledge – and it is this intellectual return, and the subsequent possible or impossible adaptation of the new representation to that treasure, that shall dictate the fate of the representation. And finally, the *ingenious or sensitive memory* 'consists in a certain game of "Witz"' (AA, 25.2:1463). It is this kind of memory which, by *reproductively* coupling two known representations, but by *productively* establishing an analogy between two yet unknown characteristics of the latter (imagination), presents new images to the power of judgement, after which the power of judgement shall commence the process; it therefore aims at the future, not the past. A fact from which one might conclude that, according to Kant, the three previous memories exist simultaneously, and labour as one – and this with different results to the subsequent faculties of the spirit. But whereas the two first kinds of memory always return to that common ground, *Witz*, though departing from it, describes an opposite, progressive, and creative trajectory; and though this is the reason for the opposition between *Witz* and the power of judgement, it is also the reason for their simultaneity – for their mutual competition as well as concurrence – precisely because they are one. Hence, the power of judgement and *Witz* are indeed to be seen in their opposition; but given that, in spite of their opposite directions, they are also simultaneous, there must be a point where the power of judgement and *Witz* are not just opposed, but also analogous. That is, there must be a point in which judicious and ingenious memory meet, rather than diverge.

Kant approaches this final problem in the same lecture (AA, 25.1:310–28). The problem, it seems, consists of two opposite, hardly compatible directions which compose the imaginative process of the human spirit; which, not by chance, are visible in just as many possible physical dispositions of the human brain; for it 'is certain that no characteristic capacity of

the human being is possible without physical modification in the brain';<sup>60</sup> and though it is not possible to observe this change with 'magnifying glasses', it does exist, and 'each distinct sensation demands for a special organization of the brain' (AA, 25.1:311).<sup>61</sup>

Hence, the question is: if there are as many dispositions as those created by the different memories, and the different re-dispositions of the faculties, and the different states of spirit, brought about by the latter, then how to describe the *specific disposition of the brain brought about by ingenious memory*, that is, by *Witz*, in simultaneous opposition and conjugation with intellectual memory, which has to resort to the treasure of human knowledge to ascertain the validity of *Witz*?

The answer, not coincidentally, arises in the form of a precise description of the phenomenon of *Witz*. For, although it is Kant's view that no representation ever leaves our brain,<sup>62</sup> there are certain representations which, unlike the intellectual ones, 'inasmuch as they are not used, are, so to say, buried under dust and rubble, in such a way that they are totally unrecognizable' (AA, 25.1:311). These, so to say, are out of sight, and hence seem to limit the understanding in its scope. That is, the understanding knows nothing of the latter, and by not knowing the possible connection between these and the existing representations, nor their possible utility towards forming new representations, the understanding is ever incomplete, as well as unaware of the possible benefit of such representations, even from an intellectual point of view. Hence, what is *Witz's* role in this? *Witz* – Kant answers – resorts to ingenious memory, and in doing so unearths unknown connections between representations, and thus revives such representations. And yet it does not unearth any random images, which would lead to its rejection by the understanding. Quite on the contrary, amid the momentary whirlwind of its game (*Spiel*), *Witz* creates a special disposition of the brain; it revolves the cognitive ground of the human spirit and thus once again brings about these images by enlivening not only them, but also others which are akin to them,<sup>63</sup> and were only just half-buried, turning all of the latter into rejuvenated and renovated images, and thereby ultimately favouring the understanding and causing pleasure to the spirit. For, according to Kant, the memory too can be aesthetic (AA, 25.2:1463); and if so, that is because certain images border closely in the human brain, if not in the eyes of a judicious memory, certainly in those of an ingenious, aesthetic memory, and those images only need that 'an image is enlivened, and one occurrence operates the other' (AA, 25.1:311). For, as we have seen, *Witz* is immediate, unexpected and fiery: just like the moment of poetic inspiration, it is pungent but ephemeral; and hence, once this inspirational eruption occurs, once such a 'noise' (*Lärm*; AA, 25.1:312) is brought about in the brain, all the images are set into motion. A torrent of images, the 'torrent of our representations' (AA, 25.1:312) sweeps us from our feet and takes us along with it; for 'fantasy is like a restless activity; it is a torrent of images which flows ceaselessly. These images are sometimes known to us, sometimes not; here an image enlivens the other, and that goes on and on, endlessly' (AA, 25.1:314). Until at last the understanding, which has witnessed all this from a distance, grinds this formative torrent to a halt, thus preventing it from seizing us

<sup>60</sup> The use of the word 'physical', which Kant resorts to in the *Lectures*, is not to be taken as a disruption of Kant's endeavor of founding a *pragmatic* anthropology; nor should Kant's example of Swift, which I shall expound in the next pages. Instead, it should be dissociated from the physiological sense in which, for instance, Swift, or Platner used it, and understood in the *pragmatic* sense in which Kant – not without a pinch of irony – wishes to use it here, namely, as the *natural* disposition of confining, interrelatable images in the human brain: the special disposition from whence poetry arises.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> 'Es ist wahrscheinlich, daß alle Bilder, die einmahl in unser Gehirn kommen, niemals wieder aus demselben verschwinden' (AA, 25.1:311).

