Art and Perspicuous Vision in Wittgenstein's Philosophical Reflection

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1. *From the* Tractatus *to the* Philosophical Investigations*: From Logic to Aesthetics*

If today a decidedly analytical interpretation of Wittgenstein's thought seems to be dominant in many ways, there are, in my opinion, countless reasons that lead instead to reintroduce the possibility, and even the opportunity, of a different reading: a proper philosophical-aesthetic reading – where «philosophical» is equivalent to «transcendental» in the Kantian sense – which certainly seems to me more productive in theoretical terms, as I have already tried to demonstrate in my book *Dalla logica all'estetica. Un saggio intorno a Wittgenstein* (Di Giacomo [1989]).

In my volume, and later in subsequent essays, I investigated especially the meaning of Wittgenstein's «shift» from the perspective of the *Tractatus* to the approach of the *Philosophical Investigations*, reading it in the first place as a transition from unity to multiplicity, or, which is the same, from being to becoming, hence from necessity to contingency. Indeed, if it is true that Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* assigns to philosophy – as is known – the task to define the essence of language, it is also true that, in this same work, such essence is to be found in logic as universal and necessary order, that is able to guarantee *a priori* the functioning of the only language endowed with a sense, which is, in this perspective, «denotative» language, i.e. language based on the distinction between true and false. From this point of view, according to the referentialist conception expressed in the *Tractatus*, the meaning of a word is the object such a word stands for – the referent, precisely, to which it refers –, which is guaranteed by the identity of structure (i.e. of the «logical form») existing between language and reality.

Well, it is precisely the alleged fundamentality of such a referentialist model that Wittgenstein radically questions in his *Philosophical Investigations*: here is, in fact, the

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notion that everyday language, i.e. the multiplicity of its possible different actual uses, is more originary and fundamental than the denotative paradigm. In this sense, what *precedes* – in a «transcendental» sense – any possible rationale for language (and its meaningfulness) is our own ability to «act», i.e. our ability to use ordinary language in many different ways; it is no coincidence that, in *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein cites Goethe's statement that «in the beginning was the action». This is also what Wittgenstein points out from the very first paragraph of the *Philosophical Investigations*, containing the famous example of the «shopkeeper» and the «five red apples», as well as in the second paragraph, concerning the relationship between the «builder» and his «assistant»: at a closer look, what emerges is, in both cases, the insufficiency and non-fundamentality of the denotative model, whose functioning always *presupposes* a linguistic dimension that can never be fully defined in logical-intellectuals terms.

In this context, what Wittgenstein seems to «put on stage» in the *Philosophical Investigations* is a real dissolution of the uniform and compact unity exhibited in the *Tractatus* in the multiplicity of possible concrete situations represented by the so-called «language-games», among which is undoubtedly the denotative model. It is clear, then, that Wittgenstein in no way denies the validity of the latter, but rather – as I said – its supposed originality and fundamentality. This emerges especially from paragraph 18, where he highlights the «secondary» and «derivative» character of that logical dimension – and, consequently, of those highly formalised scientific languages – in which the neo-positivist perspective expressed by the Vienna Circle claimed instead to recognise the very foundation of sense; here, in fact, Wittgenstein states that «the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus» are, upon closer inspection, the «suburbs of our language», and not its essential nucleus:

(And how many houses or streets does it take before a town begins to be a town?) Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with extensions from various periods, and all this surrounded by a multitude of new suburbs with straight and regular streets and uniform houses. (TLP: § 18)

Furthermore, that logic cannot be the absolute and incontrovertible foundation of language is demonstrated in the first place by the fact that, if every language-game is always in some way governed by «rules» (which as such have a logical basis), it is nonetheless undeniable that *not everything*, in the concrete practice of that game, can be explained through rules: what escapes *logos*, from this point of view, is the very application of the rule, i.e. the application of the concept *in abstracto* (the universal) to the contingency of the single concrete case (the particular). Indeed, if such an application

were itself governed by principles that could be made analytically explicit, the result would be an unacceptable «infinite regress», and this because each rule, introduced to explain the application of a particular concept to a specific case, would in turn need, in order to be applied, another rule, and so on, precisely *ad infinitum*. On the contrary, the «agreement», and hence the actual «proportioning», between the particular and the universal is each time made possible by a principle that in fact exists *beyond* the logical dimension: a truly *aesthetic* principle, and I mean by this – in the very Kantian sense of the term – an authentic *feeling* (the ability, for example, to «feel» that a certain use of language, within a specific language-game, is the most «appropriate») .

In this perspective, it is precisely to highlight the irreducibility of such feeling to the realm of *logos* that Wittgenstein, in paragraph 78 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, compares the notions of «knowing» and «saying», emphasizing how, if we can «say» for example «how many metres high Mont Blanc is», we cannot say «how a clarinet sounds»; and yet we recognise, that is to say we «know», how a clarinet sounds. Even at this level, then, one can see that such a relationship between «knowing» and «saying» can be considered a reformulation of the relationship between «saying» and «showing», which was one of the central points in the *Tractatus* and which, as a matter of fact, in later works does not take on the form of a contradiction, but rather of a mutual presup-position, because, in order to «say», we have to know *already*, as testified in an exem-plary way – again in the *Philosophical Investigations* – by the relationship between «use» and «understanding»: if it is true that we understand a sign as we are able to use it in relation to the multiple language-games in which that same sign can occur, it is also true that this possibility of multiple uses necessarily presupposes our understanding of the unity implicit in that multiplicity of uses; and it is such understanding that consti-tutes the aesthetic principle which – as already mentioned – is a real feeling.

