

Wittgenstein and Aesthetics by Hanne Appelqvist

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Hanne Appelqvist, *Wittgenstein and Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. 75 pp.

Hanne Appelqvist's new book *Wittgenstein and Aesthetics* (2023) in the Cambridge Elements series argues that aesthetics plays a much more significant role in philosophy than was hitherto thought and it does so by looking at Wittgenstein's philosophy. Appelqvist also makes use of Kant's philosophy to bolster her interpretation of aesthetics and ethics in Wittgenstein, for it to become a way to express normativity in a non-conceptual form of encounter with reality.

Aesthetics for Appelqvist is not merely about art, beauty, and taste, and she argues that this is true too for Wittgenstein. This broader philosophical use of aesthetics brings her back to Alexander Baumgarten (1983) and Kant's First and Third Critique. Like Baumgarten and Kant, she sees aesthetics as the "investigation of the domain of sensibility in general" (p. 1). In this way aesthetics is contrasted with logic as the conceptual domain.

What do we learn about "sensible perception, imagination, and feeling [...] as a realm independent of and irreducible to the discursive realm of concepts, contributing to cognition on its own terms" (p. 1.)? What is

their contribution to cognition? Appelqvist distinguishes aesthetics in a narrower and in a broader sense – again in line with Baumgarten – and insists on natural points of overlap, since judgments about art are often paradigm examples of judgments pertaining to sensibility.

Let us zoom in on the kinds of judgments we are dealing with in aesthetics narrow and broad. Appelqvist elaborates on music and architecture, since they are the kind of "complex developing 'aesthetic systems'" that Wittgenstein "claims should be investigated 'grammatically,' in a way similar to the philosophical investigation of language" (p. 3). This sets the tone of Appelqvist's book: that it is not how we investigate language that will be useful for investigating music, but the other way round, that how Wittgenstein investigates music matters to language. To do so Appelqvist stresses the notion of ineffability as central to Wittgenstein's position (p. 4): "the principled impossibility of conceptually determining every aspect of our encounter with reality." This she calls "a natural corollary of the essentially nonconceptual domain of aesthetics."

The book moves chronologically from the *Tractatus* with the help of the *Notebooks* to uncover central features of Wittgenstein's understanding of the perspective that is common to aesthetics and ethics. The middle period discusses lecture notes from 1933 and 1938 on aesthetics. Finally, the comparison between music and language brings home the constitution of meaning and the question of understanding in both. Here Appelqvist presents the argument that a

nonconceptual form of understanding, similar to aesthetic judgment as Kant understands it, is evoked in the *Investigations* to complement the discursive form of understanding cashed out by reference to rule-formations. (p. 6)

Appelqvist aligns the philosophical and aesthetic investigation to showcase that the contribution of aesthetics to Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy is crucial. It is surveyable or perspicuous representation that she focuses on. This method of the later Wittgenstein, she argues, is an aesthetic method.

To elaborate this crucial importance of aesthetics, Appelqvist puts an emphasis on the difference between the intuitive versus the discursive method and plays it out in regard to music and language. Wittgenstein argued in the *Tractatus* that we must use the "intuitive method" of a pictorial presentation in order to recognize a tautology as a tautology (TLP 6.1203). We do not quite know why this is called an intuitive method, until in 1933 Wittgenstein takes up the distinction between intuitive and

discursive perspectives in relation to Kant. By then he has developed a system of grammar, that supplants logic, which allows him to approach meaning in two different ways. Appelqvist writes that the first is an intuitive approach that according to Wittgenstein takes something in as a whole at a glance. The second is according to Wittgenstein the discursive way of looking at meaning as use in a calculus that can be taught to another." (Cf. Appelqvist p. 18).

