

What's the Point of Seeing Aspects?

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The game, one would like to say, has not only rules but also a *point*.
(Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 564)¹

Introduction

Recent years have seen several commentaries on Wittgenstein's remarks on 'seeing aspects', and there is a growing sense that these remarks have a significance that goes beyond the curiosities of an esoteric phenomenon. I believe, however, that something important about the seeing of aspects, as Wittgenstein saw it and in so far as it isn't simply an isolated experience or mental state, but one embedded in a language-game,² has so far been missed. It has to do with the role

1. Abbreviations for works of Wittgenstein cited:

PI *Philosophical Investigations*, G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees (eds.), tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963).

RPP I *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. I, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds.), tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).

RPP II *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. II, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds.), tr. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).

LWI *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. I, G. H. von Wright and H. Nyman (eds.), tr. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

LWII *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. II, G. H. von Wright and H. Nyman (eds.), tr. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

2. Much has been written about the notion of 'language-game' in Wittgenstein. But for the purposes of this paper, and since I will occasionally be talking about 'the language-game of aspects', and contrast it with what I will call, after Wittgenstein, 'the language-game of information (or reporting)', let me briefly say what I take 'language-game' to mean. I am using the term in the same way that Wittgenstein uses it when he talks about 'the language-game of "lying"' (*PI*, 249), or 'the language-game of "making a prediction from the expression of a decision"' (*PI*, 632), or 'the language-game of "reporting"' (*PI*, 190i). These 'language-games' are not well-circumscribed activities of the kind we often associate with the notion of 'games'. In this respect they are also different from the imaginary language-games that appear earlier in the *Investigations*. Rather they are patterns, strands, moments that go into the making up of our conversations or even into the making up of a single utterance. Very rarely do

that the seeing of aspects plays in the human form of life. I also believe that until we recognize this role and appreciate its significance, the true nature of the aspect, as a particular 'object of sight' (*PI*, p. 193a), is not going to come to light.

It is common among commentators on Wittgenstein to proceed from the assumption that his remarks all work themselves out against one metaphysical confusion or another. No doubt, this reading of Wittgenstein is encouraged by much that he says about what philosophy should aim at. However, I believe that more can be gained from a faithful description of the grammar of our language than just the easing of philosophical headaches. So instead of reading the remarks on aspects as all meant to provide an answer to a metaphysical confusion, I will try to show how the seeing of aspects, as Wittgenstein presents it, answers in a particular way to what may be described as a fundamental aspect of the human condition – the one, namely, of having to *articulate* our experience of the world, if that experience, and hence the world, is to become ours.

That we have to articulate our experience for it to become ours (true *for* us, and not just true *of* us) is a way of putting one of the main teachings of Kant's first *Critique*. It is also part of this teaching that the articulation is going to be done by means of used and shared materials. What Kant's teaching does not take into account is our being, at the same time, always susceptible to the question of value, which means that we have to find something about that experience that makes it *worth articulating*. Our making sense, to ourselves and to others, depends on that.

For the most part, our choices of what to articulate and how would be guided by pragmatic considerations. But in so far as pragmatic considerations are concerned, we can afford to leave most of what we go through unnoted and unarticulated. Also, what we hold to only because it serves us, stays with us, so long as it does, only under the terms in which it serves us. And then there may be, occasionally, something that we find worth noting simply because we have not known it before; and there are people who seem to constantly look for new experiences: they change jobs or partners, they try new foods and travel to strange places. However, it is still the inescapable fact that

we play just one or the other. But we can still recognize these elements within human communication, and understand the distinct significance of each. This is how I will be using the term 'language-game'.

most of human experience is of what tends to present itself as ordinary and familiar, and so as unremarkable. What we need, then, if this experience is not to be lost on us, not to pass us like nothing, and if we are not to be bored, is the ability to find something about the ordinary and the familiar that makes it worth noting and articulating – we need to be able to find it *new*. It is here, I wish to propose, that the significance of the seeing of aspects lies.

The point of seeing aspects, as I will present it, lies in its being the place where we expand our experience of the ordinary and the familiar without, as it were, turning our backs on it; the place where we strengthen our bonds with the world by renewing them; and the place where we go beyond habitual ways and established routes without giving up on intelligibility. Hence, the seeing of aspects, or rather its expression, puts our attunement with other people to the test, which means that it can also provide the occasion for certain moments of intimacy, depending on how far that attunement is found to reach.

One is not likely to take *this* as the point of seeing aspects if one takes the ambiguous figures to be one's paradigmatic examples. But then, if one takes the duck-rabbit as one's paradigmatic example, one is not likely to think that the seeing of aspects needs to have any point at all – either you can see this or that aspect, or you can't. As an isolated mental experience, or state (with its outward criteria, no doubt), arrived at in the course of a philosophical or psychological investigation and in the confinements of a study or a classroom, seeing the duck, or the rabbit, needs to have no point. And as for giving *expression* to what you see, well, the point of doing *that* is provided by the context of the investigation.

As long as the seeing of aspects is approached from the direction of the ambiguous figures, one is likely to miss two very basic and important facts. The first is that in the course of daily living we come across numerous things that *could* be seen as this or that – say, triangles that could be seen as lying on their side or as pointing to the right, or M's that could be seen as upside down W's and vice versa – but we don't take *that* as a good enough reason for so seeing them. Another thing that is likely to be missed is that very rarely is the mere having of an experience, or merely being in a certain mental state, a good enough reason for giving it expression. Being in deep pain is in general a good enough reason for groaning (if asking for a reason makes any sense in this case); but that you, say, believe something, or

see something, is *not* going to automatically give sense to your expressing it. For think what it would be like if we constantly gave expression to anything and everything we believed, or saw.

Does it matter for our understanding of aspects that it doesn't make sense to see them anywhere and anytime you can, and that giving expression to what you see cannot derive its sense just from the fact that you see it? I think it does. It matters for our understanding of aspects that human beings are endlessly required to make sense, not only in what they say, but also in what they pay attention to. We can ignore or deny this requirement, but we cannot erase it. And it matters for our understanding of aspects that we will recognize the particular way in which the seeing of aspects answers to this requirement in ordinary contexts.