<sup>63</sup> 'es muß also doch etwas im Kopfe liegen was angränzende Bilder hat' (AA, 25.1:311).

completely;<sup>64</sup> which is why, when we wish to capture *Witz*, it is all too late, for it has already crumbled through our fingers.

So, at last, we ask: once this special disposition of the brain between judicious and ingenious memory is brought about, and given that *Witz* works with progressive images, and the power of judgement with regressive ones, how should we understand the actual contact between opposite entities? For one thing is to define their field of action; but since the power of judgement works with insights (*Einsichten*), with true images in a common disposition of the brain, how will it ever let itself be swayed by such a special disposition, to the extent of accepting the inspirations of *Witz*, which present themselves in their eccentricity, if not in their apparent deceptiveness? That is, how can these two powers ever cooperate? For, quite conversely, Kant also warns against the risk of the images of *Witz* deceiving us (AA, 25.1:316), or the danger that *Witz* might be no more than 'a turmoil of representations which is very harmful to the concepts of the understanding' (AA, 25.2:1463).

Now, we have already established that the understanding is inflexible; its task is to cleanse the human spirit from captious representations, thus obeying a progress towards truth; and that would in principle rule out the images of *Witz*, for the understanding cares not for a special disposition of the brain, only for a normal one. But if there was something that we drew from section I, it is that *Witz* is not at all strange to the truth that the understanding holds as good. For *Witz* had been once, and was still then, of an intellectual nature – a fact which was not unknown to Kant. And so, *Witz* can be tasteless, even absurd; but if endowed with understanding,<sup>65</sup> if under the rules of the understanding – the same understanding it already has by nature – and not acting on its own, *Witz* is neither mere dead rationality, nor an excess of life.

Hence, in this spirit, let us take a final look at *Witz*. As we have seen, *Witz* creates a whirlwind of images; and amidst the latter, through aesthetic or ingenious remembrance, *Witz* promotes a mutual comparison not only between images which show an evident relation to each other, but also between images which show an obscure, if not seemingly absurd relation. But amid this noise (*Getön*), *Witz* elects neither the purely rational, nor the purely fanciful ones; that is, in no way does it elect images just by randomly playing 'with the external side of things' (AA, 25.1:317). Quite conversely, because up until this phase of its evolution it was still intellectual, but now more and more imagination, that is, because it was in the threshold between both faculties, *Witz* does indeed play, but, according to Kant, it does so by discerning a 'true similitude in things, but not in arbitrary signs' (AA, 25.1:318);<sup>66</sup> and so, the spectator of *Witz* is faced with inspirations or images which have something obvious (intellectual), and yet at the same time something strange (imaginative) about them: which are therefore singular and seemingly untruthful, but at the same time have some sort of connection to the aforementioned treasure of knowledge, and are therefore true. That is, *Witz* creates images which are true, and yet are not true; are real, and yet they are not; and therefore it illudes us and connects us to reality in a whole different way, through a feeling and a rationality other than feeling and rationality in general – which, to Kant, is but the result of the dynamic balance

<sup>64</sup> An important action since, according to Kant, 'wir haben so wenig Macht über unsre Imagination als über den Lauff unsers Bluts' (AA, 25.1:312).

<sup>65</sup> 'Um die allgemeinen Begriffe anwenden zu können gehört UrtheilsKraft. Man nent alle Handlungen des Witzes Spiel und das Spiel und der Witz sind fade wenn er falsche Aehnlichkeit hervorbringt [...]' (AA, 25.2:1268). 'Der Witz belebt die Gesellschaft der Mangel aber an UrtheilsKraft darin macht sie abgeschmackt. Da der Witz dann schaal ist wen er nichts von Verstand in sich enthält' (AA, 25.2:1264).

<sup>66</sup> 'Wenn man durch eine Aehnlichkeit eine Sache reproduciren will, so muß es eine wahre Aehnlichkeit in den Sachen, nicht aber in willkürlichen Zeichen seyn.'

between intellectual and imaginative forces in *Witz* (or *Witz* as part of, or as one with, the power of judgement), as reenacted in the third *Critique*.<sup>67</sup>

Now, to once and for all grasp the meaning of this illusory effect, let us see how it resounds not only in other lectures on a related theme, but more particularly in the text 'Entwurf zu einer Opponenten-Rede' (AA, 15:903–35) – under the form of the topic of *poetic illusion*.

