

# Multi-sensorial Perception in Wittgenstein and Mitchell. Sense-Scapes and the Epistemic and Ethical Significance of Alterity

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## Introduction

The broad aim of this article is to explore the usefulness of Wittgenstein's work on 'aesthetic interest,' 'aspect perception and aspect blindness,' and 'seeing anew' for addressing challenges that face efforts to develop jointly contextual and comparative approaches to "socio-culturally and historically diverse sense-scapes" (Bracker and Seifert, editors invitation of contributions to this Special Issue in *Visual Past*, 2016). Emphasis falls upon challenges suggested by two questions W.J.T Mitchell has raised:

(1) Why do we persist in talking about some media as if they were exclusively visual? Is this just a shorthand for predominance? And if so, what does that predominance mean? Is it a quantitative issue (more visual information than tactile?) or a question of qualitative perception, the sense of things reported by a beholder, audience, viewer/listener?

(2) Why does it matter what we call 'visual media'? Why should we care about straightening out this confusion? (Mitchell 2005a, 258)

Few scholars have questioned problematic generalisations about vision and images more deeply than Mitchell (1984, 1986, 2005a, 2005b). For Mitchell (2005a), when we examine "so called visual media" in contexts, they all "turn out to involve the other senses (especially touch and hearing). All media are, from the standpoint of sensory modality, mixed media." Already in his article, "What is an Image" (1984) – published before *Iconology. Image, Text, Ideology* (1986) – Mitchell argued for fresh approaches to:

- problematic generalisations about vision and knowledge;
- the efficacy of images in terms of “multi-sensory apprehension and interpretation”;
- the consequences of disregarding the significance of that efficacy (Mitchell 1984, 507).

For Mitchell, to study images and visual culture anew we need to recognise the extent to which prioritising vision is grounded in:

social and cultural practices, and in a history fundamental to our understanding, not only of what images are, but of what human nature is or might become. Images are not just a particular kind of sign, but something like an actor on the historical stage, a presence or character endowed with legendary status, a history that parallels and participates in stories we tell ourselves about our creation from creatures ‘made in the image’ of a creator to creatures who make themselves and their world in their own image (Mitchell 1984, 504).

Mitchell’s collection of essays, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (2005b) and article, “There are No Visual Media” (2005a) document his continuing engagement with these issues. He poses the two above listed questions in the latter. These are very different sorts of questions. However, answers to them may relate to one another. Mitchell (2005a, 265) argues that “because there are no visual media” (only “mixed media”) “we need a concept of visual culture” to “study the intricate braiding and nesting of the visual with the other senses.” This argument raises a number of the questions, which motivate the present article:

- To what extent might multi-sensorial approaches call into question not only problematic generalisations about images, but also about knowledge?
- Might Mitchell’s work provide especially useful points of departure for developing jointly contextual and comparative approaches to describing and analysing diverse sense-scapes?
- What contributions might examining Wittgenstein’s work on aesthetic interest, aspect perception and aspect blindness, and seeing anew be able to make to multi-sensorial conceptions of visual culture? Why might these matter? Might they help foster

appreciation of the epistemic and ethical significance of diverse sense-scapes? Of alterity? Of the arts?

Mitchell's chapter, "Showing – Seeing, Visual Culture – Myths and Counter Theses," in *What do Pictures Want?* (2005b), distinguishes between "visual culture" and "visual studies" in order to avoid ambiguities and foreground commitments to:

a set of hypotheses that need to be tested (not taken for granted) about the extent to which "vision" is culturally constructed – "it is learned and cultivated, not simply given by nature" and may have "a history related to some yet-to-be determined way with the history of the arts, technologies, media and social practices of display and spectatorship; and (finally) that it is deeply involved with human societies, with the ethics and politics, aesthetics and epistemology of seeing and being seen (Mitchell 2005b, 337-338).

While some of these ideas are now widely accepted, conflicts arise when one raised questions about relationships between visual studies and "existing disciplines such as art history and aesthetic theory," including conflicts around the idea of the supposed "boundlessness of visual studies" that closely resemble conflicts over the idea that there is "nothing outside the text" several decades ago (Ibid, cf. 1984, 503). Three components of Mitchell's "Showing – Seeing" are especially useful for our purposes. One is his examination of "ten myths about visual studies" that give rise to such responses. The second is his "eight counter-theses." The third is that he concludes with reference to a version of a key activity in elementary schools ("show and tell") that he uses to introduce university students to "visual culture." The components proved the framework to linking the present article's sections to one another.

This article has three parts. The first concerns obstacles to contextual and comparative cultural sense-scape description and analyses. The second examines the relevance of Wittgenstein's work on aesthetic interest, aspect perception and blindness, and seeing anew for addressing these obstacles in ways that relate directly to Mitchell's question about why "straightening out confusion" matters. Emphasis falls these themes in Wittgenstein's *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1966 [1938]) and *Philosophical Investigations* (1958) – rather than his unpublished *Nachlaß*. The conclusion focuses on suggestions about multi-sensorial approaches to images and taking the arts and the sciences

equally seriously. Emphasis falls upon such approaches' relevance for fresh appreciation of contributions the arts have and can make to seeing the epistemic and ethical significance of the alterity of sense-scapes anew.

### Multiple Challenges

Dualisms are distinctions whose components are conceived in terms that make their characteristic relations to one another unintelligible (Brandom, *Making It Explicit. Reasoning, Representing and Discursive Commitment*, 2004, 615).

In Mitchell – as in Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* (1979 [ca. 1938–1948]) and *Philosophical Investigations* (1958) – before exploring prospects for fresh approaches, we need to be clear about obstacles, and about reasons for their tenacity.

We must begin with a mistake and transform it into what is true [...] That is, we must uncover the source of error; otherwise hearing what is true won't help us [...] To convince someone of what is true, it is not enough to state it; we must find the road from error to truth (Wittgenstein 1979, 1).

Mitchell's examination of "ten myths about visual studies" (2005b) relate closely to his question, "(1) Why do we persist in talking about some media as if they were exclusively visual? [...]" (2005a). They draw attention to a variety of different challenges: historical, philosophical; and political-ethical.

