Wittgenstein's Methodology of Gestalt Psychology

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Abstract   This article proposes a methodological understanding of Wittgenstein's remarks about Gestaltpsychology. Wittgenstein is not so much concerned with Gestaltpsychology proper but rather with its understanding of the nature of the problem of seeing (and seeing-as) as dealt with by British empiricism. Gestaltpsychology offers a more sophisticated physiological explanation of seeing and seeing-as than empiricism has done, yet also this explanation bypasses the (conceptual) problem. Physiological explanations are not eschewed by Wittgenstein, he even gives himself interesting physiological hypotheses. The problem with physiological explanations is that they focus on particular items in the brain as underpinning our use of concepts like seeing and seeing as, whereas they are constituted by our reactions and responses to what we see. Such reactions are embedded in language games and acquire their meaning by our 'forms of life' rather than the human brain. This interpretation is finally applied to Wittgenstein's and Köhler's explanation of social understanding'

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Summary   1. Psychology and Physiology. – 2. Wittgenstein. – *3. Variety of Aspects*. – 4. Wittgenstein's Critique of Köhler's Explanation of Aspect Seeing. – 5. Wittgenstein and Köhler on Social Understanding. – 5. Conclusion.

Part 2 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* aims to understand the logic of psychological concepts. The main source material from which Part 2 has been drawn is to be found in the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* and the *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology* which were published in the 1980s.

Wittgenstein's philosophy of psychology has not drawn the same attention as Part 1 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Yet some topics in Part 2 have received more attention than others. In particular the notion of seeing-as or aspect seeing can count on numerous interpretations. The section concerned with aspect seeing, however, includes also related but clearly different psychological concepts and which have largely failed to draw the attention they deserve. One of them is the concept of seeing, another and related to this, seeing pictures (of human beings), such as portraits but also photographs. And finally, seeing the emotions, feelings and thoughts of other people.

In this article I will focus on Wittgenstein's analysis of the concepts of seeing and seeing-as, and how they apply to 'social understanding'. My approach will be largely historical in that I discuss these topics in the context of Wittgenstein's reading of the work of the Gestalt psychologist Wolfgang Köhler. In my *Beyond the Inner and the Outer* (1990), I presented the earliest detailed interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy of psychology against their background in empirical psychology. In my view, Wittgenstein's work is closer to philosophy of science, or methodology, than to what is now conceived as philosophy of mind which is predominantly metaphysical. In ter Hark 1995 I further strengthened my 'methodological' reading of Wittgenstein by interpreting his notorious remarks about mind and brain (cf. RPP I, § 90 3 ff.) in the light of Köhler's theory of isomorphism of mental states and brain states. In Wittgenstein's methodology there is no focus on how science can best proceed, as with e.g. Popper, in order to get better explanations and predictions. Rather the emphasis is on a clarification of concepts in the light of their natural history. Psychological concepts have their habitat in a natural history which relates their meaning to our physiognomy, our gestures, our ways of responding to other people, our use of instruments and samples in explaining and teaching language, etc. When these concepts are transferred to a scientific context, such as the psychological lab, much of their natural history disappears from view, but it is still what gives them their meaning. Notably the concept of seeing (or perceiving) is not a concept which has been coined by psychologists for purely scientific purposes, as is common in the physical sciences. Yet in the 1920s, especially during the rise of Gestalt psychology, the concept of seeing got increasingly used in a physiological context. Indeed, Köhler remarked that not until the physiological underpinnings of psychological processes were discovered,

psychology would remain a preparatory science at best. In Hausen and ter Hark (2013), the methodological understanding of Wittgenstein's remarks about seeing and all aspect seeing has been further deepened. There we employed the conceptual distinction between 'intransitive' and 'transitive' uses of words, which Wittgenstein outlines in the *Brown Book*, to throw light both on his critique of and alignment with Köhler. In this essay, therefore, I will continue the work by Hausen and ter Hark (2013), and elaborate on the misleading effect physiology has (had) on the concepts of seeing and seeing-as in the context of early twentieth century science and philosophy. In addition, I add a new interpretation of Wittgenstein's often overlooked remarks on facial expression and social understanding which also have Gestalt psychology as their background.

1 Psychology and Physiology

According to the British Empiricists, Locke and Berkeley, the senses are only capable of registering form and colour, the intellect being the instrument for all other visual aspects. In nineteenth century psychology, this dichotomy was developed into a division between sensation and perception. Köhler has called this approach the 'Meaning Theory'. An assumption of this theory is that sensation reveals simple and neutral sense data. Sure enough, as adults we do not have such virginal impressions in everyday life, but the demarcation of the adult's visual field into segregated units is the result of learning. By contrast, the original visual field is a mere mosaic of sensations. To explain visual percepts, the empiricist invokes associations or previous knowledge.

When we look at the desk in front of us, we thus perceive a grey object because our previous interactions with objects (and in particular, our interactions with desks) impart meaning to the grey patch of colour that we would *see*. That we do not seem to see simply a grey patch of colour is due to the effects of learning.

