The Thinker and The Draughtsman: Wittgenstein, Perspicuous Relations, and 'Working on Oneself'

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In 1931, in the remarks collected as *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein writes: 'A thinker is very much like a draughtsman whose aim it is to represent all the interrelations between things.'[1] At a glance it is clear that this analogy might contribute significantly to a full description of the autobiographical thinker as well. And this conjunction of relations between things and the work of the draughtsman immediately and strongly suggests that the grasping of relations is in a sense visual, or that networks or constellations of relations are the kinds of things (to continue the ocular metaphor) brought into focus by *seeing* in the right way.

This should not come as a surprise: emphasis on the visual constitutes a leitmotif running throughout Wittgenstein's writings from the earliest to the latest, and we know that for him one way of making progress in philosophy is to loosen, and then—when philosophical problems have been dissolved—finally escape from the grip of simplifying 'pictures' or conceptual templates that attempt to generalize beyond their contextually specific sphere of applicability. And that escape constitutes, and is the measure of, philosophical-therapeutic progress. Indeed, also in 1931 he wrote, in response to people saying that philosophy does not generally progress and that we are still working with, and on, the problems bequeathed to us from the ancients, that those who level this complaint do not grasp why 'this has to be so.'[2] 'It is,' he writes, 'because our language has remained the same and keeps seducing us into asking the same questions.' And by seduction, he means the ensnaring grammatical 'look' of language: "the verb 'to be' … looks as if it functions in the same way as 'to eat' and 'to drink.'" And we speak of 'a river of time' and 'an expanse of space,' and we have the *adjectives* 'identical,' 'true,' 'false,' 'possible,' and so forth (as though we are attributing generic or Platonic properties to the particulars before us, thus giving rise

[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 12.
[2] *Culture and Value*, p. 15.

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to metaphysical questions concerning the nature not of the particular but of the Platonic quality it allegedly exemplifies or in which it participates). The achievement of conceptual clarity, of perspicuity, is also a result of the kinds of philosophical therapy Wittgenstein has shown us throughout his investigations. Indeed that achieved perspicuity is very often described by Wittgenstein as a perspicuous *overview* (*'übersicht'*). Without such a clarification (itself of course initially an ocular term), 'people will keep stumbling over the same puzzling difficulties and find themselves staring at something which no explanation seems capable of clearing up.'[3]

The distinct kind of Wittgensteinian therapy being discussed here has, since the writings of John Wisdom, been likened to psychoanalysis, and this analogy has proven enlightening in a number of ways. But in characterizing Wittgenstein's work one should bear in mind that this is after all an *analogy*, and so it has its limits, can be taken too far, and can insinuate misleading expectations. This distinctive kind of therapeutic work, for example, can be taken as excessively personal (to the point that it loses force or value beyond the individual psychology within with this work takes place) and so be only of correspondingly limited value to the discipline of philosophy. This, to put it bluntly, is utterly false. Rush Rhees writes:

> Philosophy as therapy: as though the philosopher's interest were in the personal disabilities of the perplexed: and as though he were not perplexed himself – as though philosophy were not discussion. Some remarks which Wittgenstein himself made are partly responsible for this. But he was suggesting an analogy with therapy; and he was doing this in an attempt to bring out certain features in the method of philosophy: to show the difference between what you have to do here and what you would do in solving a problem in mathematics or in science. It was not a suggestion about what it is that philosophy is interested in. If Wittgenstein spoke of 'treatment', it is the problem, or the question, that is treated – not the person raising it. It is not the personal malaise of the 'patient' which makes the perplexity or question important. What has led me to this perplexity is not my personal stupidity. Rather it is a tendency in the language which could lead *anyone* there, and keeps leading people there.[4]

[3] *Culture and Value*, p. 15.