Thus, it is precisely in recognising the «more fundamental» character of this feeling compared to any possible logical-conceptual dimension, that the *Philosophical Investiga-tions* appear not as the denial of the point of view expressed in the *Tractatus*, but rather as its development and its further investigation, in a «movement» in many ways similar to Kant's shift from the notion of «transcendental» formulated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* to the one expounded in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. In this perspec-tive, if any possible primacy assigned to the logical dimension, and therefore to necessi-ty over contingency, is refused in the transition from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations* – and this is exactly the destruction, consciously carried out by Wittgen-stein, of all those traditional metaphysical structures that he calls «houses of cards» –

however, such a «shift» must not in any way be understood as a rejection of the first term exclusively in favour of the second; in other words, there is no relativism: no side-lining of the «condition» in the name of a (neopragmatist) absolutization of the «conditioned». Rather, what prevails is the need to encompass the relationship – indeed paradoxical – existing between the two polarities, with the awareness that an «identity-difference» is really at stake.

Here the point is that if essence as unchanging foundation of reality is undoubtedly – as Wittgenstein writes in paragraph 340 of the *Philosophical Investigations* – a «prejudice», it is not, however, a «*stupid* prejudice». Hence, then, the crucial importance of a paragraph such as 65, dealing with the very question of the relationship between unity and multiplicity; it is no coincidence that Wittgenstein states in the paragraph that he does not want to «let himself off» the quest for unity he had been pursuing in the *Tractatus*, which now appears as the capability to understand the affinities – i.e. the «family resemblances» – among different language-games. This capability, moreover, is closely linked to the notion of «perspicuous vision» referred to in paragraph 122 – a notion that in fact coincides with the notions of «grasping at a stroke» and «seeing-as» – and that consists in the ability to «understand», that is, to grasp unity *in* diversity. In this sense, we are dealing with a unity – the one implicit in the many family resemblances gradually identified among the various phenomena one observes – which presents itself not as an *analytical* unity (which, as such, can be translated in conceptual terms), but as a *synthetic* one (which, as such, can never be made fully explicit): it is, indeed, a unity which, in its always new and different configurations, cannot be «said» but only «felt», in the sense that it cannot be «known», but only «thought» or «imagined». We are dealing, therefore, with a constitutively temporal unity: with a dimension that «becomes» and that, while exceeding each of its possible manifestations, can never be «grasped» independently of it. Therefore, the *Philosophical Investigations* attest to the emergence of an insurmountable and, as such, foundational paradox: the one expressed by the mutual presupposition of concrete «use» and abstract «rule», that is to say «use» and «understanding», and hence by the mutual implication of «condition» (universal, necessary) and «conditioned» (particular, contingent).

Hence, then, the radical redefinition of the role assigned to philosophy, as Wittgenstein clearly highlights from paragraphs 89 and 90 onwards: if logic, in fact, seeking to «see to the foundation of things», i.e. intending to investigate «the essence», «shouldn't concern itself whether things actually happen in this or that way», and if science instead arises from an «interest in the facts of nature», that is from the «need to grasp causal

connections» in an attempt to explain phenomena, philosophy, on the contrary, not wanting to «learn anything *new*», that is, without claiming to know the phenomena, wants to «*understand*» – and not «explain», as science does – «something that is already in plain view». From Wittgenstein's viewpoint, such an understanding of philosophy is the ability to «*see right into* phenomena», where to «see right into» means in the first place to grasp, from within a particular language-game, the similarities and the differences between the present and other language-games; but it also means, for this very reason, to critically interrogate the data, that is the multiple, to go back to its internal conditions of possibility, or to its «horizon of meaning» (the synthetic unity, precisely) never fully determined and never fully defined.

2. *The Importance of the Notion of «Mystical» and the Question of the Saying-Showing Relationship*

More generally it is crucial, in order to highlight the importance of ethics and aesthetics in the *Tractatus*, to consider the notion of «mystical», which means «what cannot be expressed» or «what is unsayable»; it is no coincidence that, identifying unsayable and mystical, Wittgenstein intends to refer to «feeling», i.e. to «something felt», which cannot be expressed through words, since it is outside the scientific description of facts, something to be found precisely in the order of ethics and aesthetic. As a matter of fact, proposition 6.44 of the *Tractatus*: «It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists», is clarified in the *Lecture on Ethics*, where Wittgenstein describes, without using the term «mystical», what he calls his «experience *par excellence*»: «I believe that the best way of describing it is to say that when I have it, I wonder at the existence of the world». It is indeed the experience of «seeing the world as a miracle»: hence, for Wittgenstein, the analogy between mystical and aesthetic experience. In the *Notebooks*, moreover, we read: «Aesthetically, the miracle is that the world exists» (NB: 86, 20.10.1916), and again: «We feel that even if all possible scientific questions are answered our problem is still not touched at all» (NB: 51, 25.5.1915). Thus, if Wittgenstein does not doubt that we can understand the propositions enunciated in the *Tractatus* on logic, ethics and aesthetics, which have «no sense» in that they do not correspond to the relations between certain objects in the world, this is because here he already saw what he would later present in his *Philosophical Investigations*, i.e. that language does not have the mere function of designating objects or translating thoughts, and that the

act of understanding a sentence is much more similar than one believes to what we usually call «understanding a musical theme».

Not only, but one of the central points of the *Tractatus* is that language cannot «say itself», which is connected to Wittgenstein's fundamental thought: what can be «shown» cannot be «said», a notion explicitly formulated in the *Tractatus*, but in fact present – albeit implicitly – in the development of all his subsequent reflections from the *Philosophical Investigations* to the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (it is, however, a decisive motif for a large part of twentieth-century philosophy, covering a trajectory that goes at least from Nietzsche to Adorno). Wittgenstein *shows* us, indeed, that sense is ultimately formed within language itself, at the very moment in which he puts before our eyes that what makes the sense of a proposition possible cannot be said, but in fact only shown. For this reason, we cannot say that *there is* language, since every *there is* for humankind is already generated in language: the result is that we can never overcome the limits of language itself. However, already in the *Tractatus* for Wittgenstein language does not only say what can be said, that is what can be represented; what is really important is not what language tells us, but *what it allows us to tend to*. In the *Philosophical Investigations* in particular, Wittgenstein's pivotal idea – an idea that has decisive consequences – is that language does not have only the purpose of naming or designating objects, or of translating thoughts: in short, language is primarily intended not to *inform*, but to *form*.

