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Carolina Scotto
carolinascotto@gmail.com

"Meaning is a physiognomy"[1]: Wittgenstein on Seeing Words and Faces

Abstract

The second part of *Philosophical Investigations* and other contemporary writings contain abundant material dedicated to the examination of visual perception, along the lines of similarities and differences manifested in the use of concepts such as "seeing as", "seeing aspects", "noticing the aspect", "aspect blindness", among other related ones. However, their application to phenomena such as face perception and word perception, and similarities between the latter two, has not received proper attention in the literature. My first aim is identifying the features pertaining perceptual (and more widely, experiential) relationships we have with written language, showing in what ways they are strongly linked with some proper features of facial perception. In other words, I will try to show how the "phenomenology of reading" is akin to the "phenomenology of facial perception" or "physiognomy". Based on all this, my interpretative hypothesis is that, in Wittgenstein's view, the features shared by face and word perception are more deeply related than via a mere analogy; hence they might contribute to explain, in the case of words, a variety of specific semantic, perhaps semantic-pragmatic, phenomena, that should be included in an appropriate clarification of the varieties of use in natural languages.

[1] PI §568.

The second part of *Philosophical Investigations* and other contemporary writings contain abundant material dedicated to the examination of visual perception, along the lines of similarities and differences manifested in the use of concepts such as "seeing as", "seeing aspects", "noticing the aspect", "aspect blindness", among other related ones. A variety of recent but not always convergent interpretations have already come to make amends for the early neglect of Wittgenstein's latest work on this topic (Glock 2016: 78). However, their application to phenomena such as face perception and word perception has not received proper attention in the literature – the similarities between both kinds of abilities much less attention still. My interest lies in clarifying the way in which the perception of words and the "phenomenology"[2] of reading, and more broadly speaking, the experiential relationships with written words, are connected in relevant ways, with the perception of faces or "physiognomy". More specifically, I want to raise and answer the following question: Does our ability to read texts, inasmuch as it involves the visual recognition of words and other related experiences, owe anything to abilities that we demonstrate in seeing faces?

My exposition will be mainly guided by Wittgenstein's use of the notions of *aspect-perception* and *physiognomy*. According to my interpretation, the notion of physiognomy, rarely explored in the literature, allows a better understanding of the more general notion of aspect-perception, and thus, of the similarities between facial and word perception as cases of aspect-perception. The notion of *familiarity*, which clears up important dimensions of both, will be explored, too.

This article has, on the one hand, specific exegetic objectives; on the other, more general theoretical motivations. As to the former, which will take up most of the text, I will hold that some perplexities or disagreements arising from the interpretation on these matters may be clarified, at least in part, by paying better attention to similarities between face and word perception. As is

[2] I use the concept in a very liberal sense, meaning the perspicuous representation of our ordinary use of the notions involved, i.e., "seeing as" and its cognates.

the case with most questions examined by Wittgenstein, the treatment given to aspect-perception is far from systematic. An additional difficulty with this topic is that similarities between seeing faces and seeing words may appear, *prima facie*, somewhat whimsical, merely idiosyncratic or at best metaphorical. My interpretative hypothesis, on the contrary, is that these similarities are more deeply rooted than by means of a mere analogy. These features might help to explain, in the case of words, specific semantic (perhaps, semantic-pragmatic) phenomena that should be included in an appropriate clarification of the varieties of use in natural language. I believe it is precisely this what Wittgenstein was trying to explore with an aim at enhancing his own perspective on meaning as use.

In this sense, I will propose an interpretation according to which the features of aspectual vision of faces, which I will take to be the most basic case of aspect-perception, are *projected* to the aspectual vision of words, and so, they shed light upon them. In this sense, my reading departs from, mostly, those interpretations which claim that seeing aspects is a kind of perception limited to specific visual objects and/or more or less special circumstances or contexts.[3]

From a theoretical perspective, I would only like to foreground the remarkable interest of current neurocognitive sciences in these topics. Exceeding by far the possibilities of this article, not many references in this literature will be made here, except for a few that serve to identify more clearly the experiences Wittgenstein was trying to describe on a phenomenological level.

To carry out this task, I will focus first on the perception of written language and more specifically on the perceptual familiarization with the mother tongue, analyzing the varieties of "experience of meaning".[4] My aim will be to examine how written words are seen aspectually by readers, and more specifically, to identify what are their physiognomic aspects. I will try to show how

[3] I will not always identify every questioned interpretation, though.

[4] Here I will only deal with written language, since its involvement with visual modality shows more clearly the resemblances with face perception. Yet, most issues I will refer to, may be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to auditory perception of spoken words.

this fact contributes to explaining some semantic phenomena related to reading and writing. Second, I shall identify and characterize the features of aspect-perception in general, and after that, those applied to the contents of aspectual vision of faces or "physiognomy". In order to do that, I will revise a few controversies in the literature that are relevant to the issue, advancing my own approach. Some concluding remarks will be proposed by the end, connecting these issues with a view of philosophy as a way of seeing aspects in language.

1. "The familiar physiognomy of a word" [5]

Even though the relationship between aspects and the rich notion of "experience of meaning" has been studied extensively, it is quite odd that the strong relationship between the "experience of meaning" and visual perception of the faces and written words, have passed almost completely unnoticed. [6] These connections come together in the expression: "Meaning is a physiognomy". Wittgenstein examines both forms of aspect-perception together (RPPI §1064). So much so, that on occasion one serves to clarify the other, as I will show later.

Seeing written signs reveals a variety of aspects, depending on the type of signs, the type of words and the character of the text, and depending on the reader. We see letters[7] or words – not just

[5] PI p. 218.

[6] One of the most remarkable exceptions is Cavell's *The Claim of Reason* (1979), which showed the strong connections between experiencing words and physiognomy, and between our attachment to language and to human beings (see 355 and ss.). The other is Mulhall (1990), where the importance of physiognomic traits of words early on is underscored. See Mulhall's analysis of sections dedicated to reading in part one of PI (2001b: 106 and ss.), especially those dedicated to aspects of meaning (2001b: 163 and ss.). Though I am sympathetic with his idea that aspect seeing is not a local phenomenon, I will not commit here to the strong claim that all seeing is a "continuous aspect seeing", nor that all meaning is a "continuous meaning perception".

[7] Wittgenstein points out that even letters may be seen aspectually, for example when we see "the figure  as an F and sometimes as the mirror-image of an F", or when we say "It'll be an F that the writer slipped with" (RPPI §1). Many fragments are devoted to the aspectual vision of written letters (see RPPII §§535, 537, 540, 548, etc.). Aspect in letters

strokes of ink with a certain shape or disposition – only when we know about language and writing[8]; but by then we do not only see written words, but we also 'see' the meanings they express (Mulhall 2001b: 164 and ss.). Now, as expert readers, we are not usually aware of this. But we may become aware in a variety of cases listed below. Then the aspect of a word "dawns upon you" (LPP: 296) and you "experience" its meaning.

Let us see then which aspectual features, especially the physiognomic ones, the "experience of meaning" consists of. It is worth remembering here that the notion of "experience of meaning" (PI p. 176; RPPI §§354, 358, 359) is added to the notion of meaning as use. The concepts of experience or "vision" and its counterpart, "meaning-blindness" (PI p. 214; RPPI §§175, 182, 189, 344; RPPII §§571–572), are both part of the family of "seeing aspects". They are "experiences", albeit in a special sense (RPPII §469), or in a "secondary sense" of experience (ter Hark 2011). Wittgenstein suggests these would be located in a "fourth dimension" (RPPI §1074), to distinguish them from "those experiences which we regard as the most fundamental ones, our sense impressions […]" (PI p. 215; also RPPI §259). Like in other cases of "seeing as", experiencing words is not the vision of mere physical traits of the letters that make them up, nor the resulting sum of each of them. Rather, what we see in the case of known words is related to a concept or meaning (RPPII §378; RPPI §869), or is "'the echo of a thought in sight' " (PI p. 212). What is more, the semantic content of words is related to the purely physical or geometrical features of signs in the same seemingly paradoxical manner that is characteristic of other cases of aspectual vision: what is perceived remains identical, although it is very different once meaning is experienced (RPPII §§474, 476). And the question:

cannot be the meaning, but it could be, e.g., a synaesthetic aspect (PI p. 216), or a physiognomic aspect (RPPI §18, 542).