Köhler critically observes that "little is left that would be called a true sensory fact by the Introspectionist" (1947, 83). His alternative theory of seeing and perceiving is that our visual field has an 'organisation' and this organisation is a sensory (specifically, a visual) fact, just like colour and shape. According to Köhler, it is in virtue of organisation that "the contents of particular areas [in the visual field] belong together as circumscribed units from which their surroundings are excluded" (1947, 137, 139). Köhler maintains that the segregated wholes or Gestalten are given first as visual facts, and *then* we associate meaning with them (1947, 138-9). He stresses also that when sources outside the organism stimulate the retina, the resulting 'mosaic' on the retina is not itself already organised into Gestalten. Instead, the nervous system responds to the retinal stimulation,

and various Gestalten in the visual field can thereby result (1947, 160-2). Sensory organisation, therefore, constitutes a characteristic achievement of the nervous system.

Thus, for Köhler 'organisation' or 'form' is the primitive unit of perception. Form or organisation is *seen* as much as colour and shape are seen. Organisation takes its properties from 'electric brain fields', or underlying configured brain processes.

Consider some of his examples in more detail. Köhler refers to maps of countries, or to charts of ships captains. On these maps the sea tends to the appearance of which the land has on ordinary maps. The contour of the land on maritime maps is the same as it is on a map we use when touring through the countryside, which means that the geometrical line which separates land and water is normally projected on the retina.

> None the less, when looking at such a map, says, of the Mediterranean, we may completely fail to see Italy. Instead we may see a strange figure, corresponding to the area of the Adriatic, and so forth, which is new to us, but which happens to have shape under the circumstances. (Köhler, 181)

He concludes that to have shape is a peculiarity which distinguishes certain areas of the visual field from others which have no shape in this sense. So long as the Mediterranean has shape, the area corresponding to Italy has no shape.

The retinal stimuli constitute a mere mosaic, in which no particular areas are functionally aggregated and shaped. These stimuli as such do not tell us which organisation of the visual field will be prominent and which will fade into the background. Only when we take into account brain fields and their principles of organisation can we predict which particular organisation will result.

A further example is the figure of two different shapes, either that of a cross consisting of four slender arms, or that of another cross which consists of the four large sectors. So long as the former shape is before us, the area of the latter is absorbed into the background, and its visual shape is non-existent. When the latter shape emerges, the former disappears. Köhler concludes that

> in both cases, the oblique lines are boundaries of the shapes which are seen at the time. They belong to the slender cross in the first case, and to the large cross in the second. (1947, 183)

And in an earlier treatment of a similar figure he says:

> Now the lines which in the first object belong together as boundaries of a narrow sector are separated; they have become

boundaries of large sectors. Clearly, the organization of the pattern has changed… (1947, 171-2)

Thus, to Köhler the change of organisation which occurs when we report a change of our visual impression upon looking at the figure of the double cross is a change of visual reality as we also experience such a change when we are facing a change of shape or a change of colour. It is a change of visual reality in the sense that we (or our brain) *group* the lines in different ways.

Despite Wittgenstein's greater sympathy for Gestalt psychology than for empiricism, their common physiological way of explaining problems concerning seeing is rejected by him. Indeed, the problem situation created can hardly have satisfied him. On the one hand there is empiricism which claims by appealing to the physiology of the retinal image that colour and shape are the only items of perception and that psychological states like emotions are a matter of interpretation. On the other hand there is Gestaltpsychology which claims also by appealing to physiology (of brain processes), that we do see emotions because we see organisation as much as we see colour and shape. To be sure empiricism notices a difference, a difference between seeing colours and shapes and seeing emotions, depth and other phenomena. The question, however, is whether they grasp the nature of the difference?

And Köhler may be right when he observes that empiricism is in conflict with the common, or as he puts it, the naïve view of seeing. However, what does he understand by the naïve view of seeing? It seems as if he assumes that built into common sense is a theory of perception. This is what Wittgenstein explicitly rejects. There is no general theory of perception built into common sense. There are only concepts. It is to the study of these concepts that one has to turn in order to solve the problems of perception.

2 Wittgenstein

It is in particular Köhler's understanding of the problem the empiricist psychologists wrestled with that is the target of Wittgenstein in the first volume of *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*. And because, according to Wittgenstein, Köhler fails to understand the nature of the problems concerning seeing as tackled by empiricism, his own alternative approach fails.

I first discuss Wittgenstein's comments on empiricistic theories of perception.

