For nothing is concealed! Motion picture, Wittgenstein, and *seeing-as*

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Abstract: According to Wittgenstein's claim that our "seeing a thing as" is strongly dependent on what he calls "world-picture" and vice versa, motion pictures present "surveyable representations" of our world-picture and therefore influence the way we see the world. Insofar as *understanding* means to see coherences, motion pictures help humans understand world-pictures. But the insights imparted by motion pictures are not of a mere cognitive kind, since motion pictures do not present arguments. By making use of imaginative identification they have such an impact on humans that they directly "embody" insights and thereby changing what is accepted as knowledge within a world-picture.

Keywords: Wittgenstein, imaginative identification, world-picture, insights, epistemic value

It has become quite uncontroversial that motion pictures can impart knowledge. However, the interesting question is how they can do that and what kind of knowledge is meant here. This question is discussed at least since Stanley Cavell put the consideration of film on the philosophical agenda in 1971. For the insight that motion pictures do have an epistemic value of their own is quite not self-evident.

In analogy to Richard Rorty's *linguistic turn*, William Mitchell declared a *pictorial turn* in 1992 and after him Gottfried Boehm identified an *iconic turn* in 1994. Boehm´s main claim is that *Bilder* (the German word contains *pictures* as well as *images*) are a source of knowledge *sui generis* as well as true sentences are. If this is true, it is then also likely that motion pictures must have an epistemic value in their own right, even though motion pictures are different from pictures in some respects. While for instance a photograph stands for itself and can be interpreted as it is, a motion picture is not the totality of the individual photographs of which it consists. Also, an interpretation of each single photograph is not identical to the interpretation of the motion picture as a whole. The sense and meaning of a motion picture arises from its essential feature of being a *moving* picture that also usually includes a soundtrack. Nevertheless, leaving this undoubtably interesting, but in this case not crucial question unattended, Boehm's arguments will also work when applied to motion pictures. Boehm tries to show that pictures or motion pictures constitute and refer to a distinct realm of sense by formulating some arguments that focus on the phenomenon of showing (in the sense of *deixis*). If it could be proved that (a) *showing* can't be reduced to *saying* and that (b) showing constitutes sense, then *showing* would refer to such a *realm of sense*.

His first argument to promote (a) – (a1) – is that in order to constitute sense, *saying* — in the end — depends on a *deixis* (= showing). Therefore, the deixis cannot be reduced to saying. Otherwise a circulus vitiosus would be the result (Boehm *Wie Bilder Sinn Erzeugen: Die Macht Des Zeigens* 15).

The second argument in support of (a) – (a2) – aims at the relation between *word*, *reference* and *meaning*. This relation may be unclear sometimes or even problematic, but it is nevertheless distinct and so is language as a whole. By contrast, images always bear a *continuum* within themselves. Many aspects of an image, for example, are not *either-or*, but *as-well-as*. Therefore, images cannot be reduced to a class of sentences describing the images. Many of William Turner's paintings or Claude Monet's *Cathedral of Rouen* (1894) are good examples of such a continuum (Boehm *Wie Bilder Sinn Erzeugen: Die Macht Des Zeigens* 48-53).

Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics, Vol. 44, No. 3, Autumn 2021 [54-61]

Finally, that *showing* constitutes sense (b) mainly follows from the fact that today's world is fully depicted with far more pictures than subjects to be depicted. And as things do not prescribe the way they must be depicted, it is always up to the painter, photographer or director to decide how that will be done. Out of this difference between the thing (or the world in general) and its picture arises the picture's sense. This sense can be understood for now as the answer to the question as to *why* an author has made a certain picture or motion picture and why they did it in this specific way. *Showing* construes a realm of sense by showing how the world should be seen in a specific way according to a respective author (Boehm *Wie Bilder Sinn Erzeugen: Die Macht Des Zeigens* 43).

If these arguments are correct then motion pictures can be a source of knowledge *sui generis* with them referring to a realm of sense. This immediately leads to the aforementioned question of if and how they can impart knowledge. This question is best answered by looking at how knowledge is gained. In general, there are at least two attempts to explain this phenomenon: the classical theory of cognition and the embodied approach. Cognition understood in the classical way describes knowledge acquisition as a very definite process: "Cognition involves algorithmic processes upon symbolic representations" (Shapiro 2) which supposedly take place in the brain. According to this definition cognition takes place solely in the brain. It works simply by applying methods of logic (*algorithmic processes*) to concepts (*symbolic representations*). Cognition in this sense is a very technical process which depends on language. It is clear that this account runs into trouble when it comes to understanding motion pictures, because they constitute sense by showing which cannot in all cases be reduced to saying as we have just seen. From a cognitive point of view, motion pictures either have to be translated into language first (they have to be fully described, which is impossible according to a2) or it must be denied that they can be understood by the means of classical theory of cognition. Previously, both positions had their supporters.