[8] "Beginner" readers are forced to pay attention to the elements that make up the words and to visually go through letters sequentially (Wong et al. 2011). Siegel (2006) uses perception of written language (his example being from a Cyrillic text, which looks different before and after learning Russian), to argue that expert perception in general supports a "rich" conception of the properties of visual experience. As we will see below, this conception is similar to Wittgenstein's "seeing aspects" as seeing "rich" properties.

"Do I actually see something different each time; or do I only *interpret* what I see in a different way?", as well as his reply: "I am inclined to say the former", are formulated by Wittgenstein in identical terms in relation to perception of letters and written words (RPPI §1).

Words have "configurational" traits (the "visual word form"), due to which they produce characteristic perceptual effects. The so-called "inversion effect" affects the capacity to recognize the "mirror-written" signs Wittgenstein refers to (PI p. 198; LWI §§598–599; see Kao et al. 2010), both in relation to letters and words; the "superiority effect of the word" (Martelli et al. 2005; Wong et al. 2011), which leads to the correct reading of a word in spite of having some letters missing or distorted in shape (PI p. 210); and the "jumbled word effect" (Grainger & Whitney 2004), which accounts for the fact we can read words, even though some of their letters are mixed up or "faultily written" (LWI §706); among others. These effects show that known words are clearer to read and easier to copy than unknown ones (PI p. 198). These effects are similar to those Wittgenstein has described for face perception, as we will see below.

The first examples of "experience of meaning" are words with two meanings (RPPI §332). Wittgenstein shows this phenomenon in different grammatical categories and everyday words, such as conjunctions, nouns, adjectives, verbs, and even proper names, where one word can express more than one meaning (RPPI §§328, 332–333, 359; RPPII §571; PI pp. 176, 214). He refers, besides, to experiencing a word "substantively or adjectivally", suggesting that meaning may also depend on the way we experience the words that it express (RPPI §876; LWI §69). Just as one cannot see two figures in one ambiguous image at once, one cannot use an ambiguous expression "in their two meanings" in a significant way (RPP1 §77). In these cases, "meaning […] switches back and forth from one to another […]. You can only describe this by saying 'I suddenly saw what it meant'" (LPP: 296). Here one could say nothing changes in the word, although its meaning has suddenly and completely changed. This is the same phenomenon that aspectual vision exhibits in the case of ambiguous figures. Also, when different

expressions share one same meaning, but more distinctly still, when one of them is chosen randomly, and the other, by contrast, contains familiar words in our language: "Say 'a b c d e' and mean: the weather is fine" (RPPII §259; see LPP: 296–207). The experience of meaning also unveils when one intends to use familiar words with a different meaning, for example, you intend to mean: "'Get out' while you say 'Come in'. One is pulled two ways" (LPP: 296). The synaesthetic experience with letters and words (PI p. 216; LWI §362) and the feeling attached to specific words, for example, the 'if-feeling' (PI p. 182), and the 'but-feeling' (RPPII §264), are cases too. The feeling of the right or correct word or the 'word that hits the mark' is also observed (LWI §62), accompanying the recognition of the wanted word, no matter whether we know why this is so (RPPI §72–73; LWI §842). These experiences are described as the recognition of "a fine aesthetic difference" spreading from the word out branching out into "the *field* of each word" (RPPI §§357, 362; PI p. 219). They are very much akin to another frequent experience: "to have the word on the tip of my tongue" (PI p. 219; RPPI §254; LWI §841–842), unveiling the way we appreciate the individuality of some words (Mulhall 2001b: 165). Wittgenstein calls it "*germinal experience*" of a word (LWI §843–845), which we will see with other aspects.

In contrast, these experiences are thoroughly absent when we speak (RPPII §§250–252) and write "automatically" (RPPII §§262–267) or when we read "without thinking", or we speak "parrot-wise" (PI p. 176). Or when someone has a lack of "sensitiveness" of "changes in orthography" (RRPII §§571–572). But even more so, when we come up with expressions in a completely unknown language or being not a native speaker, when we are "not acquainted with the precise shade of meaning" (RPPI §1078). Or when a word is repeated over and over again until it loses its meaning and becomes a mere sound (PI p. 214; RPPII §464), producing a sort of "linguistic anesthesia" (ter Hark 2013). These experiences can only be explained if words were not standardly perceived as mere sounds or marks in the first place (Mulhall 2001b: 164). They are all partial or momentary meaning-blindnesses. The extreme case would be a global "meaning-

blindness" whereby an individual or a community would be trained to speak only in an "inexpressive and monotonous" manner, and "to move mechanically" (RPPII §706) or "to act like a robot" (RPPI §324). For Wittgenstein, this was an "invented syndrome" (ter Hark 2009) which was meant to identify, via contrast, the experiential dimension of our habitual relationship with language. In spite of suggesting that people have varying degrees of semantic sensitivity ("a tendency [that] is not always here, or not always in the same measure") (RPPI §324), it would only be null in the borderline cases of people lacking a mother tongue (Mulhall 2001b: 171) or with "mental defectives" (RPPI §179), people completely unable of responsiveness or reactivity, "like (an) automaton(s)" (RPPI §198). Yet it is known nowadays there is an array of this sort of disorders, which may be found in the neuro-cognitive literature, showing when perceptual processing of spoken or written words is severely compromised (see Dehaene 2009, ch. 6).

Wittgenstein frequently makes use of the concept of "physiognomy"[9] not only to refer to our ability to recognize aspects on faces, but also to account for our experiential relationship with words. As we will presently see, this is no metaphor, for there are different features shared by face and by written word perception. The most illustrating example is the case of proper names. Strongly related to their use as singular referential expressions, the names of people we know very well seem to also have a "face" or "a physiognomy", i.e. a "character":

> remember how the names of famous poets and composers seem to have taken up a peculiar meaning into themselves. So that one can say: the names "Beethoven" and "Mozart" don't merely sound different; no, they are also accompanied by a different *character*. (RPPI §243)

That "character" and "atmosphere" (RPPI §337; LWI §726) is expressed both in proper names and in the portraits of those people named and, in a more complex manner, in the things they

[9] Wack points out that Wittgenstein's use of this notion might be close to the Kantian tradition of "critical physiognomy" in which "a critical physiognomic judgment is the recognition of thought, intention, feeling, and character in the apprehension of the body's expressivity" (2014: 116). In that sense, physiognomy is a key to understand the experience of meaning (2014: 135).

do. Here everything seems to "fit well": the name of a person, their face, their work: "I feel as if the name 'Schubert' fitted Schubert's works and his face" (PI p. 215; LWI §791). These relationships may be better appreciated when we imagine "a meaning-blind man", unable to recognize the character or the "imponderable something" about proper names (RPPI §243), or when we make an attempt to disconnect these relationships. Wittgenstein proposes the mental experiment of imagining a picture of Goethe, instead of Beethoven, composing Symphony nº 9: "Here I should not know how to imagine anything that would not be extremely incongruous and ridiculous" (RPPI §338; PI p. 183). So, these are stronger relationships than mere associations (RPPI §356): they are described as "identification" (RPPI §336), "kinship" (LWI §75) or "fitting":

> His name seems to fit his works.—*How* does it seem to fit? […] It is as if the name together with these works, formed a solid whole. If we see the name, the works come to mind, and if we think of the works, so does the name. We utter the name with reverence. The name turns into a gesture; into an architectonic form. (RPPI§ 341)

> We see something according to the picture, the concept, of fitting […] Maybe it is strange to bring into this context the case of a person's name. But a connection can be drawn. Namely this: a person's name is *seen* as a portrait. (LWI §70; cf. LWI §372, 790)

These kinships reveal too why a person's signature, being a "drawing" or iconic representation of its proper name, "drawn" by the very "bearer" of the name, is unique, and thus has similar physiognomic qualities as a singular face: "Goethe's signature intimates something Goethian to me. To that extent *it is like a face*, for I might say the same of his face. It is like a *mirroring*"(RPPI §336).