In this perspective, the mystical comes from the awareness of the impossibility of giving sense to the world, its existence and its totality, from within the world or from within language. From this point of view, there is a radical contingentism to the *Tractatus*: «No part of our experience is at the same time a priori. Whatever we see could also be other than it is. Whatever we can describe at all could be other than it is. There is no a priori order of things» (TLP: § 5.634). This means that what we must pass over in silence is indeed contained *in* language, but is not *the* contents of language. In fact, at a closer look, far from banishing the notion of the ineffable, language unveils it: for this reason we must accept to use a logically incorrect language, which does not represent anything, but rather *evokes*. Hence the incantatory value of language, with the result that its fundamental form could be poetry, which makes the world appear before us, at the very moment in which it makes us *feel* the silence (the Mystical of the *Tractatus* that, as we will see, in the *Philosophical Investigations* is presented as «the hidden nonsense») with which words are charged, and which is instead concealed by communicative language. The entire *Tractatus* can then be summarised as follows: «What expresses itself in lan-

guage, we cannot express by means of language» (TLP: § 4.121). In short, if we cannot represent the irrepresentable, this is because it shows precisely and only in language. But exactly because we are in language, and we cannot get out of it, then *transcendence*, as irrepressible excess, is something that is shown to us, only from within language.

In this sense, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes: «What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use» (PI: § 116): this return to the «everyday» is Wittgenstein's hallmark in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Too often, indeed, philosophers have the illusion that they are looking for depth and wonder beyond everyday language, without realising that exactly the most obvious and familiar things should surprise us (according already to the Platonic idea that philosophy stems from wonder): «The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one's eyes)» (PI: § 129). Hence, then, the crucial importance of a statement such as the one we find in *Culture and Value*, dated 1940: «How hard it is for me to see what is *right in front of my eyes*» (CV: MS 117 160 c; 10.2.1940) in pointing out the non-obviousness of the datum, namely its ability to reveal something that is other from itself, such a statement seems to be a counterpart of the famous line from Joyce's *Ulysses*, «Close your eyes and see», which expresses the very sense of wonder generated by the sudden showing forth of what, in the datum, offers itself to us as other from the datum itself and, as such, escapes the optical-retinal vision.

3. *Wittgenstein's Anti-Foundationalism and the Recognition of the Autonomy of Language*

From this point of view, exactly as he wonders at the existence of the world, Wittgenstein also wonders at the obviousness of everyday language. And if the *Tractatus* already assumed the insurmountable character of language, on this issue the *Philosophical Investigations* are even more explicit: «Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to regard the facts as "proto-phenomena" [*Urphänomene*]. That is, where we ought to say: this is the language-game that is being played» (PI: § 654). The term *Urphänomen* is, most likely, a reference to Goethe: it designates a dimension that the philosopher can only describe, and this is due to the impossibility of explaining everyday language, which – as mentioned above – is insuperable for us and which, consequently, constitutes the condition itself for any explanation (cf. PI: §§ 81-108).

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein refuses to seek outside everyday language itself the rules that govern its correct use. Thus, if in the *Tractatus* logic is an *a priori* that cannot be surmounted, in the *Philosophical Investigations* it is instead «language-games» that constitute the insurmountable limits within which meaningful propositions can be formed. In this light, according to Wittgenstein, we do not understand language in itself, but rather a specific language-game, by putting ourselves inside it; in this sense, that every game works according to its own rules is to say that there are no meanings in themselves that language subsequently expresses, i.e. there are no meanings existing independently of the linguistic activity of human beings. This is why Wittgenstein rejects any exact correspondence between words and definite objects, whose meaning would somehow pre-exist language. Thus we must *always* presuppose language when we want to account for the fact that language has some meaning. Therefore, human language cannot discover meanings that exist outside of itself; consequently, understanding a proposition is not equivalent to referring it to a pre-existent meaning, previously known by thought. Everything, in short, lies open in front of us and there is nothing to explain (cf. PI: § 126).

The fact that we philosophise *in* language means, then, that it is not the object that gives the sign its meaning, but it is the sign that induces us to think the object through its meaning. This is to say that language gives us the illusion of being a system of signs that function as intermediaries between our thought and objects – an illusion which is exposed when we realise that without language there are neither «thought» nor «objects». And it is precisely by running up against the limits of language that the philosopher discovers that his reflection is possible only within language itself. It would be necessary to be «outside language» to be able to make each word correspond to a distinct idea. One such limit is evident in the impossibility of identifying an absolute beginning, functioning as the foundation of philosophical reflection, as well as in the impossibility of carrying out a totally complete analysis and deduction. The fact is that right when we reflect on comprehension, we realise the existence of elements that cannot be reduced to conceptual thought.

Hence, throughout Wittgenstein's work, the recurring comparison between music and verbal language, that is between understanding a proposition and understanding a musical theme; it is no coincidence, as hinted above, that Wittgenstein himself in the *Philosophical Investigations* affirms: «Understanding a sentence in language is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think» (PI: § 527). The point is that for Wittgenstein music is something that *shows itself* – exactly as silence shows

itself in words – but that cannot be enunciated, and this because the meaning of a musical phrase lies within it, beyond any sound/thought dualism. Well, also everyday language – although, unlike music and poetry, it does not make us perceive silence – does not refer to anything external, being rather the condition that makes the perception of things possible: in short, language says nothing but itself and its sense is inseparable from it. From this point of view, against the logic of the double, Wittgenstein underlines that the meaning of a statement is immanent in its very structure.

