Charm and Strangeness: The Aesthetic and Epistemic Dimensions of Derek Jarman’s Wittgenstein

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Ethics has nothing to do with changing the world, only with contemplating it …
- C. B. Daly

Interspersed with scenes of the philosopher at the blackboard teaching, Derek Jarman’s biopic of Ludwig Wittgenstein combines aesthetic and didactic qualities. Didacticism in the philosophy of art is often assumed to diminish aesthetic value (Gaut 2007; Repp 2009). Yet nothing of Jarman’s film is depreciated by the intention to instruct. If the objective was didactic, the film is also stylised and theatrically rich: a series of chiaroscuro set-pieces assembled in dark interiors, the *mise en scène* of Wittgenstein (1993) is framed and lit with painterly intent. Jarman’s distinctive cinematic style has been attributed to his appropriation of the intentionality of painting for film. Apart from his Super-8 experiments of the early 1970s this painterly aesthetic is nowhere more evident than in Wittgenstein (the British director’s penultimate project); approached as if following the methodology of the eponymous painter in his 1986 film Caravaggio the result is a succession of still episodes that are almost Beckettian in their stasis. And the effect of this stillness is exhaustion – whether an index of the debilitations of Jarman’s worsening condition (he died of an AIDS-related illness in 1994 having become symptomatic in 1991) or an intuitive representation of Wittgenstein’s well-documented fatigue after his philosophical exertions – whatever its ultimate significance, this stillness contrasts with Tariq Ali’s footage of the director on the set of Wittgenstein: energetic and animated,...
moving about everywhere, he gestures flexibly to the cast. (We are nevertheless reminded of his contemporaneous remark: ‘I can never quite forget my illness, it gives a finality to every gesture’) (Jarman 2001, 33; in Townsend 2008, 90).

This article examines the aesthetic and epistemic dimensions of *Wittgenstein*. Of course, to propose that the film is a *picture* involves a predicate that in this context is hardly neutral but already postulates a tacit argument. Admittedly the form of this picture has been determined by Jarman’s distinctive style as well as by the challenges of budgetary limitation typical for a Jarman production. Similar formal limitations, for instance, contribute to the distinctive *mise en scène* of *Edward II* (1991) which deployed portable artificial walls in the construction of sets; yet this style in *Wittgenstein* becomes intuitively and spontaneously relevant to Wittgenstein’s philosophy. While it may be possible to argue that such formal observations pertain generally to Jarman’s work (and that therefore his work is Wittgensteinian per se), I wish to defend the stronger claim that *Wittgenstein* and Wittgenstein’s philosophy are, *ceteris paribus*, isomorphic. So despite certain formal similarities *Edward II*, for instance, is not Wittgensteinian in the manner argued here; neither is *Caravaggio*. Rather, I maintain that the epistemic content of Wittgenstein’s philosophy is complexly *developed in* the aesthetic dimension of Jarman’s picture (and this is not the case, for instance, in the Eagleton screenplay).

Wittgenstein’s sexuality is not irrelevant to the epistemic-aesthetic isomorphism identified here. Indeed, it is this aspect more than anything, I believe, that renders *Wittgenstein* continuous with Jarman’s antecedent films. In a very interesting (if controversial) article, Albert Levi has acknowledged the relationship between Wittgenstein’s philosophy (particularly the ethical dimension of the early work) and his homosexuality (Levi 1978-9). He argues for instance that the ‘astonishing identification of intrinsic value with the experience of absolute safety’ (in ‘A Lecture on Ethics’) is ‘intimately tied up with the ramifications of Wittgenstein’s sexual nature’ (Levi 70). But, more significantly, the gnomic reflections

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7 According to Ali, the budget was ‘minuscule.’ C4 put up £150K, BFI added another £50K and Takashi (an admirer of Jarman’s work) donated a further £50K to the project (Ali 1993).
8 See also Bowell (2001, 135) who asserts that *Wittgenstein* is Wittgensteinian in form and content.
9 Marxist Literary Theorist Terry Eagleton scripted the draft screenplay (see below).
10 On this aspect of the film see Tariq Ali (1993).
11 An art student in Oxford called Barry Pink inquired of Wittgenstein if his philosophical work was connected with his sexuality. ‘Certainly not!’ was the immediate retort (Monk 1991, 568). On the theme of Wittgenstein’s sexuality see W. W. Bartley’s biography (1973) where he claims that while living in Vienna after the war Wittgenstein was victim to ‘uncontrollable promiscuity’. ‘Several nights each week he would break away from his rooms and make the quick walk to the Prater, possessed as he would put it to friends by a demon he could barely control.’ The philosopher, he concludes, ‘preferred the sort of rough blunt homosexual youth that he could find strolling the paths and alleys of the Prater’
that conclude the *Tractatus* (*TLP*), namely, the notorious imperative to observe strict silence concerning the non-factual axiological dimensions of life (especially the ethical) (*TLP* §7) are exegeted convincingly by Levi as the ‘subtle strategy of a proud but guilty homosexual who has placed himself … beyond the condemnation of rational speech – that is to say – beyond the condemnation of his fellow men’ (Levi 1978-79, 74). Despite the controversy activated by Levi’s paper (which followed W. W. Bartley’s revelations about Wittgenstein’s sexual behaviour), almost every sensitive commentator now acknowledges that there is a profound connection between Wittgenstein’s personal life and his work; indeed, for some, understanding his philosophy necessitates some engagement with its confessional element.12

Broadly speaking, the consensus among professional philosophers is that Jarman’s film, while idiosyncratic and stylised, nevertheless says something important about Wittgenstein’s philosophy.13 Take the story narrated in the film by Keynes (Jon Quentin) regarding the boy who designs a new logical system, a crystalline realm without flaw or ornament, because he feels at home in a world of ice. Much later, however, he slips into doubt. He slowly realises that coarseness and irregularity are not marks of dysfunction but rather are what help us find our feet. Yet the older philosopher remains ‘homesick for the ice.’ Although the ‘image of the ice as, precisely, home is screenplay writer Eagleton’s and Jarman’s, not Wittgenstein’s,’ Naomi Scheman observes, there remains ‘something oddly right about it’ (Scheman 1996, 384). Keynes’s narrative is largely appropriated from *Philosophical Investigations* §107,14 a paragraph that concludes with the exclamation: ‘Back to the rough ground!’ Such a drive for the paradigmatic language shorn of its everyday excrescences is a

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12 See for instance Monk (1991, 366) and Bowell (2001, 134-135) (she quotes Monk).
13 We would do well to stop short of universalising this consensus however. The view is not shared by every philosopher. A certain Wittgensteinian philosopher in conversation described the film as ‘superficial and trivialising’.
14 Stanley Cavell has developed the affinity of this paragraph with one of Wittgenstein’s principal aims in the *Investigations*. Paragraph 107 should, he demonstrates, be affiliated with the crucial §116 which states that when philosophers inquire about the essence of a certain word, one should reply: ‘is the word ever actually used in this way in the language game which is its original home?’ (Cavell 2005, 198).
function of the desire to inhabit a medium that is ideal and perfect, a formal architectonic to which all contingent incidences will finally be reducible. Yet such a language, in being ideal and perfect, is also glassily treacherous because it cannot support our fundamental efforts. For these, the friction of contingency is required.