However, it is not just proper names that have "a familiar face". In principle, all the words we understand have a "particular physiognomy"[10] - though it may not be the same one in different uses:

10 This trait also includes a few letters or fonts (RPPI §§541–542) as well as some texts such as proverbs, which can be observed in the fact they are "hung on the wall" as a

> While any word […] may have a different character in different contexts, all the same there is *one* character – a face – that it always has. I looks at us. —For one might actually think that each word was a little face; the written sign might be a face. And one might also imagine that the whole proposition was a kind of group-picture, so that the gaze of the faces all together produced a relationship among them and so the whole made a *significant group*. (RPPI §322) (LWI §366)
>
> For is it even certain that anyone who understands our language would be inclined to say that each word has a *face?* (RPPI §323)

Nevertheless, Wittgenstein himself does not seem to hold a fairly defined position to the scope of this feature, because, as we have claimed before, some uses of words may not include "experiences of meaning" at all (e.g., when we speak or read automatically).

The similarities between the experience with written words and aspect vision of portraits[11] or faces accounts for us having "the feeling that it [a word] has taken up its meaning into itself, that it is an actual likeness of its meaning" (PI p. 218). Thus words become a constitutive part of the experience themselves, not merely their symbolic and arbitrary expression; and this is why they cannot be replaced: "This expression goes with the experience just as the primitive expression of pain goes with pain" (RPPII §574; PI p. 218). Thus, it is possible to characterize these physiognomic features as variants of iconicity in language.[12]

Besides, the physiognomic traits of letters, words and expressions account for our emotional attachment and feeling of care for certain words:

> The familiar face of a word; the feeling that a word is as it were a picture of its meaning; that it has as it were taken its meaning up into itself— there could be human being to whom all this was alien. (They

portrait or a picture (PI p. 205; LWI §653), because they function as holistic representations, in a similar way as pictures do.

[11] Schroeder analyzes these remarks about physiognomy in terms of occasional associations between pictorial (or theatrical) representations and experiencing of meaning, without acknowledging that faces are the primary cases. (2010: 369)

[12] The iconicity of linguistic signs can be said in many ways. I think that Wittgenstein's remarks about the physiognomic features of the "experiences of meaning" are an example of iconicity in language (see Scotto 2017).

> would not have an attachment to their words.) And how are these feelings manifested among us? By the way we choose and value words. (PI p. 218; RPPI §6)

Familiarity with words gets to reveal itself as "the tendency to regard the word […] as something intimate, full of soul" (RPPI §324). It crystallizes that only the words in one's mother tongue have a familiar face, because only they are "constantly repeated and enormously familiar to us, like well-known faces" (PI §167). They *absorb* their meanings as faces take up the identity of persons.

These physiognomic experiences thus account for the intimacy and even identification relationships that are quite difficult to acquire in a second language. In this sense, Mulhall claims rightly that "to acquire language is to acquire a second nature" (2001b: 170): we are 'at home' with our words. Now, the most important effect of this phenomenon is that it enables different and ubiquitous expressive uses, both in spoken and in written language, such as affectionate language use (LWI §712), the "emotional tone" attained by means of some words (LWI §713), the expression of wishes (PI §546), the careless use of certain words (PI §546); or the opposite phenomena, when it turns to be difficult to enunciate certain words (PI §643), when we pronounce them respectfully (RPPI §341), or we underline a word or positively put it "on a pedestal in the sentence" (RPPI §1059; PI p. 214; RPPI §992), or when one is ashamed "because one has pronounced such-and-such a sentence to oneself in the imagination" (RPPI §891). This is also the case when we create puns or jokes (LWI §711):

> Someone makes up a pun for the first time. He 'plays with the meaning of two words': making the pun seems to consist of, at a time, seeing *two* meanings before you and *one* word. (LPP: 296)

These uses depend on particular words, so if we wanted to translate puns or jokes into another language, recreating a similar experience, we would have to choose "a completely different play on words" (LWI §278). Finally, using words in a new way, and, needless to say, poetic uses of words, are expressive too. Many other kinds of linguistic uses and speech acts can be added: pleads, regrets, slurs, ritualized expressions such as oaths, prayers, fixed expressions or idioms, etc. These are always more difficult to

produce or understand when we have to speak or read in another language, because we are not acquainted with "the precise shade of meaning" (RPPI §1078). As a consequence, when it comes to the experience of meaning, *pace* Glock (2016: 82), it transcends aesthetic discourse and humor; *pace* Schroeder (2010: 365), it does not "suggest merely that aspect perception may *help* one's understanding". Nevertheless, *pace* Mulhall (2001b: 164), the experience of meaning is not equivalent to the "continuous meaning perception" either, because not all language uses involve simultaneous experiences of meaning.

Then, we have two different uses of the word "meaning" (LWI §785) or understanding meaning, as much as we have two different uses of "seeing":

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

Wittgenstein additionally proposes a distinction (albeit without elaboration) between "primary" and "secondary meaning" (PI p. 216). This consists in words being used in their primary meaning, but in different contexts or language games. Characteristically, the new use cannot be paraphrased without losing its expressed secondary meaning: "The secondary sense is not a 'metaphorical' sense" (PI p. 216). This new meaning does not contradict nor exclude the primary one: on the contrary, it presupposes it (PI p. 216; ter Hark 2011) or has a "parasitic relationship" with the other (Mulhall 2001b: 167), because only when we feel sufficiently at home with primary meanings of words are we able to use them with secondary meanings (Mulhall 2001a). These are not the unique cases of aspect-perception of language (*pace* Glock 2016: 81), but only the most evident ones. The clearest examples are synaesthetic experiences and its linguistic expressions, triggered by letter or word perception, including tastes, colors and spatial, affective or psychological properties (i.e. "Wednesday if fat" and "Tuesday is lean", PI p. 216). From what is known about this phenomenon, it

would include a variety of "correspondences", crossmodal at times, among stimuli, non-linguistic and linguistic, generating "congruent" (not idiosyncratic) perceptual effects in varied degrees (Spence 2011). "Weak" forms of synesthesia are habitual in ordinary language use and visual representations (e.g., the connections we make between 'joy' and 'light', or 'sorrow' and 'the lead grey-sky', RPPI §§853–854). So, "experiences of meaning", including synaesthetic ones, might be cases of perceptual correspondences.

Wittgenstein outlines a "phenomenology" of reading which shows the physiognomic features mentioned clearly. Firstly, "reading" (as "seeing as") is a family resemblance concept (PI §164), in the sense that it ranges from a mechanical reading to "the more familiar, comprehending kind" (Mulhall 2001b: 108). Secondly, "the visual look of the word is familiar to us to a similar extent to its sound" (PI §167), which accounts for the difference in "influence" the arbitrary marks exert, in contrast with letters or known words: "our eye passes over printed lines differently from the way it passes over arbitrary pothooks and flourishes [...] with particular ease" (PI §§168–170). This observation strengthens the importance of familiarity with written signs in one's language and, consequently, of the different experiences the accomplished reader and the beginner will have (PI §§156, 166). It also points to a contrast with visual experiences of signs that are not words, doodles or pseudo-words, or with words of an unknown language or alphabet. Additionally, reading makes us experience the connection of the written sign with the oral one: "when I read I feel a kind of influence of the letters working on me" (PI §169), or a "feeling" of the "connecting mechanism between the look of the word and the sound that we utter […] I as it were feel the movement of the lever which connects seeing the letters with speaking" (PI §170); "the written word *intimates* the sound to me" (PI §171). The oral and the written language are connected experientially, since "the experience of reading a word" consists in "letter and sound form[ing] a *unity*—as it were an alloy" (PI §171). Wittgenstein adds that this is the same unity that we experience between "the name of famous men with the sound of their names" (PI §171).

