Kant And The Meaning Of The Anschauung

The most difficult word for me (and for many non-Germans, I think) in all of Kant is the *Anschauung*, the "at-look" or "on-look." When you tell a a German that you see a face in the cloud, and she cannot, she might easily say, "Das ist *Deine* Anschauung," i.e., "that's the way *you're* looking at the cloud," or: "that's *your* take on the cloud."

I have tended to translate this with "envisagement," for I like the idea of "envisage."* What shall we say to translate the German? "that's the way you are looking at the cloud", "that's your envisagement, your take, your observation, your sighting, your perspective," "that face is in your *looking* at the cloud and not in the cloud. itself" Or "that's *your* view of the cloud."**

* I like the suggestion of "envisagement" (though not the formal definition) of putting a face on something, i.e., an activity of the onlooker. Merriam-Webster has this to say "To *envisage* something is to picture it in your mind, or to view or regard something in a particular way."

** The material of the face is the cloud, but the face depends on the way I am looking at that material, my envisagement or my perspective. Generally then the object of any looking or viewing is what that viewing represents to the onlooker.

It is certainly true that the face is not in the cloud, but entirely in the looking/viewing. The face in the cloud is what Kant calls an *Erscheinung*, a shinning forth, an appearance, hallucination, mirage.* Earlier I used "specter" for that, but more recently I am using the more generally accepted translation of "appearance," the "looks of something." The cloud has the look of a face, at least as I view it, as I look at it and as I see it.

* The "water" on a highway ahead of you on a hot day and which vanishes when you reach it is a mirage The Germans call this mirage or appearance an *Erscheinung*, a "shining forth", the appearance of water, i.e., it *looks like* water.

In English-speaking Kantdom, *Anschauung* is usually translated as "intuition," but I haven't liked that because it seems too vague for me. By intuition we usually mean a recognition which is direct and without need for any reasoning. And this is true for the anschauung,* for the face in the cloud is seen immediately, and even though we know it is the play of our imagination, nevertheless it is no play or make-believe that we see a face--we do in fact see (the appearance of) a face in the cloud. But again I like more the idea of envisaging or looking-at or viewing, seeing something via or in the looking, and with the suggestion that it is something that is being accomplished or formed within me and by me (even if unconsciously so).**

* I'm playing with the idea of using "anschauung" as a word in English and without the capital A that is proper in German.

** I think that "intuition" could be well utilized for Kant studies in English for "Anschauung" *if* it is understood in the sense of "my take" on the object or "my view" of the object. "My intuition of a certain cloud could be the profile of an infant" and that

works when taken in the sense of: "my take on, or view of, the cloud is the profile of an infant."

I want to give one of Kant's examples of the anschauung in his reasoning about the source of certitude in mathematics which has to do with the anschauung. We can imagine and picture a triangle in our brains, and we can then also do something rather special: we can project that imagined triangle out into the space before our eyes and actually "see" it there. That is what Kant calls a "reine Anschauung," a *pure* envisagement or a pure viewing (and here is where I think "intuition" is less satisfying). We picture the triangle out in space (or just picture it per our external imagination) and see it there and can point it out and point to the sides and the end points. We see the triangle as well as we can see the face in the cloud, i.e., we can actually trace it out and point it out to others to also see. But unlike the face in the cloud, this sighting is certain and objective (for all can "see" it). And all it is our imagination thrusting an imaginary something into the space before our eyes. But also where we then see it shimmering, as it were.*

* Something similar takes place when we look at an open door frame before us. By focusing just right we are able to "see" the plane that the frame delineates. It has to do with being able to focus on the space (which is nothing, of course) in what feels like a slightly cross-eyed fashion.

And so to say that some sighting is a product of our own envisagement or anschauung means that it is something personal and immediate and direct and which we ourselves project and what we actually in fact see as some object. The fact that some anschauungs are objective, despite being subjectively seated, refers to those situations (like the triangle in mid air per above) where we ourselves have provided an object (which is true with all envisagements/viewings in a more general sense) and which is in this objective case "truly there" and all can see it (unless you are a very young child who thinks a pantomimic tracing of a triangle in mid air is merely a trick that an adult is playing on her, and where she sees nothing there but empty space*).

* I once traced out a circle in the air to a 4 or 5 year old boy and asked him what he saw, and he said "nothing." Maybe he was thinking that the circle was a zero and which would then indeed represent nothing. But more likely he thought I was trying to tease him. This is not unlike the game of Charades.