Wittgenstein concedes that the psychologist has identified an important meaning of the verb 'to see', namely, what is seen is what can be inferred from the retinal image. What is seen, is that of which

one can make an ideal and precise representation. At many occasions Wittgenstein remarks that our gaze continually wanders when we look at objects or scenes, for instance, streaming water (cf. RPP I, § 1080). The point of these remarks can be made clear when considering our perception of people's faces. Especially when we look at another person's face our gaze wanders and our impression of the facial features and the contours of the face consists largely out of edges and subtle transitions of colours and their shadings. A drawing of our impression of the other person's face would not contain the above-mentioned fuzzy areas. Hence, what is called an exact representation of what is seen would always leave out aspects that are truly characteristic of what we see. What then is the use of the ideal of an exact representation?

And how about the use of the concept of interpretation? To be sure there are clear cases of seeing something and interpreting it. Wittgenstein gives the example of a blueprint of a triangle. One may give someone such a blueprint asks the person to hang a triangular shape on the wall with an apex as the upper part. Here the person is not seeing the blueprint as a triangle but he interprets it. When we interpret, Wittgenstein would say, we make a conjecture, we express a hypothesis, which may subsequently turn out false (ter Hark 1990, 179). But in the cases discussed by Köhler in his chapter on sensory organisation, and other chapters, what is called by him "seeing" (and by Wittgenstein "seeing-as") there is not only no fitting together of pieces, but there is no hypothesising either, no verifying, nor falsifying. When we look at the figure of the sea chart our experience of the switch of aspect, i.e. the visual emergence of the Mediterranean and the disappearance of Italy, and vice versa, our experience has 'genuine duration'. And this is one reason why it is legitimate to speak of 'seeing', as Köhler does, rather than seeing plus interpreting as Introspectionism does.

Despite this commonality Wittgenstein and Köhler approach aspect in distinctly different ways. In what respect different is hinted at in this remark:

> "When you get away from your physiological prejudices, you'll find nothing in the fact that the glance of the eye can be seen." Certainly I too say that I see the glance that you throw someone else. And if someone wanted to correct me and say I don't really *see* it, I should hold this to be a piece of stupidity. (RPP I, § 1101)

Köhler thinks that overcoming the empiricist prejudice that real perception remains true to the patterns of the retina is the way to explaining as well as describing real perception, including the role of wholes in real perception. It is only by according the organisation of the visual field a role that real perception can be explained. Changes

in one's visual field, like those occurring during aspect seeing, can be accounted for only by the physiological underpinnings of processes of organisation.

Although Wittgenstein has no problems with causal explanations of mental phenomena in terms of association, he believes that the problem hand – e.g. can we really see a human gaze or do we just see form and colour – is to be solved in a different way. A causal explanation is as much in need of a (conceptual) clarification as is the phenomenon of seeing and seeing-as itself. He has two more specific reasons for this insight. For one, he notices that Köhler wants to treat everything in a uniform way and explain all the Gestalten that we see by the notion of an organised visual field that is on a par with colour and shape. For another, Wittgenstein notices an ambiguity in Köhler's notion of organisation. Following ter Hark (2011) and Hausen and ter Hark (2013), I will explain this ambiguity by means of the distinction between transitive and intransitive use of words that Wittgenstein makes in the *Brown Book*.

3 *Variety of Aspects*

I start with a brief overview of the kinds of aspects Wittgenstein distinguishes in his writings and the lecture notes by his students between 1945-47. In (ter Hark 1990), I distinguished between optical aspects and conceptual aspects. Optical aspects can switch automatically, almost like after-images. Conceptual aspects require the use of words in order to convey that and how one experiences them. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein speaks of organisational aspects, thereby referring to what I have termed optical aspects. An example of the optical aspects is the picture of a series of points or dots at equal distances from each other: ….. The one who perceives the figure is asked to see them grouped as 2,1,2, or as 1,2,3,4, and then yet another one. In such cases to describe one's changed visual impression in terms of a change of organisation or of grouping is quite apt. Closely related to this case is the figure the 'double cross', of a black cross on a white background and of a white cross on a black background. In this case the aspects can be reported

> simply by pointing alternately to an isolated white and an isolated black cross. One could quite well imagine this as a primitive reaction in a child even before it could talk. (PI II, 217)

Clearly, the black and the white cross need not, and typically do not, switch automatically, hence they are not straightforward optical aspects with their characteristics of after-images. But they do not need the help of concepts in order to be experienced. Even prelinguistic

children might be pointed out the switch of the black cross and the white cross

Things are different with the famous duck/rabbit figure. The ability to see the ambiguous figure as a duck, or as a rabbit, does not come off the ground simply by pointing as in the preceding case. One needs already to be "conservant with the shapes of these animals" before one can say that one sees it so or so (cf. PI II, 217).

I believe there is here a connection with another dimension of aspect seeing that Wittgenstein observes but Köhler does not. Aspect seeing, Wittgenstein notes, are subject to the will. It makes sense to give the command "See this as a rabbit" but it makes no sense to say "now see this leaf green" (cf. PI II, 213). Wittgenstein does not explain his reason for bringing this difference between aspect seeing and seeing under our attention. But let us counter factually suppose that it would make sense to command someone to see this leaf green. In that counterfactual situation we could not learn the meaning of colour words by ostensible definition, i.e. by making a pointing gesture at a green leaf and saying "that is what we call 'green'". In the case of the duck/rabbit, though, one could point to colours and shapes but not to a rabbit, or to a duck. To see it as a rabbit is not a matter of what but of *how* we see what we see. And how one sees it is to make a comparison, a comparison with e.g. pictures of rabbits. Clearly the ability to make comparisons is voluntary.