For these reasons the ambiguous figures and schematic drawings, which are pivotal to most accounts of seeing aspects, will not be given centre stage in my discussion. Looking for the point of a language game is asking how it meshes with our life. I take the ambiguous figures and schematic drawings as pointing us – by providing a most striking and clear case of the seeming paradox expressed by 'Everything has changed and yet nothing has changed' – in the direction of an interesting and important distinction within our language. I don't, however, take them as typical or central instances of that distinction. It is a psychological phenomenon that we can see certain drawings this way or that. The *explanation* of this phenomenon is a matter for science (*PI*, p. 193d). Philosophically, what's important is that *grammar has room* for that phenomenon. But that room, I should like to say, wasn't prepared quite for the ambiguous figures and schematic drawings. It is *not* typical of the language-game of seeing aspects that those aspects will come in pairs, and that most people will be able to see the two, and to flip back and forth between them at will. It is also not typical of aspects that they will be elicited from us as part of a psychological experiment or a philosophical illustration. For one thing, as I just indicated, those artificial contexts provide us with the *point* to the expression of the aspects. To think that it is irrelevant to the nature (essence) of 'aspects' that their expression does *not* ordinarily take place in the lab or classroom, and so necessarily has a different point, is, I think, to only come half way with our words on the road back from the metaphysical to the everyday use (*PI*, 116). We have to remind ourselves of the actual contexts of the seeing of aspects. We have to

ask ourselves what exactly happens, happens *to us* and happens *between us*, when aspects are seen and expressed.

I will be developing my understanding of Wittgenstein's remarks by contrasting it with other commentaries, for the most part the ones offered by Stephen Mulhall³ and Paul Johnston.⁴ I will start, in section one, with the distinction between 'seeing' and 'knowing', which forms the heart of Mulhall's interpretation. I will try to show that the distinction Wittgenstein is talking about in connection with the seeing of aspects is actually the one between '*seeing*' and 'knowing' (or, often, 'merely knowing'), where the former would typically be italicized by Wittgenstein in order to indicate that it refers to a particular state of involvement with the object – one in which the object is, as it were, alive for you. This will prepare the ground for the fuller account of seeing aspects that I will offer in section two, one that will show, among other things, why the seeing of an aspect is a case of *seeing*.

In the second part of the paper I will try to sharpen some of the main points on which my understanding of Wittgenstein's remarks differs from the ones offered by Mulhall and Johnston. In section three I will argue against the idea that 'aspect seeing' marks for Wittgenstein a *typical* relation that we have to things in the world (*some* things, according to Johnston) and that his true interest therefore lies in the notion of '*continuous* aspect seeing'. I will argue that this idea is rooted in a failure to see that there are two senses of 'seeing an aspect' at play in Wittgenstein's remarks, and that it goes against much that Wittgenstein says about aspects. In section four I will argue that the relation of representation is not essential to the seeing of aspects, not even when it comes to pictures. In section five I will consider Mulhall's and Johnston's suggestion that our psychological concepts are 'aspect concepts'. I will argue that, like most concepts, they may or may not be, depending on how they are used and in what context.

I

Let me start with Mulhall's understanding of the distinction between 'seeing' and knowing'. Mulhall, the first commentator to offer a

3. Stephen Mulhall, *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects* (hereafter known as *OB*), (London: Routledge, 1990).

4. Paul Johnston, *Wittgenstein: Rethinking the Inner* (hereafter known as *RI*), (London: Routledge, 1993).

comprehensive account of Wittgenstein's remarks on aspects, builds his interpretation around that distinction, as he sees it. I think Mulhall is right to suggest that *something like* that distinction is central to the remarks on aspects, but I also think that the distinction Wittgenstein is trying to make is not the one Mulhall ascribes to him. To have realized this would prepare the ground for the more systematic understanding of seeing aspects that I will be developing in the next section.

Mulhall's idea is that Wittgenstein's remarks play themselves against a metaphysical model of perception, 'summed up under the label of "knowing"' (*OB*, p. 19). The metaphysical model, according to Mulhall, makes our relation to the world a process of attaching meaning and significance to 'dead' sense data by means of interpretation and inference. Supposedly, Wittgenstein's remarks aim at showing that 'seeing' – which for Mulhall comes to be equated with the 'seeing of aspects' and basically to mean a direct and immediate grasp of the meaning of things – and not 'knowing', is the correct way to describe the human relation to the world. The idea is to undermine a metaphysical view by 'reminding ourselves of an aspect of the grammar of the concepts with which we describe human life' (*OB*, p. 150).

According to Mulhall, the basic criteria that distinguish 'seeing (aspects)' from 'knowing' are the immediacy, the spontaneity, the taking for granted, and, anticipating the analogy with Heidegger that he tries to draw, the 'readiness-to-hand' of the expression of what we see.⁵ 'Knowing', by contrast, is taken to be marked by hesitancy and doubt (see, for example, *OB*, pp. 18, 23–4 and 139–40). As an account of the grammar of our language, however, this cannot be correct. If anyone asks me (perhaps over the phone) where I am, and I say that I am sitting in front of my computer, and I say it straight away, with

5. This is not the place to discuss Mulhall's reading of Heidegger in connection with the 'seeing of aspects', and with the distinction between 'knowing' and 'seeing'. But if my reading of Wittgenstein is correct, then the connection with Heidegger would have to be sought not in the latter's distinction between 'presence-at-hand' and 'readiness-to-hand', as Mulhall has it, but rather in the one between authenticity and inauthenticity, and more specifically in Heidegger's discussion of the 'they' (*Das Man*) as a point of view, an attitude, that 'disburdens' Dasein from its responsibility to its being, *its* way of seeing things, by making it turn everything it encounters into 'something that has long been known'. Heidegger calls this adoption of the point of view of '*Das Man*' (the point of view of 'any one'), 'publicness' [*die Öffentlichkeit*], and says that by it 'everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets

no hesitation, does this *mean* that I am *seeing* my computer, and don't merely know it is here in front of me? And, on the other hand, can't I be struck by something about someone's face, and only after some time realize that she reminds me of someone else, and perhaps only after some more time come to be able to put what they share in words?

Not once in his later writings does Wittgenstein say that the difference between 'seeing' and 'knowing' is the difference between immediacy, on the one hand, and hesitancy and doubt on the other.⁶ He actually says explicitly that this is *not* where the difference lies:

What does it mean to say that I '*see the sphere floating in the air*' in a picture?

Is it enough that this description is the first to hand, is the matter of course one? No, for it might be so for various reasons. This might, for instance, simply be the conventional description.

What is the expression of my not merely understanding the picture in this way, for instance, (knowing what it is supposed to be), but *seeing* it in this way? – It is expressed by: 'The sphere seems to float', 'You see it floating', or again, in a special tone of voice, 'It floats!'. (*PI*, p. 201e)

Another criterion Mulhall offers for distinguishing between 'seeing' and 'knowing' is that in the case of the latter you take your description of what you see to be one possibility among several, whereas in 'seeing', other descriptions, as it were, are non-existent for you (*OB*, p. 20). Again there is no solid textual evidence to support the ascription of such a claim to Wittgenstein,⁷ and, again, it is a false

passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone' (*Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Harper & Row, 1962, p. 165, my emphasis). The connection of all that to my reading of Wittgenstein will emerge more clearly as we go along.