### Historical Difficulties

An immediate challenge is to recognise the extent to which predominantly opposed paradigms for art history and aesthetic theory mirror one another around presuppositions, which polarise art versus science, truth versus contingency, and claims about timeless objectivism versus hyper-relativism (see, for instance, Wylie 1996; Daston 2000). Mitchell's (1984, 1986, 2005b) work brings light to problematic connections between polemic over:

- interpreting art, science and modernity as a triumph or as a tragedy;

- human origins and generalisations about the factors claimed to be most responsible (for instance, the arts and spirituality, and/or predatory propensities);
- predominant paradigms for aesthetics around such dichotomies as these of mind versus world, ideas versus material conditions, and so on.

The deep rootedness of these problems is particularly striking in the work of scholars, who are renowned for questioning problematic received assumptions. Mitchell examines manifestations of this difficulty in the work, for example, of Ernst Gombrich, whose insights of the “beholder’s share” otherwise illuminate numerous problematic generalisations about vision and art. For Mitchell (1986) there are complex clashes between the strengths of Gombrich’s work, and such difficulties as the rootedness of Gombrich’s conception of “natural signs” (and of “nature versus convention”) in problematic ideas about human origins and the histories of art, science and modernity. Similarly, for Svetlana Alpers (2005), we need to explore these sorts of difficulty in order to address “vexations” in art history anew. For instance, we need to rethink the tenacity of such ideas as:

that the problem solving nature of Italian Renaissance art made it the model for the progress in human knowledge that later became associated with science. Here is Gombrich: “the artists work is like the scientist. His works exist not only for their own sake but also to demonstrate certain problems solutions” [Gombrich 1966, 7]. The immediate reference was what he and others took to be the scientific and demonstrable character of perspective (Alpers 2005, 416).

For Mitchell (1986, 151), what bears stressing is the extent to which influentially opposed paradigms mirror one another around portraits of “the image as a site of power that must either be contained or exploited; the image, in short as an idol or a fetish.” Mitchell’s (2005b) examination of “ten myths of modernity” throws light on how closely this problem relates to the tenacity of the pre-modern ‘modes of thought’ versus modern ‘world views’ dyad (cf. Mitchell 1996). The publication of *Modes of Thought: Essays on Thinking in Western and Non-Western Societies* (1973) marked a turning point in awareness of such problems by drawing attention to connections between assumptions about:

rationality as opposed to non-rationality; the findings of science (usually identified with Western science and sometimes defined as 'true') as against non-science, mistaken notions, false ideas; openness as against closure in thought; secularism (sometimes equated with scientific method or findings) as against religiousness and/or magic [the former characterised by rationality or science – a mechanistic view of the world, the latter characterised in terms of emphasis on religion, magic, an enchanted view of life [...] or even interest in poetic and symbolic forms of expression]; high against low division of labour (more relevant for modes of thought than may at first appear; the dominance of tradition (including rote-learning) as against creativity and individual express (Horton and Finnegan 1973, 17. 20. 23).

In *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Creates Its Object* (1983), Johannes Fabian drew attention to the variety of ways in which these dichotomies create gaps between recognition of coevalness in ethnography practice and its denial in theorising.

Beneath their bewildering variety, the temporal distancing devices [for separating "the modern West from its Other"] we can identify produce a global result. I will call it denial of coevalness. By that I mean a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse. (Fabian 1983:31).

Fabian's work raises numerous questions relating to this Special Issue's concerns. For instance, how important might the multi-sensorial and embodied nature of images, language and aesthetic experience be for recognising the coevalness of diverse sense-scapes, and the epistemic and ethical significance of that alterity?

### Philosophical Challenges Posed by Portraits of Knowledge as Epistemology

Of course, human intelligence is embodied and embedded [...] The question is how important this fact is to the nature of intelligence (Haugeland 1998).

For many working in today's increasingly interdisciplinary humanities, micro-historical approaches to rethinking the histories of art and science figure amongst the most novel innovations over the last decades. These efforts throw new light on numerous problems relating to this Special Issue's concerns, including:

- the polarisation of the historical (or culture) study of art versus warnings – such as that cited in the 2014 Editorial that Jacobus Bracker and Martina Seifert wrote for *Visual Past* - that "historical considerations" obstruct aesthetic appreciation;

- notions that see science as revealed truth, and art as ‘mere’ individual statement and/or as esoteric expression of subjective experience or artistic ‘genius’ (Jones and Galison 1998);
- notions that see vision or sight not only as the predominant sense; but also as a model for knowledge itself (Koerner, S. 2014).

New light is being thrown on presuppositions, which have been shared by the most influentially opposed philosophical traditions. These include presuppositions about vision that are shared by both objectivist and hyper-relativist versions of conceptions of knowledge as epistemology (or essentialist ontologies, e.g. Wylie 1996). Prioritising vision plays central roles at the heart of shared presuppositions that the ideal form of knowledge is: “an *assessment* of the *totality* of our knowledge of the world; issuing in a judgement delivered from a *detached* standpoint, and amounting to a verdict on our claim to have knowledge of an *objective* world” (Williams 1991, 22). It is difficult to overstate the obstacles these views pose for studying interaction across cultural boundaries. Celia Klein (1996) has focused on obstacles that impede studying the roles that images “of the other” played in interaction across boundaries between Europeans and Aztecs in Renaissance colonial Mexico. One of the most problematic responses to crises over disregard of such topics, in general, has been that:

in rejecting the idea that Renaissance documentary sources – whether visual or textual – constitute a glass window looking out on European’s “others,” more and more authors on both sides of the Atlantic have moved to treat those sources more like a mirror, as an opaque surface capable only of reflecting back to us an image of ourselves (Klein 1996, 245–6).

These problems relate to areas of paradox at the heart of objectivist versus hyper-relativist polemic. Writing on polemic over “realism versus constructivism” Lorraine Daston (2000: 2) explains:

On the realist view it makes sense to talk about a history of scientific discovery, but not a genuine history of scientific objects [...] On the constructionist view, scientific objects are eminently historical, but not real. In much debate, the opposition between nature and culture shadows that between the real and the constructed, nature stands as the eternal, the inexorable, the universal; culture for the variable, the malleable, and the particular. Like the return of the represses, the supra- and

sub-lunary spheres of Aristotelian cosmology crop up in a new guise, crystalline nature encircling mutable culture (Daston 2000, 3).