The voluntariness of aspect seeing is not to be seen as a direct refutation of Köhler. He simply has failed to take account of the role of language in aspect perception and instead proceeds from association and brain processes. Yet there is a difference between association, which is involuntary, and the role of language in aspect perception. It may be true that eye movements are involved in noting aspects, and it may be true that association works in the background. But the point is that one may see a certain aspect, e.g. a duck in the duck/rabbit figure, just by *saying* or pronouncing the word 'duck'. Hence, language and therefore language games, have a role to play, even at this transitional point where physiology seems to take over psychology.

This role of language is even more prominent in a number of different examples of aspect seeing. Wittgenstein gives the example of the figure of a triangle and the question to see the triangle as if it is hanging from its apex or as if it is standing on its base (cf. PI II, 200). The person who receives this command normally understands it immediately and also asks for no other explanation of what is meant by 'hanging' or by 'standing'. The situation is not be explained in the following way. There you see a real physical hanging object and what you see on the picture resembles it so that is makes sense to say that it is hanging. These words are meant in their ordinary sense, as possible states of a physical object. In particular they do not seem to be an indirect description of what one sees as when we speak of the colour of

blood rather than of red. The use of standing or base are *essential* here and hence being able to apply them in other situations is an essential condition for underhand applying them in the case of aspect seeing.

Again the case of the triangular hanging figure is different from both double cross and the duck/rabbit figure. In the latter two cases it is possible that someone fails to note the ambiguity and takes, e.g. the duck/rabbit for a rabbit, but it is not possible to take the bare triangular figure for the picture of an object that has fallen over: "To see this aspect of the triangle demands *imagination*" (PI, 207).

4 Wittgenstein's Critique of Köhler's Explanation of Aspect Seeing

Köhler's physiological departure to the question of the nature of seeing is especially dominant in his treatment of aspect seeing. His description of our seeing the duck/rabbit figure would be as follows. When we look at the ambiguous figure and see first the rabbit and then the duck we first of all experience that a real rabbit looks like X and then that a real duck looks like Y, and that the ambiguous figure switches between X and Y, and back again from Y to X. Our visual experience thus changes, from X to Y and conversely from Y to X. To explain this change in our visual experience Köhler invokes the concept of organisation. When we see the figure as X our visual experience is organised differently from the situation in which we see the ambiguous figure as Y.

Wittgenstein rephrases Köhler thus: an example of organisation aspects is when I suddenly see the solution of a puzzle picture. Before there were only branches and twigs, now there is suddenly a human shape. "My visual impression has changed and now I recognize that it has not only shape and color but also a quite particular 'organization'" (PI II, 196).

Wittgenstein's initial response to this explanation in terms of organisation is that it makes no sense to say this. This 'scientific' explanation is not better than the naïve view that the ambiguous figure would *move* when we undergo an experience of aspect seeing. Although Köhler does not hypothesise inner mental objects that change, he still falls victim to a 'category mistake' for it seems that the only (hypothetical) change that may occur when we experience a change of aspect is a physiological change. But it is also obvious that a (hypothesised) physiological change is not what we see when we say that we see something as. Put otherwise, what we see does not change and what does (possibly) is not what we see.

The hypothesised physiological change therefore has no bearing on the solution of the conceptual problems concerning seeing and seeing as. As Wittgenstein puts it nicely:

> You have now introduced a new, a physiological, criterion for see-
> ing. And this can screen the old problem from view, but not solve
> it. (PI II, 212)

A fairly standard view of Wittgenstein's comments on the notion of
organisation in his *Philosophical Investigations* goes as follows. Were
we to represent our experience of a change of aspect by means of two
drawings, one of the situation in which we note the rabbit and one
of the situation in which we note the duck, the drawings would show
no differences at all, they would be exactly the same. It is also fair-
ly standard in the secondary literature to continue as follows there-
by drawing on some remarks Wittgenstein subsequently makes. If
someone, notably Köhler, concedes that change of organisation is not
the same as change of colour or shape then change of organisation
becomes an object which is vulnerable to Wittgenstein's arguments
against private inner objects.

Commentaries who argue in this way fail to see that Wittgenstein's
discussion of Köhler has not only a negative side but also a positive
one. The negative and the positive side, however, are interdepend-
ent, hence I once more have to discuss the negative side in order to
explain what is positive about Köhler's use of organisation. I will do
this by drawing on earlier work by Hausen and ter Hark (2013). I will
show how Wittgenstein's negative and positive arguments rely on a
subtle and rarely discussed distinction that Wittgenstein makes be-
tween the transitive and intransitive use of terms.