By contrast, embodied cognition identifies the place where cognition takes place as occurring not only within the brain: "Whereas standard cognitive science puts the computational processes constituting the mind completely in the brain, [embodied cognition science claims that, T.W.] constituents of cognitive processes extend beyond the brain" (Shapiro 158). This position asserts that the whole body, with all of its senses, takes part in the process of cognition. Shapiro in general thinks that a deep interaction between perceiving and acting is the solid ground on which embodied cognition rests: "[E]mbodiment involves a deep connection between perception and action. [… Embodied, T.W.] Cognizers make their world, in some sense, as a result of activities that reflect the idiosyncrasies of their bodies and perceptual systems" (55).

Let's take a closer look at some cognitive processes which occur beyond the brain, residing in a deep connection between perceiving, acting and thinking. An example of such actions are gestures according to Shapiro: "Gesture, in at least some cases, seems bound to thought" (174). Shapiro supports this point by referring to a study that compared the participants' ability to explain a certain issue when some subjects were prevented from gesturing while other subjects were not. The subjects who weren't allowed to gesture had measurable difficulties in explaining the issue. So, in conclusion, gestures are not merely rhetorical, but rather carry (or convey) cognitive relevance (Shapiro 173). There are many more examples of how bodily movements or sensory impressions are constitutive, or at least supportive, of cognitive processes. For example, everybody knows the power of certain scents which sometimes evoke reminiscences of certain events or things which took place when first smelling that scent. It is not by chance that it is for a scent the protagonist of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things past* is seeking.

At this point, it does appear that there are processes which occur beyond the brain, but which are nevertheless constitutive of cognition. So it seems that embodied cognition is the way forward when attempting to understand how motion pictures constitute sense and impart knowledge. With that given, the next question concerns how exactly motion pictures embody cognition. To answer that question, I will take a detour by looking more closely at the concepts of *metaphor* and *world-picture*.

In *Metaphors we live by*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson pointed out that the "concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details" (3). This means that beyond their rhetorical and poetical functions metaphors have both the ability to structure our relation to the world and at the same time illustrate fundamental cognitive structures.

Metaphors influence the way we *act*, the way we *think* and "contribute to the meaning of concepts" and thereby affect and expand our *understanding* of the world we live in (Shapiro 86–87). As such, metaphors are not exceptional cases within our conceptual system, but rather reside at its very core: "Primarily on the basis of linguistic evidence, we have found that most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff and Johnson 4).

This result is of a very high interest since motion pictures and metaphors have one important feature in common: they reveal their sense not by asserting, but figuratively by *showing* and making use of pictures as substitute. As a consequence, motion pictures, so to speak, develop a real-life effect. This suggests the assumption that motion pictures have an impact on our conceptual system similar to that of metaphors. What that impact might be becomes more intelligible when examining what our *ordinary conceptual system* is and how it works. I will make use of Ludwig Wittgenstein's conception of language to show how concepts (and metaphors) come into existence and *govern* our everyday lives. Wittgenstein, if you will, advocates an embodied concept of *language*. His notion of a *language-game* binds language to actions. He says: "I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the 'language-game'" (*Philosophical Investigations* §7). Consequently, speaking is not only a mental process. Wittgenstein rather stresses "the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity" (*Philosophical Investigations* §23). He draws this analogy between language and games, because both have more in common than is visible at first sight. Taking a closer look at games helps us to understand some crucial aspects of language. As with games, the rules of how to speak a language are also dependent on the actions to which they are connected.

To emphasize this point Wittgenstein uses a rhetorical question. He asks "is there not also the case where we play and make up the rules as we go along? And there is even one where we alter them—as we go along" (*Philosophical Investigations* §83). So, concepts and rules are dependent on what we do. They arise *as we go along*.

Such a conception of language has different consequences. One of those affects the notion of *meaning*. If speaking is bound to action then so, too, is the meaning of a word. Indeed Wittgenstein claims that: "For a *large* class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (*Philosophical Investigations* §43). Therefore, the way a word is used is influenced by the way we act. The way we act is again among others influenced by our experience.