Tracy Bowell (2001) has also claimed that Jarman’s film serves particularly well as an educational supplement to introduce philosophical themes to students in an accessible and palpable way. In bringing the philosopher to life, she concludes, the work is also brought vividly to life (Bowell 2001, 134). Invoking an important distinction from the *Tractatus*, she says that the film is particularly appropriate to Wittgenstein’s work because much of the philosophy dealt with in the film is invoked at the structural level: ‘the form of the film’, she concludes, uniquely shows rather than verbalises ‘Wittgenstein’s views about the relationship between language and the world and about the pursuit and aims of philosophical enquiry’ (Bowell, 2001 134). Yet it is precisely because the philosophy is embedded in the film as a tacit component of its aesthetic form (and not only presented didactically at the level of explicit content) that *Wittgenstein* seems oddly right to Wittgensteinian viewers.

This essay identifies the salient characteristics of Jarman’s film, in the process furnishing explanation as to why the film can be regarded as genuinely Wittgensteinian. It will emerge that the aesthetic and epistemic dimensions of the film are not as unambiguously clear cut as they might at first appear. Rather, when its formal structure is revealed as a vehicle for philosophical content, it becomes clear that the aesthetic dimension of the film represents the less explicit creative function of its epistemic dimension.

To facilitate constructing this argument a synchronic approach to the film is proposed. Instead of surveying the genealogy of Jarman’s cinematic aesthetic in order to track the development of his style and then using this to assess *Wittgenstein’s* position in (or more precisely at the end of) the narrative of this development, I suggest approaching the film just as presented: a single unit composed of functionally systemic elements. Working in this manner, although perhaps artificial and slightly anachronistic, nevertheless provides a crucial epoche according to which the aesthetic logic of the film can be brought into focus. I am convinced that Jarman’s film contributes to understanding Wittgenstein’s philosophy. However, I don’t think it is completely clear why this is the case. By proceeding in the manner suggested however the specific relationship between Wittgenstein’s philosophy and the structural emergence of epistemic content from the asymmetries of form in Jarman’s biopic can be made perspicuous.
'The Picture is a Fact': Aesthetic Form as Vehicle for Epistemic Content

Wittgenstein began life as an idea for a series of TV shorts about philosophy, three of which were completed.\(^\text{15}\) Channel 4 producer Tariq Ali commissioned Terry Eagleton (then Professor of English Literature in Oxford) to script the screenplay and Jarman, who had previously contemplated a film on the philosopher, was appointed to direct. Eagleton claims that the brief was to assume a ‘totally ignorant audience’. Although securing extra funding (from BFI) to extend it to a feature-length film, budgetary constraints nevertheless compelled Jarman to radically economise. The film was filmed entirely in a small studio in Waterloo\(^\text{16}\) which, to Eagleton’s irritation, involved a substantial script re-write. A fresh screenplay authored by Jarman and his associate Ken Butler, which deviated significantly from the original, occasioned some words from the accessible Professor who described it among other things (and somewhat bizarrely) as ‘reinforcing a very English anti-intellectualism’ (Eagleton 1993).\(^\text{17}\) Despite Eagleton’s misgivings however the film was allegedly very well received by followers of Wittgenstein: several people who knew him personally regarded *Wittgenstein* as an accurate depiction.\(^\text{18}\) Yet Jarman’s film is not a conventional biopic. Possessing more than biographical value, he (unlike Eagleton) has used the project to innovate ways of translating Wittgenstein’s philosophy to aesthetic form: ‘My task

\(^{15}\) The initial plan was to produce ‘six or seven’ one-hour films about philosophers. Finally only three were made: *Spinoza – the Apostle of Reason* (script: Tariq Ali, dir.: Chris Spenser), *Wittgenstein* (Jarman and Eagleton 1993) and *Locke* (script: David Edgar, dir.: Peter Wollen).

\(^{16}\) It was filmed in a non-sound-proof studio in 12 Theed St. The Martian reflexively refers to the location in Scene 13.

\(^{17}\) Eagleton’s criticisms of Jarman are interesting for the light they cast on the film (as well as on Wittgenstein’s philosophy). Regarding the alien that appears in the film to hector young Wittgenstein he says: ‘A camp Martian crops up for no particular reason, uttering wads of embarrassing whimsy’ (Eagleton 1993, 8). However, his self-confidence that this motif is Jarman’s invention is corrected by Wittgenstein’s respected biographer, Ray Monk, who pointed out that a lot of this can in fact be sourced in Wittgenstein’s work (Monk, 1993). In *On Certainty* §430, to differentiate knowledge from certainty, Wittgenstein imagines a Martian inquiring how many toes a human has. Jarman enacts this interchange (so characteristic of Wittgenstein’s interlocutory style): ‘Far from the camp indulgence Eagleton takes it to be’, Monk concludes, ‘the scene is perhaps the most literal example ever filmed of ‘photographing philosophy’’ (Monk, 1993). The Martian, in Jarman’s film, is cast as an allegory of scepticism: the uneasiness that haunts Wittgenstein throughout his later work and whose taunting and tantalizing voices he attempts, sometimes in vain, to answer. It is very interesting that Monk should use the incongruous locution ‘photographing philosophy’ rather than ‘filming philosophy’ in this context. This underlines our point about the stillness of the scenes of Jarman’s film. Incidentally, the Martian also makes an appearance in *Remarks on Colour* § 330.

\(^{18}\) See www.jclarkmedia.com/jarman/jarman10.html; see also Ali (1993). At the first screening of *Wittgenstein* in Cambridge several people who knew the philosopher attended including ‘Wittgenstein’s old landlady’ who according to Ali was very impressed.
was to make a philosophical film’. However the effort ‘to redefine film, like language, needs a leap – in this case, the black drapes’ (Peake 2000). (I will discuss the ‘black drapes’, which are crucial to the philosophical structure of the film, in due course.) Jarman’s film indeed seems the consummate fulfilment of Cavell’s ‘idea of the solution of a philosophical problem as requiring, or inviting, an aesthetic interpretation’ (Cavell 2005, 210), an idea that derives, incidentally, from Cavell’s exegesis of the \textit{Philosophical Investigations}.