Daston's insights throw useful light on areas of paradox at the heart of the pre-modern modes of thought versus modern world views dichotomy. These include clashes between notions that see appreciating contingency as a distinguishing feature of modernity, and the roles that the truth versus contingency dichotomy continues to play in the ways objectivism and hyper-relativist mirror one another around conceptions of knowledge as epistemology (or essentialist ontologies). Ontologies concern questions about 'being', about how the sorts of things that exist came to be, and why these rather than other sorts of things exist. Epistemologies concern the conditions of human capacities for ontological knowledge. Both rationalist paradigms rooted in Plato (427–347 BC) (1999) and empiricist paradigms rooted in Aristotle (384–322 BC) (1984) take the opposition of absolute unity and permanence Parmenidean Being versus "the pure flux of Heraclitus" as their starting point (McGuire and Tushanska 2000, 45)

Importantly, in both views, (not just such things as multi-sensorial perception but) the very possibility of change (and, especially historical contingent change) is a problem. Aristotle's version in the *Metaphysics* (1941) centres on the question: if something can be said to be subject to change, what is the essence of that something? He offered three alternative answers: (1) the unchanging aspect, (2) the changing aspect, and (3) both, that is, the interaction of changing and unchanging aspects. In the views which underwrite the narratives under consideration, the important answer is (1), and the others have to be reducible to it. All this helps explain why essentialism has led to treating the task of ontology as being that of epistemology – or more precisely, as being classification in line with supposedly timeless systems of categories (McGuire and Tushanska 2001, 45–7). Put another way, essentialism leads to the reduction of diversity to mutually exclusive categories (mind versus world, nature versus culture, male versus female, modern versus pre-modern); and the reduction of historically contingent processes to categories of periodisation and ty-

pology. Finally, in essentialist perspectives, multi-sensorial experience, discrepant experiences – indeed all of our sublunary world – are seen as impediments – for instance, human beings’ limited perspectives, biases and partialities – rather than as fundamental aspects of reality.

### Iconoclasm – Challenges Posed by Problematic Responses to ‘Crises over Representation’

All this raises questions about connections between essentialism and the problem of notions that see “the image as a site of power that must either be contained or exploited; the image, in short as an idol or a fetish” (Michell 1986, 151). The collection of essays published in conjunction with the exhibition *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art* (Latour and Weibel 2002) marked a turning point in rethinking these problems. Writing from an “art/sci” studies perspective, Lynda Henderson stresses that in “striking contrast to art/science exhibitions in the past, *Iconoclasm* centered on the conceptual question: why and how have scientific, artistic and religious images provoked such passionate responses either negative or positive – in viewers?” Importantly, *Iconoclasm* stresses that:

Images do count; they are not mere tokens, and not because they are prototypes of something away, above, beneath; they count because they allow one to move to another image as frail and as modest as the former – but different (Latour 2002, 32)

Thus, for Bruno Latour, we need to ask:

What has happened that has made images (and by images we mean any sign, work of art, inscription, object, picture that acts as a mediation to access something else) the focus of so much passion? [Under what circumstances have] destroying them, erasing them, defacing them [...] been taken as the ultimate touchstone to prove the validity of one’s faith, of one’s science, of one’s acumen, of one’s artistic creativity? To the point where being an iconoclast seems the highest virtue, the highest piety, in intellectual circles? (Latour 2002, 14).

It matters that the title of the project is “iconoclasm” not “iconoclasm.”

Iconoclasm is when we know what is happening in the act of breaking and what the motivations for what appears as a clear project of destruction are; iconoclasm, on the other hand, is when one does not know, one hesitates, one is troubled by an action for which there is no way to know, without further inquiry, whether it is destructive or constructive (Latour 2002, 14).

One of the remarkable insights gained is that many of the most ferocious image breakers may also be extremely influential image makers. Or put another way, some of the most powerful images may be created by the most radical iconoclasts. How has this gone unnoticed? Perhaps the very idea of *Iconoclash* calls for shifting attention away from preoccupations with crises over representation towards inquiries into highly problematic supposed settlements (Koerner, S. 2014). Such a shift is suggested by Joseph Leo Koerner's contribution to *Iconoclash* (2002) and study of *The Reformation of the Image* (2004):

Theirs were the settlements that remain operative still today [...] From the long history of iconoclasm, we learn that there never were, nor will there ever be, idols, since these are artefacts of the iconoclast's conviction, the imaginary Other of all critical campaigns. It is iconoclasm that never goes away, but haunts us as if forever newly with its fictive foe (Koerner, J.L. 2004, 11).

Our considerations thus far are likely to raise as many questions as they address. For instance, how can we explore connections between:

- essentialism (or conceptions of knowledge as epistemology);
- vexed options of treating images either as 'mere' or as powerful threats of pollution;
- parallels noted by Mitchell's (2005b) between polemic responses to the ideas of the supposed "boundlessness of visual culture" and of there being "nothing outside of text."

Although such an exploration lies far beyond the present article's purposes, I suggest that useful steps might depart from Steven Toulmin's *Cosmopolis. The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (1990). One of the hypotheses Toulmin's work suggests is that new light can be thrown on such connections by examining the circumstances under which it has become for some to supposedly settle jointly epistemic and social crises around claims that the state of emergency of contemporary affairs calls for demolish everything that went before and quest of timeless certainty from a "clean slate" (or *tabula rasa*, as Plato and Locke put it).