There are other aspectual traits in written words that are similar to those applied primarily to facial expressions. For instance, we sometimes characterize the stroke of handwritten words by means of varied psychological predicates, such as "clumsy", "bold", "energetic" (RPPII §355), "unattractive" (RPPI §544), "hesitant" or "vulgar" (LWI §741). We perceive differently written words' normal strokes and words handwritten in a "typical childish awkwardness" (PI p. 210; RPPII §458; LPP: 105–106). Readers also have different sensitivity towards orthographic features in writing (PI §167; RPPI §1087). Those who lack these experiences will suffer from a type of "meaning-blindness" (Z §184; RPPII §572). Finally, the experience of meaning takes place in certain reading modes, too. Some texts, for example, require an "expressive reading": adequate intonation, modulation and rhythm, even reading out loud:

> […] when I read a poem, or some expressive prose, especially when I read it out loud, surely there is something going on as I read it which doesn't go on when I glance over the sentences only for the sake of their information. I may, for example, read a sentence with more intensity or with less. I take trouble to get the tone exactly right. (RPPI §1059; cf. PI p. 214)

Not only can some texts be read paying particular attention to "prosodic aspects"[13] (tone, emphasis, pauses, stress), but it also seems more appropriate or even necessary to read them out loud (e.g., speeches). Indeed, one very text, read in different ways, might reveal different meanings: when words matter and not all of them have an equal value, the text gains particularized or physiognomic features, and becomes, as it were, "irreplaceable". We intend to reproduce out loud, as it were, the singular manner in which an author would have pronounced their own words. We are all familiarized with these phenomena. Now,

> When I am reading expressively and I pronounce this word, it is, so to speak, filled brimful with its meaning. How can this be, if meaning is the use of the word? (PI p. 215) (RPPI §§1060–1061.)

[13] These kinds of sound aspects pertain properly to spoken language, but are projected to written words when they are read at loud, in an appropriate manner: "Verbal language contains a strong musical element" (RPPI §888).

Wittgenstein replies to this question by reinforcing the distinction between the "secondary meaning" and the "original" one, adding to this that the former "forces it itself" rather than gets chosen (PI p. 215).

The interpretation I defend here on the experience of meaning differs from Schroeder's, who reduces the aspectual experiences of words to a "figurative sense". He claims that there is only a useful analogy between "emotional seeing-as" and the experience of meaning (See 2010: 371). My interpretation also differs from Glock's, who claims that:

> experiences of meaning are not essential to linguistic understanding […] Wittgenstein does not intend to reinstate the idea that understanding a word is a mental episode. And while experiences of secondary meaning raise intriguing philosophical puzzles, they hardly constitute the core of linguistic meaning and understanding. (Glock 2016: 82)

But if the reconstruction I have offered is correct, experiencing meaning does not consist in having certain mental episodes, hence it cannot it amount to a psychological reification of meaning. Nor can it be reduced to semantic epiphenomena, or an analogy or a metaphor either. On the contrary, it presupposes primary meaning and it is potentially ubiquitous, although not continuously present. That is why these are not experiences confined to relatively exceptional language uses; instead, they are strongly linked with the familiarization with one's mother tongue, and with a variety of uses it enables. Similarly, although some local "meaning-blindnesses" are frequent, the global version is not a harmless disorder, nor is it purely imaginary either. Thus, a meaning-blind person is someone that cannot see meanings in written words, not in a metaphorical sense of seeing, but in a literal but aspectual one. So, the expressions "seeing meaning" and "meaning-blindness" refer to the way *we aspectually see the visual features of the written language of our native language as fully meaningful signs*, in a very similar way to when we see familiar faces and their expressive features. Word perception may be better understood as we highlight its similarities with aspect-perception in general, and with faces, in particular, in the following sections.

2. Seeing Aspects

It has been correctly observed that the variety of examples examined by Wittgenstein shows that seeing aspects is "a family-resemblance concept" (Ahmed 2017: 518)[14]; so, among those examples, there will be obvious similarities as well as important differences. What is more, Wittgenstein says: "The concept of 'seeing' makes a tangled impression. Well, it is tangled […]. Here we are in enormous danger of wanting to make fine distinctions" (PI p. 200). For this reason, it is wrong to characterize aspect-perception as a homogeneous phenomenon in the sense that certain essential common traits or neatly-cut types may be identified. Let us see why.

First, even though I will only deal with visual modality,[15] aspect-perception is manifest in all sense modalities, especially auditory (RPP1 §316). Secondly, seeing aspects encompasses a wide variety of visual 'objects'.[16] In other words, the notion is not restricted to semiotic objects (figures, drawings, photographs, words, tunes) or artistic ones (Batkin 2010: 24; Baz 2000: 117); rather, it also includes natural (especially animated) objects, such as people, their faces, facial expressions and bodily gestures; artificial but non-semiotic objects,[17] and others that are relatively natural or artificial, such as a landscape or a particular environment. It was mentioned before that each of these types of objects will not give way to the same variety of aspect-perception. Therefore, focusing on the

[14] To be more precise, Ahmed refers to "lighting-up the aspect", not to "aspect vision", and it is a matter of dispute whether these notions are equivalent.

[15] Besides, the notion itself has a clear visual connotation (Gould 2010: 65).

[16] I use the notion in a Wittgensteinian and minimalist sense, between quotes (see PI p. 193: 'objects' of sight).

[17] Wittgenstein refers to faces, rooms, artifacts, geometric figures, such as the Necker cube or the shape of a triangle, a shoe box, the ambiguous duck-rabbit figure, the drawings of a horse, a sphere, dotted lines, letters, words, a melody or tune, graphic puzzles, toys or objects used as toys, and even random marks on a wall.

examination of only some of them, say, graphic representations, distorts the interpretation of the topic.[18]

Thirdly, the notion of aspect refers to features of perceptual content caused by the perceived entity as well as to others that are, instead, in the "eye of the beholder". Even though Wittgenstein characterizes aspectual vision as a *relational phenomenon* between the objective and the subjective (PI p. 200; Baz 2000: 107), more precisely as a *hybrid phenomenon* between seeing and interpreting, "half visual experience, half thought" (PI p. 197; LWI §542), some readers have attempted to subsume cases under the scope of one or the other of these two poles. Following the mapping of the four interpretations offered by Glock (2016) on the relationship between perception, aspect-perception and interpretation, I agree with him that some of these interpretations have over-intellectualized aspect-perception. Strawson (1974) and McDowell (1996), for example, consider that all "seeing", including "seeing as", presupposes conceptual competence and demands intellectual interpretative effort. Schroeder (2010), however, separates "seeing" from "seeing as", claiming the latter is always conceptual and interpretative. On the contrary, Baz (2000, 2016, 2017) rightly shows the important senses in which aspect perception is non conceptual and non interpretative, by examining extensively the case of face perception. But, as I will show below, I believe Glock is right in pointing out that both these readings are wrong because they do not recognize the relational, hybrid and graded notion of aspect-perception, "between the poles of immediate perception and intellectual thought" (Glock 2016: 87). Moreover, the distinction between "seeing", "seeing an aspect" and "thinking" cannot be made "on a linear continuum" either, but in "a multidimensional network" of "plastic" or "elastic" interrelations. So not only *degrees* must be distinguished, but also different *ways* in which "seeing" and "thinking" are interrelated (Dinishak 2013: 322–324).

