# 'Now I Can Go On:' Wittgenstein and Our Embodied Embeddedness in the 'Hurly-Burly' of Life

JOHN SHOTTER

*Department of Communication, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824-3586, U.S.A.*

**Abstract.**
Wittgenstein is not primarily concerned with anything mysterious going on inside people's heads, but with us simply 'going on' with each other; that is, with us being able to inter-relate our everyday, bodily activities in unproblematic ways in with those of others, in practice. Learning to communicate with clear and unequivocal meanings; to send messages; to fully understand each other; to be able to reach out, so to speak, from within language-game entwined forms of life, and to talk in theoretical terms of the contacts one has made, as an individual, with what is out there; and so on — all these abilities are, or can be, later developments. Wittgenstein's investigations into our pre-individual, pre-theoretical, embodied, compulsive activities are utterly revolutionary. They open up a vast new realm for empirical study to do with the detailed and subtle nature of the bodily activities in the 'background' to everything that we do. The *relational* character of such pre-theoretical, Ur-linguistic, spontaneous bodily activities — and the way in which they display us as 'seeing connections' from within a 'synopsis of trivialities' — is explored through the paradigm of currently fashionable 3-D random dot autostereograms.

"We find certain things about seeing puzzling,
because we do not find the whole business of seeing puzzling enough"
(1953: 212)[1]

"What we find out in philosophy is trivial; it does not teach us new facts.
But the proper synopsis of these trivialities is enormously difficult, and
has immense importance. Philosophy is in fact the synopsis of trivialities"
(1980a: 26).

Unlike computers and other machines, as living, embodied beings, we cannot not be responsive to the world around us. We continuously react and respond to it, spontaneously, whether we like it or not; that is, we respond directly and immediately, without having 'to work it out.' And in so doing, we necessarily relate and connect ourselves to our surroundings in one way or another. As the kind of people we are, according to the kind of culture into which we have been socialized, we come to embody certain more elaborated ways of reacting to our surroundings immediately and unthinkingly than those we are born with.

Certain sounds, movements, physical shapes, smells, etc., occurring around us, 'move' us; they 'call out' vague, but wholly undifferentiated responses from us. Thus we find 'movements' of this or that, or some other kind at work in us, originating from others or an otherness outside us. Indeed, what we do later, individually and deliberately, originates – we might follow Wittgenstein in suggesting – in what we do earlier, in what we do socially and spontaneously: "The origin and the primitive form of the language game is a reaction;" he says (Wittgenstein, 1980b: 31), "only from this can more complicated forms develop. Language – I want to say – is refinement, 'in the beginning was the deed.'" "What is the primitive reaction with which the language game begins . . . The primitive reaction may have been a glance or a gesture, but it may also have been a word" (1953: 218). Yet somehow, in all our current disciplinary practices in the human and behavioral sciences, the way in which our immediate reactions are *necessarily related* to our surroundings, *and* the complicated nature of their refinements, has remained *rationally-invisible* to us. As professionals, we have mostly ignored our embodied embeddedness in this living flow of spontaneous but complex responsive activity. Not only have we let it remain unnoticed in the background to everything that we do, but we have ignored its importance *as* a sustaining, supportive, ever-present background in all our ways of making sense in and of our lives – there is something about its nature that we have failed to 'see!'

The failure to take proper account of the nature of this 'background' activity, is of especial importance in the newly emerging social constructionist movement (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Coulter, 1979, 1989; Gergen, 1991, 1995; Harré, 1983, 1986; Shotter, 1993a and b). For, both critics and exponents alike still face the special task of telling us how, by intertwining talk of a certain kind in with our other more practical everyday activities, it is possible for us to draw each other's attention from within such talk, to events *beyond* it. Indeed, this is precisely my task in this paper: to attempt to 'point,' from within its unfolding text, out toward the nature of our spontaneous, embodied understandings as they occur in our conduct of our everyday practices. For, as Wittgenstein (1980c: II) puts it, it is: "Not what *one* man is doing *now*, but the whole hurly-burly, is the background against which we see an action, and it determines our judgment, our concepts, and our reactions" (no. 629). Thus it is to the nature of these pre-cognitive, embodied, background responses and reactions – both to each other and to our surroundings – that I want to draw attention. And I want to do it through the use of some of the special methods (forms of talk) that Wittgenstein himself offers us, mainly in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), but in his other works also (Wittgenstein, 1969, 1980a, b, and c, 1981).

Indeed, this is what I take to be so very special in Wittgenstein's philosophy: That, on the one hand (as he himself puts it), "what is inexpressible (what I find mysterious and am not able to express) is the background against which whatever I could express has its meaning" (1980b: 16); but yet, on the other, he nonetheless shows us how, from within our own talk entwined activities themselves, we can still come to a grasp of their nature, in practice. We can do it *through*, or *from within*, our talk itself, even when a vision of it as a whole, in theory, is denied us. And it is the character of his practice – of clarifying our practices in practice – that I want to explore in this article.

## Clarifying our Practices in Practice (Not in Theory): Wittgenstein's Methods

In so doing, I shall adopt what we might call a *relational* approach to these issues, an approach common, I think, to both social constructionism and to Wittgenstein's investigations. It suggests that, instead of turning immediately to a study of how as individuals we come to know the objects and entities in the world around us, we should begin in a quite different way: by the study of how, by interweaving our talk in with our other actions and activities, we can first develop and sustain between ourselves variously many ways of linking, relating, and connecting ourselves to each other, in what Wittgenstein calls *forms of life*, with their associated *language-games*. And only then, should we turn to a study of how we 'reach out' *from within* these forms of life, so to speak, to make various kinds of contact – some direct and some indirect – with our surroundings, *through* the various ways of making sense of such contacts our forms of life provide. In such an approach as this, as I shall argue, our studies should be focused, not on individual people, nor on any abstract ('eternalized') systems beyond or underlying our socio-historical lives, but on what might be called, *the momentary relational encounters*, or on successions of such momentary encounters, that occur on the boundaries between us and our surroundings. And they should focus on the nature of the spontaneous, uninterpreted, responsive, bodily reactions 'blindly' called out within these marginal spheres or boundary regions. Where, the reactions and responses in question should be treated, not as 'natural' or as in any way pre-linguistic, but simply as occurring prior to the establishing of any particular "language games" between us, as constituting, in fact, the 'root' or the 'origin' of any such games. We might call them *Urphänomena*, the "proto-phenomena" in terms of which one plays a particular language game (1953, no. 654).