## **Mitchell, Wittgenstein and Prospects for Seeing Images Anew**

In the previous section, I tried to show something of the issues that are at stake with Mitchell's (2005a, 258) questions about (1) why "we persist in talking about some media as if they were exclusively visual," and (2) "why does it matter"? As noted at the onset, Mitchell's article, "There are No Visual Media" was published in the same year as the collection of essays, which includes "Showing – Seeing, Visual Culture – Myths and Counter Theses." While the first part of "Showing - Seeing" examines "myths," the second concerns "counter-theses":

- "Visual culture encourages reflection on differences between art and non-art, visual and verbal signs, and the ratios between different sensory and semiotic modes.
- Visual culture entails a meditation on blindness, the invisible, the unseen, the unseeable, and the overlooked; [...] it also compels attention to the tactile, the auditory, the haptic, and the phenomenon of synesthesia.
- Visual culture is not limited to the study of images or media, but extends to everyday practices of seeing and showing, especially those we take to be immediate or unmediated [...]
- There are no visual media. all media are mixed media [...]
- The disembodied images and the embodied artifact are permanent elements in the dialectics of visual culture [...]
- We do not live in a uniquely visual era. The 'visual' or the 'pictorial' turn is a recurrent trope that displaces moral and political panic into images and so-called visual media [...]
- Visual culture is visual construction of the social, not just social construction of vision [...]
- The political task of visual culture is to perform critique without the comforts of iconoclasm" (Mitchell 2005b, 343–344).

For Mitchell, these theses can help with seeing the roles of visual culture in the dynamics of art history and aesthetic theory anew. Here they provide a point of departure for exploring the relevance of Wittgenstein's work on aesthetic interest, aspect perception and blindness, and seeing anew for fresh approaches to how "socio-culturally and historically diverse sense-scapes" can "be described and analysed" (Bracker and Seifert 2016). Emphasis falls upon the light Wittgenstein might throw on why "straightening out confusion" matters (Mitchell 2005a).

### **Mitchells' "Eight Counter-Theses" and Rethinking Polemic Over 'Early' and 'Late' Wittgenstein**

For much of the latter half of the twentieth century the most influentially opposed positions on Wittgenstein revolved around such dichotomies as those of truth versus contingency, science versus art, and objectivism versus relativism. The situation with Wittgenstein scholarship paralleled numerous other areas of specialisation in the humanities, which are mentioned above.

Over the last decade, many Wittgenstein specialists have been rethinking polemical interpretations of Wittgenstein. Notable examples include interpretations, which have led to caricatures of contrasts between so-called early and late Wittgenstein around such dichotomies as those of truth versus contingency, science versus art, and objectivism versus relativism. Recent research suggests that, while Wittgenstein's earlier work envisages philosophy's task in ways that continue to see knowledge as epistemology (as suggested by his arguments concerning the constraints that language and logic impose on our relationships to one another and the world) his later work goes against the grain of these ideas. Of special importance for our present purposes, the themes in Wittgenstein's later work that we are focusing on may be highly relevant for appreciating the epistemic and ethical significance of the multi-sensorial, embodied and inter-subjective nature of "language games" and "forms of life" (and their embeddedness in sense-scapes). In these connections, our exploration

may bear directly upon the importance of taking the pedagogical significance of the arts very seriously.

In their 2016 entry on Wittgenstein to the Stanford Encyclopedia in Philosophy, Anat Beletzki and Anat Matar stress the importance of his critical attitude towards what he called the “dogmatism” to many of the directions his work took.

The idea that philosophy is not a doctrine, and hence should not be approached dogmatically, is one of the most important insights of the *Tractatus*. Yet, as early as 1931, Wittgenstein referred to his own early work as dogmatic [and] used this term to designate any conception which allows for a gap between question and answer, such that the answer to the question could be found at a later date. The complex edifice of the *Tractatus* is built on the assumption that the task of logical analysis was to discover the elementary propositions, whose form was not yet known. What marks the transition from early to later Wittgenstein can be summed up as the total rejection of dogmatism, i.e., as the working out of all the consequences of this rejection (Beletzki and Matar 2016).

The concepts of “language games” and “forms of life” play central roles in Wittgenstein’s arguments concerning the importance of treating “meaning as use” for developing alternatives to conceptions of the tasks of philosophy, which have been grounded in “dogmatism.” His *Philosophical Investigations* (1958, 23) provides a remarkable list of examples, which includes, e.g., reporting an event, speculating about an event, forming and testing a hypothesis, making up a story, reading it, play-acting, singing catches, guessing riddles, making a joke, translating, asking, thanking, and so on. Biletzki and Mater explain that:

Language-games are, first, a part of a broader context termed by Wittgenstein a form of life [...] Secondly, the concept of language-games points at the rule-governed character of language. This does not entail strict and definite systems of rules for each and every language-game, but points to the conventional nature of this sort of human activity. Still, just as we cannot give a final, essential definition of ‘game’, so we cannot find “what is common to all these activities and what makes them into language or parts of language” [Wittgenstein 1958, 65]. It is here that Wittgenstein’s rejection of general explanations, and definitions based on sufficient and necessary conditions, is best pronounced (Biletzki and Mater 2016).

For Wittgenstein, investigating “language games” and “forms of life” goes against the grain of claims about timeless laws of human behaviour and meanings of words.

We should, instead, travel with the word’s uses through a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing (Wittgenstein 1958, 66).

In Wittgenstein, the complexity of investigating “meaning as use” provides means to avoiding risks of positing either internal or external metaphysical causes – and associated dualist paradigms for intentionality. It can help us avoid the numerous paradoxical consequences of paradigms grounded in the dichotomy of notions of an internal “private language” versus an external world of the body, behaviour, the world and so on. The *Philosophical Investigations* begins with a quote from Augustine’s *Confessions*, that Wittgenstein describes as presenting us with “a particular picture of the essence of human language,” based on the idea that “the words in language name objects,” and that “sentences are combinations of such names” (1958, 1). Augustine wrote:

When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shown by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples; the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of the voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires (quoted from Wittgenstein 1958, 1)

For Wittgenstein, versions of this picture of language have continued to be accepted even though they do not even provide a satisfactory account of the most basic functions of language. What bears stressing, for Wittgenstein, is that the categories and presuppositions of this picture also make up the foundations of the most influential traditions of philosophy. For the present article’s heuristic purposes, it is useful that we note that Augustine’s picture represents one of the two main theories of origins of language debated since antiquity ( and which continue to appear in new guises to this very day), namely:

- the Biblical theory (which has roots in Plato and Augustine) that sees language as a creation [*ex nihilo*] divine or some other mystical authority, a body of rules, words, and meanings that had been naturally given first to Adam and then to all human beings;

- the conventionalist theory (which has Aristotelian roots) that sees language as a creation of human reason, the rules, words, and meanings of which have been maintained by customary agreement among people (Mali 1992, 173).

