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Wittgenstein's Aesthetic *Kulturpessimism*: An *Aspectist* Approach

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Abstract From the perspective of my particular aesthetic theory of aspects (or *aspectism*), I would propose an approach to Wittgenstein's philosophical thought, focusing on a personal anecdote of Wittgenstein's own in which he makes aesthetic assessments of music and architecture. Wittgenstein's words can be interpreted in three different ways: from the relationship between the artistic and the moral within the framework of his notion of culture; from some biographical details of Wittgenstein himself; and from the meaning of his *Kultupessimism*. Finally, the importance of "courage" (*Mut*) for him sheds light on the relationship between nature, language, and culture, showing how critique and commitment can coexist with an acknowledgment of a certain inability to *see*.

Keywords: Wittgenstein's aesthetics, *Kulturpessimism*, aspects, aesthetics of music, aesthetics of architecture.

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This paper[1] is intended to pay a humble tribute to two of my *maestri*, recently deceased, in the work of approaching the thought of Wittgenstein: Jacques Bouveresse and Benjamin R. Tilghman. Both scholars were pioneers in underlining the relevance of the concept of aspect in Wittgenstein's philosophical thought. They were for me a decisive boost in order to develop the aesthetic scope of that concept in my own theory of aspects. My proposal will not focus on the central texts of Wittgenstein, but rather on some peripheral texts and *memoirs*. In fact, the driving force behind this text is actually some Wittgensteinian remarks, often indirect ones (that is, captured in the testimonies of others), that have always intrigued me. There is also a certain playful spirit in my choice of examples, particularly musical and cinematic ones.
The structure of my presentation will be as follows: 1) I will start from an anecdote that refers to an aesthetic assessment of music and architecture made by Wittgenstein, 2) in order to propose three possible keys to interpret this assessment: a) a first key based on the Wittgensteinian idea that understanding a work of art ultimately implies

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understanding a culture, and, implicitly, that aesthetic values and moral values are intimately linked, b) a second key based on some biographical data about Wittgenstein, and 3) a third key based on the critical and, at the same time, committed Wittgenstein's *Kulturpessimism*. Finally, 4) I will propose a special interpretation that underlines a certain notion of nature, in connection with the concepts of culture and language, supported by the meaning of "courage" (*Mut*) for Wittgenstein. My starting point is an anecdote told by Rush Rhees, one of Wittgenstein's students, in his *memoir*:

> Once when we were sitting in Trafalgar Square he spoke of the architecture of the buildings and especially of Canada House. We had been talking of music and of how hard it is to play Brahms at the present day. Myra Hess played Brahms exactly in the way which had been right during Brahms's lifetime. But to play him that way *now*–with just the emotional emphasis to fit the emotional reactions of people then–this made the music meaningless for us. There was only one man he had heard in recent years, a pianist who really did know what the music meant and played it– "and that was the *great* Brahms." A nose for what was music and what was rhetoric. The way Myra Hess played it would have been music in Brahms's day, but now it's just rhetoric; and whatever it gives us, it isn't Brahms. Wittgenstein pointed to Canada House, which the builders were just finishing. This architecture has followed a tradition by taking over certain rhetorical forms, but it says nothing in them. Large scale, meant to fit within a great culture. But–waving his hand towards it – "that's *bombast*; that's Hitler and Mussolini." He would not have said that another architect might have built one that *wasn't*. Not today, and not here. And Canada House helped to show why Hitler and Mussolini *had* to work with bombast. As it showed how truly they were one in spirit with us. (Rhees, 1981: 225-226)

The anecdote is not exactly dated by Rhees, although it could very well be from the late 1930s or early 1940s. Myra Hess was an English pianist who organised concerts in London during the Second World War.



Myra Hess (free license)

We have some moving images of Myra Hess playing the piano in a propaganda documentary film, *Listen to Britain* (Humphrey Jennings and Stewart McAllister, 1942)[2]. As we can see, this is a film designed to keep British morale high during the war, but the editing work also serves to construct the idea that the nation, across its entire social scale (from workers to the Queen), leads a life dedicated to the war effort (unity is strength), but also a "normal" one (phlegmatically normal, I would say) supported by British values and lifestyle.