[4] In 'Assessments of the Man and the Philosopher', in K. T. Fann, ed., *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Man and His Philosophy* (New York: Dell, 1967), pp. 77–78. This passage is helpfully discussed in Ronald Suter, *Interpreting*

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At the same time, one wants to bear in mind that it is a philosophical or conceptual problem expressed in words, where those are the words of a particular person with a particular sensibility and experiential background as spoken or written in a particular context—all in such a way that the meaning of the words is inflected by those occasion-specific particularities. One can thus go too far in the direction Rhees is pointing out here as well and render the matter in what would then be insufficiently personal terms. The balance—fitting to a nuanced awareness of the multiform determinants of linguistic meaning—is and should be a delicate and in a sense bi-focal one.

So this affords, as we say, a glimpse of some of the content of Wittgenstein's remark about the similarity between the thinker and the draughtsman, but one needs to say more to show why and how the recognition of this similarity can prove helpful. As one part of the task of clarifying relations, the thinker assembles cases in which terms such as 'identical,' 'true,' 'false,' 'possible'—and many other philosophically seductive words such as 'intentional,' 'willed,' 'caused,' 'planned', 'preconceived,' 'remembered,' 'recollected,' 'inner,' 'content', and 'reflected upon'—actually function, and these uses, seen in particularized contexts, often show one of two things. They show either (1) that the uses of such terms in context are very remote from the philosophical or metaphysical use of the term in which the general or Platonic question concerning the nature of the thing (willing, causing, preconceiving, remembering, etc.) is asked, to such an extent that we come to doubt our grasp of the very meaning of the term in the metaphysical sense; or (2) that a wide range of intermediate cases *connects* the seductively puzzling case before us to related unproblematic cases, cases in which the criteria for the use, for the meaning, for the intelligible comprehension of the term or concept in question are given. This kind of 'connective analysis,' as it has been called, reveals the 'interrelations between things,' to return to Wittgenstein's words concerning the similarities between the thinker and the draughtsman. And both (1) the sense of disorientation to the language in which the general philosophical question is expressed, and (2) the gradually-dawning awareness that the criteria that emerge for particularized usages of these philosophically-troublesome words do not (legitimately) carry over to the generalized philosophical case, are themselves also measures of therapeutic progress.

Wittgenstein: A Cloud of Philosophy, a Drop of Grammar (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), p. 48.

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A good draughtsman will clarify the relations between all the various parts in such a way that the drawing itself constitutes a perspicuous overview of the building—and incidentally here we see one philosophical motivation for architectural modernism (of precisely the kind practiced by Wittgenstein in his house for his sister in Vienna), in that the relations will be clearer in a design that is not obscured by ornamentation. But note that, for Wittgenstein as for the draughtsman, not everything visual, or visually 'plotted', is by virtue of that fact good, i.e. conducive to perspicuity, be it philosophical or architectural. We have just seen above that the 'look' of words, the parallelisms on their grammatical surfaces, can deeply mislead. Phraseology that for the user unwittingly insinuates metaphysical 'pictures,' in Wittgenstein's sense, is a bewitchment of our intelligence by language that is itself pictorial, as in the phrase 'the river of time.' The visual, or our way of seeing, can be clarified, and it can also be profoundly clouded or confused. A good thinker articulates, in Wittgenstein's phrase, 'all the interrelations between things,' as does the good draughtsman. If a bad one, then, obscures them, we might think, as an extreme example, of a draughtsman who generates drawings like those of M. C. Escher in depicting impossible or internally contradictory states of affairs and yet who does not realize he is doing so. (Imagine a construction company working from Escher's drawings—'slab', 'pillar', 'beam,' and perhaps 'what?!').[5] The 'painting' of a false self-portrait in autobiographical writing, or creating what becomes a verbally-encrusted, deceptive self-definition (where, to put it one way, the 'dots' of a life narrative are falsely or misleadingly connected), would constitute the parallel unrecognized anti-therapeutic failing in self-understanding.

Of the interrelations that the draughtsman perspicuously represents, some would be the formal elements within the design (say of an architectural façade). The strength, and the significance, of a vertical line is determined in part by its interaction with the other

[5] I am referring here to Wittgenstein's imagined microcosm of linguistic usage, the 'builders' language'; see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Basil Blackwell, 1958), §§ 1–38. See Also Rush Rhees, 'Wittgenstein's Builders,' in *Discussions of Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 71–84; Warren Goldfarb, 'I want you to bring me a slab. Remarks on the opening sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*,' *Synthese* 56 (1983), pp. 265–282; and Norman Malcolm, 'Language Game (2),' in his *Wittgensteinan Themes: Essays 1978–1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 172–181.