This also is certainly a matter of what we commonly call the perspective. To utilize the terms "here" and "there" is a matter of one's perspective or viewing or envisagement, i.e., how we are situated in the world and how we are looking and even our background and exposure. Kant points out that "here" and "there" are obviously not in the appearances,* but solely and entirely in the envisagement or perspective of the appearances. "Here" is (i.e., I represent or see as) very close to me, while "there" will be further away. So obviously it is not in the appearance, but only in the anschauung, the "take" on the appearances, or how we look at and see the appearances and how they look *to us.*** Time is also a way of looking at or considering things. It is one thing to see a tree and another thing to see the tree *now* (as opposed to *earlier*). And all of our memories, as active (conscious) recalls, are always *now* (when we are conscious of them in recall), and so it is a way of looking at them to classify the "now" of the images (of some memory presently in mind) as "before." Kant notes that it is impossible for anyone to be given any "before" in all the possible appearances (for they are always "now" when being considered); this is simply our take

on or our view *of* the appearances, and how we look at them, and thus how we see them. And if it were not, we would never make the least sense of the term.

* This is a bit odd, when you think about it. I see the car to the left of the house, for example. And it is so vivid, this relationship, that one is tempted to say that it is contained in the objects (car and house). But of course it is not in those objects nor is it in the relationship of those objects, but totally in the way that I look at the two objects, i.e., my perspective or anschauung. Perhaps I never notice that the car is to the right of some bush, or underneath the branches of a tree, or three feet to the east of a front porch, although another person might notice that.

** A young Japanese monk approaches a river and sees no way over to the other side, but then spies a Zen master on the other side and calls out to him, "Sir, how do I get to the other side." The Zen master shouts back, "You are already on the other side."*** [I don't remember the source of this story.]

***Another cute play might pit two people against each other and who are arguing about who is here and who is there, with each shouting "I am here and you are over there." Or, let someone stand before you and trace out a circle in the air. However that someone draws the circle, and let it be clockwise for this example, you will see the opposite, i.e., counter-clockwise. So what is it: clockwise or counter-clockwise? It is both, and yet they are opposites. It depends on how one looks at it, it depends upon the anschauung or perspective. And it is only because we know that this conflict is a matter of how we look at and view things that we can make sense of this "contradiction" and also make space and time objective, even though subjectively seated within us and the forms of our looking or viewing.

Since we cannot recognize anything without seeing it, and we cannot see anything except when we are looking at it, it follows that the *form* of our looking (space and time) will qualify and affect everything that we can ever see or sense or recognize as an object. This is Kant's justification of the application of the concepts of space and time to the appearances: we cannot see in space and time unless we are looking in terms of space and time; and space and time are the *forms* of all our looking; they are the forms of our anschauung; they are our way of looking at and viewing the world.

All that we can ever see exists, strictly speaking, within the "brainarium" (the visible and sensitive projection within the brain at the far end of the optic and other nerves) and vanishes (briefly) with every blink of the eyes.* And no matter what we see when we look, we can know that it is a function of our own looking, at least with respect to the forms of space and time.

* Lightwaves strike the eye, pass (inverted) through the lens to the retina, are changed into electrical impulses which the optic nerves deliver mainly to the opposite sides of the brain and there in the brain a correction and synchronization takes place and a panorama unfolds which we call the universe, ranging from the Milky Way to the <u>split finger</u>, i.e., letting an extended finger approach one's nose while looking beyond or "through" the finger, resulting in two "ghost" fingers (assuming two functioning eyes).

Later, in his Transcendental Analytic,* Kant will undertake to explain how it is that we are able to distinguish the face in the cloud from the face on the front of a person's head,** and to recognize that one is a product of our looking while the other is objectively in space whether we are looking or not. The face in the cloud (as well as any rainbow) we come to realize and say, goes out of existence when we blink our eyes, but the face on the head remains whether we are looking or not,*** speaking in terms of common and scientific talk.

* From his *Critique of Pure Reason*.