[18] Schroeder, by way of example, ends up narrowing down the vision of aspects to "non-pictorial aspects" (such as faces) and a few semiotic objects, such as non-pictorial drawings and pictorial but schematic drawings (2010: 370). Mulhall focuses on graphic representations, such as paintings, drawings, photographs, and then on language and finally, on people -on their expressive behavior. Nevertheless, it is not clear what the correct explanatory order is among them (2001a, 2001b).

Another mistaken reading, though more mitigated, has been to propose stable distinctions, for example, between cases that are more visual from those that are more interpretative, or more or less continuous or sudden, e.g., the sudden perception of an aspect in an ambiguous figure or the continuous perception of aspects in representational art. Nevertheless, it is easy noticeable that the same visual object, i.e., a triangle (PI p. 200), may be seen in very different ways by different observers or by the same observer in different contexts or moments, in virtue of factors such as habits, familiarization, education or cultural patterns (PI pp. 201, 203, 205, 208; LWI §§ 750–751). These factors may make our vision of certain objects stable, thus making it different from other individuals' visions. Therefore, we should distinguish between varieties of "seeing-as". In some of them, voluntary, epistemic or imaginative elements are engaged, under the control of perceivers (PI p. 207, 210, 213; RPPI §§899, 970, 976; RPPII §544), but I claim that other aspects are interpretative long-lasting effects by way of "habit and education" (PI p. 201) or cultural patterns, e.g., styles in furniture (LWI §§ 750–751) or in painting (PI p. 201), or the familiarity with some drawings (PI p. 203) or images (PI p. 205), or "the mastery of a technique" (PI p. 208). So, interpreting may be either an intermittent activity or a more permanent condition.[19] Thus, the *degree of contribution from seeing and interpreting is, in each case, not only variable but unstable* ("an unstable situation", RPPII §540).[20]

Despite Wittgenstein's claim, in different fragments, that "seeing as" differs from *data* or clusters of *sense-data* perception, such as colors, sizes, or other "low-level" properties, the difference between "seeing" and "seeing-as" is not introduced to account for this contrast, which is also important,[21] but to distinguish between

[19] Glock, instead, brings forth interpretation as an *intermittent* activity as opposed to having a *permanent* experiential state (see 2016: 90).

[20] Glock points out that we only have continuous aspect-seeing of objects like pictures, and particularly puzzle-pictures (2017: 89), but I think he is only right whenever we see an aspect in them, which is not always the case (PI p. 201).

[21] Wittgenstein questions "*sense-data* philosophers" (LPP: 87), for they try to explain object perception as the result of a "construction" based on directly perceived monadic

"seeing objects" (or "seeing *this*") and "seeing aspects in objects". The distinction is supported by "the difference of category between the two 'objects' of sight":

> Two uses of the word "see". The one: "What do you see there?"—I see *this* (and then a description, a drawing, a copy). The other: "I see a likeness between these two faces—let the man I tell this to be seeing the faces as clearly as I do myself. The importance of this is the difference of category between the two 'objects' of sight. (PI p. 193)

Now, the difference is illustrated via the notion of "noticing an aspect":

> 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". (PI p. 193)

Three observations are wanting here. Firstly, although the topic would deserve a detailed discussion, I think Wittgenstein is clearly aligned with those who uphold contents of perceptual experience involve "high-level properties", such as natural or artificial kinds of objects, individual objects (or people), as well as certain properties, such as emotional features, and semantic properties (and they are not perceived as derived inferentially from "low-level properties"). This feature is clearly relevant to our issue. I will come back to this below. Secondly, "noticing an aspect" reveals a seemingly paradoxical experience: in some sense, we see the same, but in another, we see it differently. This paradoxicality of aspect perception is resolved by denying that the difference can be explained through a visual impression or an inner picture of the object. And through distinguishing the material properties of the object seen and the intentional ones (Glock 2016: 86). But Wittgenstein claims that the difference mainly lies in the way we react to the visual object we are seeing (LWI §744) and the way we treat it, our attitude and abilities in its respect (Glock 2016: 88; Baz 2017: 189). And yet this way is not related only with "noticing an aspect" but with "a continuous seeing an aspect" (see Mulhall 2001a, 2001b). Thirdly, it is worth noticing that the example

properties. He claims, however, that we usually perceive objects from the start, and we perceive, also directly, certain aspects of those objects.

introducing the notion of aspectual vision is on perception of similarities between two faces. Perhaps Wittgenstein's insight was that family resemblances (and the face recognition it presupposes) were the most basic aspects we are able to recognize. As clearly illustrated in this case, the visual content is modified when the resemblance between two faces is perceived. Wittgenstein calls this type of aspect-perception, "to experience a *comparison*" (RPPI §316–317). As with other types of visual objects, we may or may not notice the similarity, or we may notice it at different times, or with more or less ease, or we may notice it while somebody else may be oblivious to it even with the same previous perceptual information. It becomes apparent aspect-perception may be spelt out as *an array of similarity cases,* from the more purely perceptual and almost "automatic" (RPPI §970) (such as discriminatory abilities, including the ability for re-identification, e.g. of a singular face) to others involving categorization or conceptual classification and interpretation (e.g., for facial expressions) (PI p. 208; LWI §§582, 741, 770, 774).

At this point, Wittgenstein's simple, albeit a bit too schematic, distinction between of "optical aspects" (RPPI §970) and "conceptual aspects" (RPPII §509; RPPI §§961, 970, 989, 1017) might be handy. While the former, e.g. the "double cross" (the black cross over a white background, or the other way round) might be seen without assuming any conceptual capacity whatsoever –since even a child might observe them before being able to speak (PI p. 207), others (such as the rabbit or the duck in the ambiguous figure) do assume the possession of corresponding concepts (PI p. 207). Nevertheless, the examples examined by Wittgenstein seem to admit gradations and changes. Then, this distinction is not "sharply drawn" either (Dinishak 2013: 324). Wittgenstein also refers to "aspects of organization" (PI p. 208) of perceptual content ("something that belongs together" or "what is held together") (LPP: 114) or "going together" (PI p. 208), as a subtype of optical aspects (LWI §§529–530). Similarly, he refers to the lines of a face as a "grouping" (RPPI §1017) or "constellation" (RPPI §1028). However, this type of aspects is manifest more clearly in the perception of ambiguous figures, e.g. the well-known

duck-rabbit by Jastrow (PI p. 194), which have been considered the paradigmatic cases of aspectual vision. Therefore, I believe this is a common feature of aspect-perception, although not in the same manner for every visual object. This means that visual contents are presented to subjects in an integrated and simultaneous manner, i.e., holistically, in the sense that they do not result from associative or inferential processes of successive partial perceptions, but as "unified, significant wholes" (Baz 2017: 191). As described from the point of view of the observer (or at a personal level), aspect-perception is also a kind a *direct perception*. Some aspects are seen after an effort of interpretation yet, but not of inference. Suddenly manifested aspect-perception shows more clearly these holistic and direct features of aspect-perception, yet I think it may be a basic feature of all aspect-perception and ordinary perception of objects, too.

Finally, an additional trait to highlight, that is usually ignored, is the possibility of varying degrees of perceptual *expertise*. Objects, when seen for the first time, are perceived in a different way from those very objects when they have already become part of a familiar perceptual environment. In some cases we even say: "'He has the eye of a painter', 'the ear of a musician'" (LWI §764). This trait is especially significant in face perception and also in the expert perception of spoken and written words in one's mother tongue, as we have seen before. So, familiarity and expertise are "two faces of the same coin" in aspect-perception.