Wittgenstein develops the transitive/intransitive distinction in the
Brown Book, immediately prior to a discussion of aspect seeing. His
example is the word particular, as when we say, "The face has a par-
ticular expression". On the one hand we may mean 'particular' in a
transitive sense, as when we say "This face gives me a particular
impression which I cannot describe". We also may mean it intransi-
tively as when we say: "This face gives me a strong impression" (cf.
BBB, 158). So, in the transitive case, the word 'particular' is used as
a precursor to a further specification. To the question 'Peculiar in
what way?', an answer can be given that explains this way in differ-
ent words. In the intransitive case, however, the word 'particular'
is used for emphasis, hence there is no further specification or com-
parison to be made.

Transitive and intransitive uses of words are not always easy to tell
apart, however. This is especially true when the sentences in ques-
tion involve what Wittgenstein calls a "reflexive construction" (BBB,
159-61). The use of words in a reflexive construction is intransitive
yet appears to be a special case of a transitive use (namely, the re-
flexive constructions appear to be comparing something with itself
or describing something by appealing to the thing itself). The impor-
tant feature of reflexive constructions is that the sentences can be, as

Wittgenstein says, 'straightened out'. What he means by this is that the sentences seem to involve a comparison or description that loops from an object back to itself. But when the sentences are straightened out, we see that there is no loop. Rather, the sentences involve only an intransitive use; that is, they involve emphasis, not comparison or description. For instance, Wittgenstein says that "That's that" is a reflexive expression. Although "That's that" appears to compare a thing to itself, it can be straightened out as "That's settled" and in fact is used to emphasise the finality of the situation.

Wittgenstein's objective in discussing these distinctions is to point out that confusion can arise if intransitive uses are not properly distinguished. Hausen and ter Hark have argued that Köhler's notion of organisation falls into the transitive/intransitive trap. Specifically, it looks as if Köhler is using the term organisation transitively when he speaks about the organisation of the visual field. But actually what is involved is an intransitive use.

As explained earlier, Köhler defines the organisation of the visual field as a sensory fact in addition to colour. So, when we experience a change in aspect of (for example) the pie figure, there is a change in the sensory facts, namely, the organisation of our visual field changes.

Wittgenstein wonders whether the change of our visual impression can be attributed to change of organisation as Köhler would have it. He seems to take the use of 'change of organisation' from other linguistic situations. As Wittgenstein notes:

> "The organization of the visual image changes" has not the same kind of application as: "The organization of this company is changing". *Here* I can describe *how it is*, if the organization of our company changes. (RPP I, § 536)

That is, a company's organisation may be described by a flowchart that shows the company's hierarchy and structure. It makes sense to ask, "How did the organization change?", and the response could involve pointing to changes in the flowchart. But there is no comparable way to describe the organisation of the visual field (cf. ter Hark 1990; Hausen and ter Hark 2013, 98). We might, as Wittgenstein suggests, represent our visual impression by means of drawings. Such drawings would reflect a change in colour. Yet, these drawings will show no change when there is a change of aspect, "they will be the same before and after the theorized change in organization takes place" (LW I, § 439).

Now the sentence "The organization of my visual field has changed" seems similar to a sentence "The color of the sky has changed", yet in answer to the question "How has your visual field changed" one can say no more than "Like *this*", thereby pointing to inner (mental)

objects. But this response is not an informative further specification, and the use of 'organisation' in "The organisation of my visual field has changed" is not transitive. Rather the sentence involves a reflexive construction, and the use of 'organisation' is intransitive.

In making this argument, Wittgenstein's comments in RPP I, § 1118 (which immediately follow a remark about Köhler and the pie figure) also are relevant to discuss. Wittgenstein notes:

> Indeed, you may well see what belongs to the description of what you see of your visual. Impression is not merely want to copy shows, but also the claim for example to see this solid this other as intervening space hear it all depends on what we want to know when we ask someone what he sees. (RPP I, § 1118)

A central idea in Wittgenstein's analysis of aspect seeing is that in everyday contexts, the change in what we see is adequately described by, for instance, pointing to part of the pie and saying "I used to see this part of the figure as intervening space, and now I see it as solid". For example, if Wittgenstein was looking at the pie figure and wanted to describe a change in what he sees, he could say, 'I now see the narrow sectors as solid'. The situation is different in Köhler's case, however. Suppose that Köhler would suggest that "I now see the narrow sectors as solid" describes a change in organisation of the viewers visual field. That is, suppose that Köhler were to suggest that a (transitive) answer to "How has the organisation of your visual field changed?" is "I now see the narrow sectors as solid". In this case, the answer is not sufficient.