[2] The film can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nq1UqU2u1hs (accessed 11 July 2026). See in particular Hess's performance from 14:54 until 17:54.

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I think there are at least three keys (or three directions) in order to interpret Wittgenstein's words.
The first key is perhaps the broadest, and is based on the Wittgensteinian idea, lucidly exploited by Tilghman (Tilghman 1994) with regard to architecture, according to which understanding a work of art ultimately implies understanding a culture. In other words, a work of art is an expression of an understanding of a culture, and therefore, understanding the wide range of human practices and values behind a work of architecture is understanding an entire culture. The example of Canada House explicitly mentioned by Wittgenstein is quite easy to comprehend.



Canada House in 2015 (free license)

It's quite clear what Wittgenstein means when he speaks of "following a tradition", "taking over certain rhetorical forms", or "large scale": just look at the pediment and Greek columns (a-functionally) adorning one of the building's façades, or the CANADA sign inserted into the upper pediment, or the inhuman, overwhelming scale of the floor space encompassed by the columns. Indeed, there is an entire culture behind the columns and pediments of the Parthenon. We have learned to make sense of them from the heritage of the Pythagorean proportion (the golden ratio), the ideality of Platonic pure geometric figures, or the religiosity of the Greeks and the civil and social role of their temples and their architecture in general. But by the time of Wittgenstein's remark, this cultural background had been lost, and in its place was in another culture where all these features now had a different meaning, in a decidedly "rhetorical" and "bombastic" way.
David Cooper (2008) has elevated this idea to a comprehensive theoretical proposal named "virtue-centrism." The virtues Cooper speaks of are not a monopoly of ethics, but rather refer to an "integrated human good" prior to "artificial" particularizations of the ethical, the aesthetic, the legal, etc. For Cooper, the experience of beauty not only reflects a conception of the human good, but also contributes to its formation, in the sense that, for example, for Palladio, Roman buildings were not simply proof of the virtue of that people, but perhaps his admiration for beautiful buildings contributed to cementing and forging the Roman understanding of virtue, or in the sense that, for example, Zen gardens contribute to the good (virtuous) life of the inhabitants of the monasteries of Kyoto. According to Cooper, the movement of sensibility does not proceed in a single direction, from moral perception to aesthetic appreciation or vice versa. I quote:

> Instead we witness, in such examples, the maturing of a conception of the good life in which the components we tend to allocate to the respective realms of the moral and aesthetic intimately, indeed inseparably, combine. (Cooper 2008, 260).

In his *Wittgenstein, Ethics and Aesthetics* (Tilghman 1991), Ben Tilghman begins by pointing out that, unlike the *Tractatus*, in the *Philosophical Investigations* there are no explicit

considerations on ethics and morality, nor on aesthetics or the philosophy of art, but rather

> […] a philosophical diagnosis of traditional philosophic thinking about language and about what in the broadest sense can be called psychological concepts. This traditional philosophy is shown to misrepresent the nature of our language and this in turn results in the misrepresentation of the nature of people and our understanding both ourselves and of others. (Tilghman 1991, xi)

But what interests me most now is what Tilghman's fragment says next:

> What Wittgenstein has done is to show how it is with our language, how our language is woven into our lives and how that weave must incorporate our understanding of other people. What has not been generally realized is that this understanding of other people brings with it the possibility of moral relationships with them and opens a way that can bring art into our lives as well. (Tilghman 1991, xi)

I'm naturally interested in this because, in the final lines, Tilghman explicitly mentions the link between morality and art, and at the same time shows the centrality of this link in Wittgenstein's thought. There is a link between ethics and aesthetics that permeates Wittgenstein's thought, although it takes a distinctive form in the *Philosophical Investigations* and the work of the later Wittgenstein.

