SINGULARITY AND VISUAL PERCEPTION[1]

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Abstract: This paper deals with the mutations in Wittgenstein's treatment of the notions of "generality" and of "singularity", from his first philosophy, in the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, to his later mature philosophy represented by the Philosophical Investigations. As we shall see, Wittgenstein's philosophical handling of the notion of "visual perception" plays a key role in those conceptual transformations.
Keywords: Wittgenstein, generality, singularity, visual perception.

Resumo: Este artigo trata das mutações no tratamento dado por Wittgenstein às noções de "generalidade" e de "singularidade", desde sua primeira filosofia, no Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, até sua filosofia madura posterior, representada por suas Investigações Filosóficas. Como veremos, o tratamento filosófico de Wittgenstein da noção de "percepção visual" desempenha um papel fundamental nessas transformações conceituais.
Palavras-chave: Wittgenstein, generalidade, singularidade, percepção visual.

> It seems plausible to say that the particularity of particulars is actually given in experience. … consider the content of a perception. … If so, then it can be claimed that the particularity of particulars, the fact that they are not exhausted by their properties and relations, is part of the content of perception. (ARMSTRONG, 1997, p. 95-6)

> And above all do *not* say After all my visual impression isn't the *drawing*; it is *this* – which I can't show to anyone. – Of course, it is not the drawing, but neither is it anything of the same category, which I carry within myself. The concept of the 'inner picture' is misleading, for this concept uses the '*outer* picture' as a model. (WITTGENSTEIN, 2005a, p. 196) (PI, p. 1996)

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[1] We employ the term "*perception*" to mean *a subjective response to a stimulus*. This seems to be the sense in which the *Gestalt* psychologists employed the term. There is an older acceptation, introduced by Descartes (DESCARTES, 1989, p. I, § 23) and used by Kant and the German idealists, in which *perception* is contrasted with *sensation*, as involving a reference to the external stimulus. (ABBAGNANO, 1982, p. "Percepção"). This is not the sense in which we employ the term here. A French version of this paper, carried out by Bento Prado Neto, was published in: *Philosophiques*, v. 39, n. 1, printemps 2012, p. 75-100.

Introduction

The idea of a *visual field*, of an internal two-dimensional extension – a kind of "screen spread somewhere within our mind, attentively scrutinized by our mind's eye" – has been harshly criticized by many philosophers and psychologists. But anyone who is familiar with the development of Wittgenstein's thought, from *Notes on Logic* to *On Certainty,* knows that for him the refusal of the idea of an "inner picture" is far more central and has much wider consequences for philosophy as a whole than is normally thought to be the case. For him, this is not just the matter of an item in the philosophy of perception. As we will see, the fate of the *inner picture* is connected to a central thread within his thought and represents one of the key mutations connecting his *Tractatus* to the latter *Philosophical Investigations*.

But, according to him, just why can't we model, say, a visual perception, according to the idea of an "internal painting"? What in a nutshell is wrong with this suggestion? The main objective of this paper is to propose a rather strange answer to this question. Our thesis will be: for Wittgenstein, a visual perception cannot be modeled after a picture, say, a photograph, because a photo is a *particular*, it is a *singular thing*. We will claim that this is *not the case* with a visual perception. Going against a tradition that stems at least from Kant, we will claim that for him visual perceptions *are not particular things!* Or, to put it more appropriately within the philosopher's terms, the grammar, the logical structure of the concept of *visual perception* is not such that the language game *singular/general* can always be played. Beyond a certain point, requests for further specification of visual impressions simply *cease to make sense*. We are left with a general description not liable to further specification. To construe a visual perception on the model of a picture would be to forget this grammatical difference. In Wittgenstein's jargon, it would be a terribly misleading analogy (*eine ifeführende Analogie*).

Our goal in this paper will be double, both exegetical and more strictly philosophical. As we've anticipated before, the history of the "*problem of the visual field*" has an extremely rich and central role within Wittgenstein intellectual development. The exegesis of this development has an interest on its own. So, we begin by the idea of *complete determination of sense*, so characteristic of Wittgenstein's initial thought, and trace this development all the way up to the problem of the *complete description of a visual perception*, a key concern in the philosopher's intermediary period. This first objective is going to absorb us for the first two sections of our paper.

The article's last section is going to be dedicated to Wittgenstein's final criticism of idea of a *visual field* (and that of an *internal object*). We believe his arguments here are novel, penetrating, and even revolutionary, and so their interest transcends the boundaries of a purely exegetical presentation.