Finally, the last confirmation of a word's meaning lies not in its somewhat obscure relation to the world, but in acting which in turn "lies at the bottom of the language- game" (Wittgenstein *On Certainty* §204). So, it is at the bottom of our language-games where we attach meaning as well to some words (when we name something, for example) and others get their meaning through their being involved in actions; it is therefore at the bottom of a language-game where "the explanations come to an end" (Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* §1) and whereon our certainties rest. There is no deeper foundation of explanations or meanings than the connection of acting and speaking at the bottom of a language game which, likewise, is the last stance of justification. There, at the bottom of a language-game, "[i]f I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do.'" (Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* §217).

Wittgenstein later notes the consequence he draws out of his conception of language-games: "At the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded" (*On Certainty* §253). That means that there will always be assumptions which cannot be proven right, because to do

so, other assumptions which have already been proven as true would be necessary on which this proof could rest and so on ad infinitum. From this point of view it sounds absurd to demand a set of true propositions from which all other true propositions could be derived as a foundation of science or of everyday life.

Once the mentioned set of true propositions cannot take over the role as a solid and reliable foundation of knowledge (as such a set of propositions does not exist), assumptions do instead. These assumptions involve propositions about things one has been told, read, heard, but altogether not proved right. "That is to say, the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn" (Wittgenstein *On Certainty* §341). These assumptions seem to us to be so certain that further investigations into their being true or false do not seem necessary or simply are not undertaken. "That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted" (Wittgenstein *On Certainty* §342). Everyone believes such propositions about the world they have not verified by themselves. And some of these beliefs necessarily cannot be doubted, because something must stand firm so that another can move. They are the *hinges* that make the question of right or wrong become possible in the first place.

In their entirety, these assumptions constitute a deep belief and they form our picture of the world, or our *world-picture*. "But I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false" (Wittgenstein *On Certainty* §94) One is adopted to its world-picture by taking part (and being a part of) primitive language games, e.g. such language games in which one learns to use the language. The language-game is *the* ultimate plain fact, the ground everyone stands upon, but it is itself, however, "not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there – like our life" (Wittgenstein *On Certainty* §559).

It is important to notice that our world-picture rests on a nest of ungrounded beliefs and is subject to constant change depending on our acting and speaking. And although these propositions I have adopted and which I am acquainted to – the ungrounded belief as well as the grounded belief upon which our world-picture is founded – are derived from the world in a very broad sense, on the other hand they strongly influence the way I see the world.

Wittgenstein demonstrates this close dependence between a world-picture and the way one sees the world with an argument developed in the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*. He there presents what he calls the *duckrabbit* (figure 1), a figure which can be seen either as a head of a rabbit or a duck. The aspects one is capable of seeing depend on the existence of a corresponding concept within a particular world-picture, meaning that one only sees them "if you are already conversant with the shapes of those two animals" (*Philosophical Investigations* ii, XI 207). Wittgenstein calls "this experience 'noticing an aspect'" (*Philosophical Investigations* ii, XI 193) and stresses its close relation to world-pictures from where concepts originate depending on the language-games. This once again makes clear the close dependence between language-games, world-pictures and seeing-as.

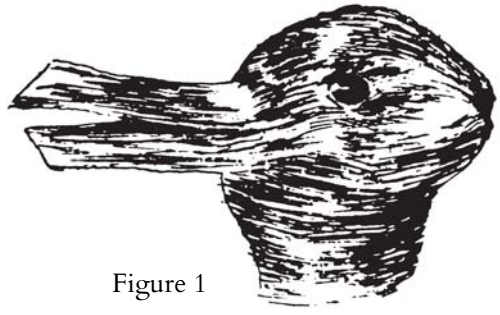

Figure 1

There is something special worth realizing about *seeing an aspect*. Wittgenstein argues that it is not solely a visual experience one has when noticing the flashing of an aspect. In fact "the flashing of an aspect on us seems half visual experience, half thought" (*Philosophical Investigations* ii, XI 197). This is because we have influence on how we see the duckrabbit and similar illustrations. We perceive the same "[b]ut we can also see the illustration now as one thing now as another. — So we interpret it, and *see* it as we *interpret* it" (*Philosophical Investigations* ii, XI 193). This is a very important point, paving the way for an embodied concept of seeing. We do not *perceive* the world, but *see* it by interpreting what we perceive according to our world- picture. Only interpretation leads to the seeing of an aspect. Interpretation, now, is an action, interpreting is acting. "Do I really see something different each time, or do I only interpret what I see in a different way? I am inclined to say the former. But why?—To interpret is to think, to do something; seeing is a state", Wittgenstein says (*Philosophical Investigations* ii, XI 212).