Here, in this small set of annotations Kant etched in order to argue a dissertation, in 1777, it is his main argument that poetic illusion is to be differentiated from the mere deception of the senses, and that, unlike the latter, this kind of illusion is 'though not lucrative, at least not inglorious' (AA, 15:906). For, Kant adds, what sensorial deception does is take advantage of the spirit's natural propensity to be deceived (AA, 15:905), thereby creating fictional images, fallacies of the senses solely aimed at a physical gain, which may even please the body, but bring the spirit nothing more than 'void and deception' (AA, 15:907), and are for this reason rejected by the supreme censor of human cognitions. That is to say, sensorial deception resorts precisely to the 'external side of things' (AA, 25.1:317), and by doing so it presents the spirit either images it already knows, or, in order to appear new, falsities supported not upon true signs, but precisely upon 'arbitrary signs' (AA, 25.1:318). Whereas poetic illusion, though grounded on the latter's propensity, ascribes the image a different feature, namely, one of a playable semblance created by poets with the specific aim of enlivening or vivifying the spirit; and for that Kant says: 'There are indeed certain images of things through which the spirit plays, but by which it is not deceived' (AA, 15:906). That is, while deception 'frustrates the naive and the credulous with adornment and deception' (AA, 15:907), and its image vanishes,

<sup>67</sup> Although the scope of this article is limited to the presentation of the concept of *Witz* in Kant's *Lectures on Anthropology*, one is bound to ask: if, according to the *Lectures on Anthropology*, *Witz* and the power of judgement are in Kant's view two different powers and yet, in the greater scope of things – that is, amid the whole process of human imagination – they act as one (due to the intellectual nature of *Witz*), how is this supported by Kant's work where one such process of human imagination is best depicted, namely, the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*? That is, what is the relation, and status, of the third *Critique* regarding the *Lectures on Anthropology*, as far as the topic of *Witz* and its connection to the power of judgement is concerned? Indeed, the relation seems to be a difficult one to establish, inasmuch as Kant refers to the term *Witz* only three times in the third *Critique*, and always with regard to the power's mere originality, never in the active, preponderant attire he ascribes to it in the *Lectures on Anthropology*. However, even though the third *Critique* does not inform us on such a relation, Kant's concept of *Witz* in the *Lectures* is so abundantly dealt with that it succeeds in, although tacitly, informing us on the possible role of *Witz* within the *Critique*, and indeed it prepares the concept for its critical usage. For in the *Lectures*, *Witz*, as we have seen, is presented in its multilateral, heterogeneous relation to other imaginative powers of the mind (among which are not only memory, genius or fantasy, but also the power of judgement), in what constitutes a multi-layered chain which shall result in all these powers' due application in poetry, or the faculty of presentation of aesthetic ideas, herein presented as the natural apex and outset of human imagination. In a word, then, in the *Lectures* – which is in the previous sense a propaedeutic version of, and in many senses foreshadows the problems of the third *Critique* – *Witz* and the power of judgement are presented as pre-conditions of aesthetic judgements, and hence in their necessary primary division and yet ulterior intertwinement. They, as well as all the remaining imaginative powers, are seen in their propaedeutic, so to say, pre-aesthetic, pragmatic dimension, a dimension which, though autonomous, requires and only comes to application in a critical one. Now, such a field of application – such a complementary dimension – is precisely that of the aesthetic, in the third *Critique*. And here, since the task is no longer to approach the detailed pre-formation of aesthetic ideas, but to delimit their proper field of action and to consider their applicability in the world, *Witz* is already tacitly assumed not in its essential difference, but in its intimate connection with – if not inoculation in – the reflecting power of judgement, as a mere but real pre-function of aesthetic ideas. In a word, then, in the third *Critique* *Witz* comes to fulfil its double destination: on the one hand, it fulfils its destination, namely, to be different from the determining power of judgement, as stated in the *Lectures* (in its general actions), but to be one with the reflecting power of judgement, as suggested in the *Lectures* (in their ulterior creative, formative design); on the other hand, even though Kant omits it under the creative process of genius (due to the almost common origin of *Witz* and genius) and as a silent po(i)etic power, the third *Critique* succeeds in definitively bringing to light the true potentialities, both imaginative and rationalizing, of *Witz*: those which provide the spirit with new representations and culminate in the creation of aesthetic ideas.

thus causing displeasure, the one of poetic illusion, inasmuch as it is a game, and inasmuch as this game is played through the unexpected relation between objects brought by such representations, causes pleasure, and the image lingers (see AA, 25.2:745). And though at first it may strike us as odd, or as a confusing noise, it suddenly acquires a new life and meaning: the one of presenting the understanding images under 'the colours of the senses' (AA, 15:907), or rather truth in an attire different from the one to which the understanding is accustomed.