Thanks in part to the writing of Cavell, indeed, a loose yet consolidating affiliation of researchers is establishing an epistemological relationship between film and philosophy. Thomas Wartenberg’s (2006) reading of \textit{Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind} (2004) for instance as a counterexample to utilitarianism epitomises the methodology of the new discipline of film-philosophy\textsuperscript{19} according to which film is considered to have the capacity to challenge or (indeed) replicate philosophical hypotheses because it can develop thought-experiments in a non-propositional medium. The anticipation of causal patterns through syllogistic inferences from material conditionals is perhaps the lifeblood of all fictional forms. Yet the epistemic affinity between logic and the causal patterns of narrative can be vividly realised in film (which, as Wartenberg correctly claims, develops arguments).\textsuperscript{20} A valid argument involves drawing a necessarily true conclusion from true premises (if the premises are accepted as true, then the conclusion \textit{must} be true). Often in films a premise is established and a further premise appended (not necessarily in that order: frequently the second premise is established prior to the first), and therefore the conclusion anticipated which gives ensuing events a sense

\textsuperscript{19}‘Film as Argument’ (Wartenberg 2006); in \textit{Film as Philosophy} Wartenberg also argues that film can construct philosophic thought-experiments (2007, 17-19; 24-29); see also Mary Litch (2010) and Basilis Kroustallis (2009). Kroustallis refers to Mulhall (2002) and Goodenough (and Read 2005). Amanda Montgomery’s reading of \textit{Touch of Evil} (Orson Welles) as the development of a proto-Gettier-type thought-experiment (Montgomery 2009) should also be considered in this connection. All of these propose that film can present philosophical arguments through a non-standard (i.e., aesthetic) medium. Incidentally, Williamson’s paradigmatic example of counterfactual reasoning, namely, (C1) ‘If the bush had not been there, the rock would have ended [up] in the lake’ elucidates the way in which movies can deploy counterfactuals. According to Williamson, one comes to know counterfactual C1 through the exercise of imagination; we do not imagine things in an infinite number of aberrant ways (à la \textit{The Butterfly Effect}) because our ‘imaginative exercise is radically informed and disciplined by [our] perception of the rock and the slope and [our] sense of how nature works. … Thus the imagination [just as in film hypothetical scenarios] can in principle exploit all our background knowledge in evaluating counterfactuals’ (Williamson 2007, 142-143).

\textsuperscript{20}Yet his view that films can present (valid) arguments despite their narrative (fictional) structure seems to involve the assumption that narrative form cannot be a vehicle of logical form. I would argue rather that it is precisely because of its narrative structure that film facilitates the construction of (not necessarily valid) counterfactual arguments. He is also wrong that the hidden premise in \textit{Eternal Sunshine} is that ‘utilitarianism justifies social institutions by their beneficial consequences’ and the argument of the film (there is one) is therefore not an enthymeme (Wartenberg 2006, 135).
of causal inevitability. 21 (Thwarting the cognitive anticipation of inevitability in surprise twists, of course, is a favourite device.) Cinematic narrative therefore, consistent with processes of inference from conditional antecedents, resembles *modus ponens* 22 reasoning: ‘If birds attacked humans, then we’d have to barricade ourselves in our houses; Birds attack; therefore …’. This makes film not just a laboratory for armchair thought-experiments (as Wartenberg et al. have claimed) but also a significant vehicle for actualising (and testing the validity of) counterfactual conditionals: what would happen if I, for instance, had the power to alter some key fact of my past? How would things be if THAT didn’t happen (*The Butterfly Effect* [2004])? 23

In the case of Jarman’s *Wittgenstein*, however, it is the *constructedness* of the scenes – what could be termed their *artificiality* – that lends itself to being analysed in the film-philosophy mode. Clearly, aesthetic form in *Wittgenstein* draws attention to its synthetic structure in a way that a more conventional biopic could not. Standard examples of the genre such as Ed Harris’s *Pollock* (2000), Julie Taymor’s *Frida* (2002), and Christine Jeffs’s *Sylvia* (2003), as well as Ron Howard’s celebrated biopic of John Nash Jr., *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), tend to subordinate every aesthetic consideration to the dominant formal criterion of narrative homogeneity.

Where *Wittgenstein* encourages viewers to engage with philosophy through its aesthetic dimension, *A Beautiful Mind* establishes a very different relationship with its audience. Are we ever in doubt that Nash is a genius? He is involved in important, highly specialised ground-breaking work, far beyond ordinary comprehension (his psychosis, of course, is treated as an unfortunate side-effect of this crazily intensive abstract labour and the narrative trades on our incomprehension of advanced applied mathematics for this effect). Although not a Nobel Laureate, Wittgenstein

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21 Consider *Cape Fear*:

P1 Defence lawyer suppresses crucial file and as a result his client (Max Cady) is sentenced  
P2 While incarcerated Cady educates himself and discovers this fact  
Therefore:  
C Cady seeks revenge when released

Or *A History of Violence*:

P1 Philadelphia gangster changes identity and settles down in small town  
P2 Forced to protect his business from small-time criminals he becomes a local hero but is recognised by Philly gang  
Therefore:  
C They come looking for him and his true identity is exposed.

22 *Modus ponens* is an inference of the form: if *p* then *q*; *p* therefore *q*.

23 This tests the ultra-causal notion of sensitive dependence on initial conditions (i.e., the so-called ‘butterfly effect’).
was engaged in comparatively advanced and abstract, indeed revolutionary, philosophical work in Cambridge in the 1930s and 40s (until 1947). Despite this, the audience, through the familiarity of the seminar scenes (and the deceptive banality of the questions) is encouraged to participate in the reconstruction of the philosophical activity that led to his revolutionary ideas.

Notwithstanding the quaint classroom scenes in *A Beautiful Mind*, there appears to be no comparable epistemic dimension in any of the movies cited above. Why is this? Because it is by virtue of its *logical* form that *Wittgenstein* re-enacts the epistemic content of Wittgenstein’s philosophy at the level of *aesthetic* form. In the other movies, form is constrained to the single narrative desideratum of continuity and is thus rendered both generic and transparent (anything assumed to detract from narrative homogeneity is eschewed by the methodology of continuity editing). It appears unconscionable that such movies could possess any of the recursive qualities of Jarman’s picture. Yet it is precisely as a consequence of its reflexive mode of presentation that *Wittgenstein* iterates epistemic content at the formal level. This it achieves through its aesthetic dimension – something that, in classic Wittgensteinian style, is *shown* and not *said* (*TLP* §4.1212). Form defines the limits of what it is possible to show; and in Jarman’s picture aesthetic form and logical form coalesce in a manner that importantly represents both the content of the philosopher’s life and elucidates the status of form in his philosophy of language.

My argument is that the aesthetic dimension of Jarman’s film can be analysed specifically according to the ‘picture theory’ of the proposition associated with Wittgenstein’s early period.24 The aim of the *Tractatus* (1922) (*TLP*)25 was to define – or more accurately *elucidate*26 – the logical relationship between language, thought and the world. Following Frege and Russell, Wittgenstein focuses on the proposition (the meaning of, or content expressed by, a sentence) and maintains that the solution to the language-world problem lies in identifying the proposition as a picture (*Bild*) of reality (*TLP* §4.01). For Wittgenstein, at this stage, the proposition (*Satz*) is a picture (where ‘is’, *pace* McGinn, functions as an identification not a predicative copula) which amounts to the deceptively naïve claim that the thought expressed by a sentence constitutes an image of the world. It is necessary to outline the structure of this now familiar (although still perplexing) argument.

Firstly, according to Wittgenstein, the world should be considered as composed of facts and not things (the fact being the fundamental unit of

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24 On the picture theory see Kenny (1973); Grayling (1982, 1988); Monk (1991; 2005); Cashell (1998).
25 The *Tractatus* (*TLP*) was first published in German as *Logische-Philosophische Abhandlung* in 1921.
26 Marie McGinn (1999, 497, 498).
logical significance). Facts, in turn, are described as particular arrangements of things (simple facts are structured configurations of ontologically basic ‘objects’27). What Wittgenstein calls the ‘logical form’ of these objects is given by their compositional role in the configuration of a fact; the form of an object, in other words, is its potential for combining with other objects in possible simple facts.