This indicates that some of the ways in which Wittgenstein's perspectives on logic, language, images and philosophy changed in his later work might be useful to characterise in terms of opening the latter theory up to radically new interpretations - with particular attention to bringing about deep and far reaching change in what is meant by philosophy. This helps draw attention to the importance to Wittgenstein's work of thinking through the philosophical implications of multi-sensorial (and semio-logical) expression and communication (and – although he does not use the term – mimesis). Importantly, Wittgenstein's conceptions of multi-sensorial or embodied expression and communication are not restricted to models of the five senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell). Senses include what some have called "common sense" (a concept with roots in conceptions of *sensus communis* as public grounds of truth) (Vico 1948 [1744]) and the sorts of capacities for mimesis that might count as a 'sixth sense'. This sense might endow humans with capacities for imitation, for creating symbolic forms and for experiencing alterity. These themes may relate to the idea that the *Philosophical Investigations* (1958) envisages the tasks of philosophy as "therapy."

Quite a number of the scholars working on visual culture recognise that insights drawn from Wittgenstein have played decisive roles in changes that have taken place over the last decades in perspectives on language, images, and conceptions of the tasks of philosophy – including, changes that have given rise to important alternatives to the paradigms that equate knowledge = epistemology, which we considered earlier. There is also growing recognition of Wittgenstein's relevance for addressing obstacles that the art history versus aesthetic theory dichotomy pose for developing fresh approaches to relationships between how art works are made and the meanings of the ways there are used (e.g. Hagberg 1995; Day and Krebs 2000; Koerner, S. 2014). However, it bears noting how unique Mitchell has been in the

ways in which he has drawn upon his study of Wittgenstein. These include the ways in which Mitchell (2005b) formulates and addresses such questions as the two we focus on in this article; his critique of “myths about visual culture” and his “eight counter-theses” noted above. Thus, with the exception of Mitchell, there may not be precedents of our exploration of the relevance of themes that link Wittgenstein’s *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1966 [1938]) to his *Philosophical Investigations* (1958) for addressing issues that concern this Special Issue in *Visual Past*. In what follows we focus on the themes of “aesthetic interest,” “aspect perception and aspect blindness,” and “seeing anew.”

### Rethinking “Aesthetic experience” or “Aesthetic Interest”

The transcripts of Wittgenstein’s *Lectures on Aesthetics* open with his two-fold argument concerning aesthetics, namely, that the subject of aesthetics is “very big and entirely misunderstood.” Wittgenstein was right about how “big” the subject matter is, in general, and in philosophy. Many issues at stake to this day – go well beyond the scope of issues relating to the above noted questions raised by Mitchell (1984, 1986, 2008) that we considered above. In Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* (1790) in addition to the following range of themes, human cognition is rooted in a priority experience of space and time and the aesthetic judgement.

- beauty and the sublime – reflective judgement, and the roles of intellectual pleasure in aesthetic appreciation;
- the roles of “free play” – cognitive and imaginative elements in aesthetic appreciation, and the absence of determinate concepts in aesthetic appreciation;
- artworks as productive exemplars in art making – and the crucial roles of normative *sensus communis* in the education and/or training of artists, critics and audiences.

During the twentieth century aesthetics figured centrally in such far-reaching changes in humanities theory as those summarised by the

notions of linguistic, practice, embodiment, extended mind, and visual culture ‘turns’. By characterising aesthetics as “very big” Wittgenstein may have meant that:

- the arts may be amongst the minority of a wide diversity of language games, which elicit aesthetic interest depending upon contexts (Hagberg 2014);
- aesthetics is central to a very wide range philosophical issues (*Ibid*);
- conventional disciplinary orientations pose obstacles for its understanding.

In Wittgenstein, the range of things that elicit aesthetic interest are not at all restricted to art. Gary Hagberg suggests that, by very big, Wittgenstein may have meant:

both that the aesthetic dimension weaves itself through all of philosophy in the manner suggested above, and that the reach of the *aesthetic* in human affairs is very much greater than the far more restricted reach of the *artistic*; the world is densely packed with manifestations of the aesthetic sense or aesthetic interest, while the number of works of art is very much smaller (Hagberg 2014, 4).

Wittgenstein’s argument that aesthetics remains largely misunderstood relates to his critique of the ideas of a “science of aesthetics” and “experiments” in empirical psychology. For Wittgenstein (1958, 232) the complexity of aesthetic experience goes against the grain of the ways in which “experimental method makes us think we have the means of solving the problems which trouble us; though problem and method pass one another by.”

The sort of explanation one is looking for when one is puzzled by an aesthetic impression is not a causal explanation, not one corroborated by experience or by statistics as to how people react [...] This is not what one means or what one is driving at by an investigation into aesthetics (Wittgenstein 1966, 21).

Hagberg stresses two key aspects of Wittgenstein’s critique of traditional aesthetics, namely:

- that aesthetic questions are of a conceptual type very distinct from empirical questions and the kind of answer, or conceptual satisfaction, we want is very unlike what we might get from an experiment in empirical psychology, and

- that the philosophically traditional method of essentialistic definition – determining the essence that all members of the class “works of art” exhibit and by virtue of which they are so classified – will conceal from our view more than it reveals (Hagberg 2014, 5).

Wittgenstein argued for replacing universalising generalisations with investigations of the complexity of ‘family resemblance’ amongst ‘language games’, which elicit aesthetic interest in different cultural contexts. For some, this argument – as well as numerous other aspects of Wittgenstein’s later work – have been interpreted as a shift towards a form of hyper-relativism, which would lead to solipsist conclusions that all cultures and languages are mutually closed to one another. Actually – very much to the contrary – Wittgenstein’s critique of traditional aesthetics shares many features with Clifford Geertz’s argument that:

The truth of the doctrine of historical of cultural (or historical relativism – it is the same thing) is that we can never apprehend another people’s or another period’s imagination neatly, as though it were our own. The falsity of it is that we can therefore never genuinely apprehend it at all. We can apprehend it well enough, at least as well as we apprehend anything else not properly ours; but we do so not by looking behind the interfering glosses that connect us to it but through them (Geertz 1983).