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verticals in the composition, its role in relation to horizontals, its placement within the illusory third dimension or the receding space of the image, and so forth. This makes the rendering deeply analogous to a language-game, to a circumscribed context or conversational microcosm within which certain verbal 'moves' get their interrelations to other moves, to previously-said things, to things left unsaid, to what was implied, and so forth. Here the analogy is indeed deep, and it is perhaps no accident that Wittgenstein begins his discussion of language-games in *Philosophical Investigations* with the builder's language. And recall that he said there that '[i]t disperses the fog to study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of application in which one can command a clear view of the aim and functioning of the words…' (*PI*, §5). Simplicity here functions (as the removal of decoration does in an exactly parallel way in modernist architecture) as that which allows the important elements—elements that, like language, get their *point* within the context of their 'utterance'—to be seen. Thus to grasp the larger context of the line, the vertical beam, the horizontal slab, is not an *addition* to the fundamental perception of that particular element—no, the context rather is an ineliminable prerequisite for seeing the beam or slab for what it is in the most elemental sense. The context, within which the architectural element, or 'gesture,' makes sense or takes its point—or has its 'interconnections'—is just like the language-game within which the word, the phrase, the utterance, gets its point and, indeed, shows its meaning-determining 'interconnections.' And to understand that word, or more likely the group of words used collectively, to see it within its meaning-determining web of interconnections, is precisely to make the therapeutic progress described just above, i.e. to see both (1) the remoteness of this actual usage from the linguistically-disoriented generalized question and (2) the illicit or linguistically-deceptive borrowing of criterial legitimacy that can give those clouded expressions their appearance of sense, their Escher-like false plausibility.

This relation between the work that the thinker does clarifying language and dispelling confusions and the work of the draughtsman or architect who clarifies the design and its network of interrelations, surfaces time and again throughout Wittgenstein's writings. We see it in the 1930 draft of the 'Foreword' to *Philosophical Remarks*, where—of his work there in the philosophy of language—he writes: 'I am not interested in constructing a building, so much as in having a perspicuous view of the foundations of possible buildings.'[6]

[6] *Culture and Value*, p. 7.

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Judith Genova[7] offers a very helpful elucidation of what is meant by the important phrase 'a perspicuous view.' She begins[8] with Wittgenstein's already quoted remark from *Philosophical Investigations*, § 5: 'It disperses the fog to study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of applications in which one can command a clear view of the aim and functioning of the words.'[9] Genova writes: 'Clarity's main virtue is that it reveals the connections between things and thus provides a view of the whole…' (p. 28). Here there emerges a link (also helpfully explained by Genova) between the later Wittgensteinian notion of perspicuity and the early work of the *Tractatus*: in *Tractatus* 6.45 Wittgenstein wrote 'To view the world *sub specie aeternitatis* is to view it as a whole—a limited whole. Feeling the world as a limited whole—it is this that is mystical.'[10] The modernist gaze, as one might call it, could be succinctly described in just these terms. To see all of the connections between elements perspicuously would be to see that architectural microcosm as a limited whole. And if god is, indeed, in the details, we need to keep these in sharp focus. In *Philosophical Investigations*, §51, Wittgenstein wrote 'In order to see more clearly, here as in countless similar cases, we must focus on the details of what goes on; must look at them *from close to*.' This passage is also discussed in Genova (p. 41), who articulates well the need for a 'double perspective,' one that both moves in for fine detail and moves back for an overview. It is worth recalling in this connection that in 1938 Wittgenstein wrote the entry quoting Longfellow: 'In the elder days of art,/ Builders wrought with greatest care/Each minute and unseen part,/For the gods are everywhere,' adding to it the parenthetical note to himself '(This could serve me as a motto).'[11] Also in the early 1930s he writes: 'Remember the impression one gets from good architecture, that it expresses a thought. It makes one want to respond with a gesture.'[12] And in 1942 he writes, further cementing the analogy between a purposive and meaningful human gesture made within a context that is in ineliminable part constitutive of its

[7] In *Wittgenstein: A Way of Seeing* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[8] In her Chapter 1, 'Commanding a Clear View,' pp. 27–54.