But given that, formally speaking, pictures combine distinct elements into coherent compositions, pictures therefore resemble facts. It is however the potential to combine its elements into a structured configuration – because these elements refer to simple objects – that a picture pictures (that is: represents a fact). Das Bild, Wittgenstein concludes, represents a possible fact; so this fact need not necessarily exist, that is to say: it may or may not exist (TLP §2.201).

It is impossible to ascertain from the picture itself therefore whether the fact it represents actually exists (cf., TLP §2.224). We are unable to tell from the picture, in other words, whether it is true. For no picture is a priori true (TLP §2.225); and this is because the picture of necessity must depict, that is, the picture always represents something: thus we are compelled to apply to experience to discover if this something (the fact as depicted by the picture) actually exists. If it exists then the picture is TRUE; if not it is FALSE.

Applying this logic to the proposition, it becomes evident that the proposition is also a structural combination of distinct elements (i.e., names). A proposition depicts a fact only because its individual elements (names) are co-ordinated in a particular way that enables them to refer to basic objects and therefore assert that the referred-to objects are arranged in this way in the fact. Are they? To confirm this and thereby establish the truth-conditions of the proposition can only be achieved by inspecting the proposition’s extension: we must compare it with what it represents.

According to Wittgenstein, the represented fact [that p] as asserted by ‘p’ allows us to establish the truth conditions of the proposition in the following way. If the fact [that p] (as depicted by ‘p’) exists, then proposition ‘p’ is true, if the fact [that p] doesn’t exist, then ‘p’ is false (and in the latter case the proposition ‘p’ possesses sense but no reference) (TLP §4.25). For example: the proposition ‘dans la maison, il y avait une grande cuisine’ is true just in case it is a fact that the house has a large kitchen.28 Therefore: ‘What we understand, when we understand a proposition’ Anthony Kenny comments ‘is not its reference, but its sense’ (Kenny 1973,

27 As Wahl (1995) remarks, the objects of Wittgenstein’s Tractarian ontology are difficult to characterise: he ‘argues that they are simple, but does not give any example of them’ (192). But Wittgenstein clearly includes ordinary things (subjects) and properties (predicates) but not relations in his ontology.

28 Therefore, clearly, this analysis of propositional truth is not simply disquotational but rather involves initial translation from the specific language of the statement’s expression to its epistemic value (or conceptual content in Fregean terminology).
61: i.e., we know by the sense of the proposition how to translate from the object language to the metalanguage). This constitutes the sense (Sinn) of the proposition: (‘p’ says [that p]). To modify the Fregean formulation slightly, the sense of the Wittgensteinian proposition is its ‘mode of representation’ (rather than ‘presentation’). For: ‘The proposition is a picture of reality, for if I know the state of affairs presented by it, I understand the proposition. And I understand the proposition without its sense having been explained to me’ (TLP §4.021). This is because the proposition shows that it represents something (a fact) independently of whether that fact exists or not. This means that the sense (i.e., what ‘p’ represents) of the proposition is recognised prior to knowing the truth value of ‘p’ (i.e., before we observe and confirm [that p]).

4.024 To understand a proposition means to know what is the case, if it is true. (One can therefore understand it without knowing whether it is true or not.) One understands it if one understands its constituent parts.

Sense determines the truth-conditions of the proposition therefore as follows: we know a priori from an immediate appreciation of the proposition’s sense what would have to be the case if it were true. (And interestingly this means that establishing the truth of every contingent proposition involves counterfactual reasoning.) We know intuitively from looking at the proposition what is required to establish its truth-value. Thus every proposition remains disjunctively either true or false (i.e., is neither true nor false until what it represents is verified by experience).

However, this entails that a hitherto vital class of logical propositions, the so-called analytic propositions (whose truth-conditions are known a priori by virtue of their logical form alone) because they do not picture anything are excluded from the category of genuine propositions (i.e., contingent disjunctive pictures) in Wittgenstein’s logic: in language, he discovered, contra Frege, that it is impossible for a sentence to be both significant (that is to meaningfully inform) and also to be known a priori. Such propositions are characterised as semantically vacuous (they are ‘tautologies’ of the form A = A); he goes on to redefine all the propositions of logic as tautologies (or contradictions: A & ¬A). Because they are not pictures, analytic propositions lack sense and, therefore, inevitably lack the capacity to refer. Although their truth-conditions are known with certainty they are unsinning (i.e., senseless) because they do not have the intensional capacity to determine any extension. They are, strictly, not propositions at all since they do not or cannot picture anything.

The genealogy of the picture theory is well documented. During the War while serving with the Austrian army, Wittgenstein was manning the searchlight of a captured vessel (the Goplana) on the Vistula; at this time he
referred in his journal to a newspaper article about a trial in Paris that employed forensic models to establish the facts of an accident. ‘It occurred to Wittgenstein’ Norman Malcolm writes ‘that this … was a proposition and that there was revealed the essential nature of the proposition, namely, to picture reality’ (Malcolm 2001, 57).\(^{29}\) He originally referred to the picture theory as the ‘Theory of Logical Portrayal’ to indicate that the kind of picture a proposition constitutes is logical in form.

Traces of this epiphany remain in the *Tractatus*. At §3.1431 for instance Wittgenstein elucidates the nature of the proposition by imagining it composed of objects (tables, chairs and books) instead of signs; and, later, at §4.0312, he suggests that his entire conception relies on the logical fact that objects can be represented by signs.

\[4.0311\text{ One name stands for one thing, and another for another thing, and they are connected together. And so the whole like a tableau vivant, presents the atomic fact.}\]

A combination of variables represents a possible fact only because names refer to objects. Yet they do so, as considered, only in the ‘nexus’ of the proposition (TLP §4.23).

Names possess reference but (contra Frege) not sense: this is because a name cannot fail to refer to the object it represents. According to Ishiguro, tractarian names, unlike the proper names of Russell’s description theory, are not amenable to further analysis (TLP §3.26). ‘Not only can names not be analysed further by any definitions, but the objects to which they refer are simple and cannot be given by a definite description’ (Ishiguro 1969, 22); thus the meaning of a name is its reference which, unlike sense, is grasped only by a posteriori familiarity with the object to which it refers. Yet this implies that names, unlike propositions, do not have a picturing relationship to what they refer. And this is correct: names are conventional symbols that stand arbitrarily for their referents. Once assigned to an object, however, the name will refer necessarily to that object. ‘Without its corresponding object, a Name would be devoid of significance, a meaningless sound or squiggle or mental event’ (Summerfield 1996, 119). Hence the names ‘Wittgenstein’, ‘Russell’, ‘Lady Morrell’, ‘Keynes’, and ‘Francis Skinner’, in the possible world of Jarman’s *Wittgenstein*, no matter how they are combined and arranged, necessarily refer to the real individuals they name in Wittgenstein’s biography (and can be embedded in any combination that, even if false, does not cease to make sense).