For me, Tilghman and Bouveresse were the Wittgensteinian pioneers who most clearly and lucidly showed how the ethical and aesthetic consequences of Wittgensteinian thought were not only intimately connected to each other (which seemed to be affirmed already in the "Ethik und Ästhetik sind Eins" of the *Tractatus*), but above all they showed how these ethical and aesthetic consequences were connected to the linguistic core of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, and connected to it centrally rather than peripherally[3].

A good example of this is how Tilghman (Tilghman 1984) finds in the understanding of others (of other people) the best antidote to the misunderstandings of understanding art. For example, if we conceive of the understanding of a work of art as a relationship (as we normally do in our understanding of people) and not as a mere object or event, then many of the traditional problems of aesthetics dissipate. Tilghman's conclusion is that the ability to see aspects and use words in secondary senses, which is central to explaining aesthetic meaning, rests on the mastery of a technique supported, albeit partially (since it also depends (1) on the imagination, and (2) on the causal and experiential link), by our competence in the primary uses of language, which in turn reinforces the importance of the connection between art and the world and human life (in its most everyday and basic dimensions). This emphasis has an anthropological and experiential meaning (for Tilghman) that is not obvious, and to which Tilghman furthermore gives normative force when he says that something (bad) happens when art has become disconnected from people's real problems and interests. With this, Tilghman does not intend a generic condemnation of the production of certain avant-

[3] References to Bouveresse, Tilghman and Cooper in this text should be understood as a tribute to them, rather than as an examination or questioning of the (undoubtedly existing) limits of their positions. Similarly, the differences in the way the link between ethics and aesthetics is understood at the various stages of Wittgenstein's thought certainly entail notable nuances which I cannot address here and which do not affect the main purpose of this text. I am very grateful for the clarifications provided by an anonymous reviewer in this regard.

garde movements such as conceptualism or minimalism, but rather a critical key that is as well-founded as it is powerful.

For his part, Jacques Bouveresse had already emphasised with extraordinary clarity and lucidity in *Wittgenstein: la rime et la raison* (Bouveresse 1973) the importance of notions such as *seeing*, *seeing as*, *perplexity*, *further descriptions*, or *aspect blindness* in what we might call the aesthetic dimension of later Wittgensteinian thought[4]. In his final period, Bouveresse gave us a book, *La connaissance de l'écrivain* (Bouveresse 2008), dedicated to literature, truth, and life in which Wittgenstein continues to play a central role, this time in dialogue with Proust, Nussbaum, Valéry, Musil, Flaubert, and many others. A central idea of that book is that literature teaches us that there is a certain knowledge of the world and of others that is only possible with the tools (with the peculiar intimate connection between form and content) that literature itself forges and fosters. Bouveresse has the virtue of bringing together *aspectivity* (Wittgenstein's *looking and seeing*), literature (as an example of an artistic approach to reality), and moral life. The conclusion is optimistic: we can learn (acquire knowledge) from others, both in art and in moral life, but this knowledge is experiential (not theoretical), and in it, *tips* (*further descriptions*, that is, *seeing as*, invitations to *look and see*) play a central role, taking the place of demonstrations that would be found in a theory.

But let's now turn to the musical example in the previous passage, which is less obvious than the architectural example of Canada House. For Wittgenstein (following Rhees), let us recall:

> Myra Hess played Brahms exactly in the way which had been right during Brahms's lifetime. But to play him that way now–with just the emotional emphasis to fit the emotional reactions of people then–this made the music meaningless for us. There was only one man he had heard in recent years, a pianist who really did know what the music meant and played it– "and that was the great Brahms." A nose for what was music and what was rhetoric. The way Myra Hess played it would have been music in Brahms's day, but now it's just rhetoric; and whatever it gives us, it isn't Brahms.