> The reason why it is insufficient is because Köhler needs the answer to provide more than just a description of the change in what is seen, for he intends to *explain* change in what is seen by appeal to a change in organization of the visual field. Yet, saying that I now see the narrow sectors as solid (this is how the organization has changed) does not explain why I now see the narrow sectors as solid (this is what I now see). In other words, Köhler would be claiming, in effect, "I now see the narrow sectors as solid because I now see the narrow sectors as solid", which clearly does not provide an informative explanation. (Hausen; ter Hark 2013, 101)

Viewing Köhler's situation from the transitive/intransitive perspective hence exposes yet another way that his notion of organisation is unilluminating and mystifying.

> When introducing organization as a sensory fact, he apparently assumes that his notion will have a transitive use similar to that our concept of (ordinary) organization and to that of color and shape.

But, upon inspection, we see that his notion lacks any transitive meaning at all. (Hausen; ter Hark 2013, 101)

On that note, let us turn to Wittgenstein's alternative, positive description of the use of 'organisation' with respect to aspect seeing. Wittgenstein's idea here is that a sentence like "The organization of my visual field has changed" can be useful even if it is not used as a precursor of *how* the organisation has changed. In particular, it can be used to express and thereby emphasise an experience that one has had. Like the sentence "That's that" which can be straightened out as "It is settled", the sentence "The organization of my visual field has changed" can be straightened out as "I am having an experienced that I want to express by saying 'The organization of my visual field has changed'". Moreover, this experience need not be further explicated in order for the sentence to be meaningful. As Wittgenstein says, regarding the feeling of everything being unreal "[a]nd how do I know that another has felt what I have? Because he uses the same words as I find appropriate" (RPP I, § 125). The other person knows what I am talking about not on epistemological grounds, but because we are in tune with the very verbal expression. A continuation of this use of words might be "Yes, I should like to say what you say", but not a statement to the effect that there is something which we both describe by means of the same words. "Accordingly, the inclination to say such and such is not simply a reaction but is itself the psychological phenomenon that matters" (ter Hark 2011, 516). To conclude, by speaking of the organisation of our visual field, we are intransitively emphasising an experience rather than transitively describing the visual field.

5 Wittgenstein and Köhler on Social Understanding

Köhler distinguishes between two notions of behaviour: behaviour in the physical sense and behaviour as perceived. Behaviour in the physical sense is the domain of behaviourism and physiology. Köhler admits that behaviour qua physical has nothing in common with mental processes. To the extent that the philosophical argument by analogy for the existence of other minds proceeds from the notion of physical behaviour, it can be dispensed with. The body and the behaviour of other living human beings, Köhler emphasises, is given to us "only as percepts and changes of percepts" (Köhler 1947, 221-2). Emotions, he continues, tend to express themselves in the behaviour of people as we see them. The question now is, if these expressions resemble what is being expressed? If so, he argues, the main reason for strictly indirect interpretation of social understanding would obviously be removed (223).

Behaviour as perceived by others provides us with all sorts of sensory experiences. Is there a similarity between these sensory experiences and the mental life of other creatures, Köhler asks? He proceeds cautiously by first investigating similarities between different senses that have nothing to do with mental, subjective experiences. Brightness and darkness, he argues, are attributes of both auditory and visual experiences. Again, ik fiets nu weg an object which we touch appears cool, its coolness somehow resembles visual brightness. Even words, in particular their sound, may resemble qualities of different senses. He quotes a line from the German poet Morgenstern:

> Die Möwen sehen all aus, als ob sie Emma hiessen (All seagulls look as though their name were Emma).

"The sound of 'Emma' as a name and the visual appearance of the bird appear to me similar" (Köhler 1947, 224). Köhler rejects the view that these and other synesthetic linkages are mere analogies from which nothing can be inferred about underlying facts. On the contrary, he defends the view that the analogies are all grounded in resemblances that exist between different realms of sense-experience.

From these and other examples he concludes that certain experiences of the inner and the perceptual worlds resemble each other.

As I have shown elsewhere (cf. ter Hark 2011), synesthetic experiences and their relation to language are also discussed by Wittgenstein in detail. For now it suffices to consider his comments on Köhler's reading of Morgenstern. But there is no similarity between the sound of the name Emma and the appearance of seagulls. What could the resemblance be here? It is obvious that the experience might be due to a childhood association between seeing seagulls walking lamely, and the stiffness of women called Emma. Perhaps there is even an association between a particular Emma limping out of the house at the seaside and the gait impeded by stiffness seagulls. But such associations are a far cry from noticing a resemblance between the sound of a name and a certain visual appearance. Indeed, there is no more similarity between Emma and the appearance of seagulls than between the name Beethoven and the Ninth Symphony. Hence Köhler mistakenly believes that giving an associative explanation also amounts to having described this typical use of words.