But art and language rest on convention and a sort of communal agreement that Wittgenstein also takes to be essential for language (cf. PI §§ 242, 355). Furthermore the "possibility of making and refining aesthetic judgments arises only via such immersion into our shared form of life" continues Appelqvist on p. 37. There is a "seeing" and "feeling" that is relevant for aesthetic judgments as we can see in a quote from the *Brown Book* in which Wittgenstein focuses on reading, and what it means to be impressed by the reading. He says that there is something besides seeing the written signs and the speaking of the words. Something comes on top of the seeing and speaking. Wittgenstein calls it "noticing an atmosphere" (BB, 177). It is not the words or the propositional content, but the atmosphere around the sentence that is brought into focus. Appelqvist compares this to when Wittgenstein uses the metaphor of facial features (*Gesichtszüge*), that is used when internal properties show themselves but cannot be said (TLP 4.122).

Aesthetic satisfaction arises when a disturbing feature is amended by finding the right rhythm, tempo, or accentuation for a performance. There is a sort of “click” that brings “equilibrium” writes Appelqvist (p. 41). She concludes that while aesthetic judgments are nonconceptual they still contribute to cognition (p. 42) There is a sort of intransitive meaning, which has a role analogous to Wittgenstein’s early logical form, whose inexpressibility he illustrated by reference to facial features and music.

Appelqvist makes the connection from aesthetics to following a rule as a practice, as it has been discussed in *PI*. Her connection is to Kant and to the way in which every cognitive judgment, as a general rule, which for Kant is typically a concept, is applied to a sensible intuition. Without them concepts are empty and without concepts intuitions remain blind. Training is important and in Kant training is akin to the power of judgment. It is necessary in the formation of cognitive judgments. It bridges the gap between conceptual rule and particular instance. One must see the particular as a unified whole, just pretend as if it were subsumed under a concept. What we get is a blind judgment, one that does not presuppose or lead us to a concept.

In *PI* § 527 Wittgenstein states that “understanding a sentence in language is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one might think.” The quote ends with Wittgenstein explaining that “as an ‘explanation’ I could compare it

with something else that has the same rhythm (I mean the same pattern).” There is no determinate rule, no concept to make the generality work. Instead, we could say with Wittgenstein features of the object “click,” even when we cannot explain what it is that “clicks” and why (*LA III*: 1–5). Furthermore, the non-conceptuality of aesthetic judgments may lead us to equating aesthetic judgment and aspect-seeing. But Wittgenstein warns us that if we do so we miss the fact that an aspect is not a property of an object. It is a matter of seeing, not of knowing. Seeing an aspect, e.g., seeing the duck in the duck-rabbit picture is not the same as finding the right tempo for a musical performance. That would not be an aspect of the performance.

To find the glue between the generality of conceptual and aesthetic judgments Appelqvist goes back to the roots of the parallel between philosophy and aesthetics to lie in the notion of a *sub specie aeterni* perspective. But I wonder whether to find the solution in a transcendental realm is the right way to go here. I agree that there must be an operation of unification and of seeing the object as a limited whole. I think that a performative reading of how such a unity or whole could come about would be preferable to a transcendental one, as I offer it in my book on performativity in Kant and Wittgenstein (Moser, 2021). In the end, the discursive perspective that treats language as an explicable calculus must be done away with and an intuitive perspective must be added. Appelqvist writes on

p. 61 that “our aesthetic craving for an explanation is not satisfied by a hypothesis, but only by a surveyable representation provided by a description of the system.”

In conclusion I think that Appelqvist succeeds in showing that in aesthetic and in philosophy we try to get to see another aspect to see the object of investigation from an illuminating perspective. I agree most wholeheartedly with Appelqvist when she holds that looking and seeing are not philosophically innocent. Wittgenstein does elaborate in philosophy a mode of grasping reality that is not a discursive explanation. How often does he remind us to “look and see”? Finally, I agree with Appelqvist that aesthetics is an investigation of the domain of sensibility in general, and that that domain is not philosophically innocent.

Aesthetics is indeed the center of philosophy.

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