[9] This itself, I would suggest, is deeply analogous to the methodological imperatives of modernism in architecture: to strip away ornamentation, where this is understood as a form of concealment, in order to reveal the aim and functioning of the elements of the structure.

[10] Discussed in Genova, p. 29.

[11] *Culture and Value*, p. 34.

[12] *Culture and Value*, p. 22.

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meaning and a 'move' or gesture made within architecture: 'Architecture is a *gesture*. Not every purposive movement of the human body is a gesture. And no more is every building designed for a purpose architecture.'[13]

For Wittgenstein, when philosophers are misled by the tricks (although this word should not for a moment suggest that they are simple or superficial)[14] of language, they use (or misuse) words in ways severed from the particularized context that ensures their

[13] *Culture and Value*, p. 42.

[14] On this point see Wittgenstein's observation in *Philosophical Remarks*, trans. Raymond Hargreaves and Roger White (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pt. 1, sec. 2: 'Why is philosophy so complicated? It ought, after all, to be *completely* simple. –Philosophy unties the knots in our thinking, which we have tangled up in an absurd way; but to do that, it must make movements which are just as complicated as the knots. Although the *result* of philosophy is simple its methods for arriving there cannot be so. The complexity of philosophy is not in its matter, but in our tangled understanding.' Applied to the issue of self-understanding (of the kind that is the result of the autobiographical or self-directed therapeutic conceptual work being examined presently), this rightly suggests that the tracing of the etiology of conceptual confusion standing in the way of self-knowledge may well be no less complex and intricate than the life of a human being, but the end result may be a state of clarity that, in contrast to the complexity of the autobiographical labour that led to it, seems liberatingly simple. A deeply absorbing example of this process as it traces layered complexity and multiple resonances across and through a life, but then emerging in moments of perspicuous clarity, is shown in Bela Szabados, *In Light of Chaos* (Saskatoon: Thistledown Press, 1990). In the final passages of this autobiographical novel Szabados articulates the nature of the labour he has actually undertaken from the first page. In referring back to his reading of Popper and Marx with a group of young students and the impulse to not only understand the world but to change it, he writes: 'Yes, change it, but for the better, and this can not be done in terms of rigid schemes and systems, where the voice is privileged, univocal, and the source of violence. Perhaps the real revolutionary is he who revolutionises himself. I incline toward clarification, the dispelling of myth and confusion in the personal life and in the world – my conception is that of a cognitive therapist where the therapist is himself always the therapee, as well' (p. 124). This book also shows the considerable value, the meaning-determining significance, of the most fine-grained particularities in experience as they uniquely allow the kind of 'tracing' mentioned just above; Szabados closes the book with the line 'I resolve always to stay close enough to see the terrain clearly, never to lose sight of the terrain' (p. 125). His epigraph is Wittgenstein's remark: 'The lover of wisdom has to descend into primeval chaos and feel at home there.'

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intelligibility and gives them a point. And as suggested above, the criteria that make this so much as possible reside within those contexts; they are not brought in with the individual words, item-by-item. If aestheticians ask of the nature of beauty itself, as at once an abstraction and a substantive, in such a way that no particular case is really relevant to the question, they severe the word from its criteria in just this way. In such circumstances of conceptual vertigo, *no* answer will seem satisfying. And the real problem, as we can be quick or slow to see, lies with just what this therapeutic approach addresses, i.e. the question and what it presupposes, and not the answer. Language, like architecture, imposes a certain discipline, of a kind that was brought into particularly sharp focus in the generation of J. L. Austin: not just *any* utterances constitute language, and not just any drawings constitute architecture. Wittgenstein wrote, in 1931:

> Philosophers often behave like little children who scribble some marks on a piece of paper at random and then ask the grown-up 'What's that?'— It happened like this: the grown-up had drawn pictures for the child several times and said: 'this is a man,' 'this is a house,' etc. And then the child makes some marks too and asks: what's this then?