6. The only remark Mulhall cites to support the thesis which is so central to his interpretation is *PI*, p. 204c. 'Knowing' is not mentioned in this remark at all. Rather, what we have is a very peculiar utterance ('I saw it at once as two hexagons. And that's the *whole* of what I saw') and then an attempt by Wittgenstein to make sense of it. The person says 'I saw it at once as ...', and Wittgenstein, who often examines claims by looking for what could possibly be the contrast that the speaker has in mind and that would give the claim its *point* (see, for example, *PI*, 183 and 481), says: 'I think he would have given this description at once in answer to the question "What are you seeing?"'. In any case, this remark is a very dubious textual evidence on which to base a whole interpretation, especially when there is decisive textual evidence against that interpretation.

7. Again the only evidence Mulhall cites is *PI*, p. 204c. 'Knowing', as I said, is not mentioned at all in that remark.

account of any distinction that may exist in ordinary language between ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’. I *know* that the yellow circle in the sky at night is the moon, and I never take ‘moon’ to be one description among many possible ones of what I see.

Johnston, who appears to be following Mulhall here, says that the aspect blind – the one, as we shall see, who can ‘know’ but not ‘see’ – might, in front of a ‘*well executed* picture of a balloon floating up in the sky . . . agree that it could represent a balloon but would add that it could also represent a *thousand other things*’ (*IR*, p. 44, my emphases). This is to draw a caricature of ‘knowing’ (and to misrepresent ‘aspect-blindness’), not to describe the grammar of our language. If someone points to a *well-executed* picture of a balloon and asks you ‘What’s that?’, and you then stand there for a while, full of hesitation and doubt, and finally say that it could *represent* a balloon, but many other things as well, then nobody who knows English, knows our criteria, would say that you *know* what it is. Your problem in that case is a little more serious than ‘aspect blindness’. And unlike the case of the ‘aspect blind’, it shouldn’t be too hard to say what it is you’re missing.

The distinction between ‘*seeing* (something)’ and ‘knowing (it to be so and so)’ is indeed essential to an understanding of Wittgenstein’s remarks on aspect seeing, but it is *not* a distinction that Wittgenstein *introduces* in order to discredit a metaphysical theory. It is a distinction that already exists within our language, together with the grammar that gives it sense, and of which he tries to remind us. Now to ask for the distinguishing criteria between ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’, without qualification, is already to set ourselves on the wrong track. For the ordinary sense of ‘seeing’ goes hand in hand with ‘knowing’. This is why, after the person in the above remark says ‘I see the sphere floating in the air’, it still makes perfect sense for Wittgenstein to ask whether it is a case of knowing or of *seeing*. The ‘seeing’ he is after is *not perception in general*, as Mulhall makes it out to be, but *seeing*; and the ‘knowing’ he contrasts it with is more like ‘merely knowing’ – knowing *without seeing* (see, for example, *PI*, p. 202e and p. 203b). *Seeing* – which refers to a state in which one not only knows what one sees, but is occupied in a particular way with it, and is absorbed by it – will turn out, as we shall see, to be intimately related to the seeing of aspects. The ‘seeing of aspects’ would therefore *not* be equated by Wittgenstein with perception or seeing in general, as Mulhall has it, but rather *distinguished* from them. After all, section xi of the second part of the *Investigations*

opens with exactly that distinction. And the way to bring out the difference between ordinary 'seeing' and the 'seeing' of aspects would be to look at the wider context:

'Seeing as . . .' is not part of perception. And for that reason it is like seeing and again not like (*PI*, p. 197a).

Wherein lies the similarity between the seeing of an aspect and thinking? That this seeing does not have the consequences of perception (*LWI*, 177)

An account of a change of aspect has essentially the same form as an account of the object he saw. But its further application is different. (*LWI*, 447)

The difference between '*seeing* (an aspect)' and 'knowing' is a difference between language games. As we will see in the next section, many things combine to constitute this difference. It is not only what we say and how, or how fast, we say it, but also when, and in front of what, and in the company of whom, and what we would accept as a proper response on her part to what we say. It is usually very easy to tell whether we have a case of *seeing* or merely knowing. For example, to stand in front of a (picture of a) running horse and say 'It's running' in order to *inform* our friend who is standing in front of it and sees it just as we do is, unless we can think of a peculiar context that would give point to this piece of information, to make a fool out of ourselves. We'd better have *seen* something (in the picture).

II

In this section I will present an understanding of what Wittgenstein means by 'seeing an aspect'. The reader must bear in mind, though, that this understanding, as well as the textual support for it, should not be expected to reach completion before the end of the next section. I do not mean to suggest that the 'seeing of aspects' is just *one* thing for Wittgenstein. In the next section we shall see that there are at least two senses in which he talks of aspects and of seeing an aspect. But the sense of seeing an aspect that I will be talking about is central to him, and essential to the understanding of many of his remarks that Mulhall's interpretation, and Johnston's, cannot account for. By the end of this section we should be able to see why the seeing of an aspect is a *seeing* and not merely knowing. We should also be able to

see the particular way in which the seeing of aspects answers to the requirement to make sense in what we find worth noting and putting to words.

The most important thing about the aspect is that there is a sense in which it isn't really there and a sense in which it is very much there; a sense in which to speak about 'truth' and 'falsity' with respect to it is to miss its point and yet another sense in which in seeing it and in giving it expression you are truer to the object than if you stick to objective terms – the terms, that is, of what Wittgenstein calls 'the language-game of reporting' (*PI*, p. 190i), or 'the language-game of information' (*RPPI*, 888).

Aspects, according to Wittgenstein, do not 'teach us something about the external world' (*RPPI*, 899). He puts 'not teaching about the external world' in quotation marks (*nichts über die 'äussere Welt lehrt'*) and I understand that to suggest a qualification, i.e. that the aspect's not teaching us about the external world is something that we would be inclined to say, and that we would be correct in saying, provided a certain understanding of 'world', of 'external' and of 'teaching'. Aspects don't teach us about the external world if 'teaching about the external world' is understood on the model of giving (objective) information (see *RPPI*, 874). In the *Investigations* Wittgenstein says that the aspect is 'not a property of the object' (*PI*, p. 212a), and that the expression of a change of aspect, while having *the form* of a report of a new perception, is not quite such a report (*PI*, p. 196a; see also p. 206i). He also says that the criterion for what you see, when 'seeing' in the sense in which aspects are seen is concerned, is your representation of 'what is seen' (*PI*, p. 198b).⁸ If I say to you that I see a resemblance between the two faces that are right before your eyes, I could be lying (perhaps because *you* say you see a resemblance and I seek an intimacy with you, or wish to avoid the issue of our inability to see things the same way), but I couldn't be mistaken. In this respect, the expression of the seeing of an aspect is an *Äusserung*.