The "Great Analysis" in the *Tractatus*

One of the most striking characteristics of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is its robust conception of an immense *logical machinery* hidden underneath our ordinary sentences. In the famous image of that text:

> … Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it …. The tacit conventions on which the understanding of everyday language depends are enormously complicated. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1961, p. 4.002)

In another passage from the preparatory *Notebooks of 1914-16*, we find the same idea:

> A proposition like "this chair is brown" seems to say something enormously complicated, for if we wanted to express this proposition in such a way that nobody could raise objections to it on grounds of ambiguity, it would have to be infinitely long. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 5)

Following Frege and Russell's lead, Wittgenstein proposes a total radicalization of the idea of *deep structure*. He envisions the theoretical possibility of a "*great analysis*" that would simultaneously fix, once and for all, both the structure of *reality* and of all *possible thought and language*. This unique analysis heralded at (WITTGENSTEIN, 1961, p. 3.25) would unveil the final tractarian *objects* laying at the bottom of reality. Once this basic stock was determined, all physical and psychological possibility would be somehow prefigured as mere combinations of these mysterious building blocks (WITTGENSTEIN, 1961, p. 2.0124).

But where does this rather extravagant idea comes from? What possible though process could have led Wittgenstein to this strange posit? As most of what is in the *Tractatus*, the idea of this "great analysis" was extracted *a*

priori as a *condition of the possibility* of language itself.[2] If language was what Wittgenstein thought it was then, this great analytical endeavor would have to be possible. So, let us back up a little and begin our exposition of the fate of idea of this great analysis by showing how it stems directly from the *Tractatus* view of what *language* and *sense* (meaning) are.

Bipolarity and Complete Determination of Sense

At the core of Wittgenstein's conception of *sense*, of *linguistic meaning*, lays the idea of *choice* (DOS SANTOS, 1994, p. 22). To *say something* is to *choose* between *alternative possible enunciations*, some of which are *false*, some *true*, reality being the ultimate tribunal. In the *Tractatus*, language is clearly thought of as *representation*. But even then, the possibility of *falsity* is taken as being *essential*: it *assures* that some *choice* has been affected. The strongest symptom of this is his idea that *tautologies* and *contradictions, just* because they lack, respectively, *falsity* or *truth* conditions, are *senseless* (WITTGENSTEIN, 1961, p. 4.461). Let us take an example. If one says "Either it rains, or it doesn't", one is not *committed to any particular outcome*: whichever happens is fine. But *precisely because of that*, according to Wittgenstein, one is not really *saying anything*, no *statement* is being done.

According to the philosopher of the *Tractatus,* thus, an enunciation involves choosing between alternate representations of *possible events*. Such is his famous *Principle of Bipolarity*: to understand a proposition is to know in which (*possible*) situations it would be counted as *true* and in which (*possible*) situations it would be counted as *false*:

> Every proposition is essentially true-false: to understand it, we must know both what must be the case if it is true, and what must be the case if it is false. Thus a proposition has two *poles*, corresponding to the case of its truth and the case of its falsehood. We call this the *sense* of a proposition. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 98)

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[2] "My difficulty surely consists in this: In all the propositions that occur to me there occur names, which, however, must disappear on further analysis. I know that such a further analysis is possible, but I am unable to carry it out completely. In spite of this I certainly seem to know that if the analysis were completely carried out, its result would have to be a proposition which once more contained names, relations, etc. In brief, it looks as if in this way I knew a form without being acquainted with any single example of it." (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 61)

Wittgenstein's *Principle of Bipolarity* is clearly derived from Frege's idea of *truth conditions*: the sense of a proposition is given by its truth conditions. But there is an important difference: Frege accepted any kind o settlement of truth conditions, even arbitrary ones (FREGE, 1977, p. 33). Not Wittgenstein. On his hands, the notion of *truth condition* is to be *ontologically* construed as *possible empirical events*, his *states of affairs*. As we know, for a proposition to be meaningful in the *Tractatus*, it has to project some *contingent happening*, an event that, though *possibly non actual*, could *effectively be the case*. Thus, strangely enough, Wittgenstein's *logical space* is constituted, not by *logical*, but by *real* possibilities.

As we know, Wittgenstein's conception of *sense*, the *content of a proposition,* is not *mentalistic*: it is not construed as a *subjective event* within someone's *mind*, but as *connection* with *reality*: the *projection* of a *state of affairs*. This is precisely where singularity comes into our story: empirical events are *singular*, *non repeatable entities*. Whatever *happens* is a *particular* event. So the truth makers of propositions are never *classes of events*, but always *singular entities*. Thus, the very *connection* of a proposition with reality – the only *source of meaning* according to the *Tractatus* – depends on the capacity of being *made true by a singular event* that this proposition has.