In Geertz – as in Wittgenstein – appreciating the complexity of such phenomena goes against the grain of solipsism. Hagberg (2014) stresses that one of the major strengths of Wittgenstein’s *Lectures on Aesthetics* is that he

never loses a sense of the *complexity* of our aesthetic engagements, our language attending and in cases manifesting those engagements, and the contextually embedded nature of the aesthetic actions he is working to elucidate. Nor does he lose a sense of the relation – a relation necessary to the meaning of the aesthetic language we use – between the aesthetically-descriptive expressions we employ within particular contexts and “what we call the culture of the period” [Wittgenstein 1966, 8] (Hagberg 2014, 5).

This aspect of Wittgenstein compares closely with Clifford Geertz’s (1973, 1983) conceptions of the experience near and the experience far. In Wittgenstein, aesthetic experiences cannot be understood in terms of timeless universals. Relationships between our areas of aesthetic interest and of aesthetic blindness are context dependent.

Hence, Wittgenstein's (1966, 8) argument that: "To describe a set of aesthetic rules fully means really to describe the culture of a period."

Importantly, for Wittgenstein this calls for a conception of culture, which focuses on the diversity of embodied skilled practice that and social relationship of everyday life – with particular attention to their complex multi-sensorial aspects. In order to draw highlight how this emphasis in Wittgenstein relates to this Special Issue's question about possibilities for describing and analysing diverse "sense-scapes," it can be compared with parallels in Michael Baxandall's work. A notable example is that, for Baxandall, in *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (1972, 152), to study fifteenth century painting means to study how it was situated in relation to, for instance, music, social dancing, and practical activities of gauging – estimating quantities, volumes, proportions, ratios, and so on for commercial purposes:

If we observe that Piero della Francesca tends to a gauged sort of painting, Fra Angelico to a preached sort of painting, and Botticelli to a danced sort of painting, we are observing something not only about them but about their society (Baxandall 1972, 152).

Baxandall does not refer to Wittgenstein as a source of his approaches. Thus, it is more useful to characterise parallels as outcomes of shared interests and concerns. A remarkable example in the parallel between Wittgenstein's investigations of alternatives to models of supposedly timeless internal and external causes of aesthetic interest; and Baxandall's comments at the beginning of the chapter on "Intentional Visual Interest: Picasso's Portrait of Kahnweiler" in *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (1985):

A word must be said on 'intention,' I suppose.... The [conception of] intention to which I am committed is not an actual, particular psychological state or [...] historical set of mental events [...] Rather, it is primarily a general condition of rational human action which I posit in the course of arranging my circumstantial facts or moving about on the triangle of re-enactment. This can be referred to a 'intentionality' no doubt. One assumes purposefulness – or intent or, as it were, 'intentioniveness' – in the historical actor but even more in the historical objects themselves. Intentionality in this sense is taken to be a characteristic of both. Intention is the forward-leaning look of things (Baxandall 1985, 41–42)

Few of Baxandall's works bring more light to the relevance of such parallels for studying culturally diverse sense-scapes than *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (1980). For Baxandall, important light can be thrown on the complex variety of limewood sculptors' technological equipment and skills, social practices, and aesthetic orientations than Paracelsus' writings on chiromancy (the practice of reading the inner lines of the disposition and qualities of things and persons from aspects of their external forms). Importantly, as Malcolm Baker (1999) points out, Baxandall stresses not only that Paracelsus was widely read by Renaissance artists and the viewers of their work, his account of chiromancy refers directly to work and the practices of those who work respectfully with wood:

People who work wood, carpenters, joiner and the such, have to understand their wood by chiromancy of it, what it is apt and good for (Paracelsus, quoted by Baxandall 1980, 32).

### **"Aspect Perception and Aspect Blindness"**

It is difficult to overstate how importantly Wittgenstein's engagement with "aspect perception" and "aspect blindness" figures in his critiques of traditional paradigms for aesthetics and for philosophy, more broadly. The passages above from Baxandall compare closely with Wittgenstein's conceptions of meaning – not as something that is given- but as something that is created (achieved) through the use and mastery "language games" in contexts of "forms of life." Wittgenstein's investigations of "aspect perception" and "aspect blindness" play crucial roles in the ways in which he develops these conceptions of meaning, and argues for their usefulness as alternatives to paradigms for "consciousness" and "intentionality, which have been grounded in claims about supposedly timeless internal or external causes. There is a huge diversity amongst the instantiations of "aspect perception" and "aspect blindness" Wittgenstein examines. Something of this diversity is brought into relief alone by the following examples that Schroeder has studied.

Seeing a geometrical drawing as a glass cube or as an inverted open box, or as three boards forming a solid angle [Wittgenstein 1958, 193]; or again, seeing a triangle as a triangular hole, as a solid, as a geometrical drawing; as standing on its base, as hanging from its apex; as a mountain, as a wedge, as an arrow or pointer, as an

overturned object which is meant, for example, to stand on the shorter side of the right angle, as a half parallelogram, etc. [Ibid., 200] [...] Aspects of organization: seeing a row of four equidistant dots either as two groups of two dots or as two dots in the middle bracketed by a dot on each side [Ibid., 208] (Schroeder 2010, 353).

What bears stressing is that all of these instantiations variously show that it is possible to explore expressions of multi-sensorial, embodied and highly inter-subjective “consciousness” and “intentionality” without positing any “sort of external or internal authority above or beyond their concrete actual applications in contexts. They also show that Wittgenstein’s conceptions of “aspect perception” and “aspect blindness” are not about what seeing and blindness mean physiologically. Indeed – for Wittgenstein, as in Constance Classen’s “A Feel for the World” discussed below, the sighted can learn much about their areas of blindness (non-knowledge or lack of consciousness and attentiveness) from the physiologically blind. Relating to this, Severin Schroeder (2010) notes that “aspect blindness” cannot be understood apart from what aspects of things a person not only perceives but is attentive to. It concerns our areas of lack of aesthetic interest and attention to things, including things we could (and maybe should) be aware of.