It is no coincidence that, in the *Notebooks* written before the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein declares: «The proposition represents the situation – as it were off its own bat» (NB: 26, 5.11.1914) hence, moreover, his refusal to define mental states, desires, sensations and feelings as transcendent entities, independent of our linguistic paradigms: there is no such thing as sensation on the one hand and, on the other hand, the word that denotes and represents it. Feelings and emotions are not *translated* into language, but *inhabit* language itself, just as – in Nietzschean terms – *pathos* inhabits *logos*. The crucial point then is that the expression of an experience does not consist in the denotation of a psychological process: we understand a symbol, a statement, in the same way as we recognise the expression of a face or a gesture; as a matter of fact, recognising a face in a drawing, or even a proposition in a set of signs, does not mean comparing two distinct visual objects. Thus, in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein avoids explanations and theories, employing instead the special description he calls «perspicuous representation»: it is, as we shall see, a notion taken from Goethe, who saw connections between one plant and another, between one animal and another; but, most of all, it is the kind of understanding we can have of a piece of music, a poem, or any other work of art.

But if it is true, as we saw, that the distinction between «saying» and «showing» is for Wittgenstein the «central problem of philosophy», then, in this perspective, the unsayable is contained in what is said; hence Wittgenstein's ideal: to communicate the inexpressible without trying to express it. So, it is precisely because philosophy can only «show» that, from this point of view, it has a form similar to that of poetry. However, whereas the *Tractatus* emphasises that what cannot be said (the mystical, the unsayable) can only be shown, what emerges in the *Philosophical Investigations* is the need not to show the reader what cannot be said, but to induce him to *see in a different way* – thanks to what Wittgenstein calls «perspicuous vision» – what he has always had in front of his eyes; this results from the fact that the ineffable that the *Tractatus* located outside the limits of language, in the *Philosophical Investigations* is placed in language-games. Hence, once again, not the opposition of «saying» and «showing» expressed in

the *Tractatus*, but their mutual implication. In this light, Wittgenstein denies the transcendent existence of universal concepts and the notions themselves of «essence» and «unity», reducing them to «family resemblances»; in this way he, like Musil, is aware of the loss of sense of a coherent and unitary reality: what remains is a fragmentary reality, a reality, that is, unfounded, in which the language-game itself has no justification, but is rather the manifestation of an unfounded praxis. In this perspective, it seems unquestionable that Wittgenstein adopts an anti-foundationalist point of view, very close to Ernst Mach's, when he observes, in *On Certainty*, that each proposition can be derived from other propositions, but this does not imply that the latter are more certain than the derived propositions: «At the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded» (OC: § 253).

That philosophy then, according to Wittgenstein, leaves «everything as it is» (PI: § 124) means that it does not touch the ground where the game of true and false is played, and this because philosophy itself, far from pretending to explain, limits itself to describing. As a consequence, it is language-games, in themselves neither true nor false, that open up the possibility of practicing the concepts of true and false. What we believe in is not then, according to Wittgenstein, a single proposition that strikes us for its evidence, but the whole language-game with which the proposition is connected, and this because a statement does not have a meaning in itself, outside of the context where it is inserted: what we believe, in this sense, is believed within a grammatical paradigm, and not on the basis of an epistemological evidence, so much so that Wittgenstein goes as far as claiming that «*essence* is expressed in grammar» (PI: § 371): «Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar)» (PI: § 373). This means that we do not recognise anything as it is in itself, but as it appears through the filter of a grammatical pattern. In this sense, for Wittgenstein, the objects we talk about are not given entities to be discovered, but entities to be built; in the same way, both according to Heinrich Hertz and according to Ludwig Boltzmann, scientific theories do not reflect things as they are in themselves, but supply models through which to filter the reality of the physical world. For Hertz indeed, as well as for Wittgenstein, the relation between models or representations and physical phenomena is an internal relation; and also for Boltzmann, reality is filtered through an apparatus of grammatical models, which do not reflect things as they are in themselves.

Once again then, according to Wittgenstein, language expresses what it expresses «off its own bat», meaning by this the internal relation that necessarily exists between a proposition and a fact: language speaks for itself, being the *testimony* and not the con-

sequence of a belief external to it; as a matter of fact, Wittgenstein writes: «The precedent to which we are constantly inclined to appeal must reside in the symbol itself» (TLP: § 5.525). This, then, is Wittgenstein's expressivism which, against any intellectualism, he himself defines as one of the main elements of continuity between the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*: the intention is already contained in the words that express it, exactly as the fulfilment of an expectation is inextricably connected with the expectation itself, or as a concept is not distinct from the set of examples that illustrate its possible uses. From this point of view, what emerges is in the first place the autonomy of language, with the ensuing exclusion of any possible intelligible depth located beyond or beneath surface, that is beyond what can be perceived by the senses. Hence, then, Wittgenstein's claim in *Culture and Value* that «the limit of language manifests itself in the impossibility of describing the fact that corresponds to […] a sentence without simply repeating the sentence» (CV: MS 110 61; 10.2.1931).