Taking this stance toward Wittgenstein's own 'grammatical remarks' – that he is concerned with clarifying a practice from within the practice itself – we notice that whatever he says (or does), he always talks of himself as

saying or doing it from within one or another kind of ongoing activity, from within one or another kind of relationship with his surroundings (surroundings that always include us as interlocutors).[2] Where, in simply bringing to our attention what is before our eyes, so to speak, he wants to 'cure' us of our 'will' or 'craving' to explain, to theorize, to 'cure' us of our obsessions with nonexistent, mythical entities of our own invention. We must attend to what we actually do do, in practice, to what our 'natural' reactions and responses are, in relation to the circumstances of our talk with the others around us. Thus, in characterizing the nature of his own investigations into our talk entwined activities, he suggests that they are not concerned "to hunt out new facts; it is, rather, of the essence of our investigation that we do not seek to learn anything *new* by it. We want to *understand* something that is already in plain view. For *this* is what we seem in some sense not to understand," he remarks (1953, no. 89). Thus, "we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place" (1953, no. 109). For our studies must leave "everything as it is" (1953, no. 124); it is our "way of looking at things" (1953, no. 144) that must change. He wants to give "prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook" (1953, no. 132).[3] Thus his aim is not to attempt to do better what other philosophies have failed to do; he is uninterested in constructing a great, systematic account of human knowledge and understanding. His interest is in 'moving' us in some new way, of changing our relationship to our surroundings; he wants to change our sensibilities, i.e., the things we notice and are sensitive to, the things we seek and desire, and so on. Hence, his talk is never 'idle' or 'free-floating,' unrelated to a specific context; that, as he sees it, is when we get ourselves confused, and confusions "arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work" (1953, no. 132).Indeed, when he is talking about a word, he is continually asking himself (and us): "is the word ever actually used in this way in the language game which is its original home? – What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical use to their everyday use" (1953, no. 116).

This emphasis upon always situating the use of our everyday words, gives us a first clue to Wittgenstein's methods. For, although his methods are as many and as various as those we use in life itself, many of them work in just the same way as our 'instructive' or 'directive' forms of talk in everyday life work. For example, we 'point things out' to people ("Look at this!"); give them 'commands;' 'remind' them ("Think what happened last time"); 'change their perspective' ("Look at it like this"); and so on. All these instructive forms of talk 'direct' or 'move' us, in practice, to do something we might not otherwise do: to relate ourselves to our circumstances in a different way, to look them

over in a different manner. Wittgenstein uses these forms, in drawing our attention to what is there, in the circumstances of our talk, before our eyes, that we also clearly use in our everyday practices, but fail to 'see' in accounting for our own practices to ourselves. He calls such remarks, "reminders:" for, "something that we know when no one asks us, but no longer know when we are supposed to give an account of it [cf. Augustine], is something we need to *remind* ourselves of" (1953, no. 89).

In fact, his 'methods,' his 'reminder-remarks,' seem to work as follows: i) They first *arrest* or *interrupt* (or 'deconstruct') the spontaneous, unself-conscious flow of our ongoing activity to give "prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook" (1953, no. 132). As 'instructive gestures,' they provoke us into stopping to consider a circumstance, to examine it to see whether there is 'more to it' than we expected. Then, ii) by the careful use of selected *images*, *similes*, or *metaphors*, he suggests to us new ways of talking that can lend or give a first form to the newly sensed, previously unnoticed distinctions, thus to make reflective contemplation of their nature possible. Then finally, iii) by the use of various kinds of *comparisons* with other possible ways of talking (other "language games"), he establishes "an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order with a particular end in view; one of many possible orders; not *the* order" (1953, no. 132) – thus to render the otherwise unnoticed distinctions in our activities and practices publicly discussable and teachable. Thus, a philosophy of this kind "simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. – Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us" (1953, no. 126). Where, the kind of grasp of the workings of our language he wants, is of an immediate and unproblematic kind: the clarity he aiming at is "*complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems [troubling us] should completely disappear" (1953, no. 133). But what is the nature of this urge for complete clarity, a sure and direct 'seeing?' What does he mean by it? How could it possibly be achieved?

In being confronted with such questions, we are often tempted to seek the 'hidden mental states and processes' (thought to be 'in our minds'), supposedly responsible for us doing what we do. Things will be clarified, once we know accurately what they are. Hence, our explanatory theories. But for Wittgenstein, they are irrelevant: not because there is no public way in which any theories of such supposed 'inner' events could ever be ultimately checked for their accuracy (which is true), but because he simply wants us to acknowledge or notice something else altogether. For what matters publicly, is how people 'interweave,' 'interrelate,' or 'interconnect' what they say and do to their surrounding circumstances; and how the practical

implications of what they say and do now are 'played out' in the future. It is how people react or respond, practically and bodily, both to each other and their circumstances in practice, that is of importance to him, how they 'go on' with each other. Thus, what some 'inner thing' *is* for us, our sense of 'it,' can only be discovered from a study, not of how we talk in reflecting upon it, but of how 'it' necessarily 'shapes' those of our everyday communicative activities in which it is involved *in practice*. Where 'its' influence is only revealed in the 'grammatical' structure of such activities: "Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is" (1953, no. 373). Where his 'grammatical remarks' are aimed, not at accurately representing the correspondence between our talk and our activities, but at drawing our attention to how our talk is in fact interwoven, moment by moment, in with other of our activities. Or, to put it another way: His remarks work by giving prominence to our moment by moment changing sense of the relations and connections between our talk and its circumstances, a sense that our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook.

But what is this kind of fleeting, continuously changing, embodied clarity like? And what would it be like for us to be able to 'see' the phenomena of importance to us, in this kind of plain view? What does he mean here? He seems to have in mind the kind of direct, unproblematic, spontaneous seeing we embody in our everyday, practical activities, in which we see things, spontaneously and unthinkingly in terms of the role or possible roles they might play in our lives. Thus, with respect to the flow of our everyday, talk entwined activities, rather than trying to discover the supposed component events *underlying* such talk, i.e., what they truly 'are,' he seeks another kind of understanding altogether, a certain kind of immediate, unquestioned, clarity or perspicuity, a kind of embodied sureness of understanding that consists in directly "seeing connections" (1953, no. 122). Thus, in his kind of investigations, rather than seeking "to *penetrate* phenomena" (1953, no. 90), to find "something that lies *beneath* the surface" (1953, no. 92), he seeks something else much more fundamental: he is seeking, I suggest, a special form of life, an inquiring or investigatory form of life, within which we specifically direct ourselves toward drawing our own attention to how we construct our own forms of life. And to do this, we need to seek the same kind of direct, unproblematic, spontaneous, continually changing, embodied seeing (and acting) within which all our everyday forms of life are grounded.