** Kant never uses this particular example, but does supply the procedure.

*** The solution goes sort of like this with regard to the face on the front of the head. We have a connective mental device called understanding which works in terms of such concepts as cause and effect and where necessity is the byword. We conceive of an object which would have to appear as does the face on the head (and we really should be speaking of just the head, since the face itself is only an appearance, a product of our envisagement/anschauung, albeit objective, i.e., can be specified and pointed out). And such an object would be the face as the part of a head which is on the front (the "front" also being a viewing or way of looking at the head) and consists of a chin, mouth, etc. So as we ourselves provided an object in space to represent the triangle, here we provide a head in thought and concept, but then which we can see in space in the appearance of a person and which is abiding.**** For more on this see <u>Circles in the Air</u> or Appendix II.2 to the <u>Critique of Pure Reason</u>.

**** According to Schopenhauer the very first object of experience is the recognition of the eye, i.e., the realization that all that we spy about us exists in the brainarium, e.g., the finger that splits as it approaches the nose is, as such, i.e., as an appearance, within the brainarium, while the real finger never splits and exists apart from the brainarium.

In general then all of our knowledge that arises by virtue of the senses in the brainarium is a function of the senses (the material) and of the envisagement/looking (the form) whereby appearances are sighted, e.g., a face somewhere. The envisagement/perspective/anschauung is the way we look at or view the appearances. All appearances for humans are forever bound in terms of space and time, and space and time are nothing other than the form of our looking and have their existence only in our looking.* They are not independent things which exist apart from our looking within a brainarium. If it were possible to know things independently of our looking, then that would be what Kant calls an "intelligible looking" (perhaps intuition?) and that is entirely beyond our human capacity.

* I like the analogy of the light in the refrigerator. Every time we open the door of the refrigerator a light is on. You could easily think that the light were on all the time. So it is with space and time; they seem always to be omnipresent, but that's because every time we look at something space and time are present, but that's because, like the light in the refrigerator, space and time "come on" every time we look at anything, for they are the *forms* of our looking in general. So we get confused and even begin to think that time and space are something existing on their own and are independent of our looking--but that's

impossible, since they are nothing more than the form of our looking. Remove our looking and you remove space and time.**

** And accordingly then time and space exist only within the brainarium (the field of all looking and viewing) although we imagine it as existing in a world independent of the brainarium such that what appears in the brainarium can be counted as an appearance and not as a real thing. If we considered appearances to be real things on their own, then faces would be real things which would come and go as they might, be that in clouds or on the front of people's heads or in the foliage or anywhere and "anywhen." And the tree before you which gets larger as you approach it, would get physically larger on its own, and not simply seem to.***

*** Here we see the difference between what I call the animal anschauung and the human anschauung. The animal, I submit, takes appearances to be real things on their own and independent of the looking and getting physically smaller at a distance. The human takes appearances to be just that, the way real things look to us, but not the way these things exist on their own independently of human looking.

Thus all our knowledge is limited to experience (and to pure viewings or anschauungs in mathematics) and we have nothing to say about things on their own independently of our looking. If we had the capacity to know things on their own and not just appearances, then we would assert that if two spherical and scalene triangles were identical in every respect, i.e., if each side were matched in the two triangles, then the two triangles would be indistinguishable and substitutable. But this is not true if they share a common base and thus are in opposite hemispheres.* There is a difference which can only be grasped in an external looking, comparing the two triangles in space together. Likewise the two hands can be identical in every respect and still cannot wear the same glove. Conceptually they are identical and yet there is a difference which is only discernible via a sighting in space.

* To make this more precise, let two spherical scalene triangles be ABC and AB'C and let AB = AB' and BC = B'C. Now each of the sides of the one can be substituted for its counterpart in the other, but still the triangles cannot be substituted for each other. Piece by piece each can take the place of the other, but not as whole triangles.

As a further note we need to realize that the object of an anschauung is taken and seen as a singularity, e.g., we see the 7 stars making up a dipper* in the sky as a single thing (with a manifold) just as we see the face as a single thing (with a manifold of lips, nose, eyes, etc.).**

* These stars (making up the Big Dipper) are seen as parts of a Bear in France and as a Wagon in Germany, which ties in with the anschauung/perspective being a subjective take on the appearances, i.e., different people can see different things, and where it all depends on how you look at things and how you view them.

** The Big Dipper suggests the envisagement or visualization because the 7 stars are disparate and yet we are able, when we look "just right," to see them as elements of a singularity.