Incidentally, this makes the character Johnny interesting from a Wittgensteinian viewpoint. In the film, ‘Johnny’ refers to the Cambridge

\[^{29}\text{See also Monk (1990, 118).}\]
student who is dispatched to rural Austria to fetch the philosopher and bring him back to England, who Wittgenstein later encourages to rescind his studies to pursue a trade, and accompanies him to the cinema after his seminars, etc. ‘Johnny’ therefore combines descriptive characteristics associated with at least three names that feature in Wittgenstein’s biography: Frank Ramsey, David Pinsent and, of course, most centrally, Francis Skinner. We search the biography in vain for ‘Johnny’ and discover other names that correlate with the description. Thus to employ the terminology introduced by Saul Kripke (1980), ‘Johnny’ does not function as a ‘rigid designator’. Rather the name designates a fiction whose identifying descriptions ultimately cluster around an empty space constructed for the purposes of narrative economy. Possessing no reference outside Jarman’s film, ‘Johnny’ is entirely reducible to its definite description (a character in Derek Jarman’s Wittgenstein that ‘does such-and-such’ and is ultimately reducible to the author’s intention). When measured against reality in the tractarian mode therefore ‘Johnny’ becomes a vacuous signifier whose fate is to disappear forever into blackness at the end of the film.30

Focus on characterisation reveals one striking incongruity in Jarman’s film. The unconventional stylisation of the film contrasts markedly with the mimetic realism of the key characters. Emphasising the tractarian account of names as irreducible designators of simple objects, the actors (in particular Karl Johnson, Michael Gough and Jon Quentin) bear an uncanny resemblance to the characters they play (i.e., the real people they represent and whose names they bear). In this context, Jarman’s concern with verisimilitude of character serves to formalise the conception of names in the Tractatus. The variables replacing x in the elementary pictures of Jarman’s scenes, like the tractarian names, are, to use David Kaplan’s term, directly referential. As Wahl observes, the proposition successfully represents if and only if within it ‘names share or mirror, the logical form of the objects they name’ (Wahl 1995, 192). In this case of this picture, the logical form of the names is their resemblance to their referents.

Is Jarman’s film not a complex proposition in the Wittgensteinian sense? It is certainly a picture (truth-functionally compounded of 65 elementary scenes). Each of these scenes, like a tableau vivant, presents a state of affairs (mediated through logical form) and thus pictures a possible fact from the life of Wittgenstein. Under Jarman’s direction the cinematic tableaux transform into propositions almost as if a search light had picked them out from the darkness. According to this interpretation Jarman’s black backdrop becomes highly significant, its dark depth bearing salient connotations: war, night aboard ship, memory, blackboard, cinema, the

30 It is interesting (and somewhat poignant) to note that the character Johnny is played by Jarman’s real life partner Kevin Collins. So perhaps the character only refers to Kevin, and by way of Kevin, refers back ultimately to Derek Jarman as creator of Wittgenstein.
negative afterimage of Wittgenstein’s sheet in the final portrait taken at von Wright’s, etc. Above all however the black drapes serve to further emphasise the propositional form of Jarman’s scenes. This function enhances the sense that the elements of each scene have been purposely articulated and thus draws attention to their synthetic nature. Relationships among elements, as a result, seem frozen like stars in a constellation.

‘My fundamental thought’ Wittgenstein instructs ‘is that the ‘logical constants’ do not represent’ (TLP §4.0312). In the proposition the structural relationship among the variables (names) is established by what Wittgenstein terms the ‘logical constants’, i.e. operators, quantifiers and truth-functional connections (‘and’, ‘not’, ‘either … or’, ‘if … then’, ‘all’, ‘some’ as well as non-representational formal markers such as brackets and commas). For these are the compositional elements responsible for composing and negating propositions (so that they represent objects, properties and their relations in facts) into combinations (conjunction, disjunction, subjunctive). But the propositional connectives do not themselves represent objects according to Wittgenstein; their logical function is rather to establish the relation of variables to each other in the proposition and to combine the resultant simple propositions into arguments. The relationship between the propositional variables (configurations of subjects and predicates) constitutes the logical form of the proposition. Yet this logical form is not itself representational. Although it does not itself depict anything, form nevertheless constitutes the conditions of possibility of representation as such. In the static world of the Tractatus the connective tissue between the signs that represent objects – the logical form responsible for their internal relations – that is, does not itself represent: it is semantically black.

In Wittgenstein the background darkness remains a constant as the scenes, like a game of charades representing the colour exclusion problem (TLP §6.3751), are played out briefly before returning to blackness once more. Articulations of discrete elements within the uniformly black surroundings, that is, are deployed to model facts from the life of Ludwig Wittgenstein. And the implication is that, in order to establish the truth value of these images, picture must, like a scale applied to reality, be compared with fact (TLP §2.1512). Let us apply the scale.

**Sc. 8 THE RHINO**

RUSSELL: Why won’t you just admit that there’s no Rhinoceros in this room?

This incident actually happened. In 1911, that is, prior to the codification of the picture theory, as documented in Russell’s *Autobiography* (1975), Wittgenstein, then his ‘obstinate’, ‘argumentative’ and ‘tiresome’ student,
would not admit ‘that it was certain that there was not a rhino in the room’ (in Monk 1991, 39). Although this seems really bizarre, Wittgenstein persistently argued against Russell and would not concede even when the Professor exaggeratedly searched under table and chair. In his letters to Ottoline Morrell, Russell associated this situation with Wittgenstein’s refusal to accept anything empirical as certain. Asserted propositions, for him, he says, were all that can be said to exist. Let \( p \) represent the assertion that [There is a rhino in the room]. Now because it pictures a simple fact, like all contingent propositions, it represents a possibility; yet this necessarily entails, as considered, that its truth-conditions cannot be known with certainty. Now we apply the ‘not’ operator to negate the proposition thus: \( \neg p \). And of course the latter’s truth value is (T) only when \( p \) is (F) and vice versa. Yet the picture (simple proposition) is not altered by this operation: negating a proposition is equivalent to drawing a line through a picture (such as a diagram of a dog to signify ‘no dogs’). So we can operate again on \( \neg p \) to make it (F): \( \neg \neg p \). We apply another ‘not’ to make it (T) again. The proposition \( p \) therefore designates, through all these operations, ‘something which is essentially a proposition to the effect that P’ (Williamson 2002, 243), which can be operated on with an infinite series of ‘nots’ while the picture or proposition, however, remains rigidly the same \( p \) (see TLP §4.0621). If the proposition ‘There is [no] rhino in the room’ exists then ‘There is a rhino in the room’ also, necessarily, exists.