## Coming to 'Look Over' Phenomena in New and Unusual Ways

To do this, we must find a new way or ways of surveying (of 'looking over') phenomena before us that we have previously overlooked; we must

appreciate their previously ignored or unnoticed relation to, or connection with, the rest of our lives. How might this be possible? What exactly is it that we have to do, if we are to 'see' what we have previously failed to see? Before turning to discuss Wittgenstein's investigations any further, it will be useful to explore a possible relation between them and people's attempts to 'see' the 3-D virtual realities seemingly 'in' currently fashionable, single-picture, random-dot autostereograms (see for example, Horibuchi, 1994). For such phenomena may help to provide something of a shared experiential paradigm in terms of which to 'see' the point in some of Wittgenstein's remarks, and their connection with what I called "momentary relational encounters" above. For, to 'see' a 3-D 'reality' in these displays, it is not a new way of *thinking* we have to learn; nor how to *interpret* them. Being instructed in theories, principles, or laws; being told of or shown 'models' of what is supposedly 'hidden' in them; or being told how to judge or consider them; or having the processes involved in 'seeing' them explained; all are of no help. Such information might help to convince us (and to justify us arguing) that there *is* something there in particular to be seen; but it will not help in us actually *seeing* 'it!' For to *see* something in such displays (as we shall find in practice below), involves us in developing a *new way of looking*, in which what is seen in relation to a whole specific range of embodied reactions and anticipatory responses. Yet, it is not something we can adopt deliberately, just because we personally want to do it – we come to find the relevant reactions and responses occurring within us (or not, as the case may be) spontaneously.

Nothing less than a new form of life *in relation to* the printed page is involved; we have to learn a new embodied 'skill.' Yet, what is so exasperating and bewildering about it, is that we cannot develop the skill required deliberately. The new way of looking required must first occur 'blindly,' so to speak, in certain, momentary relational encounters between ourselves and our circumstances. And in being produced jointly, as a novel outcome of nothing either wholly within ourselves or within our circumstances, but of our special relation, we can often be surprised by their unexpected strangeness – the nature of the 3-D displays visible in autostereograms, being a case in point. In coming to such new ways of seeing, it is as if we must first just let our bodies react or respond to 'the call' of their new surroundings, thus to let them manifest to us the possible new ways in which we (as self-conscious individuals) might relate ourselves what is before us; they (our bodies) demonstrate possibilities to us that we might make use of as the grounds of a language game.[4]

To acquaint ourselves with such a phenomenon, let us begin quite practically: Consider the two black **X**'s below:

1                                        2
X                                        X

If we do not look 'at' them directly, so to speak, but go cross-eyed – by relaxing our eye muscles, and focusing on an appropriate point either in front of them (with eyes converging), or behind them (with eyes diverging) – we can 'see' the 1X (seen with one eye) superimposed on the 2X (seen with the other eye). When this occurs, we can still see both 1X and 2X, but in the middle, a third (virtual) fused or merged 1 and 2X appears in quite a different plane of depth to the other two X's. Try to focus upon this middle X. If it is seen by convergence, then it is sensed as seemingly *further* from us, and if by divergence, then as seemingly *nearer* to us. To use the terms introduced by Polanyi (1958, 1967), in his discussions of tacit or bodily knowing, we are attending *from* the separate views of 1 and 2 *to* a fused version of 1 and 2 – of which, he says, we have a *focal* awareness. In such a process, he claims, it is our subsidiary awareness of the particular workings of our eye muscles (in and around the eye), and other imponderable factors, that contributes to our sense of the focal, fused X's distance from us. Indeed, the fused 1 and 2X image, once it becomes focal, can be seen as quite sharp, while the separate 1X and 2X images in subsidiary view are more vague and noticed only peripherally. Indeed, it is worth spending a few moments, even on this simple display, exploring its phenomenology – the ability to see the displays in autostereograms is built on this basic ability.

In a second, intermediate move toward that skill, we can now play with the two-picture random-dot stereogram below[6] in the same way. As in the previous display, a third, fused, 1 and 2 version of the whole display will appear. In divergence, it will appear as standing out toward you from the page, with a smaller central square within it, as even closer; while in convergence, the whole display will appear as if 'behind' the page, with the smaller central square even further away. But 'where' is such a square to be located? For there is no sense in either of the two fields, separately, of the contours of any 'object' being present in them at all, let alone a 'square' as such – the dots are after all quite random. What we 'see' here is something that only inheres in what Wittgenstein (1953) calls an "internal relation" between the two 1X and 2X squares. Again, try to focus upon the fused version, for it is worth exploring this display for some time in making oneself aware of its many features.

And even at this preliminary stage in our explorations here, it is worth pointing toward the already very strange nature of the events occurring in these encounters, and how they relate to Wittgenstein's overall project. For, although we can imagine the *sameness* of the two dot patterns above being
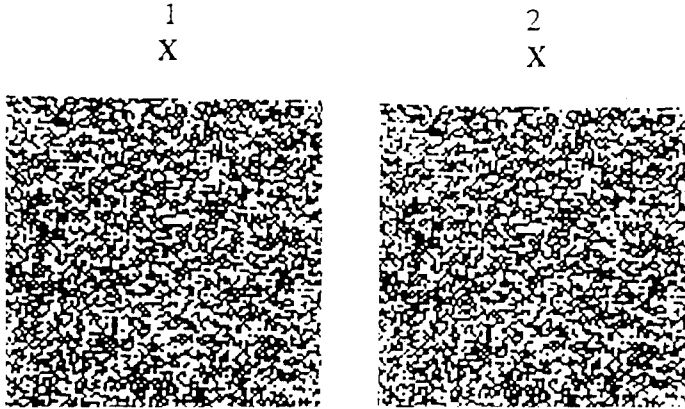
1
X