Now we have found the link we were looking for. We were concerned with two questions; how a world-picture influences the way we see the world and, conversely, how our seeing the world influences our world-picture. The answer to the first question is that we have to be conversant with things in order to see them. Broadly speaking, we can only see what is part of our world-picture. But, and this answers the second question, if we *learn* to see things we did not know before we thereby learn to interpret those things as *those things*. As interpreting is acting and acting lies at the bottom of our language game (and thereby changing it), interpreting things in a different or new way shifts our set of undoubted beliefs and, as a consequence, changes our world-picture. This way, the "riverbed of thoughts" (Wittgenstein *On Certainty* §97) – which is the set of undoubted beliefs which is founding our world-picture – changes over time: "And the bank of that river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited" (Wittgenstein *On Certainty* §99).

With this said we can conclude this excursion into the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and return to the original topic. We have already seen how pictures and metaphors influence one's world-picture (and as a result one's action). The subsequent question, now, is how motion pictures could impart knowledge by changing world-pictures. The thesis in question is that this becomes possible because a director (understood as the creative head of a team) has acquired a certain way to see the world and he now – similar to an artist presenting his art – is promoting this world-picture via his motion-picture. In doing so he might aim to change a certain world-picture which in his eyes might be flawed. He, then, can with his motion picture give us a kind of *transformation guidance* from one world-picture to another so that we can see the world the way he wants us to. It is in this sense a motion picture imparts knowledge by making us see the world in a different way and thereby — as a consequence — acquire new knowledge.

To construe such a transformation guidance a director needs both a solid knowledge of the world as it is and a vision of how the world should be seen. This comprehension of the world as it is arises out of the comprehension of what I will call *the artefact's histories of sense*. In intentional contexts *artefacts* (as well as *concepts*) respond to a certain problem, so to speak.

For example, a hammer looks the way it does because it was made to solve (among others) the problem of hitting a nail into a wall. There are not unlimited possible ways to reach this goal. So, the hammer's shape, material and so on is not *accidentally*, but thoroughly considered. The hammer is constructed to solve a certain problem. It is tested and, depending on its success, perhaps improved. Maybe it is discovered that even other problems can be solved with this hammer, maybe usage of the hammer causes new problems to which new solutions are necessary. Anyway, all the single artefacts constructed to solve a problem belong to the problem's history. Now, even this simple example shows that in order to understand a problem, one must understand the problem's history as well as the history of the attempts to solve this problem. Each of the single

attempts to solve a problem, then, is the answer to the question of its particular sense. The consequential result is a history of sense which constitutes an artefact's sense. Michel Foucault made this method to understand a concept known e.g. in his famous studies *The Order of Things*, or *Discipline and Punish*. There is again a connection to the philosophy of Wittgenstein at this point. Our failure to understand, he says, springs from our lack of an overview of the use of our words:

> A main source of our failure to understand is that we don't have an overview of the use of our words. – Our grammar is deficient in surveyability. A surveyable representation produces precisely that kind of understanding which consists in "seeing connections". Hence the importance of finding and inventing intermediate links. The concept of a surveyable representation is of fundamental significance for us. It characterizes the way we represent things, how we look at matters. (Is this a *Weltanschauung*?) (*Philosophical Investigations* §122)

To be able to understand we must gain a — as he calls it — *surveyable representation* of our grammar – the use of our words (whereas *grammar* here designates the rules for using our words and does not refer to syntax). Wittgenstein stresses not only the need of surveyability, but also the importance of finding connections between the words as well as finding intermediate cases. And although he is speaking about language, Wittgenstein uses terms descending from the semantic field of seeing like *overview*, *seeing*, *looking at matters*. This is not by chance. Wittgenstein thereby wants to hint at the close relation between seeing and speaking. That at the same time makes it tricky to translate the German passage into English. While Anscombe translated "übersichtliche Darstellung" to "perspicuous representation", Hacker used "surveyable" to attribute the specific kind of representation. The final word on the question of which translation is the correct one has yet to be given and, of course, cannot be done here.

Whereas de Mesel combines both translations by using them synonymously and apparently sees no problem in confusing them that way, Savickey by contrast does. Savickey claims that Hacker's concept of surveyability tries to aim at an attempt to tabulate grammar — and nothing more. But this, she argues, would not cope with the complexity of Wittgenstein's idea behind this concept of "fundamental significance". But nevertheless — while agreeing with Savickey's interpretation of this topic in general —, de Mesel proposes an interpretation of "surveyable representation" that seems most suitable to translate to the German word "Übersicht". He says:

> I agree with the later Baker's critique, shared by Kuusela, that a surveyable representation need not be an assemblage of grammatical rules, as the Baker- Hacker interpretation [that Savickey criticised, T.W.] claims. There are several techniques for introducing perspicuity into the use of our words. (48)

One of these manifold techniques "is to compare the use of certain words to the use of others. By way of similes and analogies, Wittgenstein often tries to break the spell of a certain analogy that 'held us captive' (PI 115)" (De Mesel 48).