8. As opposed to ordinary perception, or 'seeing' in its ordinary sense (the first sense of 'seeing' in the first remark of section xi), in which what you see, as William James Earle says, 'is mainly a matter of where you are and what is there' ('Ducks and Rabbits: Visuality in Wittgenstein', in *Sites of Vision*, ed. David Michael Levin, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1997), p. 303). If you tell me that you see a house in the distance, it makes perfect sense for me to respond by saying that what you actually see is an old stable.

And the question naturally arises: why not say that the aspect is purely subjective? Why not say that in the expression of aspects we are giving expression to our experience, without saying anything about the object, apart from the contingent fact that one person can come to have a certain experience in front of it? After all, if someone else can't see the resemblance that we see, she may still for all that know perfectly well what 'resemblance' means (and actually, if she didn't, it would make no sense to say that she can't see it).

There would be no reason *not* to call the aspect 'subjective', we might say, echoing a response of Stanley Cavell to a similar question about 'beauty',⁹ if there were still a way to register our sense that 'seeing' seems to force itself on us here (*PI*, 204g); that what we claim to see is out there, open for anybody with an open eye to see, and that if he cannot see it, then there *is* something that he is blind to; that we couldn't see what we see if the object were, perhaps even slightly, changed; that the concept we use to express what we see *fits* the object (see *PI*, 537); that, to the extent that the expression of seeing an aspect *is* an expression of an experience, the other person has no way of gaining access to that experience other than seeing the aspect; that 'Now it's a duck *for me*' would not be the same statement, would not *say* exactly the same thing, as 'Now it's a duck'; and that, in many cases, my saying 'Well, *I* see the resemblance', after crying out that I see a resemblance without being able to get *you* to see it, is not to stubbornly repeat my original statement, but to withdraw it, withdraw its claim.

There is a grammatical affinity, manifesting itself in a certain affinity in tone, between what we would ordinarily call aesthetic judgements and the expression of the seeing of aspects, and that affinity is something that Wittgenstein notes (*PI*, p. 206i). Aspects, like beauty, hang somewhere between the object and the subject, and that position is constituted by the expectation, the demand, from our partner to see what we see, in spite of the fact that we have no way for making him realize that he should.¹⁰ Even more important is the

9. Stanley Cavell, 'Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy', *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1969), 89, footnote.

10. I have deliberately been trying to invoke, in what I've said so far about aspects, Kant's characterization of aesthetic judgements in the *Critique of Judgement*. (And, of course, what Cavell says about beauty in the passage I alluded to is meant to interpret Kant.) The peculiarity of aesthetic judgements, constituted by the ungrounded

fact that in both cases what may *appear* to be the giving of information about the object is not *used* for the purpose of giving information, but rather for what may be described as a seeking of intimacy. Unlike other moments of seeking intimacy, however, moments in which we reveal our heart, in giving expression to aspects we seek intimacy by trying to reveal, bring *out*, something about the object. (Compare *RPPI*, 888: ‘Don’t forget that even though a poem is framed in the language of information, it is not employed in the language-game of information.’) In a telling remark, Wittgenstein says that when we express the seeing of an aspect, by crying ‘It’s running!’ in front of a picture of a running horse, we do so ‘not in order to inform the other person’; rather, Wittgenstein continues, ‘this is a reaction in which people are in touch with each other’ (*RPPI*, 874).

Aspects don’t teach us about the external world, and for Wittgenstein this grammatical feature ‘hangs together’ with another feature, which is that the aspect is subject to the will (*RPPI*, 899). Their being subject to the will distinguishes aspects from objective properties:

That an aspect is subject to the will is not something that does not touch its very essence. For what would it be like, if we could see things arbitrarily as ‘red’ or ‘green’? How in that case would one be able to learn to apply the words ‘red’ and ‘green’? First of all, in that case there would be no such thing as a ‘red object’ (*RPPI*, 976. See also *RPPII*, 545)

When Wittgenstein tells us that aspects are subject to the will, the danger is that we will run the example of the duck-rabbit through our mind, think about how we can flip back and forth between the aspects, or the example of the triangle that can be seen as lying on its side, as an arrow, as a piece of glass, etc., and feel that what Wittgenstein says is pretty straightforward. Those were the examples I suggested should not be taken as the primary ones. But when we are struck by the resemblance between two faces, or by the slyness of a smile, or by something about the picture of the running horse, then it

demand for the agreement of others, Kant describes by saying that they ‘involve a claim to subjective universality’ (*Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), section 6, p. 54). Cavell describes the tone of aesthetic judgements as ‘dogmatic’ and then goes on to defend this kind of dogmatism (*ibid.*, p. 96), which, in a way, is also what Kant tries to do in the ‘deduction’ of aesthetic judgements.

doesn't seem that what we see is up to us. Rather, it seems to almost force itself on us.

The point, I think, is that the dependency on the will is not (primarily, or just) *psychological*, but rather *grammatical*. What makes aspects subject to the will, for Wittgenstein, is not that we can see this or that, but rather that *it makes sense to say*: 'Now see the figure like *this*' (*PI*, p. 213e).¹¹ And notice that in all of the above 'real life' cases, that order would still make sense. It makes sense for me to ask you to see the resemblance between the faces. I can at least ask you to look for it, and give you hints as to how you might bring yourself to see it. And when I cry 'It's running!' in front of the picture of the horse, I am again calling upon you to see something about the picture, which you may have missed even though you have been standing here in front of it for some time just like me. As if it is up to you to enact it. As if nothing stands in your way to the aspect but yourself.¹²

When we think of the 'real life' cases, we can understand why Wittgenstein often talks about being struck, and even surprised, when an aspect is noticed. It is interesting that he even wishes to say that about the duck-rabbit case (*PI*, p. 199a). This ought to puzzle us. With the ambiguous figures and schematic drawings, it doesn't seem that it would be correct to say that we are being struck or surprised by the aspect, exactly because it is so clearly something that we bring about. In some of those cases, it might be helpful to think of the first time – the first time we noticed that the duck can also be seen as a rabbit. But for me, again, this difficulty shows that the ambiguous

11. This point is also made by Roger Scruton, in *Art and Imagination: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 110. In many ways Scruton's account is more faithful to Wittgenstein than the more recent commentaries. Particularly important, from the perspective of this paper, is that, unlike Mulhall and Johnston, Scruton does not take the dawning of an aspect to show that we have been seeing the object under an(other) aspect all along (p. 114). The most important difference between Scruton's account and mine lies in where we each locate the significance of the seeing of aspects. This difference, in turn, is due largely to the fact that Scruton thinks of the seeing of aspects primarily as an experience, which as such requires an external, third person criteria, no doubt, but which, being an experience, does not need to have a point, whereas I think about it as a move in a language-game; hence, as something that we engage ourselves in; and hence, as something that must have a point if in so doing we are to make sense.