In a series of three remarks in his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein turns to Köhler's similarity thesis concerning the inner and the outer. He begins by commenting on the question typically raised by empiricism: "For how could I see that this posture was hesitant before I know that it was a posture and not the anatomy of the animal?" (PI II, 209; cf. LW I, § 736). We know by now that this is not the epistemological problem the empiricist takes it to be but

a conceptual problem. The question amounts to a refusal to use the concepts of e.g. 'mean' or 'frightened' in describing an object of sight because these concepts do not serve exclusively for the description of what is visual. And if it is 'just' a question of choosing the 'right' concepts, why one does not take recourse to a purely visual concept for describing a mean facial expression? How easy is this? Or how difficult? In the next remark Wittgenstein suggests that theirs might be purely visual descriptions of a mean expression in the way the concepts of major and minor may provide purely auditory descriptions of music, including the emotional value of music. In the next remark he observes that psychological concepts, e.g. 'sad', can be applied to an 'outline face', such as an emoji, in the way major and minor can be used to describe music: "The epithet 'sad', as applied, for example, to the outline face, characterizes the groupings of line in a circle (Major, minor.)" (PI II, 209).

What is the difference between an emoji and a real human face as far as their expression is concerned? A picture face can be described by purely visual concepts. For instance, one can describe a nose as acute-angled, thereby giving the face a certain expression. But in the case of a human being there is no such equivalent to major and minor. And this is not because we haven't defined our concepts sufficiently sharp in order to meet the varieties of the sense experience of a human facial. The reason rather is that the concepts we use for describing a human facial expression have a different *use*. When Wittgenstein earlier said that they have not merely a visual descriptive use, this is not to be understood as if they are defective or vague, but to remind us that our *attitude* to facial expressions is part of their meaning. This is why he says: "We *react* to a hesitant facial expression differently from someone who does not recognize it as hesitant (in the *full* sense of the word)" (LW I, § 746). When we 'sense' the impact of an expression we will often imitate it with our own (747).

In the third remark, Wittgenstein warns us for not overlooking the 'field' of expression. Köhler's preoccupation with visual reality precludes our eyes for this field, or these other dimensions of facial expressions: "Think of this too: I can only see, not hear, red and green, but sadness I can hear as much as I can see it" (PI II, 209). We do not see a person's plaintive cries, we hear them, but especially: we react to them.

That the concept of seeing here reflects also our reactions to what we see is illustrated by yet another striking example that is discussed by both Köhler and Wittgenstein. In his *Dynamics in Psychology* (1940), Köhler tries to explain what happens when we look at the picture of a human face which is turned upside down. "They change so much that what we call facial expression disappears almost entirely in the abnormal orientation" (Köhler 1940, 25). His explanation is that it is not abnormal orientation in perceptual space, but

inversion with regard to retinal coordinates which alters the characteristics of our visual percepts and thus makes it difficult to recognise these percepts.

Wittgenstein approaches this striking phenomenon from an entirely different perspective. Unlike Köhler, Wittgenstein is not interested in the causal question as to whether the radical change of one's visual impression when the photograph is turned upside down is due to a change of perceptual orientation or of retinal orientation. Instead he focuses on a remark that Köhler makes almost in passing, namely that we fail to recognise the face and its smiling expression in upside down position. For Wittgenstein the case of the upside down face demonstrates a deep difference between language games, or between different descriptions of what is seen. Or what comes to the same, it demonstrates that the concept of description is a family resemblance concept. Consider this remark:

> Hold the drawing of a face upside-down and you can't tell the *expression* of the face. Perhaps you can see that it is smiling, but you won't be able to say what *sort* of a smile it is. You wouldn't be able to imitate the smile or describe its character more exactly.
>
> And yet the upside-down picture may represent the object extremely accurately. (RPP I, § 991)

The upside down picture may represent the construction of the face, such as the width of the face in relation to its length, or the triangular relation between the outer corners of the eyes to the base of the nose, exactly. Turning a portrait painting upside down is even a beloved practice of painters in order to check whether their constructive drawing represents the model accurately. Yet despite all this accuracy the character of the expression is gone. From the perspective of a constructive description nothing has changed, but one cannot conclude that the upside down picture of the portrait is seen in the same way as before. There is a radical change of one's impression of the face. Sameness of construction therefore is not sameness of expression. The one can be without the other. The construction can be described in constructive terms only, or by means of psychological terms. As this example illustrates, every attempt at describing the sort of expression of the inverted picture in constructive terms will fail to convey what sort of expression is involved. For that psychological concepts are essential. More importantly it is the specific use to which they are put which is essential. It is not just that we do not recognise the photograph's expression but the inverted photograph does not *make* us smile. As Wittgenstein observes we would not be able to imitate the smile. Imitating a smile is a way of representing and describing what is seen that is radically different from describing what one's sees in constructive terms. It is this deep distinction

between uses of language (and pre-linguistic behaviour) that explains what we want to say when we speak of inner states that are hidden behind outer behaviour or, like Köhler, inner states that are similar to behaviour.