Now, Wittgenstein's arguments in favor of the existence of aspectual vision, and the distinction from ordinary vision, are quite a few. I refer to those that depend on the previously analyzed relevant features. Firstly, first-person linguistic expressions, characteristic of "noticing an aspect" are not descriptions but "avowals", so they are often merely emphatic, i.e., they are usually expressions arising as spontaneous reactions to what we see (Schroeder 2010: 359; Glock 2016: 88; Baz 2000: 106), and typically lack accurate informative content (see PI p. 201; LWI §58; RPPI §§13, 20, 862) or, at most, they contain indexical words (PI p. 202) or gestures (RPPI §1046). This is not the case with non-aspectual vision, on which we make reports (see PI p. 197). Second, when

the objects perceived are recurrent and are of interest to the subject, they become a skill that does not depend on counting on descriptions nor is based on non-perceptual knowledge either (RPPI §1077).[22] Similarly, the accurate description or report of information about each of the physical or geometrical features of the object seen (PI p. 204; RPPI §287, 919), or its exact reproduction (PI p. 210), cannot, by itself, cause the contents of aspect-perception. Moreover, to express the aspect seen, a drawing may be better than words (LWI §377), and, in the case of facial expressions, imitation is easier than a drawing (RPPI §1072). Finally, if the aspects are conceptual, then they can be, at least partially or indirectly described (RPPI §9), provided the appropriate level of concepts and conceptual sophistication are used (Dinishak 2013: 327). This is not the case with non-conceptual aspect-perception, though, where fine-grained discrimination of perceptual content may be harder or even impossible to capture *via* concepts. This is in favor of treating aspect-perception as having strongly integrated and fine-grained contents which are perceived as wholes, in the way pictures or faces are.

Finally, as we may well know, much of recent philosophical and exegetic discussion has been on whether all vision of objects is aspectual (e.g., Strawson 1974; Mulhall 2001a, 2001b) or whether it is limited to the case of the sudden "dawning of an aspect" in ambiguous figures (Glock 2016; Baz 2000; but see Baz 2017: 192). I cannot deal this issue extensively here, but it follows from all previously examined points that I claim this is a potentially ubiquitous phenomenon and that it is from this trait that its great theoretical significance derives. Yet, Wittgenstein himself distinguishes "the 'dawning of an aspect'" from "the 'continuous seeing' of an aspect" (PI p. 194). However, the 'continuous seeing' of an aspect is not a permanent conscious state (and in this specific sense, I agree that it is not continuous) (LWI §169; RPPI §1034). Another reason is that the distinction may be applied to perception

[22] We are usually unable to describe how we use a word. Wittgenstein compares both difficulties with words and faces: "When we want to describe the use of a word,—-isn't it like wanting to make a portrait of a face? I see it clearly; the expression of these features is well known to me; and if I had to paint it I shouldn't know where to begin" (RPPI §944).

of any visual object. Therefore, the most natural way to understand the difference between these two ways of seeing is claiming that "the aspect is, as it were, dispositional" (LPP: 104), or, as I claim, it is *potentially ubiquitous.* [23] In other words, aspect-perception, being non-conceptual or conceptual, when habitual, 'fades away' into a familiar perception, or it turns from "acute" to "chronic" (RPPI §507–508).[24] In short, the aspects are there, as it were, "as a germ" (LWI §94, 843; RPPI §777; PI p. 201, 217) inasmuch as there were subjects able to recognize or appreciate them. This way of understanding the passage from ordinary vision to aspectual vision, and from the latter again to the former, accounts for their instability and the indetermination of its contents. For these reasons, I consider it is wrong to restrict aspectual vision to the sudden and episodic[25] seeing of the aspect or to the vision of ambiguous figures, which as a result reduces the interest of the topic in understanding our perceptual relationships with language. And probably, it was this very issue that originally led Wittgenstein to explore the matter.

Summing up briefly, aspect-perception is a family resemblance concept that involves all sense modalities and all kinds of visual 'objects'. It has hybrid contents, in different degrees and ways. Then "optical" and "conceptual" aspects may be distinguished; thus not all aspect-perception is conceptual or interpretative. Besides, aspect-perception may involve not only epistemic, imaginative and voluntary dimensions, but familiarity and expertise, habits and education, may make a difference between observers. Aspect-perception is about "higher-level properties" that are perceived holistically and directly. The distinction between "seeing" and "seeing aspects" is justified in many contexts but it is not rigid;

[23] The same textual evidence is used by Glock to question Mulhall's thesis that all aspect seeing is "continuous" (2016: 90). But he labels Mulhall's as "the ubiquity thesis". I, instead, exploit a nuanced meaning between "continuous" and "ubiquitous": the first evokes a temporal condition mostly, while the second its scope, rendering a dispositionalist notion that I believe is the right one (see Schroeder 2010: 356).

[24] Contrariwise, Baz refers to treating or taking a picture in the continuous way as the "the 'chronic' sense of an aspect", but denies it is a case of seeing as (2000: 114–15, fn.18).

[25] Against Mulhall, Schroeder (2010) claims that Wittgenstein was interested in episodic more than in continuous aspect-seeing. Yet they probably disagree on how to characterize the interest Wittgenstein had on both episodic and continuous aspect-seeing.

and the instability between the "dawning" of an aspect, that is momentary, and the continuous aspect-perception, reveals its peculiar ubiquity. In other words, aspect-perception is *potentially ubiquitous:* not only intermittent, but unstable, except when it turns habitual by means of familiarization. In these cases, our perception is enriched by fine-grained contents about "high-level" properties of the 'objects' seen.[26] All these features are applied, as we have seen, to aspectual vision of words. Bearing this in mind, specific facial aspects will be now considered.

4. "The expression of soul in a face" [27]

Seeing faces is not just the first example of "aspect perception" Wittgenstein examines, but also the starting point of comparison and the most basic type, for the reasons I will point out.[28] One could think faces are but one of the many objects in our visual environment, yet it is evident that they are especially frequent, of great interest or preferred attention for people, even from early infancy on, and that in spite of displaying special complexity, faces are easy to detect (Bruce & Young 1986). These and other traits are germane to the following remarkable facts: seeing faces provides major information to the observer, the most important being the identification of the observed individual, recognizing her familiar face, and distinguishing it from others never seen before, which, in turn, allows one to satisfy diverse social needs. It also provides information about gender, age, and about the emotional or mental state of a person, recognizing the expressive role of a vast repertoire of facial movements, among which the gaze is particularly significant in that it not only reveals psychological states, but also where the observed individual's attention is directed to (Farah 2004). It is acknowledged that gazing at a known face

[26] I owe this to an anonymous reviewer who helped me to emphasize the importance of this feature.
[27] RPPI §267.
[28] Although many interpreters refer to faces in their analyses of aspect-seeing, they only draw on examples of faces as one case among many, paying no special attention to the peculiarities and the primary significance of faces in the question of aspect-perception.

regularly activates the retrieval of stored information about the individual, the so-called "individual semantic information" (Valentine & Brennen 1996: 33 and ss.), and eventually, if things go well, the specific semantic memory of her proper name. Wittgenstein noticed the rich significance of all these contents of face perception in general (RPPI §890) and the eye gaze in particular (Z §222), and pinpointed the different "aspects" involved.

Now, face perception seems to require a very basic perceptual capacity to easily discriminate faces from other types of visual 'objects'. In normal individuals, this capacity is activated automatically or spontaneously[29]: "Immediately I *recognize* it as a face, and am prepared to treat it as one" (LWI §661). Then, the question "Do I always see a face 'as a face'?" may only make sense in a very special situation or in front of a momentary incapacity, while under normal circumstances, it does not (PI p. 195; RPPII §526; RPPI §1028). On the one hand, aspect-perception of faces takes place when we experience the recognition of features of a particular face or its resemblance to others: *face recognition*, in short. On the other, when we recognize the intentional features of facial expressions. So, aspect-perception of faces is ubiquitous. [30] Although these two types of facial aspects share similarities, the former displays some additional characteristics, and they jointly cover a wide range of features of aspect-perception. Let us see a few similarities first, following the case of intentional aspects closely.