4. *The Presence of Goethe's Morphology in Wittgenstein's Reflection: The Notions of «Perspicuity» and «Family Resemblances»*

A language-game can then be understood only by comparing it to other games, real or possible: this is precisely what the notion of «perspicuity» consists in. Particularly after the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein is deeply influenced – as already mentioned – by Goethe's morphological thought, according to which the vehicle of thought is, exactly as for Wittgenstein, language itself. By «morphological» thought Goethe means an inquiry into nature that does not look for the hidden causes of phenomena but that, looking at their surface, is interested in their exterior forms, with which they manifest themselves to the eyes of an observer. With such morphology, Goethe wants to contrast Newtonian mechanicism – very widespread at his time – which aimed at discovering, beyond the appearance of sensible phenomena, the deep mechanisms able to explain them; morphology, on the contrary, focuses exclusively on the visible, without postulating the existence of an invisible essence beyond it. The idea that in nature nothing happens which is not related to the whole is then the anti-essentialist assumption that enables Goethe to develop, along the traditional static concept of form, the morphological concept of dynamic relations among different possible forms. It is no coincidence that Goethe explicitly declares that he is not interested in the causes of phenomena and that he does not want to look at what is behind them: «Don't go looking for anything beyond phenomena: they are themselves what they teach, the doctrine» (Goethe [1998]: 77, § 575).

This means that phenomena always manifest to our sight the network of relations that «perspicuously» connects them; and it is precisely at such connection of phenomena that morphology looks. So, just because there isn't for Goethe any hidden essence on the basis of which the notion of «form» can be defined once for all, the morphological point of view implies the idea of «metamorphosis», of a continuous transformation of the identical and, at the same time, of form itself, with the ensuing recognition of the dynamic and evolving character of the latter. In this sense, the fact that form is always inscribed in the context of its transformations means that it should be conceived of not as a *Gestalt* – a «formed form» – but rather as a *Gestaltung* – a «form in formation», with the result that its unity necessarily implies the multiplicity of its various manifestations, among which – in Wittgenstein's words – it is always possible to grasp a network of similarities and differences which at the same time appear and disappear (cf. PI: § 66). Hence, even for Wittgenstein, the awareness of the original character of the phenomenon, i.e. of the single «language-game», deriving from the fact that «nothing is hidden», that everything is «already in plain view».

Thus, resuming Goethe's morphological project, Wittgenstein goes as far as asserting that «nature has neither stone nor skin», meaning that it is necessary to abolish not only a presumed essence of language, as well as the idea of purpose inherent in it, but also any distinction between surface and depth, and consequently between visible and invisible. On this issue, Wittgenstein states in the *Philosophical Investigations*: «don't think, but look» (PI: § 66), meaning: do not try to explain facts tracing them back to other facts, according to the model of scientific theories. In this perspective, what is important from the morphological or grammatical point of view is to see the multiplicity of examples, which the unity of the concept is made up of, as a sequence of cases among which there are relations of similarity and difference. As a matter of fact, employing the expression «family resemblances», Wittgenstein appropriates Goethe's idea of seeing, among these cases, passages and transitions: it is no coincidence that he uses expressions such as «links» and «intermediate links»; for this reason, in paragraph 122, he asserts: «Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate links*» (PI: § 122), in the sense that it is precisely by inventing these «intermediate links» that Wittgenstein intends to achieve that «perspicuous representation» which means indeed «seeing connections».

From this point of view, Wittgenstein's anti-essentialism is one with his recognition of the indivisibility of the internal and the external, where it is precisely interiority that constitutes the axis around which the philosopher's conception of art is articulated. Art

is indeed the spring of an «invention» that enriches and renovates our vision of interiority. So, if privileging the invisible is a strong trend in 20ᵗʰ century thought, for Wittgenstein, on the contrary, we can find such invisible only within the visible: in this sense, it is just and only art which, in an exemplary way, is able to manifest that invisible depth in the visible which would otherwise be denied to us. Moreover, a poem's words, a musical phrase, a portrait are not valuable for what they might say or explain, but precisely for what eludes any such efforts. As Edmond Jabès maintains: «Mysterious is the light, not the obscurity, of the book» (Jabès [1984]: 87). Not only, but such interiority manifested by the work is not, in any way, to be confused with inspiration and with the artist's state of mind: this is why we must turn our eyes on the works in order to «see» not what they «say» but what they «show» us. And it is precisely in this sense that for Wittgenstein, as well as for Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Paul Klee, works «look at us».

5. *The Identity-Difference of Condition and Conditioned; The Relation between «Family», «Class» and «Individual»*

More broadly, from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein's central problem is to establish at what condition language refers to the world. In the *Tractatus*, such condition – as mentioned above – is found in the identity of «logical form» between a proposition and a fact; this «logical form», however, being a condition, cannot be said, but only «shown», from within the proposition itself. In this perspective, as already pointed out, logic is the condition of the meaningfulness of a proposition, that is of an image: hence Wittgenstein's assertion that «nothing is more fundamental than logic», resulting from the fact that logic itself is recognised as «transcendental». But such logical condition implies a sacrifice: of the particular, of the determined, and thus of the individual. What is relevant from the logical point of view of the *Tractatus* is not the «how», that is the determined character of the proposition-image, but the «what» to which it refers – i.e., employing Gottlob Frege's term, the *Bedeutung* – and which can be the referent of different propositions-images – i.e., again according to Frege, the multiple *Sinne*.

Thus, Wittgenstein's statement in the *Tractatus* that «Logic must look after itself» (TLP: § 5.473) indicates precisely that logic is extraneous to the determined, that is the contingent, which, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, is instead the decisive problem: the problem which, as we saw, induces Wittgenstein to delve deeper into and rethink the relation between condition and conditioned. It is however unquestionable that logic,

as condition of possibility of the facts, comes *before* the *How* – how the world is (cf. TLP: § 5.552) –, but it definitely cannot explain the *What* of the world, i.e. the fact that something happens and that, happening, presents itself in a certain way and not otherwise: «that something happens» exceeds logic and, consequently, the world as totality of facts; indeed, this is the dominion not of logic but of the Mystical.