From the interpretive logic of the cultural background that we have applied to his diagnosis of Canada House, we are immediately reminded of Wittgenstein's lack of attunement with the avant-garde music of his time. We know that he was conservative in musical tastes. "Music reaches an end point with Brahms; and even in Brahms I can begin to perceive the noise of machinery", he tells his friend Drury (Rhees 1989, 190). And we also know that Wittgenstein extended this qualification of a period of decadence (*Kulturpessimism*) to the culture of his time in general. But this line of interpretation does not leave us entirely satisfied with this quotation, because Wittgenstein goes a little further in his judgement of Brahms's performance by Myra Hess. Because what he's saying is that the same interpretive style (a style we might call emotional, emphatic, or romantic: "with just the emotional emphasis to fit the emotional reactions of people then") that Myra Hess uses for her current performance would have made sense in Brahms's time (the great period), but not now, that is, against the perceptual background of this period of decadence. By playing Brahms in the same

[4] My doctoral thesis and my first book, *Comprender en arte* (Rubio 1995), drew directly from and confidently gained momentum from this emphasis, the most surprising observation of which I found, at first, in the aesthetic examples of Wittgenstein's most peripheral work (*Culture and Value*, *Lectures on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religion*, or Moore's seminar notes), but which ultimately, at a later stage, forced us to return to the most "central" works and thought of the later Wittgenstein, such as the *Investigations* (or even the *Tractatus*) with a renewed spirit.

way, Myra Hess is now playing badly; she is merely rhetorical, and ultimately fails to do justice to Brahms ("whatever it gives us, it isn't Brahms"). We are tempted to think that for Wittgenstein, it really made no sense to play Brahms after the great period. In fact, he ends up saying this about architecture:

> He would not have said that another architect might have built one that wasn't [bombast]. Not today, and not here.[5]

With Brahms's musical interpretation, Wittgenstein seems less definitive. It may make sense to play Brahms now, but at least it should be done differently than it was played in Brahms's time and the way Myra Hess plays it. Playing Brahms like Myra Hess is like putting Greek columns and pediments on modern buildings. They made sense in the Parthenon, but not in Canada House. The only sense they have left is a clear symptom of the decline of this new culture.
I must admit that I don't find Myra Hess's interpretation (at least in the fragment we can see in *Listen to Britain*) particularly emphatic or romantic. It's true that she plays Mozart, not Brahms. I've also heard Myra Hess playing Brahms, and I don't find it particularly emphatic, or at least no more emphatic than other current versions. I shall not pursue a discussion of competing interpretations of Brahms's piano works. This isn't about getting into a discussion on the correct way or fitting of playing Brahms on the piano today. What is relevant, and I will put this aside for now, is that a characteristic feature of *aspectivity*[6] appears here in a surprisingly clear way. This is the clearest and most concise definition of aspect that Wittgenstein himself gives:

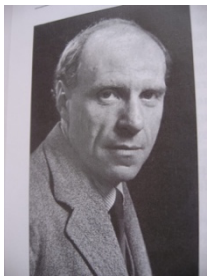
> "I *see* that it has not changed; and yet I see it differently." (IF, xi,193)

Brahms is the same Brahms, but my view of Brahms has changed after hearing him played in a certain way. Even Brahms's work performance may be the same, but it doesn't mean anything, it doesn't "say" anything, in the same way in this new era.
Why do I now momentarily abandon this other, let us say, *aspectist* line of interpretation? Because the question of the mysterious pianist remains, which you will surely have noticed in Rhees's passage. Wittgenstein does not say that it is impossible to play Brahms adequately in the current context of his commentary. In fact, he says that

> There was only one man he had heard in recent years, a pianist who really did know what the music meant and played it– "and that was the great Brahms." A nose for what was music and what was rhetoric.

We may never know who that man was, but let me offer a hypothesis, a well-founded one, even a mere hypothesis, or even a curiosity, if you will.
In an article by Vicente Ordóñez (Ordóñez 2014) on Wittgenstein and Brahms, there is a quote from the *Memoirs* of Max Zweig (Austrian playwright, cousin of the famous writer Stefan Zweig). We have photos of him.

[5] If we think of the house designed by Wittgenstein on Vienna's Kundmangasse for his sister Margarete, we must not forget that Wittgenstein never considered it a work of architecture or art, but simply an expression of "good manners."
[6] I will use "aspect" to refer to the Wittgensteinian phenomenon, "aspectivity" to refer to the capacity for aspect perception, and "aspectism" to refer to my particular theoretical framework. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this clarification.