The perceived aspect is not at the same level as the identification of each of the anatomical features (the eye globe, lids, eyelashes, etc.) or geometrical features (facial contortions, corners of the mouth, layout of lids) on a face: "We surely can't see the expression, the shy behavior, *in the same sense* as we see movement, shapes and colors" (RPPI §1070). Perhaps some of them requires

[29] It is well-known that perception of a face begins by the activation of sub-personal or "bottom-up" specialized mechanisms in front of facial stimuli (Takahashi & Watanabe 2015).

[30] Baz, in reference to psychological concepts as "aspect concepts", claims that we do not see faces aspectually in this sense (2000: 119–120).

conceptual abilities, but not all of them. So, there are "two concepts of what is perceived […]. 'Similar expression' takes faces together in a quite different way from 'similar anatomy'" (RPPI §1068). Both ways of using the notion "seeing" are legitimate and are even related, but they are learnt differently (RPPI §1071). Thus, the perceived aspectual content may only be described appropriately at an intentional level, for facial traits express emotional properties, moods and even character or personality traits: sad, radiant, bored, thoughtful or idiotic (RPPII §223). In sum, looking at intentional features in facial expressions is a way of seeing underived from previously seeing each particular trait as non-intentional:

> "We *see* emotion." [...] 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 any other description of the features […]. (RPPII §570; see PI §§536–537; Z §220, 224; RPPII §170; LWI §735)

Therefore, Wittgenstein may be attributed with advocating a variant of "direct perception" approach of basic emotions (and other intentional features) in faces.[31] Perhaps, many of these emotions depend on conceptual abilities. Nevertheless, he also considers that psychological attribution may require interpretation, due to simulation or deceit, the complexity of psychological states, the expressive variations dependent upon personality, education and culture. Even:

> […] there is what I should like to call the case of hopeless doubt. When I say, "I have no idea what he is really thinking—". He's a closed book to me. (RPPII §568)

As a result, Wittgenstein's approach to the so-called *mindreading* (including "seeing emotions") begins with some pre-conceptual capacities, where facial expressions are a primary source of attribution, and develops later on as conceptual and highly interpretative ones for faces and other observable behavior.

[31] I refer to a group of conceptions or theories that explain the basically perceptual character of emotion recognition as non-inferential (Smortchkova 2016).

The features pointed out until now reveal, besides, that perceived content does not rely upon a previous sequential perception of non-integrated visual elements; rather, it is holistic or "configurational" from the start. This trait has been vastly verified in neurocognitive research and in different experimental tests. Among the better described typical phenomena of facial perception is the "superiority effect of faces" (or "the part-whole effect"), according to which observers better discriminate a facial trait when it is perceived in the context of a face and not separately, and the "inversion effect" (Martelli et al. 2005), which makes it particularly difficult to recognize expression and identity of a face when it appears upside down. The latter would be typical of facial perception as a highly specialized system, used in order to recognize configurations which would be affected when exposed to an inverted figure, for this is a highly infrequent stimulus. Wittgenstein pinpointed, with much insightfulness, some of these characteristic effects of holistic face-processing, e.g. the "inversion effect" in: "Hold the drawing of a face upside-down and you can't tell the *expression* of the face […]. And yet the upside-down picture may represent the object extremely accurately" (RPPI §991; cf. PI p. 198). The "face superiority effect" might be suggested in these fragments, among others: "He looked at me with a strange smile"—With what kind of smile?—To answer this I might have to draw his face" (LWI §377); "An eye can smile *only in a face*" (LWI §860); "A smiling mouth smiles only in a human face" (PI §583).

Wittgenstein's scope of interest was not limited to real face perception, though. He remarks the same features of facial recognition in diverse kinds of face representations, for example, in photographs (RPPI §1072), in schematic pictures, "even though the resemblance […] is incredibly slight" (RPPII §219), and also in caricatures or in movies, "as if there were real people in front of us" (RPPII §219). What matters most is that representations give way to behaviors or reactions to them that are characteristic of their primary manifestations in real face-to-face interactions: "I stand towards it (a picture-face) as I do towards a human face" (PI p. 194). This is a widespread phenomenon of utmost importance. It manifests, e.g., in children who treat picture-faces as they treat

dolls: they talk to them (PI p. 194). Or in adults, when they are emotionally affected by the image of a face or that of a fictional character in a film, although they know they are mere representations:

> One hangs up pictures, photographs, of landscapes, interiors, human beings, and does not regard them as working drawings. One likes to look at them, as at the objects themselves; one smiles at the photograph as at the human being that it shows […].(RPPI §1018; cf. PI p. 205)[32]

Another similar phenomenon that would reveal the importance of facial perception is the tendency to see faces in objects that are not faces nor representations of them. For instance, seeing faces in clouds or on spots on the wall. Wittgenstein also attended the interest of this phenomenon, called "pareidolia" (Smortchkova 2016), as a case of aspect perception (LWI §480).

To the features identified so far, one must add that face perception, although based on a highly specialized innate capacity, becomes later a skill or specific perceptual ability, due to its potential to be honed in via experience. Firstly, children are less skillful than adults, above all, in those skills involving simulation and detection of expressions of pretense (LWI §§866, 868, 869, 871, 872). Secondly, we do not see, in the same fashion, familiar faces and faces of unknown people. Thirdly, some adults are more or less skillful than others in that they are more or less able to produce 'expert judgment' (PI p. 227) about emotional expressions or "family resemblances" (RPPII §551). Fourthly, this is a kind of perceptual expertise (not theoretical knowledge or a technique with precise rules) because to "learn to get a 'nose' for something" is obtained "through '*experience*'" (PI p. 227; RPPI §1073). Finally, somebody can even acquire something like "a better knowledge of mankind" (PI p. 227) or a "general acquaintance with human behavior" (RPPI §1073). In any case, it is possible that cultural

[32] Mulhall underscores this fact as a ground to claim that "aspect dawning […] is simply one extreme but exemplary manifestation of a more pervasive human attitude" (2001b: 162), so it must be displaced from its "dominant position" on these matters in favor of "the continuous aspect perception". In my opinion, this provides, above all else, grounds to claiming that the very basic type of aspect-perception is face perception.

differences make impossible to "read" facial expressions (RPPII §§639–640; §§707–708).

Now, the plasticity of facial perception, in turn, is related to the peculiar type of visual object that faces are:

> A facial expression that was completely fixed couldn't be a friendly one. Variability and irregularity are essential to a friendly expression. Irregularity is part of its physiognomy. (RPPII §615)

Wittgenstein refers to "irregularity" and "variability" (RPPII §627), "the subtle shades of behavior" (RPPII §616; PI p. 202–203) or "a very complicated filigree pattern" (RPPII §624). So, the possibility of seeing aspects is related to the ability to see or imagine different aspects on the same face (PI §536). Moreover, the experience of seeing live faces requires a continuous perception of different expressive aspects:

> A person who had seen only *one* facial expression couldn't have the concept 'facial expression'. 'Facial expression' exists only within a play of the features. Someone who had only seen 'sad' faces could not *sense* them as sad. (LWI §766)

And something similar happens, albeit much more slowly, with the perception of variations of each face over time. Moreover: "Suppose we were to meet people who all had the same facial features: we should not know where we were within them" (LWI§ 201). So much so that we would not be able to see features or gestures as expressions of joy, fear, sadness, etc., if they were rigid or stereotyped or "not susceptible of gradual and subtle alterations" (RPPII §614).[33] In sum, face perception has very unstable and indeterminate contents. It is the "indefiniteness" (PI p. 227).