12. Cavell makes a very similar point about acknowledging, coming to see, other people in the fourth part of *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (hereafter known as *CR*), (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1979). He also connects this idea with the seeing of aspects. See in particular pp. 368–9.

figures should not be the first place in which to look for the nature of aspects.

Something important will emerge if we think of this non-obvious combination of the aspect's being subject to the will and its being something that strikes us. We are struck because it appears all of a sudden, and appears out of nowhere. It appears *over there*, in the object, and *yet* we know we must have had something to do with that appearance. We know that, not so much because we have made a conscious effort to bring it about, typically we make no such effort, but because we *know* that nothing other than ourselves could have been the cause of that appearance. We *know* that what has so radically changed, now that we've noticed the aspect (even when no *change* of aspect has occurred), has in another sense not changed at all. And this means that even though what we see is so much *there*, still the change is due, somehow, to us. We have 'brought a concept to [what we see]' (*RPPI*, 961), which is why it might be said that the aspect is an 'echo of a thought in sight' (*PI*, p. 212b), or 'an inarticulate reverberation of a thought' (*RPPI*, 1036). One might say that what we are struck by is our own power – of seeing, and of being blind. (In *PI*, p. 199a the term used is *Staunen*, so perhaps something closer to a sense of wonder than to a surprise.)

Let me say something about 'bringing a concept to what we see'. When Wittgenstein says this he seems to be trying to say something about the phenomenology of seeing an aspect, about what it is like to see an aspect. But another way of thinking about it is that it says something about the grammar of 'seeing aspects'. Metaphysically, one might say that we are *always* bringing a concept to what we see.¹³ This would be a metaphysical claim because it cannot offer (the criteria for) anything to contrast itself with (or this is what I take myself to be saying about such a claim in calling it 'metaphysical'). 'Bringing a concept to what we see' in the case of seeing an aspect, on the other hand, is meant to contrast with cases in which the concept is 'already there', cases in which it is true of the object regardless of whether or not someone sees it, so that he who doesn't see it is in some way mistaken, or doesn't understand the concept, or is blind, literally blind.

13. I'm thinking of Strawson's idea that all perception is a 'seeing *as*' ('Imagination and Perception', in *Kant on Pure Reason*, ed. Ralph Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982)).

We are now in a good position to see why Wittgenstein says that when we see an aspect we are thinking of it (*PI*, p. 197c), and occupied with it, which is a reason to think of this seeing as something that we do (*LWII*, p. 14). He also says that the seeing of an aspect is a ‘paying of attention’ (*LWII*, p. 15). The aspect ‘lasts only as long as I am occupied with the object in a particular way’ (*PI*, p. 210d). And why do we *have to*, grammatically, be occupied with the object when we see an aspect, why do we have to *see* it? *Because* we are *bringing* a concept to what we see. As if the concept wouldn’t just rest there unless we kept it there, pressed it with our gaze against the object, as it were. That the aspect is something we bring to the object is also why the aspect *cannot be* our (or the) usual, obvious, way of seeing the object (*RPPI*, 1028), but rather has to be new to us (*PI*, p. 210d). This will become crucial in the next section, when we will ask whether, and in what sense, an aspect can continuously be seen.

As I said in the introduction, that we see something, in the ordinary sense of ‘seeing’ (the first sense of ‘seeing’ in *PI*, p. 193a), is never a good enough reason for giving it expression. Something other than the seeing, something in the context, has to make what we see worth noting and expressing. We would not, ordinarily, be making sense if we gave expression to what we saw just because we saw it. When we see an aspect, however, *that we see it* is a good enough reason for giving it expression,¹⁴ exactly because it is not obviously there. That is, it is not obviously there, but neither have we placed it there by a pure act of our imagination. It is this peculiarity of the aspect – its being something that *fits* the object, and at the same time something that *we bring* to the object; its being a way of seeing something anew while remaining faithful to it – that gives expressing it its point in ordinary contexts.

III

In section one we saw that Mulhall understands ‘aspect seeing’ to refer to the typical human relation to the world. So much of what Wittgenstein says about the seeing of aspects, however, has to do with its being something that strikes us, and something that cannot

14. Which is not to deny that we may sometimes have very good reasons for keeping the aspect to ourselves.

last for long. This would seem to make it unsuitable for being a typical, continuous, relation to things. Mulhall addresses that difficulty by claiming that while much of what Wittgenstein says has to do with the ‘dawning of an aspect’, there is another term – ‘continuous seeing of an aspect’ – which, according to Mulhall, serves Wittgenstein in order to characterize our general relation to the world. ‘The dawning of an aspect’ is then taken to be but a mere indication, admittedly striking, for ‘continuous aspect perception’:

... contrary to appearances – Wittgenstein’s primary concern in this area is not the concept of aspect-dawning but rather that of continuous aspect perception (or ‘regarding as’, as Wittgenstein sometimes labels it) ... the capacity to experience aspect-dawning is of importance primarily because it manifests the general attitude or relation to symbols and people which the concept of continuous aspect perception picks out. (*OB*, p. 123)

On this point, Johnston – who also believes that the ‘seeing of aspects’ marks for Wittgenstein a *typical* relation that we have to certain things (basically pictures, people and words) – seems to be in agreement with Mulhall:

The importance of aspect-dawning is that it draws attention to the wider phenomenon of continuous aspect perception. (*RI*, p. 43)

This, I believe, is an unfortunate misinterpretation. ‘Continuous seeing of an aspect’ is mentioned only once in section xi of the second part of the *Investigations*. After introducing the duck-rabbit, Wittgenstein says:

And I must distinguish between the ‘continuous seeing’ of an aspect and the ‘dawning’ of an aspect. The picture might have been shown me, and I never have seen anything but a rabbit in it ... (*PI*, p. 194b)

I may, then, have seen the duck-rabbit simply as a picture-rabbit from the first. That is to say, if asked ‘What’s that?’ or ‘What do you see here?’ I should have replied: ‘A picture-rabbit’ ... (*PI*, p. 194d)