In this sense "surveyable" means more than just *overlooking* things perspicuously to get a tabulation of grammar or clarity of expression. A surveyable representation enables one to understand world-pictures and to obtain the ability to find the way through them. Schroeder in this sense suggests "synoptic representation" as the most appropriate translation which focuses on both aspects of a synopsis: overlooking and orientation. Briefly, I think Wittgenstein's point is to make clear that there are always several world-pictures which we are each able to understand if we try to overlook the use of our words and if we – on this grounds – search for connections (and differences) within each world-picture and also between them. Overlooking is of course more than just tabulating grammar. It is the necessary condition to being able to see connections and missing intermediate cases. A surveyable representation will bring us into a good position to be able to *understand*. In this expanded sense *surveyable representation* can be interpreted as a source of information about artefact's histories of sense. What we must do is *seeing-to-understand*. The artefact's histories of sense help us in doing so. This, again, brings us back to motion picture.

Motion pictures use spoken words, pictures and music of all kinds and, by combining these, it has a strong and very special impact on the audience. The audience literally see the missing links between our words, our concepts and also the different world-pictures — they see the *connections* Wittgenstein speaks of which helps them to gain a surveyable representation. Motion pictures do this by presenting developed world-pictures and by making the audience learn about these world-pictures the way they learn the language through primitive language-games. A motion picture produces missing intermediate cases in a way that directly affects the audience. In fact, motion pictures do have a very high impact. This is because when watching a motion picture specific ways of acting are presented to the audience. Acting, though, lies at the bottom of the language-game and hence at the bottom of our language. Moreover, as we have seen, *interpreting* is *acting* and therefore lies at the bottom of the language-game, too. Taken together, this explains how motion pictures manage to influence the way its audience interpret and see the world. Furthermore, by watching specific ways of acting one also learns them as well as new ways of speaking (about them) – one learns to see new connections. On the one hand this leads to a better understanding of the world, but also influences the world by changing the way we see it as (our *Weltanschauung* changes). Altogether, motion pictures – so to speak – *make us feel* what a certain *world-picture* is like. They give us insights into those world-pictures, by making us feel as if we were actually in a certain situation. We, when watching a motion picture, imagine to be that person on the screen in that given situation. By identifying with this person and at the same time by ascribing those states of affairs to others we know from ourselves we become able to – to a certain degree – *feel* what the protagonists feel.

The reason for this is that there seems to be some kind of a parallelism between a subject and the world insofar we tend to assume how others feel by bringing to mind how we would feel in that specific situation. "This parallelism, then, really exists between my spirit, i.e. spirit, and the world", Wittgenstein says and concludes: "If I were to look like the snake and to do what it does then I should be such-and- such" (*Notebooks* 15.10.16).

This kind of process of embodied cognition is called *imaginative identification* and it is the reason for us weeping when observing a sad situation in spite of not being directly involved in or affected by what is happening.

Insofar as a motion picture rests on its director's interpretation of the world, then, at the same time it implicitly holds a way how the world – from this director's specific point of view – *should* be seen. This interpretation, then, likewise develops a view of a future world. And as you *cannot record fiction* it *presents* a possible world (see also Wiesing). A motion picture expresses the director's interpretation of the world and this is what is meant by saying that a motion picture bears knowledge. This knowledge is the grounded world-picture acquired by a director. The director is, so to speak, the motion picture's knowledge-knowing subject. He must consequently be understood as an author who is presenting his or her insights to the audience. The director's interpretation of the world also becomes morally relevant, then, because it gives *insights* into a world-picture, thereby changing the world by stating how the world *should* be, and by teaching us to see it that way. This, as a side note, is what Wittgenstein thinks philosophers should do in order to change world-pictures – they should simply say: "Look at things like this!" (*Culture and Value* 61e), thereby teaching others to *see*. It is the director who helps the audience to see connections and find the intermediate links. We simply must look at the world and describe what we see. We need to gain a surveyable representation and to get to know the artefact's histories of sense in order to be able to understand. Motion pictures can help us in doing so, because they are precisely made to be seen and they present world-pictures to the audience — "For nothing is concealed" (Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* 435).

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