Max Zweig (free license)

In these *memoirs*, the playwright Max Zweig mentions another Zweig (not a relative this time), Fritz Zweig. Fritz Zweig was a composer, pianist, and conductor, a disciple of Schoenberg. After emigrating to the United States to escape Nazism, he taught musicians such as film composer Miklós Rózsa and mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne, among others. We also have some photos of him.


Fritz Zweig (free license)

The passage from Ordóñez's article is as follows:

> In his *Memoirs*, the playwright Max Zweig recounts that he first met Wittgenstein during his stay in the Moravian town of Olmütz–specifically, at the house of Paul Engelmann [the architect, a friend of Wittgenstein's, as we know], somewhat ironically called the Mauritzplatz Palace. Wittgenstein was sent there in the middle of the First World War to attend an officer's training. Zweig explains that he once witnessed a conversation between Wittgenstein and the concert pianist Fritz Zweig about the "similarity and difference between the music of Schubert and Brahms; but an understanding of this conversation presupposed such a profound knowledge of music that I was unable to follow it" (Zweig 1987, 78). A person educated in the 19th-century Viennese Bildungsbürgertum, with a fine musical sensibility, and also endowed with absolute pitch like Wittgenstein, such a person is capable of penetrating the core of Brahms's music and discerning its springs and nuances. (Ordóñez 2014, 81-82)[7]

Was Fritz Zweig the mysterious pianist who, in Wittgenstein's eyes, still knew how to play Brahms –the genuine Brahms– in this new era? Perhaps one day we will know. I offer it merely as a plausible hypothesis. And what would that correct, meaningful way of playing Brahms sound like in that new era? (It is true that I have not found recordings of Fritz Zweig playing Brahms on the piano.) More importantly: Is that era still ours? These are very interesting questions, but they would lead us astray from the path I have traced.

Let's now retake the question of aspects. My *aspectism* has no pretensions to all-encompassing perspectivism (*à la* Ortega or Nietzsche) nor to relativism of any kind

[7] My translation.

(there is nothing relativistic about Wittgenstein). I have simply argued (and still argue) that understanding in art implies being able to see something from the appropriate aspect. The key moment of such understanding is the emergence of an aspect (the dawning of an aspect). And *aspectivity* rests, in turn, on what Wittgenstein often calls "internal relations" or "networks of relations": understanding a work or a fragment of it (or a period of an author's work, or an author's entire work, or an art, or art itself) consists of fitting it together meaningfully (that is, silencing the puzzlement it previously caused us), integrating it into a new network of relationships with the rest of the elements (a comprehensive dimension). And that is something that can be *seen* (or grasped): understanding is not a mere intellectual exercise[8]. The widest ring (in abstraction) of this comprehensive dimensionality is an entire culture (understanding a work of art ultimately implies understanding an entire culture, says Wittgenstein). Therefore, the dawning of an aspect is that which makes me say, "Yes, now I see it, now I grasp it". And the proof that this is so, that I have grasped it, is that I am able to do certain things or to refrain from doing certain things, even if not immediately. We are not (fortunately) continually jumping from one dimension of understanding to another in our lives as music lovers, film or theatre spectators, or as readers of literature. But it is absolutely crucial for aesthetic understanding that it is possible to say things like, "Look at it like this or like that" (*further description*[9]) and respond, "Yes, now I see it". For Wittgenstein, who shared with Fritz Zweig an education at the 19th-century *Viennese Bildungsbürgertum*, as well as a fine musical sensibility, endowed, moreover, with absolute pitch, listening to his interpretation of Brahms would be a *continuous seeing* in which he recognizes his ability to "penetrating the core of Brahms's music and discerning its springs and nuances." For Rhees, and perhaps for us as well, listening to Fritz Zweig's Brahms would be an opportunity to challenge (*puzzlement*[10]) our understanding of the authentic Brahms (or of the authentic, meaningful interpretation of Brahms today). In fact, what Wittgenstein was trying to do for his friend Rhees when he compared Mira Hess's interpretation of Brahms to Canada House was nothing more than an attempt at *further description* (successful or not).