I should simply have described my perception: just as if I had said ‘I see a red circle over there’. (*PI*, p. 195a)

‘Continuous seeing of an aspect’ is simply a report of perception, and we saw in the first section that Wittgenstein *distinguishes* the seeing of aspects from perception. ‘Continuous seeing of an aspect’, as it is here described, is nothing other than an account of what you *know* to lie in front of you. A straightforward answer to the question

'what's that?' might very well (be used in order to) teach the person who asks something about the external world. The same kind of response may be offered by someone who is asked about a non-ambiguous picture, and it would then make no sense to say that he is 'continuously seeing an aspect'. Nor would it be correct to say that he is 'seeing' the picture, *as opposed to* simply 'knowing' what the picture is a picture of.¹⁵

One way for realizing that 'continuous seeing of an aspect' is *not* simply a continuous version of what Wittgenstein elsewhere refers to as the 'seeing of an aspect' would be to see that *even the person he calls 'aspect-blind'* should be perfectly capable of 'continuous seeing of an aspect' as it is described in the above remarks. That person is defined as someone who lacks 'the capacity to see something *as something*' (*PI*, p. 213f). Now it is not at all easy to make sense of such *total* incapacity. For the purposes of my argument, however, it is enough to note that nothing Wittgenstein says about the aspect blind should make us think that he is unable to tell a picture of a rabbit when he sees one, and I don't see why the person in *PI*, p. 194, does anything more than that. If the aspect blind were unable to tell a picture of a rabbit when he saw one, his handicap would be way more severe than 'not being able to see something *as something*', and, actually, it would then make no sense to attribute the latter to him.

But if even the aspect-blind is capable of 'continuously seeing an aspect', what justifies calling it a 'seeing of an aspect' at all? It only makes sense to talk about 'continuous seeing of an aspect' here, because someone else, who *knows* that there is another way to see this picture, 'could have said of me: "He is seeing the figure as a picture-rabbit"' (*PI*, p. 195a).¹⁶ The 'seeing of an aspect' Wittgenstein is talking about here can be said to occur whenever *we* can say of someone *else* that she sees an aspect, because she describes an object

15. In order to justify calling 'continuous seeing of an aspect' a case of 'seeing' and *not* 'knowing', Mulhall goes back to what he takes to be the criteria which distinguish between the two: '... it involves an immediate, spontaneous reaching for the relevant form of description; we employ those words as a simple perceptual report, without any awareness that it is one of several available options. This preliminary characterization is enough on its own to reveal that, for Wittgenstein, 'continuous aspect perception' is just another label for what he is investigating in his later separation of seeing from knowing' (*OB*, p. 20). However, as we saw in the first section, immediacy and spontaneity, and the lack of awareness of there being other ways of describing what we see, do not warrant the talk of 'seeing' as opposed to merely 'knowing'.

16. We can also come to say some such thing about ourselves, in retrospect.

one way whereas *we know* that it could also be described differently. Now, of course, this person could maintain that description, offer it whenever asked what this object is, and so be said to continuously see an aspect. But it is an altogether different sense of 'seeing an aspect' from the one it has in almost all of Wittgenstein's other remarks on aspect seeing.

Among other things, as we saw, the *seeing* of an aspect is marked by a certain awareness that we are bringing a concept to what we see and by an occupation with what we see, a paying of attention. These things go into what is being *said* when the seeing of an aspect is expressed, and also go into the determination of what would be a proper context for, and a proper response to, such an expression. None of them holds in the above case of 'continuous seeing of an aspect', which is why, in expressing it, we are *saying* something quite different. And so, while there is certainly a sense, and a pretty straightforward sense, in which the person in the above remarks is seeing an aspect, a sense that is tied to ambiguous figures, figures *we know* to have more than one aspect,¹⁷ we mustn't assume that there is a necessary, or an obvious, connection between him and the person *struck* by an aspect.

In a few remarks of his later writings, Wittgenstein thinks of senses in which aspects can stay.¹⁸ He does so, I think, not because this is his

17. Ted Schatzki, in a review of Johnston's book, makes the mistake of recognizing *only* this sense of 'seeing an aspect'. He says that seeing an aspect 'presupposes multiple possibilities of what something can be seen as' ('Inside-out?', *Inquiry*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 1995, pp. 43–4). But in order for you to be struck by the resemblance between two faces, there does not need to be another thing that they could be seen as. It only presupposes that before you were struck they were just two faces for you (and Schatzki himself says, contra Mulhall, that it makes no sense to call *that* a seeing of an aspect (p. 44)).

18. Wittgenstein talks, for example, about 'continuously seeing the figure red'. But 'red' is a property of the object which he *contrasts* with an aspect (*PI*, p. 212a), and the continuous seeing of it takes place in the game of information: 'the description, that it is red . . . is continuously correct'. He then says the same thing about continuously seeing one aspect of an ambiguous figure: ' . . . that description, without any variation, is the right one . . .' (*RPPI*, 863–4). Thus, as we also saw in the sole example from the *Investigations*, one way in which the aspect can stay is by being, for the person seeing it, just a piece of information.

In other remarks, Wittgenstein suggests that there could be a continuous relation to a picture, a continuous attitude to it. And he agrees that it would be correct to talk in this case of a way of 'seeing' the picture (*PI*, p. 205a). The 'chronic' sense of an aspect, he elsewhere says, 'is only the kind of way we again and again treat the picture' (*RPPI*, 1022). But he notes the grammatical difference between treating the picture in a certain way and *seeing* it under an aspect: 'The expression of the aspect is the expression of a way of taking (hence, of a way-of-dealing-with, of a technique); *but*

main interest, but because it is another way of bringing out the grammatical peculiarity of aspects. There are perhaps senses, other than the one discussed in the *Investigations*, in which there could be a 'continuous seeing of an aspect', and there is nothing wrong with exploring those senses, as long as we keep in mind the *important sense* of 'seeing an aspect' for which there can be no continuous version. The aspect can stay with us for a while, but cannot, grammatically, stay with us for long while remaining, *for us*, an *aspect*. This has to do with the (grammatical) unobviousness, 'freshness' I should like to say, of the aspect, played against the background of that which *is* obvious. The game of aspects is played against the game of objectivity: we bring to an object that is *really* there a concept of something that isn't *really* there:

If this constellation is always and continuously a face for me, then I have not named an *aspect*. For that means that I always *encounter* it as a face; whereas the peculiarity of the aspect is that I see something into a picture. So that I might say: I see something that isn't there at all, that does not reside in the figure, so that it may surprise me that I see it (at least, when I reflect upon it afterwards). (*RPPI*, 1028)