The 'then' here is, for present purposes, especially interesting: the presumption on the part of the child is that *anything* can follow the intelligible drawings and be a drawing. Just as one might believe that, if we have a string of four or five sentences, then *any* combination of words following that would be a sentence, would be coherent, as well. But of course, the discipline intrinsic to language-games, be they linguistic or stylistic,[15] demands much more. The 'interconnections' that both the thinker and the draughtsman make lucid need to be present, and they may be in the foreground or in the background. If in the foreground, they can be the formally evident relations between horizontals and verticals within the plane of the façade, or the connecting thematic sinews between the episodes of an evolving conversation or narrative of any kind. But if in the background, they become in a sense even more interesting.

Wittgenstein had long been interested in the inexpressible, the unsayable, and in his early philosophical work in the *Tractatus* this

[15] I offer a discussion of the relations between linguistic and stylistic language-games in *Meaning and Interpretation: Wittgenstein, Henry James and Literary Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); see esp. Chapter 1, 'Language-Games and Artistic Styles.'

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concept played a central role. In another remark, also published in *Culture and Value*, we see that by 1931, although he is clearly still interested in the concept, he is now thinking of it in a different way, with a different inflection, or with a different web of meaning-determining interrelations. He writes: 'Perhaps what is inexpressible (what I find mysterious and am not able to express) is the background against which whatever I could express has its meaning.'[16] It is thus not now a distinctive kind of content that evades propositional encapsulation or expression, but rather the background against which what is expressed functions—and we can take this in linguistic or in artistic and architectural form. The word 'mysterious' here plays an interesting role: we sense the presence of, or our reliance upon, that unspoken background—the evolved context of the expressive speech, gesture, or work of art or architecture—but it would prove exceptionally difficult to capture in any particular case everything, or even an approximation of everything, in the background that is, again, in good measure constitutive of the meaning of the expression. And what is 'mysterious' is thus *in a sense* a kind of ghostly presence; without it our expressions would not possess the significance they do. It is as though both the thinker and the draughtsman are able to bring to mind some parts of that background, making some strands of a very complex weave explicit, perhaps particularly the elements of the background that resonate importantly with the expression at hand. Thus the literary critic shows how Dante would not have been possible without Virgil, who in turn would not have been possible without Homer. The architectural historian shows how Le Corbusier's villa would not have been possible without Palladio. The musical analyst shows how the possibilities realized in Mozart's *Six Quartets Dedicated to Haydn* would not have been possible without Haydn and yet not foreseeable by him either. The art historian shows how early analytical cubism would not have developed without late Cezanne. But each of these quick examples, as will be evident, are far too brief to really capture the point—and that is the point. To genuinely grasp the deeper significance of the great steps taken by Dante, Corbusier, Mozart, and Braque and Picasso, we need to *articulate* a great deal more. And of that vast background content—content that is expressible, but not presently wholly recollectable—what is and what is not necessary to articulate will be context-dependent. One particular line of inquiry will make one strand emerge in higher relief; another inquiry will bring out another, and there will not be a point at which this

[16] *Culture and Value*, p. 16.