2
X



*Figure 1.*

detected, upon them being merged together, why do their *differences* (in the central region) not just give rise still to a 2-D region, but of an uncoordinated or chaotic kind? Why are the dots in the central region coordinated *also*, but now . . . *as* a region at a different distance away from us, in a seeming three dimensional space? Indeed, as Wittgenstein remarks about 3-D vision in general, "it is anything but a matter of course that we see 'three-dimensionally' with two eyes. If the two visual images are amalgamated, we might expect a blurred one as a result" (1953: 213). But that is not what happens. Instead of the different views to the two eyes resulting simply in a vague and indistinct 2-D image, our subsidiary awarenesses of the differences and samenesses between them, is constituted spontaneously and bodily, *as* a focal *sense* of a 3-D scene (seemingly seen even more sharply that the separate 2-D displays). However, our development of this special way of 'looking over' or 'surveying' the relations between the elements in such displays, and interconnecting them or rearranging them in such a way, so as to see them *as* having a three dimensional quality, is something our body happens to do for us, so to speak: As I have already mentioned, it is what might be called a "proto-phenomenon" (1953, no. 654), an Ur-phenomenon that is in itself groundless that just happens to be there, "like our life" (1969, no. 559). It is unique, practical, just happening, ungrounded meanings such as these, that he thinks of as the crucial grounds, or originary moments, for our language games.

But how should we talk of the special kind of 'seeing' involved here? In surveying such circumstances as those above (and many others), Wittgenstein straightaway points out that we use the word 'see' in two quite different ways: "The one: 'What do you see there?' – 'I see *this*' (and then a description, a drawing, a copy). The other: 'I see a likeness between these two faces' – let

the man I tell this to be seeing the faces as clearly as I do myself" (1953: 193), where in the latter, due to one's particular way of looking, one sees likenesses, relations, or connections in a circumstance not seen by others. We might call the former kind of seeing, representational-seeing, while this latter form of seeing – "half visual experience, half thought" (1953: 197), that we can to an extent be 'talked into' or 'trained in' – he calls *aspect seeing*, but I shall call *practical relational-seeing*. It is this kind of 'seeing' in which we can 'see' a circumstance *differently* even though the total perception remains unchanged, that is important for us.[7] For what we 'see,' depends on us having constructed one or another "internal relation" between two otherwise unrelated or unconnected circumstances. And what changes in aspect-seeing or relational-seeing – when we 'see' a circumstance differently – are the subtle reactions and anticipatory responses of a practical kind, the 'gestures,' in terms of which we 'go out' to bodily relate ourselves to our surroundings. Thus, the relational-meaning of what we actively 'see' in our circumstances is always unfinalized and incomplete; it 'points toward' yet further relational possibilities in our circumstances.

What is special in relational-seeing, then, is that in each case it involves a particular 'orchestration' of acting (looking, attending), perceiving, responding, and thinking; it is a way of seeing into which has been interwoven a whole complex of linguistically shaped spontaneous, living responses to the situation in question; we thus see it 'as' a situation of a certain kind. For instance: In viewing the famous faces-vase figure, looking with a vase-way-of-looking, we expect to look down to a possible base, up to a possible rim, with a possible stem in the middle; similarly, with a faces-way-of-looking, we expect to look down from a possible forehead region, to a possible eye region, to a possible nose region, and so on. It is against the background of such structure of expectations, that we might want to say that "The drawing you've given me is *nearly* like the faces-vase figure, but this middle region here is too featureless for me to 'see' any proper faces in it" – for such a structure of expectations provides us with the 'standards,' so to speak, against which we can judge what we 'see'[8]; they are the Ur- or proto-phenomena in terms of which we can make sense our circumstances. Indeed, without the ability always to see such immediate connections and relations in a circumstance, if we were what he calls "aspect-blind" (1953: 213–214), then, although we might still learn already established, conventional meanings, we should not be able to respond in our own unique ways to the meaning of what for us, were our own unique circumstances.

To return, then, to the task of coming to embody (we can now say) a new way of seeing – thus to elaborate further a shared experiential basis in terms of which to make sense of Wittgenstein's remarks about the momentary,
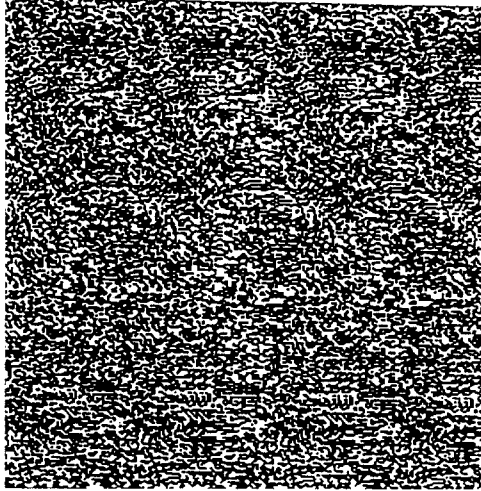
*Figure 2.*

relational origins of language games – we can introduce a further figure: The stereogram below can be 'seen' by first merging the 1X and the 2X as before, and while focused upon the fused 1 and 2X, slowly transferring one's interest to the random-dot display below: Diverging, one can see a cross-shaped, conical hole going into the page; converging, it will come out of the page. It is constituted on thirteen (!) different planes of depth.

Without going into the theory of such displays in any great detail, it is worth appreciating the complexity of the activity involved here: For their nature is such that to achieve a common, 'overlaid' focal point – as in the 1 and 2X example, but now maintaining it in whatever direction one might look as one scans over the page – the sight lines of one's two eyes must be *continually* crossing at *different distances* in front of one.[9] It is this moment by moment changing sense of where that common point of overlay lies, continually sensed from within our active involvement with the display, that creates the impression within us (the "internal relation") of us as looking out over a 3-D scene. For, just as one does not see an actual 3-D scene 'all at once,' but must survey and integrate its features over a period of time in a succession of momentary encounters, so one does not see what is exhibited in an autostereogram 'all at once' either – one's perception of it takes time to 'develop' or 'dawn,' so to speak (1953: 194). Indeed, it is only after one has learnt 'how' to look over such displays in a certain way, i.e., as possible 3-D spatial orders, and can sustain that 'way of looking' while 'surveying' the

whole scene, that can one begin to discern the patterns or entities they present to us directly and instantly. Indeed, from within a now fully embodied way of looking, a fully embodied structure of anticipations and expectations, we can come to 'survey' or 'look over' such displays with a *sense* of the whole scene *as* 'being all there' before one.