Another line of interpretation of the passage at hand is that, in Wittgenstein's vindication against bombast and empty rhetoric, which we have seen referred to Canada House or the interpretation of Brahms, the austere and alternative (and therefore avant-garde, despite himself) Wittgenstein emerges. The Wittgenstein who dressed in a flannel shirt and jacket, who always ordered his French omelet at Bewley's, who went to the movies to watch Westerns or read detective stories without any pretense of artistic flair. Perhaps this parsimony was a conscious response to the end of great art, the art of a great era that had already ended. And the phantasmal interpretation of Fritz Zweig's Brahms that we will never hear is actually the shadow, the liminal moment (like Brahms

[8] Although the concept of courage (*Mut*) will be examined in particular detail in the final section of this text, it is worth emphasizing at this stage its key role in my *aspectism* when explaining how *seeing* is not merely a perceptual phenomenon, or how *further descriptions* imply a vector of reorientation, or, finally, how sustained cultural criticism without despair presupposes a form of moral attitude.

[9] *Further descriptions* (see Wittgenstein's PO 106): explanations of meaning consisting of comparisons, associations, analogies, examples, metaphors, connections, juxtapositions, repetitions, transitions, redundancies, contextualizations, invitations to highlight this or that element, invention of new contexts of interpretation, etc. These are the type of reasons that we often use in the most everyday aesthetic situations and play such an important role in real artistic and aesthetic praxis.

[10] *Puzzlement* (see Wittgenstein's LC 28-29 and PI II, xi, 200): a sort of comprehensive *impasse* that we reach in the language (or comprehensive dimension) in which we find ourselves installed and that incites me to a change of aspect to jump to a new comprehensive dimension.

himself and the noise of the machinery[11]) of that transition without return between two eras of which Wittgenstein speaks. Wittgenstein's parsimonious manner would be what Cooper called *an overall, integrated human good* in which the ethical and the aesthetic appear fused.

But finally, towards the end of Rhees's passage, the relationships of the aesthetic, the moral and the political (even) with language, culture and nature become more acute and complex. The passage ends like this:

> Large scale [referring to Canada House architecture], meant to fit within a great culture. But – waving his hand towards it – "that's *bombast*; that's Hitler and Mussolini." He would not have said that another architect might have built one that *wasn't*. Not today, and not here. And Canada House helped to show why Hitler and Mussolini *had* to work with bombast. As it showed how truly they were one in spirit with us.

Wittgenstein (always through the filter of Rhees's *memoirs*) ends up equating the (rhetorical) bombast of Canada House in Trafalgar Square with the (rhetorical) bombast of Hitler and Mussolini, their need "to work with bombast". Indeed, Hitler and Mussolini needed to deploy their rhetorical bombast to achieve their political and military objectives. Literally, we could say that the Nazi and Fascist salute is to ancient Rome what the Canada House columns are to ancient Greece. They follow a tradition, they seem to adapt to a high culture, but they are inauthentic; they don't really "say" anything–if we are able to look at them and see them as Wittgenstein does (not as his German and Italian audiences did, that is, as the neo-mythological construction of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* intends, by the way).

Wittgenstein is not suspected of ideological affinity with Hitler or Mussolini (we already know this, and he gave proof of it in his lifetime), but his judgment on bombast goes beyond Nazi and fascist rhetoric and extends to the "us". "And Canada House helped to show why Hitler and Mussolini *had* to work with bombast. As it showed how truly they were one in spirit with us". The "they" and "us" undoubtedly refer to the two sides in the war: the Axis (Hitler and Mussolini) and the Allies (represented by the character of Canada House). The "us" also obviously refers to the fact that Wittgenstein is speaking with his friend Rhees in Great Britain, his new host nation. It is less obvious, but significant, then, that Wittgenstein clearly includes himself within the "us". There is no equidistance with respect to both axes, therefore, once this "us" is pronounced. But both (they and us) share their bombast in this new, non-great culture. It might seem that Wittgenstein's *Kulturpessimism* is enough to cover up and explain his judgment anew. But there is something more. What gives his judgment a clearly ethical (and not just political) character is precisely the tension between us and the others (they) that Wittgenstein draws through this comparison: Canada House "showed how truly they were one in spirit with us".