As we will see in a short while, even though *ordinary propositions* are perfectly all right as they stand[3] not one of them projects a *singular state of affairs*. According to Wittgenstein, even *grammatically single propositions* involve a large amount of *hidden generality*. And this *generality* has to be *matched* (or mismatched) by *singular events*. In our opinion this is the true source of Wittgenstein insistence on the *principle of complete determination of sense* and of his idea of a *Great Analysis*. Both these images are consequences of the fact that *propositions* (invariably general ones) have to be made true by a reality in which *there is room for generality*:

> It does not go against our feeling, that *we* cannot analyze PROPOSITIONS so far as to mention the elements by name; no, we feel that the WORLD must consist of elements. And it appears as if that were identical with the proposition that the world must be what it is, it must be definite. Or in other words, what vacillates is our determinations, not the world. It looks as if to deny things were as much as to say that the world can, as it were, be indefinite in some such sense as that in which our knowledge is uncertain and indefinite. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 62)

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[3] But this is surely clear: the propositions which are the only ones that humanity uses will have a sense just as they are and do not wait upon a future analysis in order to acquire a sense. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 62)

The idea of the *great analysis* and of a *complete determination of sense* are both non negotiable requirements of the tenet that propositions "extract their meaning" from reality. Ordinary propositions invariably involve *generality*: they have *truth conditions* (plural). So *all this implicit generality* concealed in ordinary sentences has to be cashed in before any one of them can be *made true* by a *singular event*. Thus, the multiple truth *conditions* of ordinary sentences have to be transformed into a *list of each single truth condition* (no plural) involved in its *sense*, before any *connection to reality* can be effected:

> In other words, the proposition must be completely articulated. … If generalizations occur, then the forms of the particular cases must be manifest and it is clear that this demand is justified, otherwise the proposition cannot be a picture at all, of *anything*. For if possibilities *are left open* in the proposition, *just this* must be *definite*: *what* is left open. The generalizations of the form – e.g. – must be definite. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 63)

The requirement of the *complete determination of sense* is a requirement derived from the very essence of what a proposition is: from its capacity to *represent, truthfully or falsely, reality*.

Ordinary names

There is no agreement among Wittgenstein's scholars as to precisely how the big logical analysis heralded by the *Tractatus* would proceed (GLOCK, 1997, p. 45). We are not interested here in all aspects of that endeavor, though. It will be sufficient for us an account of the fate of *ordinary names* within that process. We will avail ourselves of some ideas of Frege and Quine to help us in that reconstruction.

Let us take a typical *grammatically singular* proposition of our ordinary language:

John is tall

What should we say about its *truth conditions*, its *sense*? We can go back to Frege and point out the lack of *time determination* in this sentence. When John was a baby, he was not tall. Maybe now he is, maybe not. So *exact dating* should invariably be *added to the deep logical structure* of any empirical singular sentence to fix its *truth conditions*, to determine its *sense* (FREGE, 1977a, p. 10).

Is that all though? Are the truth conditions of a grammatically singular sentence like that completely determined? Even if we add a date, "*John is tall at such and such a date*", would this proposition project *one single truth condition,* a *unique state of affairs* that could make it true? It doesn't seem so. John maybe wearing a blue shirt or maybe he isn't. He might have shaved. In all such cases we will first have to *identify John,* and then check if he is tall. Another way to put what we are trying to say would be: does the expression "John" denotes a *singular entity*? Is "John" *really a name*? Is John an *object*?

Once again, Frege can lead us here. According to the German philosopher, there is a *logical requirement* that an expression must fulfill for it to be *properly called a "name"*: we have to check its behavior under *identity statements*. We need to be able to meaningfully ask questions involving its identity. And, more important, we need to have *identity criteria* for answering them.

> If we are to use the symbol *a* to signify an object, we must have a criterion for deciding in all cases whether *b* is the same as *a,* even if it is not always in our power to apply this criterion. (FREGE, 1978, p. 73)

So, in our case, what Frege is demanding is that we should have criteria for deciding statements such as, say:

John is the same person which I met yesterday.

or

The person in front of me is the same as the person I met yesterday.

Once again we will discover here a hidden *determination of time* disguised within the very logical structure of that ordinary "name". Instead of a *singular expression*, we seem to be dealing with a *general concept*, the concept "*being john*":

λtime, john's body. Being. John (time, john's body)

The identification question we were involved above appears to be exactly the task of identifying, at any given moment in time, which body is John' body. We could even go further and introduce spatial coordinates. We would then get the concept "*being a spatial part of John at the time t*":

[λt, x, y, z. Being. John (t, x, y, z)]

Only now we can finally obtain our ordinary singular expression. But, for that we have to introduce *one more logical operation*: Frege's dreaded *extensionalization of a predicate*. From the concept "being john" we could get the extension:

$$John \quad = \quad (t, x, y, z) : \ Being\ john\ (t, x, y, z)$$

That would be our ordinary "John". Quine called extensions like these "*spatio-temporally broad, four dimensional objects*" (QUINE, 1971, p. 68) and Wittgenstein called them "*(spatial) complexes*" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 45).