One definition of envisagement from the Webster's New International Dictionary renders: "the act or an instance of viewing or regarding in a particular way." And for perspective we can understand: "a particular attitude toward or way of regarding something; a point of view." And "take" can be understood as: "a particular version of or approach to something" or "a distinct or personal point of view, outlook, or assessment." Viewing can be understood as: "a particular way of considering or regarding something." And "worldview" is English for "Weltanschauung."

In general anschauung is a very subjective sort of thing, a way of looking at something, but then also has an objective element in that time and space are forms of that looking, and our individual looking via time and space can be related to the looking of others, e.g., when two people face each other, to the left of each will be to the right of the other and they grasp this.

As a good example, consider this situation: I am sitting on the porch with Dan and GF and while Y is in the house. I ask Dan to please go and call Y to come out. When Dan returns I noted that there might be several ways of looking at or viewing Dan in this situation, e.g., as the only black guy in the group, or as the youngest guy in the group, or as the person closest to the door, or as the thinnest, or as the tallest, and so on. GF said that he saw Dan as the youngest guy, i.e., that I called on Dan because he was the youngest, while Dan indicated that he looked at the situation so that he was viewed as closest to the door. GF (the only German in the group) agreed that this was a case of the Anschauung, i.e., what you see is at least partially a function of how you are looking and viewing.*

* In Michael Guillen's *Amazing Truths*, Chapter 3, Niels Bohr is quoted saying "A complete elucidation of one and the same object may require diverse points of view which defy a unique description."

Here is another example: When I look at an outstretched index finger, I can see any number of things: a finger, a scratch, a color, a finger nail, an index finger, a representation of the number one (or perhaps the number 11 when counting from 7 on my fingers), a pointing finger (where the finger serves as the first of two segments of a straight line, i.e., a ray, the second of which is not only entirely imaginary, but the far end point of which "touches" some distant object), and so on ad infinitum.

As a final and fun example, consider this riddle:

"I am the beginning of everything, and the end of everywhere; "I am the beginning of eternity, and the end of time and space "What am I?"

The common answers (from a 1st grade class) are "death" and "God". (Taken from the *Washington Post* article by Valerie Strauss.)

The correct answer is: I am the letter "e." And so, when considering "everything" in the riddle to represent the entire universe, I see the "I" (of the: "What am I?") differently than when I consider "everything" to represent the word itself. Thus in this case we have two anschauungs for (or takes on) the word "everything," namely: "I am the beginning of everything (in the universe)" versus "I am the beginning of (the word) everything." In the first case the universe is the object,

and in the second the word "everything" is itself the object. And so on with the other elements of the riddle.

Essentially then: when someone looks at any object, the Anschauung is what the object represents to that someone, to that onlooker. For example: a particular chair may represent a chair, or a color, or a shape, or a piece of furniture, or a possession, etc., etc. And a certain situation or history (as the object) can easily represent something different to different people.

I have decided (for now) to utilize "perspective" in my translation of the <u>Critique of Pure</u> <u>Reason</u>. I like the suggestion of the word meaning "a particular attitude toward or way of regarding something," e.g., following the mime's tracing out of a circle in midair; or the face you see in the cloud is not in the cloud, but in your perspective of, or take on, the cloud.*

* I am appreciative of my brother-in-law, David Alston, a teacher of German, for his help in deciding on "perspective" for the German "Anschauung."

And also for the earliest full presentation of "Anschauung" in the *Critique* see the <u>Aesthetic</u> (beginning on or around page 45).

P.S. My Japanese wife thinks that "mikata" would be a good Japanese translation of Kant's "Anschauung." It's the Japanese word for "perspective" or so she tells me. But here she warns me that there are two different characters that are both pronounced "Mikata," one meaning "perspective" and the other meaning an "ally."

Additional essays of possible interest to students and scholars of Kant:

<u>Circles In The Air</u> Expanded version of essay originally published in *Kant-Studien*, the 2nd Issue of 1996, treating the first (A) version of the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories. A more concise and accessible treatment of this subject can be found in Appendix II.3 of <u>The</u> <u>Critique Of Pure Reason</u>, beginning on or near page 774.

Kant On The Recognition Of Dreams An exposition of Kant's subjective and objective deductions of the categories with regard to the determination of how dreams are discerned as different from perceptions of our waking hours.

Kantland. Quick introduction to some Kantian thinking.

See a French movie <u>composite</u> of many of the personal events in the later life of Immanuel Kant and emphasizing some of his eccentricities. Subtitles are available for English captions.

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