But why is it still only a sense of an *apparent* 3-D reality? Why does it still have an *as if* quality to it? Because, although we can 'go out to meet' our visual environment, so to speak, with *some* of the appropriate kinds of anticipatory responses – like being ready to adjust one's focus and convergence as the 'distance away' of a 3-D feature changes – we cannot satisfy other of the more usual expectations we have in a real three-dimensional space. As Wittgenstein (1953) remarks: "an 'inner process' stands in need of outward criteria" (no. 580). So although we may have the visual impression of a 3-D 'reality,' that in itself is not enough; we expect, for instance, to be able to reach out to touch the objects it contains also! Indeed, although we cannot always specify the relevant outward criteria ahead of time – i.e., other "internal relations" between otherwise disparate events in our particular ongoing circumstances – it is always possible *from within a form of life* (actual or imagined) to be (fairly) sure of the moment by moment criteria in terms of which we claim our perceptions as veridical – even if the evidence is often of an "imponderable" (1953: 228) kind.

This is what Wittgenstein wants to bring to our attention: That we function in this complex manner, in a way crucially related to the circumstances or surroundings in which they occur, spontaneously, unselfconsciously, without effort or deliberation; that in so doing, we form mysterious "internal relations" between otherwise unconnected events occurring in them; that these Ur-phenomena form an order of possibilities in terms of which we understand the actualities around us; and that we fail to grasp this fact when we come to reflect on the nature of our own practical activities or practices. When we view a circumstance from with a particular relation to it, we do so from within a whole background set of embodied, unselfconsciously entertained anticipations and expectations as to what its yet unencountered aspects might be like. And we 'show' (and experience) the nature of these embodied anticipation in our reactions (and feelings) of 'surprise' or 'oddness' when our expectations are dashed.[10] It is in our own spontaneous reactions and expectations – both in our tactile, auditory, and visual, etc., responses to our physical surroundings, *and* in our verbal and linguistic responses to our social surroundings – in our momentary relational encounters with our surroundings, that we 'show' ourselves the nature of our relations to them. It is these activities, these compulsive, involuntary, spontaneous, and very subtle embodied responses and reactions, that we shall explore further below. These are *what* lie open

to view 'in' our relational encounters with each other (and the rest of our circumstances), if only we could 'see' them – or at least, so Wittgenstein claims.

## 'Seeing' Wittgenstein's Relational World Relationally

Just as we found a way of 'looking over' the myriad random-dots making up an autostereogram display to 'see' a surprising order of "internal relations" in it, something like a 3-D visual scene, so we also need a 'way of surveying' the myriad relational encounters making up the 'bustle' or 'hurly-burly' of our everyday lives. For we want to 'see' there too, connections and relations between momentary events in our lives that so far are without meaning for us, that we do not at present understand. We want a "synopsis of trivialities" that allows us to 'see' relationally what we have not seen before. So, in the light of our momentary relational encounters with the 3-D virtual realities in random-dot stereograms, and their capacity to call out new forms of relational-seeing from us, let us now turn to a further consideration of Wittgenstein's remarks about language-games and their origins: First, it is worth pointing out that he suggests that, what makes it difficult for beginners to see what he is 'getting at' in them, is what he calls "the craving for generality" (1965: 17), as well as, "'the contemptuous attitude [they often have] towards the particular case'" (1965: 18) – two attitudes that we come to embody in being trained into our current forms of scholarly life. Encountering his remarks, we still tend not to respond to them with the appropriate, embodied reactions and expectations; we still do not know how to *apply* them to or in our scholarly practices; we do not know how to embody them in our lives; we still do not see their 'point;' we don't quite know what he is telling us about how language works. Due to the influence of 'science' in our training, we are still often tempted into thinking that, if we are to understand how language works, we *must* discover a hidden *order* underlying or behind a seemingly chaotic array of observable linguistic phenomena, and must account for its existence in terms of explanatory *theories*. We still feel compelled to seek something that "lies *beneath* the surface. Something that lies within, which we see when we look *into* the thing, and which analysis digs out" (1953, no. 92). Thus often, we still 'look at' what he has to say in terms of the 'pictures' or 'models' it provides. And finding them often trivial and unexplanatory, we fail to see the point of his remarks. In other words, trained primarily in representational-seeing or looking, we fail to be sensitive to the possibility of relational-seeing or looking.

Indeed, academically, we often act like those who have not yet experienced the sudden "Oh, wow!" reaction of actually seeing 3-D random-dot

stereograms. For those lacking the actual experience can still be tempted into accepting that a theory (or a model, or a 2-D perspective drawing, say) of what such displays contain will help them. They might even to tempted to go so far as to claim that, on the basis of all kinds of data analyses and calculations upon the distribution of the dots in the display, they can in fact *prove* that they correctly *knew* what is hidden in the dots. And they might be tempted to leave the matter there – except, perhaps, to claim that other 'objects' could be 'found' in the distribution of the dots also – without feeling driven to seek the experience itself. Yet once one has 'seen' a 3-D scene in such a display, everything changes. Confronted with new displays, we are no longer content with such indirect, theoretical indications as to what they *might* contain; we feel new urge or compulsion to 'see' them all directly, in the same way; and we are not content until we can. And once we can, we feel a sureness about it; that 'that' (the convergence or the divergence version) is what the display contains; it is not a matter of contestable interpretation.

Why? Because we feel that there is something special about this kind of embodied 'seeing.' There is something 'real' in it for people like us, with bodies like ours, for people who can reach out in certain ways to grasp things, move in order to get things further away, or turn to avoid walking into things, and so on; such a kind of understanding is relevant to people who can *do* things in the world. It is to do with us knowing different ways of how to orient and relate ourselves to the world, with knowing practically how to 'go on' within it – not only physically, as we shall see, but with the other people around us too. And a similar compulsive desire can be generated, I want to suggest, on grasping the revolutionary nature of Wittgenstein's whole project. Once we have grasped its essentially existential nature, we can become no longer content with arguing about theories and interpretations. We begin to wonder if it is possible to change our practices such that we can come to 'see' what he claims is there, in plain view, for us all to see too.