Now such attributes of poetic illusion – its character of *untruthful truth*, its singularity, its late yet certain pleasure – are, in fact, the very same that Kant described as the most evident properties of *Witz*: its simultaneous reality and unreality, its different way of presenting the truth, its sudden and violent nature; which, in turn, shows that between *Witz* and poetic illusion, or poetry, there is more than just a happy coincidence, more than just an affinity, rather a common purpose, a mutual destination. For, so Kant, Swift's definition of poetry is that 'the brain of poets [is] filled with worms [...], which bring about, through the different gnawing of such nerves, different ideas' (AA, 25.1:311): the same sudden, innovative inspirations of *Witz*, which are, after all, inherent to a special disposition in the poet's brain. But not just this; for even the 'requisita' for being a poet are the same as for *Witz*: 'I.) He must be new in the images that he makes [...]; II) In his writings the poet must always observe an *analogon* of truth [...]. The poet must invent, and he must know how to set his invention in an intuitive clarity' (AA, 25.1:323). Hence, what to conclude from such obvious similarities? Surely, that *Witz* is in itself a manifestation of poetic illusion, for just like the latter, the first one invents and is new in its images. But in having to be illusory, and therefore to create an 'analogon of truth' which shall be presented 'in an intuitive clarity' to the power of judgement, *Witz* forges with the power of judgement a link of a different nature. For *Witz*, just as poetry, is true and yet is not so; and because *Witz* and poetry are based upon similitudes, but not similitudes given by 'arbitrary signs' (AA, 25.1:318), they do not deceive, rather create illusion, and illusion is for Kant the assumption of a connection to knowledge – the 'analogon of truth'.<sup>68</sup> That is to say, amid the act of poetic illusion, there takes place an *analogization of truth*, but not an obvious, rational, or an absurd, fanciful one; rather a new and moderate relation between understanding and imagination through which we are given a new, more sensible and true image of the object, created from non-arbitrary signs and brought about by the exact gnawing of the worms of *Witz*.<sup>69</sup> And so, in face of a *Witz* which does indeed have a connection to truth, which is simultaneously imagination and understanding; in a word, in face of the singular hybridity of *Witz*, the power of judgement, though opposed to it, not only cannot, but must not deny such images. Then – and only then – does the awaited moment take place when the understanding lowers its guard and accepts the representations of *Witz*; for although these images have something apparently illusory, they are also the truth, and not just truth, but a truth that by appearing in richer, more exotic robes than expected, is so special that the power of judgement cannot deny it. That is, if pure, if truly *po(i)etical* and therefore new, yet anchored in an intellectual 'soundness of mind',<sup>70</sup> *the image of Witz is, so to say, truer than the rational truth of things*; in such a way that *Witz*, as well as poetry, do

<sup>68</sup> Kant forges here a clear conceptual bridge between his initial expositions of the topic *Witz*, as portrayed in several of the above mentioned works, and his later expositions of the latter. Namely, this concluding vision on the topic, and the rationalizing potentialities of *Witz*, as they may be drawn from the *Lectures on Anthropology* and the 'Entwurf zu einer Opponenten-Rede' are to be read in light of the purposiveness which Kant ascribes *Witz*, the creations of genius, aesthetic ideas in general, in the third *Critique*.

<sup>69</sup> 'Profoundness is not a thing of "Witz"; but so long as "Witz", through the imaged with which it endows thoughts, can be a vehicle or a shroud for reason and its handling of moral-practical ideas, it is possible to think a profound (as opposed to the superficial) "Witz" (AA, 7:222).

<sup>70</sup> Johnson and Walker, *Dictionary*, s. v. 'wit', n. p.

not just produce inventiveness or illusion, but also new cognitions for the human spirit, and along with them an unexpected gain in rationality.<sup>71</sup> And that is why, when confronted with illusion, but also with this truest of truths, the power of judgement has nothing to oppose and not only grants them access to the human spirit, but has to recognize in this its own advantage, the balm and pleasure of new cognitions.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> "'Witz" conveys prospects for rules' (AA, 15.2:196); or: 'Es gehört also zur Philosophie viel Witz. Der Witz dient dem Verstande zur Erfindung' (AA, 25.1:518); 'Zu Erfindung und zu Wissenschaften gehört Witz, aber es muss noch Wahrheit dazu kommen' (AA, 25.2:1266).

<sup>72</sup> For, according to Kant, this is at once the ultimate end, as well as the ultimate benefit of *Witz*: namely, the connection between imagination and understanding ('Witz und Urteilskraft dienen zur Verbindung der Einbildungskraft mit dem Verstand. Der Witz bringt die Einbildungskraft dem Verstand nahe'; AA, 25:1267–68), and a subsequent more ample connection between poetry and philosophy, which must always be 'a Philosopho [meriti summi] laudibus extollenda' (AA, 15:909).

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