The word "spirit" (*Geist*) is also present in "For a Prologue [to the *Philosophische Bemerkungen*]," which is included in CV (CV, 8), where Wittgenstein calls for a certain attunement with a spirit of resistance to that other spirit of "the great current of European and American civilization." It seems to me that the analysis of the fragment from Rhees's memoirs places us in a privileged position to understand that striking and debated "For a Prologue" (that draft prologue to *Philosophical Remarks* that was never published as such). I quote it now as a reminder:

[11] "[Wittgenstein:] Music came to a full stop with Brahms; and even in Brahms I can begin to hear the sound of machinery." (Rhees 1981, 127)

> This book [*Philosophical Remarks*] is written for those who are in sympathy with the spirit in which it is written. This spirit is, I believe, different from that of the prevailing European and American civilization. The spirit of this civilization the expression of which is the industry, architecture, music, of present day fascism & socialism, is a spirit that is alien & uncongenial to the author. This is not a value judgement. It is not as though I did not know that what today represents itself as architecture is not architecture & not as though he did not approach what is called modern music with the greatest mistrust (without understanding its language), but the disappearance of the arts does not justify a disparaging judgement on a hole segment of humanity. (CV, 8)

If we think in *aspectist* terms, when Wittgenstein formulates the "us" and doesn't stop to distance himself from an equidistance with respect to "they" but instead affirms the affinity in spirit between "us" and "they," what he is really doing is elaborating a *further description* to make us *look and see* precisely what is already in "For a Prologue", that is, that one can be radically critical and even pessimistic about the new times without ceasing to believe in "energies" and "human value". The architecture, music, and literature of this new era are what they are (they will remain the same, and even inartistic, Wittgenstein believes), just as other post-artistic cultural manifestations will exist (with respect to high art), such as pulps or commercial cinema. In that sense, we see that *the thing is the same*. But Wittgenstein leaves open the door to the possibility of them being seen in their new configuration (that is, to *see things completely different*), although *de facto* he admittedly found himself incapable of seeing them in this way.

> For in these times genuine & strong characters simply turn away from the field of the arts & towards other things & somehow the value of the individual finds expression. (CV, 8)

And he goes on to say a little further on in "For a Prologue" something that reminds us of that reconfiguration of internal relations that is characteristic of the grasp of an aspect and the dimensionality of the comprehensive leap:

> Culture is like a great organization which assigns to each of its members his place, at which he can work in the spirit of the whole, and his strength can with a certain justice be measured by his success as understood within that whole. (CV, 9)

Nevertheless, Wittgenstein recognizes that there are *times without culture* that do not build, but rather nullify and destroy forces and energies. And here Wittgenstein, clearly, uses metaphors from physics and mechanics (energy, friction, distance, resistance). We cannot help but think of the war underway at the time and of Nazism, fascism, and Stalinism:

> In a time without culture, however, forces are fragmented and the strength of the individual is wasted through the overcoming of opposing forces & frictional resistances; it is not manifest in the distance travelled but rather perhaps in the heat generated through the overcoming of frictional resistances. (CV, 9)

However, Wittgenstein's *Kulturpessimism* is not the denial of a future, nor does it fall into apocalyptic qualifications:

> But energy is still energy & even if the spectacle afforded by this age is not the coming into being of a great work of culture in which the best contribute to the

> same great end, so much as the unimposing spectacle of a crowd whose best members pursue purely private ends, still we must not forget that the spectacle is not what matters.
> Even if it is clear to me then that the disappearance of a culture does not signify the disappearance of human value but simply of certain means of expressing this value, still the fact remains that I contemplate the current of European civilization without sympathy, without understanding its aims if any. So I am really writing for friends who are scattered throughout the corners of the globe. (CV, 9)