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process is complete (which, incidentally, would explain one way in which works of art are inexhaustible). The presence of the past within the present works in precisely this way, and it gives a sense of what Wittgenstein meant by the word 'spirits' in his remark of 1930: 'The early culture will become a heap of rubble and finally a heap of ashes, but spirits will hover over the ashes.'[17] A *sense* of that surrounding constellation of interrelations that led to, that made possible, what is now rubble and ashes, will persist. That we perceive a work of art or architecture within such a network of relations is implicit in another of Wittgenstein's remarks from 1930, and it reminds us of how important it is, in aesthetic contexts, to be aware of acts of restraint, to be aware of what was possible, but *not* done – where what was possible but not done constitutes in a seemingly paradoxical way (seeming, because acts of omission are nevertheless acts) part of the content of the work. We of course understand persons, including ourselves, with similar layered combinations of commission and omission. 'Today' he writes, 'the difference between a good and a poor architect is that the poor architect succumbs to every temptation and the good one resists it.'[18] A language-game, be it linguistic or stylistic, opens many avenues of development, opens many possibilities. Understanding that game is, in large part, a matter of grasping those possibilities, seeing the artist within that expanding network, and seeing what he or she did do within that surrounding dense weave of what was left out, what was not done or, for the speaker, what was left unsaid. This too is not uniform: in some cases we will consider what an artist chose not to do (i.e. did not commit a crime of ornamentation within a context where a value on the perspicuous clarification of designed interrelations is paramount); in other cases, critically, we will see a possibility opened that the artist missed, one of which he or she was unaware in an aesthetically blameworthy sense, i.e. it will be something that *should* have been seen, or was seen by another artist with—as we metaphorically say—greater vision. This stands in direct analogy with the fact that we may criticize a person, a speaker of language, for having failed to say what should have been

[17] *Culture and Value*, p. 3.

[18] *Culture and Value*, p. 3. Good architecture is thus, in a sense, a moral matter (in that there is a prescriptive sense of what ought, and particularly ought *not*, to be done). Conversely, Wittgenstein describes (some) moral issues in architectural terms: in 1937, he writes, 'The *edifice of your pride* has to be dismantled. And that is terribly hard work.' *Culture and Value*, p. 26.

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said. Indeed Wittgenstein, in 1940, criticizes himself in just these terms, saying that in his house for his sister he was working with a quite full awareness of the kinds of interrelations and possibilities within the stylistic game I have been discussing, but that a more romantic power is lacking in the building. He wrote: '…the house I built for Gretl is the product of a decidedly sensitive ear and *good* manners, an expression of great *understanding* (of a culture, etc.). But *primordial* life, wild life striving to erupt into the open—that is lacking.'[19] And if we have some difficulty imagining how the architectural expression of primordial striving might have been incorporated into that cool temple[20] of modernist consistency, internally generated, then that itself gives a sense of the way in which possibilities are circumscribed as well as opened within a stylistic language-game.

Be that as it may, everything I have said so far in this excursus into the interrelations between philosophy and architecture is, in the sense of Wittgenstein's use of 'background,' its own background for what is I think of fundamental importance here in terms of elucidating a notion of therapeutic philosophical work and the kind of progress it affords. He wrote, in 1931, this remark: 'Working in philosophy—like work in architecture in many respects—is really more a working on oneself. On one's way of seeing things. (And what one expects of them.)'[21] The phrase 'really more a working on oneself' itself invites a changed way of seeing work in philosophy. Working on oneself can mean any kind of autobiographical—in the broadest sense—inquiry, where one works toward a more capacious grasp not only of what one has done, and why one has done it, but also how one has come to hold the views one does, how pressures on one's thoughts have manifested themselves in various beliefs and actions, how what one said was opened—as a possibility—by earlier things one said, how one has understood the trajectories of one's own life projects, and so forth. And of course such autobiographical subjects can easily take a more explicitly philosophical turn: they can turn to how one pictures the act of introspection, how one pictures meaning in language (and often, by extension, how one pictures

[19] *Culture and Value*, p. 38. Also in 1934 Wittgenstein had written 'In my artistic activities I really have nothing but *good manners*.' (p. 25).

[20] Wittgenstein described his philosophical work in these terms, further underscoring the commonalities between architectural and philosophical work. See *Culture and Value*, p. 2: 'My ideal is a certain coolness. A temple providing a setting for the passions without meddling with them.'

[21] *Culture and Value*, p. 16.

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meaning in the arts),[22] and indeed how one conceives of, pictures, a human being.

But more precisely with regard to all of the foregoing as background for a point to be made presently, an autobiographical project can—and very often does—take the form of 'representing all the interrelations between things,' like the work of the thinker and of the draughtsman. Or at least, as we have seen, representing *some* of those relations: the interrelations in the web of one's background will stretch beyond any particular autobiographical iteration. And various strands of that life, various collections of past experiences, will be brought into self-interpretative play with, will be enlivened by, a present or recent event whose meaning is in significant part constituted by those past resonances or whose content is in significant part determined by those sinews of association.