Although we wish it did, Monk’s analysis doesn’t help to clarify the problem. Before moving along, he concludes that the issue is metaphysical and not empirical. But surely the issue for Wittgenstein is logical and therefore neither metaphysical nor empirical. Logic, he stresses in the Tractatus (§5.552), ‘precedes every experience’. What kind of knowledge does logic facilitate? Just the conviction ‘that something is so’. We know that a proposition can represent a possible fact because signs still represent objects in the absence of those objects. Therefore, even though it might not necessarily be true, the proposition (by possessing sense, i.e., the capacity to represent) remains meaningful (its sense is known a priori but its truth conditions are not known in this way). For its elements (names) can always be re-arranged in other ways to represent possible – that is, logical – counterfactual and therefore not necessarily actual subject-predicate pictures. (That something is so – not that something is so.) ‘Existence’ in the logical sense, as Williamson observes, is a very different proposition to existence in the ontological sense (something that exists in the logical sense may yet fail to exist in the ontological sense) (cf. TLP §6.124). But perhaps Wittgenstein was just provoking Russell in order to observe his perplexed responses. Jarman, who follows Monk’s explanation avant la lettre, solves

31 See Searle’s dialogue with Bryan Magee (in Magee 1987, 325).
32 ‘The propositions ‘\( p \)’ and ‘\( \neg p \)’ have opposite senses, but to them corresponds one and the same reality.’
the problem by having young Wittgenstein emerge from under the table when the others have gone with a horn attached to his head.

So the sense of the proposition, as we have seen, is characterised by its capacity to represent ‘such and such a state of affairs’. This entails that the meaning of the proposition, as Summerfield observes, is its mode of representation, which is not dependent on correspondence to an existing fact: ‘a proposition can’, she remarks, ‘fail to correspond to a fact and yet retain its semantic content’. In Scene 31 of Jarman’s film, with Wittgenstein representing the moon, Keynes the earth and his wife Lydia the sun, the three friends play the ‘planet game’. Now this incident actually took place; but not with Keynes and his wife. Rather, during a postprandial walk on Midsummer Common with Norman Malcolm and his wife, the philosopher suggested this game to them and then ‘entered into [the proposition] with great enthusiasm and seriousness, shouting instructions … as he ran.’ Representing the moon, Wittgenstein selected the most demanding role for himself and as a result, according to Malcolm, ‘became quite breathless and dizzy with exhaustion’ (Malcolm 2001, 44-45).

When Wittgenstein gives Russell the V sign in Sc. 34, asking him to define its logical form, he answers himself that it lacks one and concludes that his search for the ‘essence of meaning’ has been futile. He now believes that meaning must be determined by life practices and therefore, like this gesture, be totally accessible but only when embedded within a given public structure of normative convention: the kind of investigation Wittgenstein is initiating here is the effort to ‘understand something that is already open to view’ (Wittgenstein 1953, §89). Whatever form linguistic activity can be said to have, it cannot be made autonomous from the social and behavioural context within which it is used and still retain its meaning. ‘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’ (Wittgenstein 1953, §43). Wittgenstein attributed this revelation to discussions with the Italian economist Piero Sraffa that caused him to seriously doubt the basic tractarian assumption that a shared logical form between language, thought and reality is a necessary requirement for representation and communication. Sraffa, brushing his chin with his fingers (a Neapolitan gesture of disrespect) allegedly challenged Wittgenstein to define the form of that gesture. This episode, Malcolm notes, apparently ‘broke the hold on him of the conception that a proposition must literally be a ‘picture’ of the reality it describes’ (Malcolm 2001, 58). Wittgenstein acknowledges Sraffa’s influence on his later thought in the Preface to the *Investigations*.33

33 ‘Even more … I am indebted to that which a teacher of this university, Mr. P. Sraffa, for many years unceasingly practised on my thoughts. I am indebted to this stimulus for the most consequential ideas of this book’ (Wittgenstein 1953, np).
The Italian economist’s probing provided the necessary stimulus for Wittgenstein to develop a new way of approaching logical problems from an ‘anthropological’ perspective: and ‘One of the most striking ways in which Wittgenstein’s later work differs from the Tractatus’ Monk observes ‘is in its ‘anthropological’ approach’ (Monk 1991, 261):

We are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound, essential in our investigation, resides in trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language. That is, the order existing between the concepts of proposition, word, proof, truth, experience, and so on. This order is a super-order between – so to speak – super-concepts. Whereas, of course, if the words ‘language’, ‘experience’, ‘world’, have a use, it must be as humble a one as that of the words ‘table’, ‘lamp’, ‘door.’ (Wittgenstein 1953, §97)

Finally, for the moment, in Jigsaw (Sc. 44) Keynes inquires of Wittgenstein sometime in the 1930s whether he is reflecting on logic or his sins. Wittgenstein answers ‘both’. This episode, as Colin McCabe points out did not, in fact, take place – at least not like this; it is transplanted from a 1912 exchange with Russell when the student called on his teacher and paced his rooms in troubled silence. According to Monk, Russell inquired ‘Are you thinking about logic or your sins?’ ‘Both’, Wittgenstein replied, and continued his pacing’ (Monk 1991, 64).

**Sc. 28 SEMINAR 1**

Three key scenes of Wittgenstein show the philosopher teaching. Many vivid accounts of the extraordinary classes Wittgenstein delivered at Cambridge have been preserved. ‘He had no manuscript or notes’ von Wright reports. ‘He thought before the class. The impression was of a tremendous concentration. The exposition usually led to a question, to which the audience were supposed to suggest an answer. The answers in turn became starting points for new thoughts leading to new questions’ (in Malcolm 2001, 15). In Sc 28 of the film, the philosopher draws a dog on the blackboard and begins: ‘A dog cannot lie. Neither can he be sincere’ (Jarman 1993, 102). With a couple of interesting exceptions, Jarman took the material for the seminar scenes verbatim from Eagleton’s script. Most of the ideas discussed in these scenes are appropriated from the Investigations. For instance: ‘A dog cannot be a hypocrite, but neither can he be sincere’ (Wittgenstein 1953, 229).

Part Two of the Investigations begins with an inquiry into the concept of hope, teasing out the link between language-use and the intentional structure of hoping. ‘A dog believes his master is at the door. But can he also believe his master will come the day after to-morrow?’ –
And what can he not do here?’ Wittgenstein asks. ‘Can only those hope who can talk?’ Is this why we cannot say of an animal that it hopes? Hope is a propositional attitude having semantic content associated with the proposition represented by its ‘that’ clause. As language is the vehicle of human desire, hope represents a kind of desire sublimated in propositionally expressed attitudes toward some content and is therefore realised only through language. ‘If a lion could speak, we would not be able to understand what he says.’ Karl Johnson concludes (Jarman 1993, 104).

Yet this now-famous aphorism actually derives from another discussion that appears much later in the Investigations – a discussion that attempts to address sceptical questions about the relationship between the hidden and the open in terms of the traditional metaphysical categories of the inner and the outer. ‘If I see someone writhing in pain with evident cause I do not think: all the same, his feelings are hidden from me.’ Yet, as Wittgenstein says, I may visit a foreign country and, even though I have mastered the language, feel alienated. Then Wittgenstein comments: ‘If a lion could talk, we could not understand him’ (Wittgenstein 1953, 223). This is typically taken to suggest that because their world is assumed to be radically alien to ours, we do not, and cannot, know another species (à la Nagel’s hypothesis that we lack the capacity to know what it is like to be a bat). It is logically impossible to understand a non-human animal – implicitly meaning that we do not have access to the other’s ‘inner’ life. Yet Wittgenstein crucially does not say ‘Even if a lion could talk’ but simply ‘If a lion could talk’. For everything we need to understand is publicly accessible, is already open to view. A lion may in fact be well understood, his intentional life adequately represented by his leonine behaviour, his signs effectively communicated across species (‘an inner process stands in need of outward criteria’ applies here too). Rather what Wittgenstein targets with this aphorism is our propensity to grade knowledge (which is ultimately representation of others) according to our own normative standards and to ignore what it is we do know (what is open to view). The irony is that if the lion suddenly said in perfect English: ‘I am thirsty, I need a drink’, at this precise point our understanding would cease. But the lion’s language, even if it is not formal, is still a language and, to that extent, capable of being understood by other animals.