And that position is a radically critical one, but at the same time committed, vitally and philosophically. His vital commitment (in action, not in words) was evidenced in his active participation in English hospitals during the war. But philosophically speaking, his work implies, as we see, an attitude committed to the possibility of contributing something (a certain clarification, perhaps, or at least a way to avoid certain confusions) to an uncertain future of the "us" that he himself did not understand. Finally, this hypothetical (for him) community of friends (or compatriots, as he also calls them) to whom Wittgenstein addresses himself draws another possible "us" as an alternative to the generic and inertial "us," perhaps some *minor stream* alongside the *main stream*. And I would suggest that this peculiar combination of critique and commitment is, or at least so it seems to me, the true moral projection (or *minima moralia*) of Wittgenstein's thought.
However, there is one final interpretation to be made of these passages. Wittgenstein is pointing toward a certain concept of the nature of human beings, which would be the place where *energy* resides and where a certain *spirit* takes root. Jacques Bouveresse (Bouveresse 2000, 152) cites a fragment from "Philosophy," also from the 1930s, in which Wittgenstein brings forth, in connection with this broad concept of language (as a comprehensive dimension, a *seeing*), what he calls an *instinctive* state of rebellion, contrasted with other *instincts* to live within the herd.

> People are deeply imbedded in philosophical, i.e., grammatical confusions. And to free them from these presupposes pulling them out of the immensely manifold connections they are caught up in. One must so to speak regroup their entire language. –But this language came about [developed] as it did because people had–and have–the inclination to think in this way. Therefore pulling them out only works with those who live in an instinctive state of rebellion against [dissatisfaction with] language. Not with those who following all of their instincts live within the herd that has created this language as its proper expression. (PO, "Philosophy", 185)

What drives someone to adopt this position of rebellion or dissatisfaction with language (his *own* language, the one he is familiar with and should feel *at home* with): Wittgenstein's answer is courage (*Mut*)[12].

> I believe that what is essential is for the activity of clarification to be carried out with COURAGE; without this it becomes a mere clever game. (CV, 16 [1931])

But courage is not a mere voluntarist gesture toward *seeing*. On the one hand, there are *spirits* (be it the spirit of "the great current of European and American civilization", or the Jewish reproductive spirit) that induce our behavior, although they themselves are already an amalgam of nature and culture. On the other hand, *puzzlement* (that

[12] See chapter "Coraje" in Rubio 1995.

restlessness that drives me to leap toward a new *seeing*) arises, it emerges, it cannot be forced. Wittgenstein often uses the metaphor of the seed. Sometimes he uses it to describe the originality of his thought as an originality "of the soil" (synoptic, organising, comparative), and not "of the seed", which represents creative genius.

> My originality (if that is the right word) is, I believe, an originality that belongs to the soil, not the seed. (Perhaps I have no seed of my own.) Sow a seed in my soil, & it will grow differently than it would in any other soil. (CV, 42)

Wittgenstein strives to convince us that he himself lacks the courage to possess genius (even though his life is full, as we know, of clear gestures of courage, both vital and philosophical).

> One might say: "Genius is courage in one's talent". (CV, 44)

Other times, as here, the seed is the *puzzlement*:

> You cannot draw the seed up out of the earth. You can only give it warmth, moisture & light & then it must grow. (You mustn't even touch it except with care.) (CV, 48)

And courage can be nothing more (or less) than the disposition or the openness to be "in struggle against language". That's why no reader of Wittgenstein will be able to understand anything if they are comfortably settled in the language of the "great current of European and American civilization of progress". That's why Wittgenstein's work is, for him, nothing more (or less) than fertile ground. And that's why the seed requires the courage that allows puzzlement to take root.
In short, Wittgenstein's discomfort with Hess's Brahms or with the architecture of Canada House marks the liminal *momentum* in which perplexity becomes a condition for the possibility of a new way of *seeing*, which, admittedly, Wittgenstein himself never attained. Language, nature, and culture appear here in a peculiar mixture that sustains the tensions of critique and commitment, courage and sincerity, pessimism and hope.

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