We can now determine truth conditions for the identities above. For example, we can state that: "*John is the person which I met yesterday*" iff

$$\{(x, y, z) : Being\ john\ (\ yesterday\ (x, y, z)\}$$

$$= \ \{(x, y, z) : Being\ the\ person\ I\ met\ yesterday\ (x, y, z)\}$$

What we have just outlined is a very old and influential idea: *ordinary names are actually concepts*. We already find this proposal in Leibniz[4]:

> For when we say 'Alexander is strong' we mean only that Strong is contained in the concept of Alexander, and similarly as concerns the rest of Alexander's predicates. *Apud* (MATES, 1986, p. 85)

More recently, the idea that ordinary names are disguised concepts appears in both Quine and Goodman:

> Now the introduction of rivers as single entities, namely, processes or time-consuming objects, consists substantially in reading identity in place of river kinship. It would be wrong, indeed, to say that *a* and *b* are identical; they are merely riverkindred. (QUINE, 1971, p. 66)

> To say that the same thing is twice presented is to say that two presentations – two phenomenal events – are together embraced within

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[4] The modern conception was slightly different from the one we outlined, of course. It was not construed *extensionally*, but *intentionally*, as clusters of *properties*, Kant's "*Merkmal*".

> a single totality of the sort we calI a thing or object. (GOODMAN, 1951, p. 128)

But if all this is true, then as we anticipated before, there would be a lot of *generality disguised in most all of our ordinary predications*, at least in the ones involving ordinary "empirical objects", i.e., *bodies*. And, as we have seen above, all this generality would have to be identified – "the forms of the particular cases must be manifest" – before they could be *made true* by any *singular event*. We can now understand why Wittgenstein said that a simple, grammatically *singular, sentence* such as "*this chair is brown*" had such an "*enormously complicated*" logical structure.

Ordinary names were names of *complexes* that should be further analyzed until all complexity was gone:

> Is spatial complexity also logical complexity? It surely seems to be. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 45)

And all this complexity should be further analyzed until it was all gone. But, as we saw before, that logical complexity was really some sort of *disguised generality* hidden within the *identity conditions* of that complex:

> … if I am talking about, e.g., this watch, and mean something complex by that and nothing depends upon the way it is compounded, then a generalization will make its appearance in the proposition. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 63)

Once again, *logical analysis* meant *getting rid of all that implicit generality* by substituting it for a complete list of all its particular instances, all *complex states of affairs* that could possibly *make that proposition true*. This is what we called "cashing in all generality". But let us go back to our narrative of Wittgenstein's development. Let us move on to the intermediary period of his thought.

Phenomenological Description and the Intermediary Period

After a period of more than ten years of almost total philosophical inactivity, 1929 witnessed a formidable burst in Wittgenstein's thought. In the first two years alone the philosopher produced *four* manuscript volumes (MS 105, 106, 107, 108), *two* typescripts (TS 208 and 210), the *Philosophical Remarks* and the research paper *Remarks on Logical Form*. If one glances through this production, right from the initial recordings in February 1929, one set of

questions clearly stands out: investigations concerning *descriptions of visual experiences*, of the *visual field*. In an often-quoted letter to Schlick, Wittgenstein states that he had resumed philosophical research to "*work on visual space and other things*" (WAISMANN, 1979, p. 17).

One can find discussions about visual experience in the initial, tractarian period. But a sustained investigation of all aspects of the question – the notion of a *visual location* and of *visual coordinates*, the idea of *minima visibilia*, and above all, the discussion of the very possibility of a complete phenomenological description – is certainly very characteristic of *this* period of his thought. But then, why has the question of a (complete) *phenomenological description of visual experiences* acquired such a central role within Wittgenstein's philosophical concerns? Why has it all of a sudden become so important, as the letter to Schlick implies? To understand that we have to determine one important point: the heirs of some of the tractarian ideas we were discussing before, the ideas of *complete determination of sense*, and the idea of the *great logical analysis*.

The logical space as phenomenology

There has been a lot of controversy about the *ontological status* of the fundamental types of entities in the *Tractatus*: *states of affairs* and their constituting *objects*. Events in the logical space should be *physically* or *phenomenologically* construed?[5] The discussion involves the very possibility of producing an example of an *elementary proposition*, without which the logic of the *Tractatus* will simply not lift off the ground. The discussion gets very heated sometimes, maybe because if we go through the preparatory *Notebooks 1914-16* we seem to find support for *both positions*. There are passages that suggest a *physical* construal of states of affairs and objects:

> Let us assume that every spatial object consists of infinitely many points, then it is clear that I cannot mention all these by name when I speak of that object. Here then would be a case in which I *cannot* arrive at the complete analysis in the old sense at all; and perhaps just this is the usual case. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 62)

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[5] Some recent defense of the phenomenological proposal can be found in (HINTIKKA & HINTIKKA, 1994, p. Chap 3; FRASCOLLA, 2000, p. 71).