Student One slaps his face and says: ‘You can’t know this pain. Only I can’ (Jarman 1993, 105). With this, Jarman prepares to re-enact the celebrated passages of the Investigations that put the assumed logical privacy (meaning incommunicable nature) of sensation into question. ‘I have seen a person in a discussion on this subject’, Wittgenstein claims in paragraph 253, ‘strike himself on the breast and say: ‘But surely another person cannot have THIS pain!’’.
It may appear obvious that I cannot feel another person’s pain. Yet even if we acknowledge that it could be metaphysically possible, the notion that someone else can feel my pains (or vice versa) is not entailed by Wittgenstein’s argument. Rather his critical target is what this conviction is often assumed to imply, namely, that we know our own sensations in a privileged way that excludes other people’s knowledge. This inclines us to believe that having to infer private mental states from overt behaviour is a serious epistemic limitation. Yet against this epistemological background, Wittgenstein insists, counterintuitively, that sentences such as ‘I know I’m in pain’ are meaningless. What is being argued here? Well, firstly, if we seriously want to understand our fluent ability to refer to sensations, then the temptation to inquire in vintage philosophical mode must be resisted. The classical question ‘What is pain?’ suggests that we’re searching for an ultimate definition that when discovered will refer directly to an essential nature. This search is futile. ‘We mistakenly think that a definition will remove the trouble’ (1958, 27); however, it is precisely when everyday concepts are (by way of philosophising) alienated from their proper ‘form of life’, the *Investigations* argues, that they lose focus and metamorphose into ‘lifeless’ and elusive ontological wisps. Wittgenstein advises us, in contrast, to simply consider how the vocabulary of sensation is employed in ordinary circumstances: ‘look at its use’, he recommends ‘and learn from that’ (1953, §340). We ought therefore to be satisfied when the variety of ways of using the word ‘pain’ are described in the familiar situations in which we use the word without a second thought – or at least without agonising over essences or metaphysical interior/exterior mysteries.34

Secondly, the sentence ‘I know I am in pain’, according to the criterion of utility, is vacuous because the form of words, Wittgenstein claims, is ungrammatical – it is excluded by the semantic conditions identified with how ‘know’ functions in public ‘linguistic exchange’ (1969, §260). To know is a success verb. It is meaningful to refer to knowing, only in contexts where it also makes sense to doubt (knowledge-claims are relative to instances where I can find out – or be wrong about – *something* etc.). Now if admissions of ignorance are absurd in first-person expressions of pain then clearly the operator ‘I know …’ is obviated in the first-person case. If it is impossible for me to doubt that I’m in pain then it is also senseless to claim that I know I’m in pain. ‘It can’t be said of me at all’, Wittgenstein continues, ‘(except perhaps as a joke) that I know I am in pain. What is it supposed to mean – except perhaps that I *am* in pain?’ (1953, §246). For the sentence ‘I am in pain’, as Cavell comments, is neither an articulation of knowledge nor of certainty but simply an expression of (the feeling of) pain.

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34 See Wittgenstein 1958, 9.
Wittgenstein’s method of grammatical analysis is commended by Cavell for redirecting ‘words to the circulation of language and its (sometimes unpredictable) projections rather than keeping them fixated in some imaginary service’ (Cavell 2005, 199). Indeed, language only makes sense in what Wittgenstein called the *Strome des Lebens* (Malcolm & von Wright 2001, 75) and grammatical investigation seeks to disclose, by description, how meaning is embedded in efficacious, intentional social activity, in the environment of pragmatic structures prescribed by ‘human customs and institutions’ (§337).

The prosaic belief in the psychological interiority of other people is notoriously difficult to justify. If mental states are known through the private (*de se*) acquaintance that their subjective experience alone affords then it follows that we are compelled to reconstruct the consciousness of others from the crude semaphore of behaviour. Such unjustifiable inductive inference from circumstantial evidence leads, however, to skepticism about other minds. Wittgenstein, rejecting the Mill-Russell argument from analogy as a plausible solution, reparses the epistemological problem about whether we can ever be certain about another person’s mental states as a grammatical problem, asking instead what objective criteria need to be satisfied for the predication of psychological properties in the second- and third-person. The application of subjective predicates to others, unlike in the first-person case, emerges as informed by the activity of recognising when certain relevant criteria are present. Criteria can be defined in this context as publicly available conventional grounds (defeasible relative to context) for knowing when certain concepts apply in certain situations. For instance, acknowledging when someone is in pain is a matter of recognising that appropriate criteria are ‘satisfied’. We may reasonably be said then to know that someone is in pain when their emotional state is effectively communicated. Wittgenstein argues that for this to occur the expression of sensation must be sublimated through public, socio-linguistic conventions (the ‘grammar of sensation’) – this ‘grammar’ constituting the vehicle that determines the significant criteria which inform our knowledge of sensation (and, by extension, informs our knowledge of ‘other minds’). ‘Other people cannot be said to learn of my sensations *only* from my behaviour, – for *I* cannot be said to learn of them. *I have* them’ (§246). It could be said that this is a philosophically roundabout defence of the view that we know intuitively or viscerally – by empathy – which person is in pain not because we infer it through some pattern of behaviour but rather because *she feels* it. ‘The truth is’, paragraph 246 concludes, ‘it makes sense to say about other people that they doubt whether I am in pain; but not to say it about myself’. However, this implies that I do not strictly speaking *know* that I’m in pain (if I am) because I too *feel* it. Knowing is not feeling. (It is important for

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35 See Wittgenstein 1953, §116.
Wittgenstein to distinguish sensation from knowledge: feeling, even if incorrigible, is not a species of a priori knowledge.) So if I know she’s in pain then it is because the salient criteria are satisfied – but not primarily because she expresses her pain through behaviour (or even language), but primarily because she feels it.\(^{36}\) ‘Just try – in a real case’, Wittgenstein challenges us, ‘to doubt someone else’s fear or pain’ (1953, §303).

Firstly, he does not say anything about feeling pain but stresses instead the possession of pain. ‘Another person’, he writes, ‘cannot have my pains’ (Der Andre kann nicht meine Schmerzen haben). What is challenged therefore is the private property, as it were, of sensation. Yet if I slap my face, I can know Student One’s pain. Indeed it could be argued that I even feel it. But how does this prove that pain is not private? Or does it just establish that sensation is not exclusively private? ‘In so far as it makes sense to say that my pain is the same as his’, however, Wittgenstein elaborates, ‘it is also possible for us both to have the same pain’ (as in an identical pain, not just a corresponding, or a similar kind of pain).