*A Hermeneutic: 'Now I Can Go on'*

If we are to understand Wittgenstein's remarks, what *is* the structure of expectations and relations appropriate to 'seeing' what he sees, to seeing those aspects of our lives that usually pass us by, that we must come to embody? What *is* the reality he claims lies before us, open to view? What is the nature of Wittgenstein's world, so to speak? Well, whatever *it* is, to repeat, it is not something intrinsically hidden from us, but something at work everywhere in the daily 'bustle' (1980c, II, nos. 625, 626) of life around us. And if we are to 'see' its nature, like coming to 'see' the virtual realities in autostereograms, we need a simple, initial way of 'entering into' the 'seeing' of what he means here. However, because the 'reality' in question here is not

merely a 3-D spatial reality in which a 'spatial shape' is in question, but a *practical-social* one (that has a whole temporal and/or historical dimension as well) to do with meanings, we need a hermeneutic through which to read him, a unitary vision of a human form of life that will allow us to place a whole set of fragmentary parts within an orderly whole.

That hermeneutic, I claim, can be found in such remarks as the following: "Try not to think of understanding as a 'mental process' at all. – For *that* is the expression which confuses you. But ask yourself: in what sort of case, in what kind of circumstances, do we say, 'Now I know how to go on . . ."" (1953, no. 154). Or: "A philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about'" (1953, no. 123); or, "it is *the circumstances* under which he had such an experience that justify him in saying in such a case that he understands, that he knows how to go on," (1953, no. 155). Indeed, in practice, "understanding is like knowing how to go on, and so is an ability: but 'I understand,' like 'I can go on' is an *utterance*, a *signal*" (1980c, I, no. 875). In other words, as he sees it, it is as if we are often lost in an immense landscape (perhaps with hills and valleys, cities and villages, and so on), immersed in a fog, trying to find landmarks, attempting to get our bearings, thus to continue with our movements and motions over it and within it – whatever they may be.[11] Thus, in adopting this image, I shall assume that in his investigations, he is not primarily concerned with cognitive events within our heads, with us doing anything intellectual. Nor is he concerned with us necessarily understanding each other, nor with us sharing agreements, nor with us necessarily communicating with each other (in the sense of sending any immaterial ideas or concepts from the 'mind' of one person into that of another, by the use of material signs such as vibrations in the air or ink-marks on paper), nor with us necessarily discovering the 'true' nature of our surrounding circumstances. In fact, he seems unconcerned with us doing anything in particular at all, let alone anything that is seemingly 'basic' to us being human.[12] For, from within our spontaneous ways of 'going on' with each other in a sensibly followable way, we can achieve all the other things we think of as being important to us. Given the possibility of us being able to 'go on' in certain ways with each other, our other capacities – to communicate (send messages), to fully understand each other, to routinely and skillfully discourse upon a subject matter, even the constructing of *theories* in terms of which we claim to be able to explain the nature of the things around us, and to establish the 'truth' of things – such abilities as these are (or can be) much later developments.

In other words, rather than researching into all the complicated intellectual things we can do as individuals, he suggests that we should begin all our studies by focusing on those moments in which all of our activities, we simply

'go on' with each other in a spontaneous, unthinking, unproblematic fashion
(1953, nos. 146–155). As academics, as 'scientifically inclined' intellectuals,
we are used to thinking that 'pictures,' that 'inner mental representations,'
underlie all our thinking, and that such 'pictures' *must* constitute the basis
for all our activities. But what is crucial for him, is simply the character of
reacting and responding bodily in ways that make the continuation of our
relationships with each other possible. Thus, rather than with describing pre-
vailing actualities, his investigations are directed "towards the *'possibilities'*
of phenomena" (1953, no. 90), that is, toward grasping the nature of the con-
nections and relations that our actions and utterances 'point to' or 'gesture
toward' beyond themselves. Particular actualities can be established later,
through a set of testings and checkings, etc., which again will involve us in
'going on' with each other appropriately. Indeed, particular language games
are of interest to him only in relation to their particular uses. For, we can
invent forms of life and language-games that later we abandon, forms we no
longer feel to be 'right' for us: "new types of language . . . come into existence,
others become obsolete and get forgotten" (1953, no. 23). Where again, it is
our simply being able to 'go on' with each other, as embodied beings, that
makes this possible. Thus ultimately, all our problems must find their solu-
tion in us again being able to 'go on' with our activities in an unproblematic,
unthinking way, with us again being able to relate ourselves directly to our
surroundings, and to find a grounding or rooting for our actions in a way of
living out our lives. But how do we do this, how do we in fact 'develop' or
'socially construct' ways of 'going on' between us that we can trust, that we
can rely on?

   We do not seem to do it (nor do we need to do it) by discovering any
already existing but hidden 'laws of social relation' to which we must submit
ourselves; for no such laws seem to exist.[13] How we do it, must somehow be
up to us. There must be something in a form of life that stands fast for us:
the particular "proto-phenomenon" (1953, no. 654) constituting the basis, the
originary moment, for its language-game. It is that in which we can 'ground'
our talk. It must be something we can 'point toward' or 'show' in our talk
within it. But how?

*'Going On' Blindly: Momentary Practical Meanings in Momentary
Relational Encounters*

In attempting to characterize the nature of the spontaneous, unthinking com-
pulsions we feel to act in certain ways in certain circumstances, we can study
what Wittgenstein has to say about us 'following rules:' In this, we can begin
by noting that he is not at all interested in rules formulated as abstract prin-
ciples, those that we have to think how to apply – "to *think* one is obeying a

rule is not to obey a rule" (1953, no. 202), at least, not in the sense of 'obey' in which Wittgenstein is interested. The rules of interest to him are those at work in us, tending to shape our conduct *whether we like it or not*. Indeed, he is continually concerned with what, within a particular circumstance, we feel we *must* say, or are *inclined*, or have a *temptation*, an *impulse, compulsion*, or an *urge* to say. However, used to thinking of rules as something written down somewhere, like premises that we must make a wilful and intellectual effort to apply, to follow, or to implement, we find his talk of rules not easy to follow.[14] Indeed, if we begin with some of our more orderly, 'established' or 'institutionalized' activities, it may seem as if we are (or could be) following general *rules* of a fixed kind, like 'premises' existing prior to the practice: in these activities, it is as if such rules 'cause' or 'determine' the particular activities making up the practice. However, if we consider some of the joint, everyday activities we 'just do' spontaneously, without any prior delibera-tion, problem-solving, interpretation, or other inner intellectual 'working out' – seemingly simply activities like hand-shaking[15] or dancing or negotiating other people's movements upon side-walks or at door-ways; playing ball and racquet games; or, how we manoeuver furniture with the help of others, for instance – there are clearly no such fixed, prior, external rules, nor could there ever be.