'I have always seen it with *this* face.' But you still have to say *what* face. And as soon as you add *that*, it's no longer as if you had *always* done it. (*RPPI*, 526)

The likeness makes a striking impression on me; then the impression fades . . . It only struck me for a few minutes, and then no longer did. (*PI*, 211d)

I should like to say that what dawns here lasts only as long as I am occupied with the object in a particular way . . . Ask yourself 'For how long am I struck by a thing?' – For how long do I find it *new*. (*PI*, 210c)

It is as if the aspect were something that only dawns, but does not remain; and yet this must be a *conceptual* remark, not a psychological one. (*RPPI*, 1021)

It looks as though interpreters tend to think that what happens in the 'dawning of an aspect' cannot be *that* different from what happens when we continuously see it. The latter is taken to be but an extended

used as a description of a *state*' (*RPPI*, 1025, my emphases). In another place he says that 'the essential thing about seeing is that it is a *state*' (*RPPII*, 43). So in so far as an aspect stays with us by becoming incorporated into the way we treat an object, it thereby ceases to be something that we can sensibly be said to *see*. Shortly we shall see that when something does become incorporated into our habitual way of encountering an object, Wittgenstein no longer wishes to call it an aspect.

version of the former: ‘the change of aspect in an ambiguous figure is simply the correlate of the unchanged aspect in an unambiguous drawing’, says Johnston (*IR*, p. 43). Marie McGinn says: ‘If we feel disinclined to speak of “seeing” at all here [in the case of the “dawning” of an aspect], then we should recall the connection with the case of continuous aspect seeing: in that case “It’s a rabbit” is a straightforward perceptual report . . .’¹⁹ Mulhall also makes the change from the dawning of an aspect to the continuous seeing of it seem very simple: the words that in the dawning of an aspect serve as an *Äusserung* are now employed ‘as a simple perceptual report’ (*OB*, p. 20).

But as we saw in the previous section, the *whole language game* changes when an *Äusserung* changes into a simple perceptual report. We also saw, in section one, that Wittgenstein distinguishes the seeing of aspects from perception. It is only when you disregard the context and implications of the utterance (and focus your attention on the ambiguous figures and schematic drawings), that you can come to think that the aspect that dawns cannot be much different from the aspect that stays. And there *are*, I admit, connections: in both cases you stand in front of an object, the same object, and ‘say what you see’. This is not unlike claiming that there is a connection between falling in love with someone and loving her all your life: in both cases you love her. But the latter is not simply an extended version of the former, the criteria for each are entirely different, and anyone who had known both would know to appreciate the difference. To continuously *see* an aspect is akin to a continuous *falling* in love with the same person. And I’m not saying that either of them is entirely unimaginable. I just want us to be clear on what it is that we are trying to imagine.

IV

No doubt, one reason why Mulhall and Johnson don’t find the notion of ‘continuous seeing of an aspect’ problematic is that they think about it primarily, or at least initially, in connection with representation, manifested most clearly in the case of pictures. They take it that to see the picture under an aspect, or to see an aspect of the picture, is to treat the picture, to stand towards it, in some respects, as

19. Marie McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations* (hereafter known as *W*), (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 192.

if it was the object it represents. '[W]e relate to [the picture] as the representation of a specific object and treat it almost as if it really was the object it depicts', says Johnston (*RI*, p. 44). Seeing an aspect in the case of pictures means, according to Mulhall, 'that someone is regarding a picture as one does the object it depicts' (*OB*, p. 33).

Now a picture, as Mulhall himself says, 'just *is* the sort of thing that is correctly described by describing what it represents' (*OB*, p. 23). Not to describe a picture in terms of what it represents is not to know what pictures are (what 'pictures' means). But if this is so, then describing pictures in terms of what they represent *cannot* be the distinguishing criterion between knowing (what the picture is a picture of) and *seeing* (something in the picture). Both reactions, being reactions to pictures, would be in terms of what the picture depicts. Mulhall is aware of that and therefore goes back to the idea that the distinguishing criterion of 'seeing' is 'the *readiness-to-hand* of that correct form of description; and this readiness-to-hand is a manifestation of the perceiver's *taking for granted* the identity of what he perceives' (*OB*, p. 23). But again, as we saw in section one, the immediacy with which we offer the correct form of description is not what distinguishes 'seeing' from 'knowing', nor does Wittgenstein say that it is. And knowing what you see does not *contrast* with a taking for granted of its identity. It goes hand in hand with it.

Emphasizing the importance of 'representation' to aspect seeing, even in the case of pictures, is not helpful in bringing out the peculiarity of 'aspect seeing'. First of all, we can see aspects in cases where no representation at all is involved. Think of Wittgenstein's first example of seeing an aspect: the case of seeing a resemblance between two faces. One face does not represent the other, and the two faces together don't represent a case of *real* resemblance. Similarly, when you 'hear this bar as an introduction' (*PI*, p. 202h) it is not that the bar *represents* an introduction. If anything, it *is* an introduction.

Take another example which for me is a clear case of what Wittgenstein means by *seeing* an aspect. It occurs in a novel by Joshua Kenaz called *The Way to the Cats*. Yolanda, an old woman recovering from a bone fracture, is walking down the corridor in the hospital when a sharp pain makes her bend forward and lean over her walker in order to reduce the weight on her legs. She then raises her head and looks at the corridor, and Kenaz writes: 'Suddenly, it appeared as though she was standing there for the first time in her life. Never before

had she sensed like this the tragic, inhuman, beauty of this place'.²⁰ Yolanda was struck by an aspect – *exactly* as Wittgenstein defines it (*PI*, p. 193c). What she saw had entirely changed, so much so that she felt she was standing there for the first time in her life, and yet, of course, nothing really changed. It was exactly the same corridor. And there is just no room for us to talk about 'representation' here.

And now think of the drawing of the triangle, the one Wittgenstein says can be seen, among other things, as standing on its base, and as hanging from its apex (*PI*, p. 200c). It is true that Wittgenstein goes on to suggest that 'the aspects in a change of aspects are those ones which the figure might sometimes have *permanently* in a picture' (*PI*, p. 201b), but why does this mean that we have to think that a relation between a sign and the thing it represents is essential for the change of aspects? I can see these very same aspects in a wooden triangle lying on my table, and then, when I see it as standing on its base or as lying on its side, no representation at all is in play.