From this point of view, the logical possibility that the image has of saying, that is of representing or referring to, a fact constitutes the «transparency» of the image itself, whereas what makes the image something particular, that is individual – and which, as such, surpasses logical-denotative sayability and appears as nonsense – constitutes its «opacity»: this is exactly the «what» that can only be *felt* and not *said*; and it is in this way that Wittgenstein recognises that «feeling» *precedes* logic, even if it is precisely this what cannot be said. Then there is something more fundamental than logic, and this means that it is only because we «feel» the particular that we can «think» the universal: in short, we think (conceptually) because we feel. So, if opacity is this «what» – the ineffable, the Mystical –, and if it is true that «there can *never* be surprises in logic» (TLP: § 6.1251), then it is precisely the «what» – that something happens – that constitutes the dimension able to surprise us; and this results, in the first place, from its logically unpredictable character. As a matter of fact, it is in relation to the logical-denotative language that the existence of the world appears as a «miracle», that is as something that exceeds any possible explanation, any possible sayability, and therefore any possible meaningfulness.

In this perspective, if the sublimity of logic, in the *Tractatus*, implied a putting aside of the particular, i.e. of the individual, now, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, the focus is precisely on the latter. The problem is then to understand something that is already in front of our eyes – because it is exactly this that somehow we seem not to understand – and that, on closer inspection, embodies that more originary condition referred to above: the condition which, as such, cannot but be *contained* in the conditioned, but which, on the other hand, exceeds it, thus appealing not to an understanding but, rather, to a «knowing» which is, at the same time, an authentic «feeling». Hence Wittgenstein's reference to Augustine concerning the question of time: for Wittgenstein, indeed, «something that one knows when nobody asks one, but no longer knows when one is asked to explain it, is something that has to be *called to mind*» (PI: § 89). In this sense, knowing is equivalent to remembering, but also – as we saw – to «seeing right into phenomena». As a matter of fact, it is in phenomena that the condition, so to speak, embodies itself, exactly as the invisible embodies itself in the visible and the unsayable

in the sayable: such «embodying» constitutes indeed the memory that both the visible and the sayable are charged with. As a consequence, it is precisely the logical unpredictability of a language-game, of any game, the fact that it is not «everywhere» governed by rules, and thus its «vagueness», that makes *that* game possible as a determinate game; the point is that the image we can devise of a thing, as well as the language-game in which we find ourselves acting each time, can never present itself as something «exactly» determinable (cf. PI: § 70), since it presents itself rather as a necessarily «vague» and «blurred» dimension; nevertheless, the fact that vagueness presents itself *together* with definition means that the unsayable is not only connected with the sayable, but that, upon closer inspection, it constitutes its internal condition of possibility. In other words, something offers itself to us as a determinate and sayable datum only inasmuch as such datum presents itself, *at the same time*, as something vague and unsayable.

There is then, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, a real short circuit between condition and conditioned: we can even talk of a relationship of identity-difference between the two terms. This results from the fact that understanding the unity, as a unity exceeding the determined character of the particular, is one with understanding this determined character, since the determined is such only because of that excess. This exceeding unity, indeed, by withdrawing itself from any possibility to be said in a meaningful way, and thus from any possible use, is for Wittgenstein a proper «nonsense»: a nonsense which, being hidden in everything that is determined, turns out to be the very internal condition of meaningfulness. Furthermore, being conditioned by nonsense, meaningfulness can never present itself as something conclusive, but rather as something that must always and again be regained. From this point of view, the task of philosophy, i.e. of understanding, for Wittgenstein is «to pass from unobvious nonsense to obvious nonsense» (PI: § 464), which means to make evident the nonsense – the vagueness – that is hidden in what is determined. The problem then is not to say the nonsense – an impossible and contradictory endeavour – but to make it evident, through an understanding consisting in making explicit, although never conclusively, the unity implicit in multiplicity. Thus, in the process of understanding, what is determined is not accepted as such, but is questioned, so as to make emerge from it the unsayable which – as we saw – represents its internal condition.

Moreover, for Wittgenstein the logical notion itself of «class» presupposes the non-logical, but aesthetic, notion of «family». This means that, in a set of objects, we «see» a network of resemblances and dissimilarities, and it is precisely and exclusively on the basis of such unity – the unity of the similarities and differences, which we «grasp at a

stroke» – that we can classify that very set, attributing an order to it. In this case, which is indeed the case of knowledge, the family unity is the principle of any conceptual unity, in the functioning of which, however, «family resemblances», although they constitute its condition of possibility, have been put aside. In this sense, «family resemblances», and the principle of aesthetic unity they imply, are the internal condition of that conditioned which is the «class», i.e. the condition of the proper logical principle that the notion of class implies. In knowledge then, and particularly in scientific knowledge, it is the «family», as well as the aesthetic principle forming its unity, that conditions our building of «classes», i.e. conceptual determinations. In the case of a work of art, however, the function performed by family resemblances is different. But, to understand such function, it is first necessary to analyse the theme of the image, which, as a *fil rouge*, runs through Wittgenstein's entire reflection.

6. *The Question of the Image and Art as «Transition from Obvious Nonsense to Something which is Unobvious Nonsense»*

In this connection, particularly relevant is what Wittgenstein asserts in paragraphs 522 and 523 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, where – comparing the notion of proposition and that of image – he distinguishes a «portrait» from a «genre-picture»: if the first designates a kind of image which, being hetero-referential, refers to something outside of itself (and which, as such, can always be logically reformulated), the second is a kind of image which, being self-referential, «says itself», in the sense that it refers not to external reality but to its own sensuous elements («its forms and colours», as Wittgenstein puts it), as is indeed the case for a work of art. In this sense, the issue of the image is strictly connected with the question of understanding, as this is presented in paragraph 531 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, where Wittgenstein distinguishes logical understanding from aesthetic understanding:

We speak of understanding a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another which says the same; but also in the sense in which it cannot be replaced by any other. (Any more than one musical theme can be replaced by another.) In the one case, the thought in the sentence is what is common to different sentences; in the other, something that is expressed only by these words in these positions. (Understanding a poem). (PI: § 531)

Now, in the case of a sentence whose meaning is rephrasable, the task of understanding consists in «passing from unobvious nonsense to obvious nonsense» (cf. PI: § 464), that is it consists in going back from the conceptual determinateness of the sen-

tence to the family resemblances which form the condition of any conceptualisation and classification, and thus to the unity which is nonsense as condition of any meaningfulness. In the case, instead, of a non-rephrasable sentence (cf. PI: § 531) – i.e. a sentence that does not have any conceptual determination but that, like the genre-picture, «says itself» –, it is necessary to understand those precise words in those precise positions, or those precise «forms and colours» that we are in front of our eyes.