Yet, nonetheless, although changing moment by moment, in such activities as these, there is a clear sense of 'rightness of it,' a clear sense of sometimes 'getting it wrong,' and of us as sometimes ending up embarrassed and having to apologize. So, although we may talk of ourselves in some of our practices *as if* we are following clear, fixed, and general rules, what in fact influences us in our practices, Wittgenstein points out, often seems to go way beyond them. Indeed, in discussing the moment by moment execution of a particular activity in a particular circumstance, he asks: "'But how can a rule show me what I have to do at *this* point? Whatever I do is, on some interpretation, in accord with the rule' – That is not what we ought to say, but rather: any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning" (1953, no. 198); " . . . there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule,' and 'going against it' in actual cases" (1953, no. 201). In these kinds of joint, momentary relational encounters, there is a changing, moment-by-moment sense of 'getting it right,' a sensing of differences and discrepancies that flows out of and accords with the 'situation' in which the activity occurs. So, although participants respond to each other in a 'fitting' manner in such situations, to the extent that they influence each other's actions in a moment-by-moment fashion, the 'situation'

between them is intrinsically unpredictable and indeterminate; none of the participants contain within themselves an explicit grasp of its nature.

Thus, in these kinds of spontaneous social activities,[16] where what we do is 'shaped' just as much by the social context 'into' which we *must fit* our actions, as any inner plans or desires from 'out of' which we act, it is as if 'it' – the 'situation' – is a third agency that 'calls out' reactions, spontaneously, from us. Hence Wittgenstein's remark that, on those occasions when someone has failed to grasp a rule, and you repeat it to them by saying, "But don't you *see* . . .?', the fact is "the rule is no use, it is what is explained, not what does the explaining" (1981, no. 302). For their failure to grasp what to do is a practical failure, a failure to react or respond to the circumstances in the right kind of way. Hence also, his remark that: "Giving grounds, . . . justifying the evidence, comes to an end; – but the end is not in certain propositions striking us as immediately as true. i.e., it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language game" (1969, no. 204). Ultimately, just spontaneously being able to act in a certain way is what justifies our claim to understanding; there can be no question of justifying one's understanding of a language-game, if one can 'play' one's part in it, one understands it.

Thus, obeying rules in Wittgenstein's sense is, strangely, what we might call a pre-intellectual rather than an intellectual matter. For, following the 'requirements,' so to speak, of the circumstances or situation (actual or imagined) in which one is involved, is simply to react in certain ways, bodily and spontaneously, to do what 'it' calls out from one. It is not something one chooses to do, but something one finds oneself doing as the kind of embodied being one is. So: "When I obey a rule," he says, "I do not choose. I obey *blindly*," (1953, no. 219). Thus, if I am asked, "'How am I to obey a rule?' – if this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule the way I do. If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do'" (1953, no. 217). In other words, we act as we do because it is implicit in the kind of people we are or have become; it is or has become *embodied* in the character of our being in the world. Where, it is not through simply being told things that we have become like this, but through the doings we have done as a result of such tellings – themselves the result of our already existing social practices. Hence his claim that, as he sees it, "'obeying a rule' is a practice" (1953, no. 202). If I must give reasons for why I act as I do, " . . . my reasons will soon give out. And I shall then act, without reasons" (1953, no. 211). In other words, there is something at work shaping our actions in such circumstances not in us as individuals, but, as it were, centered in the 'space' between us and our circumstances. Where, it

could be said, that it is something 'in that space' that calls a reaction out from us, i.e., the "internal relations" we constitute between us within it.


## Conclusions

At this point, it is perhaps worth repeating the remark with which we started — that in Wittgenstein's view "the origin and the primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop" (1980b: 31) — but now, to emphasize four facts: 1) That all the reactions in question are unthinking, 'blind' reactions; 2) that by their very nature, they relate and connect us both to each other and our surroundings; 3) that the formative influences shaping them are not wholly 'in' any of us as individuals, but are located in the momentary relational encounters between us and our circumstances; and 4) that all that we in fact do as individuals, we do against the usually unnoticed 'background' of these relational reactions. Thus, with respect to the 'seeing' of the fused 1 and 2X discussed above (in which we experienced what we saw *as* either above or below the plane of the paper), we can now say that we 'saw' it in this way against, or in relation to, *the background of our usual, everyday ways of seeing in the world*. And it is in this way that the aspect-seeing, or, the practical relational-seeing involved, is something that we can to an extent be 'talked into' or 'trained in'. For it consists in a contrived way of 'calling out' a sequence of reactions from us, of putting into an 'arrangement' a set of reactions already spontaneously available to us.[17] In a similar fashion, our thoughts and actions take place, neither simply within our heads, nor out in their circumstances as an inert 'container,' but also centered in the 'space' between them and their circumstances. Hence his remark that "thought is surrounded by a halo" (1953, no. 97); at each moment, it presents an "order of *possibilities*," seemingly common both to world and thought, an order of what else in the circumstances ought to be, i.e., of links and connections with, say, the past, the future, other things, events, people, and so on. It is within such circumstances as these — in our momentary relational encounters — that I think Wittgenstein's notion of what it means to obey and to understand a rule can be grasped.

What Wittgenstein brings to our attention, then, is the relational character, the extent, and the influence of the usually unnoticed, taken-for-granted 'background' activities constituting the everyday lives we live as non-intellectualizing, non-deliberating, embodied beings — the 'things' we *just do* because of the forms of social life within which we have grown up. We easily tend to forget both these background activities — the "important accompanying phenomena of talking" (1953: 218) — and the different structures of feeling, or the sensibilities, woven into our different language games with their asso-

ciated forms of life, and how they both 'shape' our spontaneous, embodied ways of responding to each other. We tend to think of ourselves as doing all these things 'naturally,' while, to outsiders, they seem uniquely historical and cultural. They are all so momentary and fleeting, so intricate and elaborate, so spontaneous and immediate, that we find it difficult to attend to them. But in Wittgenstein's view, it is precisely the extent and complexity of our embodied reactions to each other and our surroundings, that distinguishes us from other living creatures, not our ability to have inner mental representations – language is a refinement of more primitive reactions. Indeed, "one forgets that a great deal of stage-setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense" (1953, no. 257).