The other specific type of aspectual perception of faces is *face recognition*: seeing a face as the same face, as well as the related cases of seeing similarities and even "family resemblances" among faces. This includes distinctive aspects that are particularly difficult to characterize. Now, identifying a face does not consist in an episodic "feeling", nor a "continuous feeling of familiar acquaintance" (RPPI §120–121); it is not a "state of mind" at all (RPPI §295) and

[33] Wittgenstein compares the changes in facial expressions with changes of "the aspect of the letter" (RPPII §356).

neither are any other cases of seeing aspects. Even when we may experience feelings of "naturalness", "familiarity" and "old acquaintance" (PI §596), what matters is that when recognition takes place, we see that person in a characteristic aspectual way (PI p. 197). The recognition of identity or resemblances among faces, may bring about a case of a "sudden" seeing as:

> I meet someone who I have not seen for years: I see him clearly, but fail to know him. Suddenly I know him, I see the old face in the altered one […]. (PI p. 197)

Therefore, "the aspect presents a physiognomy which then passes away" when I "accept" it (PI p. 210; RPPII §519). Then, we pass from sudden to continuous seeing as, and from it to ordinary perception. In all cases, *familiarity* permeates, so to speak, our way of seeing known faces, and that this becomes manifest in our reactions and behavior: we perceive faces better and more quickly, we require less attention and effort, and we feel more certain (see Martelli et al. 2005). Enhanced speed and ease to perceive very well-known faces manifests too with the perception of familiar words of one's own mother tongue.

Yet, what is the relationship between perceptual familiarization and recognition? To recognize an object perceptually may mean not only to perceive it as an instance of a kind, but as the same individual object seen before. This is the case of faces as singular objects. Besides, even though the ordinary concept of "recognition" includes the idea of "being familiar with", in the sense of knowing something, it also means "having a close or habitual relationship with", or "feeling at home". Bringing both together, perceptual recognition may involve not only the application of concepts or even the knowledge provided by the beliefs about these perceived entities, but non-conceptual skills about singular objects, such as individual faces (or the specific visual traits of individual words). Then, familiarity allows fine-grained distinction of people (or other objects), and as a result, it allows recognition (see Wong et al. 2011). Besides, familiarity manifests by the fact that it is obviously gradual, instead of determined - and that it is holistic, instead of made up by discreet states.

The other basic case of facial aspectuality is *family resemblance*, this time in a literal, non-analogic, sense. "'When I look at him, I always see his father's face.' Always?—But surely not just *momentarily*! This aspect may endure" (RPPI §528). So then, not limited to episodic perceptions, nor to that which we can avoid or modify willingly, and not being conceptual nor interpretative, seeing *family resemblances* between faces is an instance of face recognition as a basic type of aspect-perception. It is also important to bear in mind that the capacity to recognize individual faces (to distinguish *this* from *that* face), is exercised jointly with the ability to "read" psychological features. Both abilities, modulated by expertise, are used for seeing other types of visual objects, such as written words.

Finally, Wittgenstein explores *aspect blindness* for faces. A variant of this disorder would be that of an individual who lacked the capacity to identify a face, or facial expressions in one or in different representational vehicles, e.g. in a photograph (PI p. 205; RPPI §1019) [34] or in a very schematic drawing (RPPII §482). However, the most dramatic *blindness* would be an incapacity to identify intentional features in facial expressions on real faces: someone who could perceive only the geometry and the anatomy of a face, but not its expressions, or who could not identify a person even upon looking at her face - or perhaps could identify her but lacked a familiarity experience with that face. Even though Wittgenstein seems to elaborate on these *blindnesses* as mental experiments alone, a variety of similar facial agnosias has been identified in the scientific literature: first, difficulty in the detection of a certain kind of facial expressions within the autistic disorder spectrum (ASD) or among people with localized brain lesions (e.g. in the amygdala) (Griffiths et al. 2017). Second, prosopagnosia as the selective or "strikingly disproportionate" ineffectiveness in consciously recognizing faces, but not other kind of visual stimuli (Farah 2004: 98). Finally, the Capgras delusion case is interesting: individuals that lack mechanisms for covert recognition of personal

[34] Wittgenstein refers to "reading" faces in a photograph, amalgamating this kind of aspectual perception to that of written words. See too: "I read timidity in his face" (PI §537).

identity, the 'sense' of familiarity, believe very well-known individuals, whose faces they can identify correctly, are actually impostors (Ellis & Lewis 2001).

4. Some concluding remarks

I will sum up the main questions I have argued for, from the latest to the first, i.e. reversing the order of the exposition above. And I will make some conclusive comments, too. Firstly, I hope to have shown the interest and the complexity that aspectual vision of faces brings to understanding the notion of aspect-perception. Physiognomy not only refers to the emotional or psychological aspectuality, but also to the perception of identity and similarity of faces. Both types of physiognomic perception exhibit the wide range of characteristics of aspect-perception, from spontaneous to learned, from non-conceptual to conceptual, from unfamiliar to habitual, among others.

Secondly, some features of physiognomic vision, being basic, are variably transferred to aspect-perception of written words. This hypothesis no only explains the number of remarks that Wittgenstein dedicated to the physiognomic features of written familiar language. More importantly, these remarks show that the aspects involved have notable resemblances. Put in different words, if facial perception were not aspectual in all the rich senses we have identified, it could not shed light on the physiognomic perception of written words the "experiences of meaning" encompass.

Thirdly, these resemblances highlight, in turn, the importance that Wittgenstein has conceded to our perceptual and experiential relationships with language, and that becomes apparent in a variety of cases where the "experience of meaning" is added to meaning as use. Thus, although "for a *large* class of cases […] the meaning of a word is its use in language" (PI §43), besides, it may involve experiences with the words themselves, in a variety of expressive uses (ordinary or not) in the mother tongue. When familiar words acquire physiognomic features over the symbolic ones, they become more special and singular than mere arbitrary and replaceable conventions. Even in some of these cases, words may have a secondary meaning added to the primary one, turning them

into vehicles of a strong experiential significance. Of course, the resemblances between faces and words are not identities either. They are different visual and semiotic objects. But, many times, words can show, express, or do something, so to speak, in very similar ways as faces and gestures identify and express particular persons. For this reason, the answer to the question: 'What would you be missing if you did not *experience* the meaning of a word?' (PI p. 214; LWI §784) is: our way of being 'at home' with language, that it is to say, our ability to play different language-games with it. And this is not only to move oneself by means of a mechanism "as it were sleeping-walking" (RPPI §178), but to live, as linguistic creatures, a human life.

Finally, it is interesting to notice that many of these phenomena, about both facial processing and processing of written language, are described and tested scientifically, strengthening Wittgenstein's acute insights and phenomenological explorations. Although the meta-philosophical question involved exceeds the limits of this paper, I hope to have stated that this convergence discredits the interpretation that Wittgenstein's remarks were merely idiosyncratic or marginal. But further, I believe that it encourages a fruitful philosophical way of complementing conceptual explorations with explanations in terms of cognitive processes, mechanisms, and abilities. Although it surely exceeds Wittgenstein's philosophical purposes, it does not necessarily exceed those of some of his current readers.

To conclude, the notion of "family resemblance" is worth re-thinking. Doubtlessly, this is a concept that highlights the critical importance of "physiognomic" capacities, not only to understand the complex relationships we have with language, but also to apply those capacities when we try to do philosophy while understanding these relationships. Hence, another interest in these physiognomic aspects is a meta-philosophical one: doing philosophy taking into account that "(T)the aspects of things that are more important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is

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Biographical Note

Carolina Scotto is Professor of Philosophy at the National University of Córdoba (UNC) and an Independent Researcher at the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET), Argentina. She has occupied many academic positions, such as Dean of the Philosophy and Humanities Faculty (1999–2005) and Rector of the National University of Córdoba (2007–2013). She has published articles and chapters, and she has been co-editor of books on the philosophy of language, the philosophy of mind, including animal minds, and Wittgenstein's later thought. Her current research is about iconicity in language and the multimodal character of human and animal communication.