Now, when we see the smile of the picture-face as timid, what is it that is gained by saying that this seeing should be understood by realizing that we stand towards the picture in some respects as we do towards a human face? What shall we say about someone who sees the (real) human smile as timid (see *PI*, 537)? If no appeal to representation is needed in order to account for the second case, why should we have to appeal to it in the first? Why not simply say (about the drawing) that it *is* a face, and that it *is* smiling, and that that smile strikes us as timid?²¹ Wittgenstein, who later on urges us to simply accept the primitive language-game which children are taught (*PI*, p. 200b), tells us that the child can treat the picture-objects as it treats, not people and animals, but *dolls* (*PI*, p. 194c). Shall we now speak of a *transitive* relation of representation? I'm not saying that we *can't*. I just can't see how it helps us to understand 'aspect seeing'.

Marie McGinn writes: 'we "stand towards" [those "picture-objects"] in somewhat the way we stand towards the objects they represent' (*W*, p. 191). When Wittgenstein says it, however, he says nothing of 'representation', nor does he imply that the way in which

20. Joshua Kenaz, *The Way to the Cats* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1991), 87–8, my translation.

21. It is very revealing here that Wittgenstein chooses to speak of 'a picture-object (*Bildgegenstand*)' and 'a picture-face (*Bildgesicht*)', and not of 'a picture of an object' or 'a picture of a face'. What is in focus is a certain kind of object, or face, not a certain kind of picture.

we sometimes stand towards pictures is what 'seeing them under an aspect' amounts to: 'in some respects I stand towards [the "picture-face"] as I do towards a human face. I can study its expression, can react to it as to the expression of a human face' (*PI*, p. 194c). For me, this means to suggest, not that representation is essential for the seeing of aspects in the case of drawings and pictures, but rather that what happens to us in the case of drawings and pictures is important, because it can also happen to us with real people: we can notice things about them which go beyond what can simply be *known*, or we can be blind to those things; we can be occupied with, and *study*, their expression, or take what we think it means for granted and move on.

My point is simple. Wittgenstein is perfectly correct to say that there is a similarity between our reaction to pictures and our reaction to 'the real things' depicted in them. In both cases we can either see only what we *know* to be there, stay within the comfort of our shared criteria, or we can see something that 'isn't really there', an aspect, something that makes this picture, this smile, this running, special – something that calls for expression. This is what adds to the interest and to the importance of the seeing of aspects in the case of pictures, but this similarity is *not* what the seeing of aspects in the case of pictures *consists* in.

V

Another point on which Mulhall and Johnston seem to be in agreement is the idea that the best way to understand the peculiarity of psychological concepts is to see them as 'aspect concepts' (see *RI*, p. 182, *OB*, p. 72). The idea, roughly, is that the soul is an aspect of 'behaviour in context'. This is a way to avoid behaviourism without falling pray to the 'myth of the inner'.

This position again ignores the sense in which for an aspect to be *seen* it has to strike us, to be other than the usual way in which what we see is taken. To call psychological concepts 'aspect concepts' is to make the connection between the inner and its outward criteria weaker than it is. It is exactly the fact that our psychological talk is informed by criteria – that grammar usually tells us that *this* is 'sadness' and *this* is 'excitement' – that makes the seeing of sadness and excitement *not* the seeing of aspects. Similarly, pain is *not* an aspect of groaning and itching is *not* an aspect of scratching. Not to know that someone who groans is in pain is not to know that he is groaning (or

what groaning is); not to know that the monkey that scratches is itching is not to know that it scratches (or what scratching is.)²²

The 'myth of the inner' is a myth created by grammar (*PI*, 307), whereas to see an aspect is to step beyond the guidance of grammar. (Grammar will tell you that the horse in the picture 'is running' (if you don't know *that*, you don't know what 'a running horse' means), but not that '*It's running!*') This is not to say that we cannot be struck by a certain aspect of someone's behaviour. People, like pictures, can come alive for us. This would happen, for example, when we notice the slyness or the irony or the despair in a smile. But we can only do that because there is an ordinary, habitual, way of seeing, taking, and responding to, a smile such as this.

Conclusion

Both Mulhall and Johnston raise the question about the scope of the seeing of aspects: where does it make sense to speak of 'aspect seeing'? Mulhall, as we saw, takes 'aspect seeing' to contrast with (a metaphysical picture of) an intellectual process of inference and interpretation, and makes it our ordinary relation to the world. He argues, essentially, that whenever we encounter an object as an object of a particular kind, which is how we normally encounter objects, we can be said to see it under an aspect (*OB*, p. 137).

For Johnston, it is essential to 'aspect seeing' that there will be one way of taking the object (a pattern of colours and shapes, behaviour described physically, a bare sound) as opposed to another (the objects depicted, a psychological state or process, a meaningful sound). This is why he restricts the domain of 'aspect seeing' to pictures, human psychology and language. In those areas, he argues, it is typical of us that we take things in the second way, and this is what it means to say that we 'see things under an aspect'. Against Mulhall, Johnston argues that in other contexts there is no room for it. It makes no sense, says Johnston, to talk about 'seeing the table as a table', because there is no *other* way of seeing it (*RI*, p. 244).

By way of conclusion I want to suggest that Mulhall is right in claiming that we can see aspects everywhere, but not because we always can, and typically do, take objects for the particular objects they

22. For a beautiful making of this point, see Stanley Cavell (*CR*, pp. 92–3).

are. Rather, we can see aspects everywhere because it is always possible to see something as *more* than 'what it is'. We don't, however, typically, or even usually, *see* aspects, because we tend to let what we know do the seeing for us. When we turn to grammar to tell us what we see we don't see aspects. In those cases, we see what we *know* we see. Grammar tells us, for example, that we see a corridor, and it really does make no sense, it does not *say* anything, to speak about 'seeing the corridor as a corridor'. But it makes perfect sense to see the corridor, a particular corridor, as tragically and inhumanly beautiful.

'*Seeing* (an aspect)' and 'knowing (something for what it is)' belong to two different language games. Grammar tells us what the difference is between them. What grammar won't tell us, what it *can't* tell us, is that the two language games have not just different rules, but also different spirits. What you know to be so and so is what you don't need to pay attention to, to absorb, to study. What you know to be so and so is that whose identity you are taking for granted, and because of that it is something you are not really looking at. In a way, what you know is what you shouldn't (or should no longer) think about. To know that something is so and so is to shut yourself to the possibility that it may be special, *new*, something whose exact nature requires, calls for, an expression other than the obvious and common. And anything can be new, or seen anew, even the most ordinary of things, or the most ordinary of lives. It is perhaps one of art's jobs to teach us that. Aspects can always be scraped from the surface of reality. But this often requires an effort, and a paying of attention. It also takes practice.²³

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