In Scene 37, Seminar II, Student One (again) approaches Wittgenstein after his class and says: ‘I just can’t see it Professor, it somehow just seems natural for me to say ‘I know I’m in pain.’’ To this Karl Johnson replies: ‘Tell me, why does it seem more natural for people to believe that the Sun goes round the Earth, rather than the other way round?’ And the following exchange takes place:

\begin{quote}
STUDENT I: Well obviously because it looks that way.
WITTGENSTEIN: I see. And how would it look if the Earth went round the Sun?
STUDENT I: Um, well I suppose … yes I see what you mean.
\end{quote}

The ellipsis in the text clearly indicates the moment of understanding, an event well captured in the film by the expression of dawning illumination on the actor’s face.

Apparently, although the story is probably apocryphal, Wittgenstein actually said this in conversation with Elizabeth Anscombe. Yet this anecdote, apocryphal or not, clarifies Wittgenstein’s late philosophical method. For according to Monk his novel method involves the effort to change our way of looking at things (see Wittgenstein 1953, § 144). We must learn, that is, to outmanoeuvre, or better, deflate, the metaphysical presuppositions that infect language and thought by ‘turning our whole examination round’ (Wittgenstein in Monk, 2005, 65, my emphasis). That is, in order to dissolve philosophical problems we must acquire the skills to regard things from a different vantage point and, in the process, to discard

\(^{36}\) See Cashell ‘New Criteria for Pain: Ordinary Language, Other Minds, and the Grammar of Sensation’ (2011).
old comforting yet Ptolemaic vantage points: ‘we do not need a new discovery, we do not need a new explanation and we do not need a new theory; what we need is a new perspective, a new metaphor, a new picture’ (Monk 2005, 65).

One of the anecdotes recounted in Malcolm’s Memoir assumes new clarity in this connection. In conversation, Wittgenstein apparently made an observation that struck Malcolm. ‘A person caught in a philosophical confusion’ he said ‘is like a man in a room who wants to get out but doesn’t know how. He tries the window but it is too high. He tries the chimney but it is too narrow. And if he would only turn around, he would see that the door has been open all the time!’ (Malcolm 2001, 44). I would like to suggest that Wittgenstein’s instruction to ‘turn around’ relates to (yet is not inspired by) the Platonic concept περιαγωγή (turning) referred to in the Republic 515c. Heidegger has elaborated the conceptual affinity between περιαγωγή and παιδεία (education) in the Platonic text where the latter is defined in terms of the preparatory condition of the former: a turning that affects the entire being of the person, changing their life (Heidegger, 1998 166).

Conclusion

If there is a didactic objective in Jarman’s film – if his intention was to teach something of Wittgenstein’s philosophy – then we would expect this to be available in some accessible way. I have tried to demonstrate that Wittgenstein’s early (tractarian) theory of representation is doubled as a kind of constructive aesthetic methodology (something like Wittgenstein’s suggestion at §3.1431 to imagine propositions as composed of chairs, tables and books) to make propositions that model facts associated with the philosopher’s life in Wittgenstein. However, there is also a very curious aspect of the film that remains pertinent to my argument. I earlier indicated the incongruity between the anti-mimetic stylised aesthetic of Wittgenstein and the verisimilitude of the casting. The effect is extraordinary and uncanny: two logically incompatible aesthetic conventions combined in one picture. This aesthetic incongruity has its epistemic consequences in the context of the late philosophy’s discussion of aspect-seeing. The picture has

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37 It is no coincidence that the scene immediately following the Seminar Scene takes place in a cinema. Earlier in Jarman’s film Wittgenstein says: ‘There was no competition between the cinema and seminar. I loved films. Especially Westerns and Musicals’ (Jarman 1993, 108). Malcolm’s memoir corroborates this. Wittgenstein, he recollects, was often exhausted after his seminars and would ‘look imploringly at a friend and say in a low tone, ‘Could you go to a flick?’ In the cinema, he would insist, Malcolm continues, ‘on sitting in the very first row of seats, so that the screen would occupy his entire field of vision, and his mind would be turned away from the thoughts of the lecture and his feelings of revulsion. Once he whispered to me, ‘This is like a shower bath!’ His observation of the film was not relaxed or detached. He leaned forward in his seat and rarely took his eyes off the screen’ (Malcolm 2001, 26).
not changed yet it causes us to perceive it to be now one way, now another: now, that is, Wittgenstein is a visualisation – or, better, actualisation – of the picture theory of the proposition that encourages us to review its own logical standards (is the picture theory itself true?), now it is a post-Brechtian play about the life of a philosopher involving an extremely true-to-likeness cast of characters. This more than anything may finally explain why the film seems oddly right to Wittgensteinian viewers.

At the end, the black curtains are finally drawn back to reveal an efflorescent sunset into which Young Ludwig rises from the death-bed scene. The Martian delivers a final soliloquy, which includes two remarks from the finale of the Tractatus, including, ‘The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies outside space and time’ (§6.4312). Ludwig rising into the roseate and silver skies with the assistance of an apparatus of balloons and batwings evokes the intriguing ethical attitude sketched in the concluding sections of the Tractatus. Everything of value is extrinsic to the world and nothing of value in life can be expressed by a proposition. If propositional language is incapable of representing anything of value, then neither ethical nor aesthetic ideas (the traditional axiological dimensions importantly identified in the Tractatus) can be expressed. Wittgenstein’s axiological attitude here is characterised by Daly as an ethics of escape (1961-2, 54). And as Ludwig ascends into the obviously fake yet beautifully coloured sky, we clearly sense what Daly means; we are reminded of the experiences Wittgenstein associated with supreme moral value in ‘A Lecture on Ethics’, that parallel the tractarian ethics of escape: wonder at the existence of the world and feeling absolutely safe were associated by Wittgenstein with metaphysical guilt, that is, with the belief ‘that God disapproves of our conduct’. When read in conjunction with the schweigen-hypotheses in the Tractatus these thaumaturgical experiences ultimately elucidate the ‘latent (and probably unconscious)’ structure of the Tractatus but not, as Levi argues, because Wittgenstein ‘was working out a self-protective pattern of behaviour to shield himself from his most extreme tendencies toward promiscuously homosexual inclinations’ (Levi 71) but rather to protect the truly meaningful experiences of life from being reduced to trivial reformulations: Ethics, he asserts, ‘cannot be expressed’ (TLP §6.421). Yet by concentrating exclusively on what it is possible to express (i.e., represent in language) paradoxically, for Wittgenstein, although itself ultimately trivial, nevertheless allows something of supreme meaning to well up in us. ‘There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical’ it is impossible to describe. What remains necessarily transcendent of all systematic formulisation is yet evoked in life precisely by respecting the prohibition not to capture it: saying nothing but what can

38 Yet in §6.5 Wittgenstein states that the riddle doesn’t actually exist, for, ‘If a question can be put at all, then it can also be answered’.
39 Presented to a select group in Cambridge in 1929 (or 1930).
be said establishes a limit beyond which lies the hinterland of the indescribable. Paul Engelmann used a seminal motif to characterise the method of the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein’s boundary is not intended to define what is bounded *inside* it but rather to allow the unbounded power of what lies beyond it to be sensed in its ‘oceanic’ immensity. Is it possible to reread ‘The world is all that is the case’ without experiencing this wonder?

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