Importantly, in Wittgenstein, awareness or lack of it are inter-subjective phenomenon – there is no “private languages” and or “hidden” internal or external causes above or beyond concrete contexts. Again, for Wittgenstein, we need to explore cases of aspect perception and aspect blindness in contexts, and through comparisons (or what he calls “making connections”) between analogous instantiations

Could there be human beings lacking the ability to see something as something – and what would that be like? What sort of consequences would it have? – Would this defect be comparable to colour-blindness, or to not having absolute pitch? – We will call it ‘aspect-blindness’ – and will now consider what might be meant by this. (A conceptual investigation.) (Wittgenstein 1958, 213).

According to William Day and Victor Krebs (2010, 15) noticing an aspect is an experience in which our perception is placed, through an act of seeing, in a field of comparisons that involves shared ways of seeing what Richard Eldridge (2010) calls “intersubjectively shared

perspectival construals. It is the mastery of a technique of seeing connections [...] not a causal mechanism, that makes discursive consciousness possible.” For Eldridge – as for Michael Tomasello (2006) – this raises critical questions about the embodied and multi-sensorial nature of inter-subjective experiences. For instance, how important is embodied multi-sensorial perception to humans’ experience of other humans as creatures that also have consciousness and intentionality? Interestingly, the steps suggested by Tomasello towards answering these questions parallel what is meant by “showing and seeing” in Mitchell’s (2005b). For Tomasello, critical steps include recognising that long before human children speak they demonstrate capacities for recognising other humans as having intentional points of view; for moral judgements and decisions, and for showing others what they (and others should) find aesthetically interesting. These capacities, Tomasello argues can help throw new light on how human come to be able to:

- understand communicative intentions
- participate in joint intentional engagement as a common ground in which gestures (as gestures) are meaningful
- share and help in ways that are grounded in experience of shared or ‘we’ intentionality
- can inform others of things because they are able to determine what information is new, old, false, true, etc.;
- experience and understand ‘informing’ as a valuable practice in its own right – including as a practice that creates and sustains shared intentionality
- can imitatively learn communicative conventions as intrinsically multi-directional practices, with possibilities for reversing roles, for changing objects, and for affecting who and what is included and excluded (Tomasello 2006, 506–524).

### “Seeing Anew” (or Seeing Things Otherwise)

In Wittgenstein, to undergo a change from aspect blindness to aspect perception – or aesthetic interest means to “see anew.”

I suddenly see the solution of a puzzle-picture. Before, there were branches there; now there is a human shape. My visual impression has changed and now I recognize that it has not only shape and colour but also a quite particular organization (Wittgenstein 1958, 196).

I contemplate a face, and then suddenly notice its likeness to another. I see that it has not changed; and yet I see it differently. I call this experience noticing an aspect (Wittgenstein 1958, 193)

A deeply embodied and multi-sensorial orientation motivates Wittgenstein’s conceptions of meaning as use, in general, and “seeing anew,” in particular. This is brought into sharp relief by numerous contributions to the collection of studies, *Seeing Wittgenstein Anew* (Day and Krebs 2010), which indicate that many features of Wittgenstein’s later work argue for replacing traditions, which see philosophy as a site of supposedly universal truths, with efforts to “a way of attending to, and willingness to discover, the aspects of things that are most important for us (for us humans) but that for some reason we are driven to repudiate” (Day and Krebs 2010, 9).

In order to get clear about aesthetic words you have to describe ways of living. We think we have to talk about aesthetic judgments like ‘This is beautiful’, but we find that if we have to talk about aesthetic judgments we don’t find these words at all, but a word used something like a gesture, accompanying a complicated activity (Wittgenstein 1966, 11).

### Some Concluding Suggestions

The Western privileging of sight as the aesthetic sense has led philosophers and psychologists to question whether persons who lack sight can have any aesthetic experience. The usual conclusion has been that they cannot. For example, the Enlightenment encyclopedist Denis Diderot, while in many ways sympathetic to the experiences of the blind, states that, “when [a blind] man] says ‘that is beautiful’, he is not making an aesthetic judgment, he is simply repeating the judgment of one who can see [...] Beauty is only a word for the blind” (Classen 1998, 139).

Ludwig Wittgenstein ended what he once saw as his first and final publication in philosophy – the *Tractatus* (1922) – with what became the famously brief section “7. Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.” In the *Philosophical Investigations* (1958, 212), he said: “We find certain things about seeing puzzling because we do

not find the whole business of seeing puzzling enough.” Wittgenstein never linked his approach to this puzzlement directly to his concerns about the importance of taking the arts and sciences equally seriously. However, in lectures presented at the time he was working on the *Philosophical Investigations* he put forward an argument, which clearly reflects those concerns:

“People nowadays think, scientists are there to instruct them, poets, musicians etc. to entertain them. *That the latter have something to teach them; that never occurs to them*” *Culture and Value* (Wittgenstein 1998, 42)

Further, it is difficult to overstate the roles, which examples from the arts play throughout Wittgenstein’s *Lectures on Aesthetics* and *Philosophical Investigations* in the ways in which he illustrates arguments for the need of alternatives to generalisations about words, images and representations (and alternatives to philosophical traditions), which are grounded in such dichotomies as those of mind versus world. The passage above comes from the final chapter in Constanze Classen’s collection of essays *The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender and the Aesthetic Imagination* (1998): “A Feel for the World.” It relates to some of the most significant connotations of Mitchell’s question:

Why does it matter what we call “visual media”? Why should we care about straightening out this confusion? (Mitchell 2005a, 258).

Classen describes one of the key arguments in “A Feel for the World” as follows:

Standard philosophies and psychologies of aesthetics customarily held that the appreciation of aesthetics relies so heavily upon visual perception that the blind can have no real notion [...] of beauty. The argument developed in [the concluding chapter, “A Feel for the World” is] by contrast is that our modern understanding of aesthetics relies so heavily on the visual that the sighted are hampered in their appreciation of beauty experience through other senses. To begin to appreciate the subtleties of a scent-scape, to feel the power of a music of vibrations, or to experience tactile worlds of art, the sighted majority must turn for instruction to the aesthetic realms of the blind and the blind-deaf (Classen 1998).