> The division of the body into *material points*, as we have it in physics, is nothing more than analysis into *simple components*. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 67)

But there are also very strong passages that suggest a *phenomenological* interpretation instead:

> As examples of the simple I always think of points of the visual field (just as parts of the visual field always come before my mind as typical composite objects). (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 45)

> When we see that our visual field is complex we also see that it consists of *simpler* parts. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 65)

Whatever is the final outcome of that controversy, one point seems undisputable: by 1929 the *underlying basis* of Wittgenstein's philosophy was *explicitly phenomenological. States of affairs* are now *sensorial events*. It is this mutation, one of the several Wittgenstein's thought went through during this period that we propose as the key to his sudden interest in the idea of a *complete phenomenological specification*.

Much of the fundamental components of the tractarian philosophy were still very much alive in the beginning of 1929. The idea of a logical analysis of ordinary propositions was undisturbed. But, differently from the previous period, this analysis is now explicitly taken to generate propositions which would describe *elementary phenomena*. The role the *Logical Space* used to perform seems now to be carried out by the notion of a *Phenomenological Space* (SOUTIF, 2008). Ordinary sentences are explicitly analyzed into phenomenological sentences. In *Remarks on Logical Form*, written in June/July of 1929, he states:

> If, now, we try to get at an actual analysis [of ordinary propositions], we find logical forms which have very little similarity with the norms of ordinary language we meet with the forms of space and time with the whole manifold of spatial and temporal objects, as colors, sounds, etc., etc., with their gradations, continuous transitions, and combinations in various proportions, all of which we cannot seize by our ordinary means of expression. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1993, p. 31)

The analogies with the *Tractatus* are still very visible. We are presented with a robust conception of a "deep logical form". The analyses of our

ordinary subject-predicate sentences – such as "*This paper is boring*", "*The weather is fine*", "*I am lazy*" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1993, p. 31) – would demand a completely different language, Wittgenstein's *Primary Language*. In this language, all "*gradations, continuous transitions, and combinations in various proportions*" of our immediate experience would have to find precise and complete description. The difference between the two languages, *ordinary physical language* and his *primary language,* laid precisely on this: the latter's capacity to *match the* (almost infinite) *logical multiplicity of phenomena.* Just as in the case of Quine, above, Wittgenstein suggests that this could be achieved through the widespread use of coordinate systems:

> It is clear that we then can describe the shape and position of every patch of color in our visual field by means of statements of numbers which have their significance relative to the system of co-ordinates and the unit chosen. Again, it is clear that this description will have the right logical multiplicity, and that a description which has a smaller multiplicity will not do. A simple example would be the representation of a patch P by the expression "[6-9, 3-8]" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1993, p. 31)

Instead of *truth* conditions, we now have *verifying conditions*: *phenomenological conditions* that would satisfy each ordinary proposition. The rest of the plot though is the familiar one from the *Tractatus. Primary Language*, the language in which the *ultimate analysis of ordinary propositions* is supposed to be carried out, is characterized by its expressive capacity, the capability of *completely describing these phenomenological conditions.* That is, it's capacity of having the *right logical multiplicity*, a multiplicity that could match phenomena *one to one.*

We can now clearly understand why the idea of a *complete phenomenological description,* of an *entire capturing of our fleeting sensory impressions* became so central for Wittgenstein. This possibility became crucial to the very survival of some of key elements of the entire tractarian philosophical project. The idea of a *complete determination of sense,* of a great analysis of our ordinary talk into a purely extensional structure of elementary propositions, demanded now the viability of something else: the viability of an equally complete *phenomenological description.*

Doubts about the idea of *Phenomenological Description*

All hesitation and ambivalence seem to have been left out of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* by Wittgenstein. As we have seen, the *idea of a complete determination of sense*, of an extremely complex logical structure hidden

underneath our ordinary propositions, is forcefully projected in that work without any hint of a doubt. Not so in the preparatory notebooks. If we glance through those pages we find various passages that indicate deep worries about the very viability of the idea of *logical analysis* and its accompanying notion of a *simple object*:

> What is my fundamental thought when I talk about simple objects? Do not 'complex objects' in the end satisfy just the demands which I apparently make on the simple ones? (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 59-60)

> It is quite clear that I can in fact correlate a name with this watch just as it lies here ticking in front of me, and that this name will have reference outside any proposition in the very sense I have always given that word, and I feel that that name in a proposition will correspond to all the requirements of the 'names of simple objects'. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 60)

> From this it would now seem as if in a certain sense all names were *genuine names*. Or, as I might also say, as if all objects were in a certain sense simple objects. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 61)

> I tell someone "The watch is lying on the table" (…) Now when I do this and designate the objects by means of *names*, does that make them simple? (…) This object is *simple* for *me*! (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 70)

These remarks, that antecede the *Tractatus*, have a curious forward-looking flavor. One of the key traits of Wittgenstein's first philosophy and of Russell's and Frege's logical approach is being questioned: their robust conception of a *deep logical form* as opposed to a *superficial grammatical structure*. The idea that "this watch" could be "*a simple*", that this expression, coming right out of our ordinary language, would demand no further logical analysis, that it could be a "*simple for me*" (in that given situation) is even reminiscent of the first pages of the *Philosophical Investigations*. But let us return to our discussion.

