ACADEMIA | Letters

Wittgenstein's Images in Focus

Michael Biggs

Twenty-five years ago Routledge reissued *Prototractatus* (Wittgenstein 1996): a facsimile and transcription with introductory essays of Wittgenstein's draft for his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Apart from containing a new essay by B.F. McGuinness, one of the editors and translators, the reissue included images which had been revised by the present author. The revisions were the result of a comprehensive investigation into the use of images by Wittgenstein which initially focused on how they should be represented in his posthumously published works, and subsequently informed the graphical editing of the Bergen Nachlass Edition (Wittgenstein 2015). With the approval of Wittgenstein's Trustees, the outcomes of the research were communicated to Routledge and Blackwell, the English language publishers, and to Suhrkamp, the German language publisher. The reissue of *Prototractatus* confirmed the view of the editors at the time that Wittgenstein's images warranted greater felicity in editions of Wittgenstein's texts both in terms of literal accuracy as well as interpretation.

This improved focus was reinforced in 1997 when Blackwell reissued *Philosophical Investigations,* also containing revisions to the graphics. The revisions are noted in the front matter but subsequent issues that continued to implement the graphical revisions omit this editorial note. Comparing earlier editions to subsequent ones reveals that in 1998 Blackwell also made silent changes to the graphics in *Zettel, Blue and Brown Books, Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology (Vol.1 & 2), Philosophical Remarks, Notebooks 191914-1916, Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology (Vol.1)* and *Culture and Value* in line with the research findings.

These changes draw attention to the fact that Wittgenstein made extensive use of visual imagery in his philosophical texts, and also the question why he did so and their relationship to his philosophical method in general. Many commentators on Wittgenstein have noted the so-called 'picture theory of meaning' in the early works (e.g. Pears 1977) and also the concepts of 'seeing-as' (e.g. Wilkerson 1973) and 'seeing the meaning of a word' (e.g. Genova

1995), all of which reinforce the idea that Wittgenstein's concept of meaning was either based in, or could be best communicated by reference to, visual examples. On the other hand, recent scholarship has focused on the specific question of the role of the images in Wittgenstein's method, both of doing philosophy and of communicating it (e.g. Heinrich et al. 2011). Thus, in terms of form and content, one might differentiate between an interest in editing and felicitous representation, and the interpretation of the significance of those images. Amongst those recent scholars, Nyíri has concentrated on the latter with great insight (e.g. 2005), while I have concentrated on the former (e.g. Biggs 1996; 1998).

The purpose of 'academia letters' is for authors to identify a hypothesis and for this to be disseminated in order to promote discussion. My hypothesis is as follows: there are [at least] three distinct visual methods in play in Wittgenstein's works: 1) explicit visual methods, such as the picture theory or 'seeing-as'; 2) implicit visual methods, such as ambiguous figures, or analogies based on machines; and 3) embedded visual methods[1], such as picture-proofs or visual paradigms; and that the implicit and embedded methods have not received comparable attention in the critical literature as have the explicit methods.

Explicit visual methods are often indicated by the use of visualisation words and by statements such as 'draw the projection lines…'. This method uses direct analogy to map a method from visualization onto the decoding of the thought-language-world relationship[2]. These methods were the first to receive attention owing to critics identifying a 'picture theory of meaning' in the Tractatus, published in 1922, (e.g. de Laguna 1924)[3] and as a result have also received the most detailed critical attention, such as how one should interpret the key term 'Bild' (Moreno 2011) and clarifying that the key relationship of isomorphism is better described as homomorphism (Carapezza 2010). Explicit diagrammatic decoding has received less attention, but is exemplified in Bazzocchi's (2013) analysis of Tractatus 5.6331 in which the relationship of the eye to its visual field is examined through its visual representation.

Implicit visual methods are also indicated by the use of visualization words, but where the comparison is indirect. These methods received attention after the publication of *Philosophical Investigations* in 1953 and serve as a kind of therapy for when we are misled by our system of representation, (e.g. Fleming 1957). The methods often take the form of metaphor or of visual illusion and ambiguity (Nyiri 2014). The methods require a creative or cultural leap in order to connect the base with the target and often adopt theoretical frameworks from linguistics (M. Hester 1966). The difference between implicit and explicit approaches to 'picturing'

---

[1] I am indebted to Kristof Nyíri for the term 'embedded' as used by Blich (in: Nyíri 2014 79).

[2] I am indebted to Arthur Gibson for drawing my attention to Wittgenstein's discussion of intentional and unintentional aspects of derivation by projection (in: Gibson 2020 69).

[3] First published as Logische-Philosophische Abhandlung in 1921 but coming to wider attention in the book publication with Russell's introduction in 1922.

may also be reflected in the differing approaches between Baker and Hacker to the so-called Therapeutic and Elucidatory Readings of Wittgenstein (Hutchinson and Read 2008).