In this case, the case of the work of art, we have then a «transition from obvious nonsense to something which is unobvious nonsense» (PI: § 524); this means that a work of art presents itself as something determinate which is not conceptual but material: those words, those forms and colours which, as such, lacking a determinate meaning, and being rather the result of an implosion of the invisible in the visible, do not lend themselves to any determinate application or use. As a matter of fact, what we grasp in a work of art is not one meaning *or* another, but one meaning *and* another, i.e. multiple family resemblances and the unity implicit in them, which short-circuit with the material determinateness that is the form of the work. Thus, such determinateness does not actually imply a family unity, but *is* that very family unity, since it puts it at work, that is «presents» it, so that nonsense does not manifest itself at all in determinateness, but conceals itself into it. Nevertheless, such presentation always offers itself through a determinate representation which, as such, constitutes one of the multiple senses produced by the work, i.e. one of the multiple possibilities of making explicit the nonsense that is implicit in it. Hence, then, the multiple meanings that *at the same time* present and withdraw themselves, so much so that our understanding is always, *together*, a non-understanding (cf. PI: § 524). In the case of a work of art then, since it offers itself through its lines, words and colours, we face a nonsense – the family unity – which is inseparable from those signs, just as physical-material signs.

So, the fact that those signs «say themselves» means, more precisely, that what they «say» is exactly the multiplicity of family resemblances that, each time in a different way, configure themselves as a unity. From this point of view, such unity of the family resemblances among the multiple meanings of those words, forms and colours, is, on the one hand, the condition that makes those tangible signs *representations* and, on the other hand, it is *what those same signs represent*. The fact that in the representation the invisible offers itself in the visible, albeit remaining invisible, means that those signs are representations precisely because in them there is that unity that remains nonetheless the «other» of the signs themselves. The «other» is therefore such precisely because it offers itself in the signs while remaining other from them, i.e. without becoming itself a

sign. Thus, if in the case of a work of art signs surprise us, it is because they are ever new and different representations of this «other»; the surprise, from this point of view, springs from the logical unpredictability of representation, which clearly entails the ineffectiveness of any attempt at a rational justification on our part.

7. *Seeing and Seeing-as; Image and Representation; Language and Thought*

In this perspective, the short circuit of family unity and physical-material signs requires not a seeing but a real «seeing-as»; it requires, in other words, that the image should configure itself as a representation: this is just what happens, in an exemplary way, when we are in front of a work of art. Regarding this issue, Wittgenstein recognises the existence of a connection between image and representation. As a matter of fact, an image, be it figurative or non-figurative, presents itself in the first place as something physical, which can acquire a determinate meaning only on condition of being seen in a way or in another, that is of being represented in a certain manner and not otherwise. This results from to the fact that in a visual image there are non-visual elements, without which that image wouldn't even be perceived as such. This means that a visual image can be perceived only on the basis of representations that are not exclusively visible; but it also means that the transparency of the image, i.e. its referring to something determinate, exists only thanks to its opacity, or vagueness, which is such because it is non-visible and non-sayable.

This is an originary condition, which is precisely the *other* of the image, that other that offers itself in the image's physical elements, while withdrawing from them, that is remaining invisible. Thus, if on the one hand an image is readable only on condition of configuring itself as a representation, on the other hand it can manifest itself, albeit remaining «other» and invisible, only through that conditioned which is the image in its materiality. There is then a connection between image and representation. And it is precisely by seeing-as, i.e. by creating representations, that we grasp, in the image, the opacity of the image itself: an excess which is thinkable, but never completely sayable and visible. If in the *Notebooks* Wittgenstein claims the identity of thought and language – an identity guaranteed, evidently, by logic –, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, as well as in subsequent works, the relation between thought and language becomes a relation of identity-difference. This means that thought, although presenting itself through language, always exceeds it. This is what Wittgenstein highlights in paragraph 7 of the second volume of the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*: «It isn't true that thinking

is a kind of speaking, as I once said. The concept 'thinking' is categorically different from the concept "speaking"» (RPP: § 7). However, thought, although exceeding language, can never present itself independently of it, exactly as representation, although exceeding the image, can never be separated from the determinateness of the image itself. It is then the determinateness of language and of the image that requires as its condition of possibility the identity-difference of thought and language, as well as of representation and image. Hence the possibility of representing the invisible: this, indeed, manifests itself in the representation only in connection with a visual image, from which it simultaneously withdraws. If it is true that seeing-as (and hence thinking) is the condition for seeing – a condition that manifests itself *in* seeing –, it is also true that it is only because it withdraws from seeing that seeing is possible. We thus have a manifestation of that invisible background which is the internal condition of the visible and which, as such, as an aesthetic dimension, appeals to «feeling».

In this light, seeing-as is a questioning of the givenness of the visible in order to make the invisible emerge from it. But this also means that it is representation that enables us to grasp the invisible with which the image is charged and thanks to which the image offers itself to us as a memory of the invisible. And since the invisible appears only in the materiality of the image, that is in its forms and colours, then we can say that the aesthetic principle is a sensuous and representative principle. Representation indeed, being never totally reducible to the image, but giving itself always and only through the image, shows how the latter is not only visible, but displays a connection of feeling and thinking: thus, it is representation that makes visible, in the image, the invisible.