All passages listed above involved examples of *ordinary physical objects*. We believe it is fair to say that Wittgenstein's doubts regarding examples of *phenomenological analysis* were *even more acute*.

> Let's take a question quite like that one, which however is simpler and more fundamental, namely the following: Is a point in our visual field a *simple object*, a

thing? Up to now I have always regarded such questions as the real philosophical ones: and so for sure they are in some sense – but once more what evidence could settle a question of this sort at all? Is there not a mistake in formulation here, for it looks as if *nothing at all* were self-evident to me on this question; it looks as if I could say definitively that these questions could never be settled at all. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 3)

But what is a uniformly colored part of my visual field composed of? Of *minima sensibilia*? How should the place of one such be determined? (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 45)

It seems to me perfectly possible that patches in our visual field are simple objects, in that we do not perceive any single point of a patch separately; the visual appearances of stars even seem certainly to be so. (…) And it is certain – moreover – that I do not see all the parts of my *theoretical* visual field. Who knows *whether* I see infinitely many points? (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 64)

Differently from the previous physical descriptions, in the ones involving *sensory phenomena* Wittgenstein seems to be unsure about *the very possibility of an analysis*. These pre-tractarian doubts about the applicability of the idea of "logical simples" to visual perception explode in his return to philosophical activity in 1929. Right from the very first pages we find him questioning the very possibility of such description and its underlying idea of *minima visibilia* (WITTGENSTEIN, 2000, p. 7, 11). The same questions posed in 1915 – regarding how one could possibly determine a *fix place* within the constant phenomenological flux – forcefully reappear in 1929 (WITTGENSTEIN, 2000, p. 31). Even in more confident passages such as the one extracted from *Remarks on Logical Form* above*, the multiplicity of elusive "gradations, transitions, and combinations" of phenomena clearly seems to defy complete logical determination.

Could *fleeting instantaneous impression* be *captured*? Everything seemed fishy about this proposal at that time for Wittgenstein. The very idea of *instantaneity*, of capturing the *perceptual moment* and making it permanent and thus accessible to future periods in time seemed to involve a *logical mistake*: the mistake of confusing *physical* and *phenomenological* notions of *time* (WITTGENSTEIN, 1975, p. § 49, Cap VII). Paraphrasing a little the words of the latter *Philosophical Investigation*, we could say: the idea [of a complete phenomenological description] held him captive. And he could not get outside it (WITTGENSTEIN, 2005a, p. 41). Before we go into some of the issues

regarding Wittgenstein's new treatment of *phenomena* though, we have to present one more *philosophical mutation* of this period, the philosopher's new handling of the notion of *generality*.

A new treatment of generality

The intermediary period, from 1929 to 1933, was not just one which involved epistemological and ontological mutations. The very *logic* underlying these treatments withstood profound changes. Central to these changes was Wittgenstein's *new treatment of generality*. To review some of these changes, let us quickly go back once more to the *Tractatus*. There the philosopher accused Frege and Russell of treating the *universal quantifier* as a *logical product* and the *existential quantifier* as a *logical sum* (WITTGENSTEIN, 1961, p. § 5.521). Curiously enough in 1933 we find him accusing the *author of the Tractatus* of committing just the same? error:

> My understanding of the general proposition was that (∃x).fx is a logical sum, and that although its terms weren't enumerated *there*, they could be enumerated (from the dictionary and the grammar of language).
>
> Of course, the explanation of (∃x).ɸx as a logical sum and of (x). ɸx as a logical product cannot be maintained. It was linked to a false view of logical analysis, with my thinking, for instance, that the logical product for a particular (x).ɸx would most likely be found some day. (WITTGENSTEIN, 2005, p. 249)

The key reason for this strange accusation, we believe, lays not so much in the *Tractatus* treatment of the *logical quantifiers* themselves (WITTGENSTEIN, 1961, p. § 5.5 on), but on the idea of *logical generality* underlying his conception of *logical analysis*. As we've seen in the first section of this article, for the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* the great logical analysis of ordinary propositions centrally involved the riddance of all (implicit) generality. Grammatically looking *singular sentences* such as "*This watch is on the table*" were construed as involving an enormous amount of disguised generality. All this generality became apparent as soon as we tried to analyze the *identifying conditions* implicit in the *pseudo-singular* terms like "*this watch*". We would then substitute this *ordinary name* (a name denoting a *complex*) by a multitude of *genuine tractarian names*, names of *simple entities*, *coordinates* (according to *Remarks on Logical Form*).