Embedded visual methods include the practice of making drawings and diagrams and using them as the basis for a type of calculation or alternative description. These images are integrated into the text string, characteristically taking the place of a word or phrase, i.e. there is no punctuation separating them from the surrounding text and transcribing the text without the image leaves an incomplete sentence. These methods were largely overlooked until the late 1980s when scholars began to make greater use of the Nachlass and a handful started to inquire into the function of Wittgenstein's use of images, (e.g. Roser 1996). It seems to me [currently] that these methods frequently involve visual proofs (*Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*-I §50), the legitimacy of certain practices (*Philosophical Grammar*-II §27), and paradigms of meaning (*Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*-I §§67 & 105). As such, they do not so much elucidate grammatical rules as [possibly] constitute hinge propositions (cf. Harré 2009).

All three methods have as their target the way we use language, how we come to know the meaning of a word, and how it is the task of philosophy to show us how to escape from our entrapment by language. In other words, my focus is not on references to the visual world, art and aesthetics, despite this sometimes being a topic for Wittgenstein (e.g. *Culture and Value*), but on images as tools with which to do philosophy: 'sometimes we understand a thing by translating into words – sometimes we understand a thing by drawing a picture' (The Pink Book, in: Gibson and O'Mahony 2020, 124). Now that attention has been focussed on the images, and the published works contain more felicitous representations of what is contained in Wittgenstein's manuscripts, the point for discussion is what are the benefits and consequences? I would especially welcome discussion of what I have called his 'embedded visual methods'.

REFERENCES

Bazzocchi, Luciano. 2013. 'A Significant "False Perception" of Wittgenstein's Draft on Mind's Eye'. *Acta Analytica* 29 (June). https://doi.org/10.1007/s12136-013-0197-1.

Biggs, Michael A. R. 1996. 'Designing a Graphical Index to Wittgenstein's Nachlaß'. *Wittgenstein-Studien* 3 (1). http://sammelpunkt.philo.at/id/eprint/2262/.

———. 1998. 'Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Visual Concordance to the Published Works'. *Minerva* 2. http://www.minerva.mic.ul.ie/vol2/Ver_33/index.htm.

Carapezza, Marco. 2010. 'Are Images in the Tractatus Isomorphic to Facts?' In *Image and Imaging in Philosophy, Science, and the Arts*, edited by Elizabeth Nemeth, Richard Heinrich, Wolfram Pichler, and David Wagner. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter. http://hdl.handle.net/10447/51517.

Fleming, Noel. 1957. 'Recognizing and Seeing As'. *The Philosophical Review* 66 (2): 161–79. https://doi.org/10.2307/2182372.

Genova, Judith. 1995. *Wittgenstein: A Way of Seeing*. New York: Routledge.

Gibson, Arthur, and Niamh O'Mahony, eds. 2020. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Dictating Philosophy to Francis Skinner - the Wittgenstein-Skinner Manuscripts*. Switzerland: Springer Nature.

Harré, Rom. 2009. 'Wittgenstein's Therapies: From Rules to Hinges'. *New Ideas in Psychology* 27 (2): 118–32. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newideapsych.2008.04.009.

Heinrich, Richard, Elizabeth Nemeth, Wolfram Pichler, and David Wagner, eds. 2011. *Image and Imaging in Philosophy, Science and the Arts*. Publications of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society: New Series 16. Frankfurt: Ontos-Verlag.

Hester, Marcus. 1966. 'Metaphor and Aspect Seeing'. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 25 (2): 205–12. https://doi.org/10.2307/429393.

Hutchinson, Phil, and Rupert Read. 2008. 'Toward a Perspicuous Presentation of "Perspicuous Presentation"'. *Philosophical Investigations* 31 (2): 141–60. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9205.2007.00339.x.

Laguna, Theodore de. 1924. 'Reviewed Work: Tractatus Logico-Politicus [Sic] by Ludwig Wittgenstein'. *The Philosophical Review* 33 (1): 103–9. https://doi.org/10.2307/2178889.

Moreno, Arley R. 2011. 'Bild: From Satz to Begriff'. In *Image and Imaging in Philosophy, Science and the Arts*. Vol. 1. Publications of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society : New Series 16. Frankfurt: Ontos-Verlag. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110330519.73.

Nyiri, Kristof J. 2005. 'Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Pictures'. In *Wittgenstein: The Philosopher and His Works*, edited by Alois Pichler and Simo Säätelä, 281–312. Working Papers from the Wittgenstein Archives 17. Bergen: The Wittgenstein Archives at the Univ. of Bergen. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110328912.322.

———. 2014. 'Image and Metaphor in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein'. In *Meaning and Motoricity: Essays on Image and Time*, 73–92. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang.

https://doi.org/10.3726/978-3-653-04266-5/13.

Pears, David. 1977. 'The Relation Between Wittgenstein's Picture Theory of Proposition and Russell's Theories of Judgment'. *Philosophical Review* 86 (2): 177–96. https://doi.org/10.2307/2184005.

Roser, A. 1996. 'Wittgensteins Zeichnungen Im Cornell-Film'. *Wittgenstein-Studien* 3 (2). http://sammelpunkt.philo.at/id/eprint/2281/.

Wilkerson, Terence E. 1973. 'Seeing-As'. *Mind* 82: 481–96. https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/LXXXII.328.481.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1996. *Prototractatus*. Revised edition. London: Routledge.

———. 2015. *Bergen Nachlass Edition*. http://www.wittgensteinsource.org.