Similarly, like the progress-measuring escape from simplifying 'pictures' that would govern our thought and preclude the patient achievement of conceptual clarity, simple or truncated narratives of a life, or an episode in a life, will in a parallel way blind us to the contextually-specific particularities that not merely add to the experience, but indeed make it what it is. The draughtsman elucidates the complex interconnections; viewing the self's past for its significance in the present, for our present self-understanding, is much like experiencing art in three dimensions, for example viewing architecture or sculpture, precisely because, in moving around and through it, we constantly change our vantage point, which in turn changes what does and does not come into focus, what does and does not take a foreground or background position. Of doing philosophy, Wittgenstein wrote in 1937: 'I find it important in philosophizing to keep changing my posture, not to stand for too long on one leg, so as not to get stiff',[23] which is a nice way of embodying the point concerning the conceptual need for shifting vantage points and assembling a larger mosaic of initially separate perspectival positions; 'stiffness' in our present case would thus constitute the hardening of

[22] I offer a study of various ways in which preconceptions concerning linguistic meaning powerfully shape conceptions of artistic meaning in *Art as Language: Wittgenstein, Meaning and Aesthetic Theory*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995). Of such connections Wittgenstein notes: 'Phenomena akin to language in music or architecture. Significant irregularity—in Gothic for instance (I am thinking too of the towers of St. Basil's Cathedral). Bach's music is more like language than Mozart's or Hayden's....' *Culture and Value*, p. 34.

[23] *Culture and Value*, p. 27.

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one set of presently-perceived relations into what we mistakenly take as the final, settled, definitive, and complete life-narrative.

Also similarly, Wittgenstein claims that what we *need* in philosophy is a perspicuous overview, where this, as we have seen, is not meant in the sense of a generalized, Platonic concept to which no particular case is genuinely relevant, but rather where that overview is the *result* of patiently considering cases under that concept, seeing how it functions *in situ*. If we desire a fuller understanding of our own courage or cowardice, or pride or prejudice, we need an overview of the self's words and deeds *in that sense*. This constitutes a kind of connective analysis of the self's past, of one's intellectual genealogy.

We can also be misled by the surface appearance of a person's actions—or in the case of self-knowledge, our own actions—just as we can be misled, as Wittgenstein has shown, by the surface appearance of words. Both the thinker and the draughtsman (if good) clear up these confusions, and the author of a *Bildungsroman* takes both of these roles as he or she contemplates the design, the building, the construction of a life and the thinking, the pressures on thought, that shaped the construction. And again, the good *Bildungsroman* author makes these interrelations clear.[24] Some retrospective constructions of a life's story, its purpose, its developmental trajectory, will, like Escher's drawings, seem initially plausible and yet in the end fail genuinely to cohere, however good they may look on the level of surface design. If ultimately acceptable, we will—as a project that is at once philosophical therapy and autobiographical 'work on oneself'—see the connections between the equivalents in experience to a series of verticals, a strong horizontal, a set receding planes, a reiterated angle, a niche, a stylobate, and so forth. And coming to understand what we did do, what we did not, what was possible that we did see, and what was possible that we did not, are all ways of earning self-understanding. These are, in a distinctly architectural sense, language-games of the self, and we come to comprehend the range of possible moves within a person's character in a way strikingly parallel to language, to language-games. And here as well, grasping the larger context, the relevant sections of a person's experiential background, is not an *addition* to understanding the

[24] Such progressive interrelational clarifications are precisely what a reader sees while closely following the development of the eponymous protagonist in Goethe's great (and arguably first and most influential of the genre) *Bildungsroman, Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, ed. and trans. Eric A. Blackall in cooperation with Victor Lange (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