Importantly – in Classen, as in the writings of Helen Keller – remarkable attention is drawn to the epistemic and ethical significance of including mimesis and alterity amongst the key components of multi-sensorial experience. The meanings of “mimesis” in these works is not at all limited to those offered by “resemblance” and “illusionist” theories (e.g. Hyman 2006). To the

contrary they include capacities for recognising the epistemic and ethical significance of alterity – of recognising diversity of sensory experiences of self and others. According to Fabian (2002), one of the issues that *Time and the Other* (1983) raised was that the “denial of coevalness” in mainstream anthropological theory eclipses the epistemic and ethical significance of alterity.

Recognizing an other = alius as other = alter is a condition of communication and interaction, hence of participating in social-cultural practices (or whatever sociological categories, from group to society, apply); or of sharing a *Lebenswelt*. Without alterity no culture, no *Lebenswelt*. Even in phenomenological thought, I assume, this concept makes sense only if *Lebenswelt* exists in the plural (compare this with anthropology’s ‘discovery’ of culture in the plural). If there were no more than one *Lebenswelt* one would have no need for this concept. The unresolved problem is the relationship between the recognition of alterity that is part of (perhaps constitutive of) one *Lebenswelt* and the kind of alterity that allows us to recognize (in the case of anthropology: identify, describe, understand, represent) other *Lebenswelten* (Fabian 2006, 147).

The five senses that are conventionally recognised by models that prioritise vision (and associated paradigms for knowledge) include: sight (vision), hearing (audition), taste (gustation), smell (olfaction), and touch (somatosensation). However, mimesis (and “common sense” or *sensus communis*) figure as centrally amongst as these five in discussions of aesthetic experience dating to earliest antiquity (Gebauer and Wolf 1995). Over the last decade, a number of scholars have become interested in Walter Benjamin’s work “On the Mimetic Faculty” (1999 [1933]), which calls attention to the historical significance of the mimetic faculty for perceiving similarities, connections, analogies and alterities. According to Michael Taussig, in *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993), our embodied mimetic senses may play crucial roles in our capacities to appreciate the importance of the alterity of others to our self-understanding.

Victor Krebs’ chapter “The Bodily Root: Seeing Aspects and Inner Experience” (2010: 120-139) in *Seeing Wittgenstein Anew* (Day and Krebs 2010) examines the attention Wittgenstein devotes to the embodied, multi-sensorial, gestural, expressive, and mimetic nature of aspect perception and seeing anew for his conception of the task of philosophy. For Wittgenstein our very choices of words involve multi-sensorial and embodied processes – processes that can only be

understood within their cultural contexts – or “socio-cultural sense-scapes” (cf. Bracker and Seifert 2016).

How do I find the ‘right’ word? How do I chose among words? Without a doubt it is something as if I were comparing them by fine differences of smell [...] I ought to wait until a word occurs to me anew. This, however, is the queer thing: it seems as though I did not have to wait on the occasion, but could give myself an exhibition of it, even when it is not actually taking place. How? – I act it. But what can I learn in this way? What do I reproduce? – Characteristic accompaniments. Primarily: gestures faces, tones of voice (Wittgenstein 1958, 218–219).

All this goes against the grain of conceptions of vision, knowledge and the tasks of philosophy grounded in models of a supposedly timeless placeless “objectifying eye that seeks to understand only in terms of inner states and mental images” (Day 2010, 137). It suggests that Wittgenstein’s investigations of aesthetic experience, aspect perception and aspect blindness and seeing anew might be useful to characterise as an effort to reframe the tasks of philosophy around a new ways of appreciating “the constitutive role of the bodily or affective in the meaning of our words, and in our perception of the world and others in it (*Ibid.*, 138). Day suggests that, in Wittgenstein, “philosophical discourse” needs to go beyond the constraints of “the realms of the true and the false, the correct and the incorrect” (*Ibid.*). Put another way, it needs to go beyond equations of knowledge = epistemology; and “myths about visual culture” (Mitchell 2005b). Developing alternatives calls for deep and far reaching change in orientations; and for openness to new lines of research and ways of communicating findings.

Calls for such change lie at the heart of Classen’s arguments in “A Feel for the World.” It is remarkable how closely Keller’s account of how she experienced the efforts of her teacher anew (as attempting to point using touch and mimesis) parallel Mitchell’s account in “Showing – Seeing” (2005b) of the ways he has used a version of key primary school exercise (“show and tell”) to introduce university students to visual culture. The students are assigned to bring along an object, and to “show and tell” about it in ways that they might have to in a “society that has no concept of visual culture” (Mitchell 2005b, 353).

We began this concluding section with reference to Wittgenstein's complaint that it so rarely occurs to people that the arts "have something to teach them" (1998, 42). We also noted that it may be difficult to overstate how centrally examples from the arts figure throughout his latter work in the ways in which he tries to show what he means by "meaning as use," aspect perception and aspect blindness, and so on. In the first section of this article, we noted the importance of the contributions that efforts to rethink art and science's histories have made to change in approaches to images. Today the area of specialisation summarized with the expression "art/sci" is widely recognised as a major site for innovation in approaches to visual culture (e.g., Elkins 1999; Galison 2008; Henderson 2004). However, with only a small number of exceptions, little attention has been devoted to rethinking the tenacity of "disenchantment models of art history" (Wood 2008). One of the consequences – relating to Wittgenstein's complaint – is that it rarely occurs to those working in the humanities that innovations may have been made in the arts (relating directly to the themes in his work that we have been considering) long before they came to interest historians and philosophers – and may continue to be being advanced today.

To conclude – perhaps our considerations suggest that we look to innovations in the arts as sources of insights into how to describe and analyse "socio-cultural and historically diverse sense-scapes" (Bracker and Seifert 2016), as well as into the epistemic and ethical significance of alterity.

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