This is what we can term the «visual», understood as the visible that opens itself up, showing always and again something non-visible, although this process of manifestation never reaches an end. This is exactly what Adorno affirms when, in his *Aesthetic Theory*, he defines artistic form, that is the sensuous elements of a work of art – and consequently of the visible –, as «sedimented content»: indeed, if form coincided fully with content, then the latter could manifest itself once for all; on the contrary, just because it is sedimented, that is because it is stratified in the tangible elements of form, i.e. of the visible, such content is something that appears in constantly new and different manners, without ever exhausting itself into something visible. For this very reason, then, the artistic image for Adorno is not reproductive but productive, in the sense that it is *mimesis* of itself, as it produces (i.e. makes visible) from within itself. This, in turn, is exactly what also Paul Klee asserts in his *Creative Confession*: «Art does not reproduce the visible, but makes visible», referring to the ability of the image to manifest, from within itself, the

non-visible dimension which is the «genesis of the visible», or its «prehistory» (the realm of unrealised possibilities: again in Klee's words, the world of the «dead» and of the «unborn»). Thus, if such prehistory of the visible is a dimension that the artist, thanks to his «penetrating gaze», is able to grasp and translate into an image – concentrating and concealing it in its «forms and colours» (cf. PI: § 523) –, then the task of the beholder is to go back, thanks to a gaze which Klee calls «grazing», from the visibility of the artistic image towards its implicit condition and, precisely, the non-visible. Not only, but this non-visible dimension, which form makes appear in ever new and different ways, is something historically determined that, as it were, is condensed in the form itself: hence, in Adornian terms, the «truth content» of the image, that is its ability to speak of the world, an ability that, paradoxically, is one with the self-referential character of the work, i.e. its autonomy from the world.

On the whole, both according to Adorno and according to Wittgenstein, what the image displays is something hidden, that is something opaque, as compared to logic: something which is «other» from the visible image and which, nevertheless, offers itself only through the image and thanks to it. Hence, for both philosophers, the immanent temporality of the image that had been previously underlined by Aby Warburg with his strictly interconnected notions of *Pathosformeln* and *Nachleben.* In this perspective, it is precisely the connection between visible and invisible, and thus between representation and image, that transforms the image-given, that is the determinate image in front of our eyes, into an authentic «gift», that is something unforeseen logically, and which – as already mentioned – appears in ever new and different ways.

Hence, then, the idea of a memory that embodies itself in the image and that, by showing the inherently temporal character of the image, together with its internal historicity, makes a purely formal interpretation of it insufficient: what is at stake, indeed, is the memory of something that cannot be entirely represented, of something that, while offering itself to us in an exterior form, cannot be seen. So, it is precisely in the physical-material dimension – i.e. in what Adorno calls «form» –, and therefore in the realm of the body, that the invisible is inscribed. From this point of view, if the image, being in the first place made up of «lines and colours», is able to surprise and astonish us, it is because in its materiality is offered the interconnection of visible and invisible that, by making the experience of vision interminable, constitutes the condition itself of its immanent temporality. Understanding itself, moreover, cannot set this temporality aside; it is no coincidence then that the ideal of absolute formal transparency characterising the logical image of the *Tractatus* expresses in the first place a refusal of temporality.

The fact that representation is necessarily, and precariously, balanced between opacity and transparency means, therefore, that it encompasses both temporality and form, absence and presence: beyond the image, it is indeed opacity that presents itself in the image right as it withdraws from it. Consequently, denying this dimension of opacity in the image – i.e. denying the invisible –, as if the image were totally transparent (as if it could resolve itself entirely into something visible), would make the image an empty simulacrum, unable to speak of the world.

It is doubtless that, in Wittgenstein, the question of representation is one with the question of thought: representing is indeed thinking. It is an incessantly renewed effort of «restarting the beginning», of going back to what is *before*; not, however, in the sense of trying to reach the first foundation of reality, since the problem of the origin is actually an illusory one: the opacity, the occult nonsense, is this *before* that always offers itself in the *here and now* of the material image. Conceived in this manner, opacity embodies the originary character of representation as opposed to the image: the originary character, then, of thought as opposed to language. As a result, if the image is always born of the endeavour to «say» such opacity, of making visible the invisible, what ultimately emerges is a demonstration of impotence: opacity, in this sense, is a necessity for the image and, *at the same time*, its defeat. In this way, the «before» is not reached and thus «eliminated», but reproduces itself always and again. This is exactly, in short, the memory connected with representation: the *renewed production of the origin*, not the *preservation of something given once for all in the past*. In this perspective, it is just and only in the tangible dimension of the image that its opacity shows itself, but this «in» should not be understood as referring to the place where the essence finally offers itself, as if the surface of sensible phenomena were a mere occasion for the unveiling of an intelligible depth; this «in» should instead be understood as referring to the place of manifestation of that «before» that has become absent, since it is thanks to this absence that the surface offers itself to us as the place of an ever renewed wonder. From this point of view, Wittgenstein's entire reflection is an incessant questioning of the datum, which is also an incessant questioning of seeing: just as seeing exists on the condition of seeing-as, in the same way transparency exists on the condition of opacity. However, the fact remains that, if it is possible to speak of opacity, such possibility implies that opacity is already lacerated in itself, «re-vealing itself» as the other *of the* vision. Thus, if it is true not that «I know because I see» but, rather, that «I see because I know» – an awareness already expressed by Nietzsche –, where «seeing» is equivalent to understanding and «knowing» is equivalent to feeling, it is also true that such knowing, as aes-

thetic condition of any possible understanding and representation, can manifest itself precisely and exclusively in seeing.

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