It was precisely *this* conception of *logical analysis*, we submit, that was the true culprit of Wittgenstein's 1933's self-accusation. The very concept of

logical analysis now involved for him the spurious idea of *desiccating ordinary linguistic expressions* into *lists of "genuinely singular (elementary) propositions"*. It was to this idea that we were referring to when we talked above about "*the cashing in of all generality hidden in ordinary language*". Wittgenstein devotes a whole section of his *Big Typescript* to a ruthless criticism of all aspects of this previous proposal (WITTGENSTEIN, 2005, p. 240-62). His favorite example was the ubiquitous:

The circle is in the square

All through the intermediary period, critical discussions of the idea of *cashing in all generality* can be easily spotted by the ever present accompanying illustration:

(WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 163; WITTGENSTEIN, 2005, p. 243; WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 123)[6]

The new, audacious proposal was that, contrary to what he had thought before, *existential sentences should not and could not be substituted by (infinite) disjunctions of cases*. The very titles of the paragraphs 70 and 71 of the *Big Typescript* announce the new stance:

§ 70 - In a Certain Sense the Proposition "The Circle is in the Square" is Independent of the Indication of a Particular Position (in a Certain Sense it has nothing to do with It).
§ 71 - The Proposition "The Circle is in the Square" not a Disjunction of Cases. (WITTGENSTEIN, 2005, p. 241, 244)

Wittgenstein keeps stating, over and over again, different alternative formulations of his new thesis, under varied illustrations and contexts, as if to fix that idea once and for all in his mind:

Each of these cases [of the various possible positions of the circle], for instance, has its own particular individuality. Does this individuality somehow enter into

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[6] In (WITTGENSTEIN, 1975, p. § IX) we find the example but not the illustration.

the sense of the general proposition? Obviously not. (WITTGENSTEIN, 2005, p. 241)

If we say that the cross is situated between the lines, we don't have any disjunction ready that could take the place of this general proposition. (WITTGENSTEIN, 2005, p. 242)

Enumerating positions is not only unnecessary, but such an enumeration is by its very nature out of the question here. (WITTGENSTEIN, 2005, p. 245)

There's just the general proposition, and particular propositions (not *the* particular proposition). But the general proposition doesn't enumerate particular propositions. (WITTGENSTEIN, 2005, p. 246)

The idea of a *disjunction* taking the place of the *general existential proposition* was discarded precisely because the underlying idea of *equivalence* of the two forms was repudiated. In fact, Wittgenstein goes even further and talks about the two forms as belonging to two *entirely different calculi*, two *different grammars* altogether:

> That is, when we're talking about the individual positions (that we've seen), we seem to be talking about something entirely different from what is talked about in the general proposition.
> There is one calculus to which our designation of generality belongs, and another one in which disjunction exists. If we say that the cross is situated between the lines, we don't have any disjunction ready that could take the place of this general proposition. (WITTGENSTEIN, 2005, p. 246, 242)

It is hard to overestimate the importance of this logical mutation for practically all future aspects of Wittgenstein's philosophy.[7] In more retrospective terms, the whole line of development of the tractarian approach was severely shaken. If the idea of substituting hidden generality of ordinary language was misguided, a core idea behind *logical analysis* was endangered. The same blow stroke many of the *Tractatus* most characteristic proposals: the idea of *elementary propositions,* the dichotomy between *ordinary/genuine names*, the notion of a *simple object*, as well as that works robust conception of (deep) *logical form,* of course.

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[7] For some of its consequences for his philosophy of mathematics, cf. PORTO, 2009.

Impressions are not particulars

We finally have everything we need at our disposal to tackle the main topic of this paper: the reason behind Wittgenstein's refusal of the notion of an "*inner picture*". But before we move on to that central discussion, let us first call attention to a characteristic trait of Wittgenstein's general philosophical approach, one that sets him quite apart from many other thinkers. Right from start, the philosopher never gave much weight to the dichotomy between *images*, i.e., *pictorial language*, and verbal *propositions*. His famous *Picture theory of Language* is exactly the idea of *subsuming* the notion of *proposition* to that of *picture!* In sharp contrast, say, with Kant, he never proposed a fundamental cleavage between the realm of *intuitions* and that of *concepts*. This is important because, as we anticipated before, our main thesis in this paper is the idea of using the notion of *generality*, a notion usually *applicable only to concepts*, to distinguish *internal (visual) perceptions* and *pictorial documents*. But let us not anticipate too much.