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action in question, for it is within that relational matrix that the interconnections that make the action what it is become visible. When we speculate about how we ourselves, or another, might have been different, we imagine a different *set* of experiences, or 'interconnections,' grafted by contingency onto what we think of as the foundations of that person's character. This is, I think, more than merely incidentally reminiscent of Wittgenstein's metaphorical remark concerning his philosophical work that he is interested, not in constructing a building, but in gaining a perspicuous view of the foundations of possible buildings. And like the child's doodle after the grown-up's drawings, not just any string of words makes sense, nor does any construction constitute architecture. For deeply parallel reasons, not every undisciplined interpretative suggestion about a person, or about, reflexively, the self, constitute insight or self-therapeutic progress.[25] The radical relativist's undisciplined speculations, or the extreme post-modernist's 'any description goes as well as any other' ethos, turned loose on questions of self-interpretation, are in the realm of human understanding all too like the child's scribbles.

Much of our language of self-understanding and self-description is ocular, and this, as we have now glimpsed, is in differing ways, in

[25] Richard Wollheim offers a helpful discussion of some of the constraints under which such an interpretation may proceed in *The Thread of Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 171–177. He writes: 'That interpretation, properly understood, has something to tell us about the structure of the mind derives from the constraints under which it operates. In all domains interpretation is possible only under constraints – constraints imposed upon the interpreter, and specifying conditions that interpretation of one and the same text, or one and the same legal system, or one and the same person, must satisfy' (p. 171). But lest this be misunderstood, a special virtue of Wollheim's discussion is that he does not import a false (because radically oversimplified) model of belief-consistent rationality as the primary governing constraint in the interpretation of persons; rather, he rightly (and realistically) suggests that 'Instead of trying to devise in the abstract constraints upon interpretation intended to capture rationality, what we should do is to examine the actual processes by which persons do regulate, or try to regulate, their beliefs and desires, and then argue back to the constraints. It is to such processes, which are in turn part of leading the life of a person, and not to some idealized rationality, that the constraints upon interpretation must ultimately answer'(p. 173). Wollheim does not say so here, but this suggests why the close and exacting philosophical study of literature, i.e. particularized and highly detailed descriptions of the nuanced moral psychology of characters that show at a reflective distance what it actually is to lead the life of a person, is of irreplaceable value.

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differing contexts, either conceptually incarcerating or therapeutically liberating. But it does in any event seem helpful to find a way to speak of what Wittgenstein called—in his later sense of the term—the 'mysterious,' the background against which our gestures, verbal or artistic, make sense. That expansive and unbounded network of relations gives our person-defining experience the character, the resonance, and indeed even the identity, it has. And yet it lies beyond the reach of the fully sayable at *any one* time, in any single context. Our way of seeing, with regard to our interpretation of ourselves and of others, can change according to which parts of that relational fabric we focus upon, which parts we make—like the work of the thinker and the draughtsman—particularly clear, which parts we render perspicuously. And what we expect, hope for, or demand of others and of ourselves is just a function of such relationally-interweaving inquiry. Sceptics, aware of the limitless nature of this background, might leap to embrace a blanket doubt concerning the very possibility of our knowledge of the self as well as of another. But while a full and final comprehensive articulation of the content of that background may not fall within the bounds of possibility, we need not for that reason embrace scepticism. Through the conjunction considered here of the work of therapeutically-inflected philosophy and the work of architecture, we can at least begin to see that the projects of self-knowledge and of other-knowledge, are—although they may not have fixed end-points—possible within our language-games of human understanding. Like works of art—and for parallel reasons—the project may be inexhaustible (and that is itself a wondrous thing). But then Wittgenstein also wrote, in 1938, 'In philosophy the winner of the race is the one … who gets there last.'[26]

Wittgenstein's work on the house in Vienna for his sister was unquestionably architectural work—just as it was philosophical work, if in an extended sense we've only started to elucidate here.[27] And where these converged, where the labours of thinker and of the draughtsman came together, it became a distinctive kind of autobiographical work, or 'work on oneself', as well. Such work is driven by the desire for hard-won therapeutically liberating inter-relational clarification.

[26] *Culture and Value*, p. 34.

[27] I offer a fuller discussion in *Describing Ourselves: Wittgenstein and Autobiographical Consciousness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008).

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