6   Conclusion

As a concluding comment we can turn to a remark which has been quoted quite often in the literature but which has not been understood in the context of Wittgenstein's dialogue with Köhler:

> "We *see* emotion" – As opposed to what? – We do not see facial contortions and *make the inference* that he is feeling joy, grief, boredom. We describe a face immediately as sad, radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give other description of the features. – Grief, one would lik*e to say, is personified in the face. This is essential to what we call "emotion".* (RPP II, § 570)

Already the first sentence alludes to Köhler, who would emphasise that we see emotion as opposed to seeing mere colours and shapes and interpreting these visual data as emotion. For Wittgenstein the opposition between seeing in Köhler's sense and seeing plus interpreting in the empiricist sense misconstrues the concept of seeing as well as of interpretation. Wishing to oppose the empiricist Köhler puts all the weight on seeing. Replacing the idealised notion of seeing of the empiricist by the Gestalt concept of seeing, which includes and even prioritises the field of the object of perception, he believes to have found the explanation of social understanding which is in harmony with the naïve view of ascribing psychological states to other people. Seeing a person's anger is not just scanning his face but also seeing the dynamical development of objective experiences in the field of the observer which mirror the dynamical development occurring in subjective experience. As Köhler asks, who has not found himself occasionally walking faster when thinking about the disagreeable remarks of an adversary. And who has not observed his friend in the morning: "Sometimes his movements will be even and calm, sometimes his whole visible surface, his face and his fingers, will be unstable and restless" (249). For Köhler then the application of psychological concepts describing one's objective experiences of another person's experience depends on identifying the dynamical development of all sorts of traits which mirror his inner life.

Note that Köhler's descriptions of social understanding do not make use of psychological concepts like embarrassment, shyness or fear. Nor does he mention colour. Instead his descriptions remain at the *optical* level. We see that a face *lightens up, we see the crescendo*

and *ritardando* of behaviour and we see the *direction* of the eyes. Psychological states like embarrassment and shyness are similar to these objectively observable optical features.

Wittgenstein's approach is sharply opposed to Köhler's. Describing the emotion of another person is not to be understood as describing optical features of the face, or a larger sensory field which mirrors inner life and which for that reason is more than mere physical behaviour. Describing emotions is not mediated at all, neither by an inference to hidden inner states nor by a visible attunement of inner feelings and optical features of the face or body.

For Wittgenstein the appeal to optical features is as much an idealised notion of what counts as a description of what is seen as is the empiricist notion of sense datum. Are optical features really involved when attributing shyness to a person? Suppose I am drawing a sour face. To see whether I have got the expression right, what do I do? Typically, I step back and look at the drawing. But I do not check whether I got the expression right by comparing the expression with specific lines or shades of colour. To be sure I know that there are some ways to emphasise parts of the face to make a more convincing sour look. At any rate a teacher will not give pure visual hints, pointing to specific lines or halftones of colour. He may advise e.g. by building angular or blocky shapes, but these are not optical. In his Lectures on the Philosophy of Psychology, Wittgenstein remarks that the sentence "He looks shy" is embedded in completely different language games than "His face lightens up". To draw more in angular or blocky way, but surely drawing in this way belongs to the expression of the whole drawing. At this point Wittgenstein's occasional references to our native ability to imitate faces and ways of behaving may be profitable. In the first part of the *Philosophical Investigations* he says, think of our ability to imitate a facial expression without seeing ourselves doing it (e.g. in a mirror). And elsewhere he writes that to imitate a facial expression is a description, a language game (RPP I). To imitate a facial expression is not to derive one's description from visual or optical clues, since one does not see what happens while imitating. Mimicking a face, therefore, is not an indirect description: it is immediate. It is an expression which represents another expression.

To come back to Köhler's 'objectively observed behaviour', or the various optical features of the face. Suppose one is asked to imitate these optical features, the lighting up of the face, the crescendo and the ritardando of the 'fear', or the 'joy'. If we follow Wittgenstein's line of argumentation concerning the concept of imitation, to imitate the optical features would be to imitate the *expression*, for the imitation leaves no room for a distinction between on the one hand scanning optical features and using them for building one's imitation on the other. The imitation is itself an expression (of fear, of joy), hence it is immediate and direct.

Our application of psychological predicates to facial expressions is in no way different from imitation. To be sure we use words like shy or fear, but their application is immediate. "Even when we are unable to give other descriptions of the facial features", that is, even when from the perspective of plain seeing we would fail to see colours and shapes and other optical features, our description is direct. And this because the description of what is seen has taken the form of an interpretation of what is seen. Köhler is exactly in the position Wittgenstein exposes with the preceding remark. Köhler thinks that when we attribute emotion concepts to a person the sensory field in which the person's behaviour is perceived *must* be describable. As a help Wittgenstein reminds us of the aesthetic domain.

> But a painter can paint an eye so that it stares; so its staring must be describable by the distribution of colour on the surface. But the one who paints it need not be able to describe this distribution. (RPP I, § 1077)

Therefore, contrary to Köhler: "It is precisely a *meaning* that I see" (RPP I, § 869).

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