Thus, in wanting us to look "into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: *in spite* of an urge to misunderstand them" (1953, no. 109), what he wants us to 'see,' I have suggested above, is the immense complexity of the spontaneous, momentary bodily reactions and responses, in terms of which all that 'stage-setting' is done. For without it, none of our social practices, both everyday and academic, would work. How we in fact do this 'stage-setting' is always in some sense – a practical sense – in plain view to us. Yet it is this that intellectually and academically we have so far failed to notice. This is why I think Wittgenstein's work here is, to repeat, utterly revolutionary. For: i) it not only orients us toward an entirely new task; ii) it also introduces to us an entirely new set of methods relevant to its pursuit; and iii) it also opens up a strange new, creative space, a relational-space in which we can originate new forms of life, new living connections and relations between aspects of our lives not before noticed.

In an article of this length, it is impossible to range over "the immense landscape" (1980b: 56) he brings to our awareness (but not wholly 'into view') in his work. We can never 'picture' it as an integrated whole. Indeed, his aim is to 'cure' us of wanting what we cannot have: for we can never see *all* our own possibilities ahead of time. But, we can explore the specific nature of the circumstances in which it is possible for us, simply and sensibly to 'follow' or to 'grasp' the 'tendencies' in each other's conduct now available to us. We can bring to our awareness the 'tendencies' we 'show' each other in our activities, those that enable us to 'go on' with each other in the spontaneous, unreflective ways we do in our current daily affairs. Correspondingly, he is also concerned to seek ways of talking in which we can avoid 'misleading' each other (and ourselves) into confusion. He wants to avoid ways of talking about how we understand talk, that – because they forget their circumstances, because they fail to exhibit any clear connections with their surroundings – lead us into misunderstandings, or into inventing mythologies or empty

theories. For we far too easily forget (especially as academics) the original relation of our talk to its 'background' circumstances; we forget its 'use' or 'uses;' we forget its 'original home,' so to speak; we often confuse ourselves in making sense of it by placing it in a 'new home,' in a 'theoretical framework' of our own devising. The import of Wittgenstein's focus on our practical, embodied 'goings on,' however, is that our investigations can never come to an end in us achieving such a framework, in us as individuals finally 'seeing' something *as true*. They can only in fact come to an end in us all as a social group coming *to do something new*, in us all devising between us a new practice, one that at least to an extent overcomes some of the dissatisfactions of the old.

## Notes

1. All date-only citations are of Wittgenstein's works.
2. "Nearly all my writings are private conversations with myself. Things that I say to myself tete-a-tete" (1980b: 77). Their *conversational*, or dialogical, character, however, opens them up to us, too.
3. And we could insert here, that he wants to give "prominence to distinctions, *and relations and connections*, which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook."
4. "What is a telling ground for something is not anything *I* decide" (1969, no. 271).
5. My eyes tend to diverge 'naturally,' so to speak, as soon as I cease to focus on the surface of the paper. So I can see one of the merged views that way quite easily. A trick that works with most people to get divergence, is to start with the page touching one's nose. Then, to try to get a view with each eye of the 'same thing' (in this case an X), and then to move the page away until a fused version of the 'thing' (i.e., an X) comes into clear focus. To get one's eyes to converge in front of the paper, a trick I use is to hold up a ball pen point in line with the X's and look at that, while noticing that my vision of the X's has doubled. Then to adjust the position of the point while still fixating upon it, until you can notice the appearance of the 'three-Xs' display in the background. Now gradually transfer your 'interest,' so to speak, to the middle, fused X.
6. The two-picture random-dot stereogram was developed in 1959 by Bela Julesz (Julesz, 1971). A matrix of small black and white squares in equal numbers but in random distribution is first generated – call it the left field. The right field is then formed by shifting a central region (a 'square' region, say) a few dots to the left. This region will then be 'seen' as standing out from the background when both fields are viewed by divergence (and in from the background, by convergence).
7. Indeed, as we shall find below, it is an important result of his method of investigation (making comparisons, using metaphors, etc.) that it confronts us with *übersichtlichen Darstellungen*, i.e., perspicuous representations, where, as Wittgenstein (1953) says, "a perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in 'seeing connections'" (no. 122).
8. Thus, for me, when I say such a thing, it gives others a basis for judging what things are like for me: " . . . This is how I act . . . My judgments themselves characterize the way I judge, characterize the nature of judgment" (1969, nos. 148, 149).
9. Either in front of or behind the printed page, according to whether one is converging or diverging.
10. "Sure evidence is what we *accept* as sure, it is evidence that we go by in *acting* surely, acting without any doubt" (1969, no. 196).

11. "I am showing my pupils details of an immense landscape which they cannot possibly know their way around" (1980: 56).

12. Indeed, as he sees it, communication in the sense of message-sending is *not* in fact basic to us being human: "Not: 'without language we could not communicate with one another' — but for sure: without language we cannot influence other people in such-and-such ways; cannot build roads and machines, etc. And also: without the use of speech and writing people could not communicate" (1953, no. 491).

13. Even in the *Tractatus* (1988 [1922]), he is convinced that "There is no order of things *a priori*" (T: 5.634); that "at the basis of the whole modern view of the world lies the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena" (T: 6.371). And in the *Investigations*, while he is concerned "to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order with a particular end in view; [it is] one out of many possible orders; not *the* order," (PI: no. 132) — because there is no such single order to be had. Whatever orders there are, are orders that we ourselves make.

14. This is, of course, our commitment to *foundationalism*.

15. These are, in fact, activities of great complexity. Helen Keller somewhere talks of being able to recognize a person (remember that she was both blind and deaf) from their handshake up to two years after first meeting them. This is amazing!

16. Elsewhere, I have called such activity *joint action* (Shotter, 1980, 1984, 1993).

17. Monk (1990: 301–304) points out that Wittgenstein's urge to replace theory with a "synopsis of trivialities," is in the same tradition as Goethe's *Die Metamorphose der Pflanze* and Spengler's *Decline of the West*. All of them want to capture the nature of *living* forms: the problem is solved by the constitution of a *synoptic presentation*, of a "perspicuous representation" (see note 7), in which something already lying open to view, "becomes surveyable by a rearrangement" (1953, no. 92).

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