To present Wittgenstein's more definite stance on the problem of visual perception we have to leave behind the initial transitional years of 1929 and 1930 and look at later texts such as the *Big Typescript* and specially the notes recorded by Waismann in *The Voices of Wittgenstein*.[8] There we find a section entitled *Phenomenal Language* (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 313-21) which seems to summarize many years of logical and philosophical ruminations on the question. Besides that, the section is stated with a clarity and directness which we believe is absent in all earlier texts. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1975, p. Chap VII)

Phenomenal Language begins straight away with the question: "*can fleeting experience be captured in signs?*" (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 313). The author initially accepts that ordinary language descriptions of *impressions* are "*always more or less inexact*" but goes on to propose the question:

> … couldn't we imagine a language so subtle that it reproduces the finest details? One which is not, like our everyday language, a schematization of the facts, but rather gives us reality in full? (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 313)

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[8] As the editor Gordon Baker explains, precise dating of (most of) these texts is unavailable and should be only attempted based on inferences on style and content. (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. xvi)

Initial *verbal descriptions* such as "*I see a park*" or even the more analytical:

> [I see] A large expanse of lawn, sprinkled with white, yellow and deep-blue flowers which are bending in the wind; then a gravel path shining yellow in the sunshine; behind that a grove of birches, semitransparent against the broad, bright spring sky. (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 313, 315)

are rapidly discarded as inadequate because of their failure in offering a exhaustive description of all the perceived details.

What comes next in the text is characteristic of Wittgenstein. Ordinarily, the notion of a *description* is construed as implying *propositionality*: of it being a *verbal* description. Not so for the philosopher. The differences between word-languages and, say, pictorial languages (such as painting) are explicitly disregarded. He is not interested in the problem of how much can *verbal language* capture visual experiences. He is interested in the very idea of an *imprisonment of fleeting impressions*, by whichever means available:

> Here it seems that we somehow come up against the boundary of word-language. Now we could take up a quite different standpoint. Let us leave description in word-language entirely out of account, and let us imagine the description to be given by means of a drawing or a painting. Can this picture capture the impression? (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 315)

All "technical problems" [9], such as the *lack of movement* are cast aside:

> One might retort that movement is absent from paintings. Let us suppose that I had a procedure for producing pictures that move, and that this production takes so little time that I can capture the entire momentary impression. (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 315)

Even his old preoccupations with the problem of the connection between *phenomenal time* and *physical time*[10] are circumvented:

> We can even consider as disposed of the objection that during this brief time the appearance of the picture gets mixed up with my memory and distorts it. Let

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[9] Cf. (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 319)
[10] Usually referred at using the metaphors of the "time of the film strip" and the "time of the picture" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1975, p. 81).

us suppose that the production of the picture is undertaken by another person. Let us suppose the best possible outcome, that the other by chance *guessed* this description, i.e. that he produced a film, showed it to me, and I then said: 'Yes, that is how it looked'. (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 315)

Even considering all these quite extravagant allowances Wittgenstein is still not satisfied. The text is quite clear that none of these "technical difficulties" is the real source of the problem the philosopher seems to encounter in the idea of a *complete phenomenological description*:

Now it is important that, in a certain sense, even that would not do. For if I were further asked: 'Was it exactly so? or was it perhaps only very similar?', I would not know what I should answer. (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 315)

What is the exact nature of the difficulty Wittgenstein is alluding to in all these passages? What is the fundamental obstacle he apparently sees with the idea of a *perfect description of our visual impressions*, something that would show it to be completely futile, even if we abstract, as he certainly does, of all difficulties he labels as merely "technical"? To understand that we have to differentiate two notions of an "*extended object*".

Two kinds of "*extended objects*"

Let us imagine us entering into a building. One can picture any building here, even personally well known ones such as, say, the building one goes everyday to work. This building has an entrance, the door we use to get inside it. Now, do we *look at this entrance* when we access the it on our way to work? An immediate answer would be: of course we do, we don't go about *blindly* trying to find it! We do use visual information, say, to check where the entrance handle is, etc. True enough, but how *detailed* are these visual impressions?

Let us take the door's handle. We use it every morning to enter the building. But how exactly *is this handle* which we manipulate everyday on our way to work? Is it fixed, say, by screws? What kind of screws? Do we (ever) *look at it*? It is true that, according to the argument we've previously used, we do use *visual information* to locate the handle within the door. So, in a sense, we *do see* it. Let us imagine now one particular morning in which we got inside our workplace. We might remember going through that door (or may not). Let us

consider the "visual impression" we had as we handled the door (you did handle it, of course). How "*elaborate*" was *that* visual impression. What would we say about its "*structure*"? How *fine* was its "representation"?

The *physical door,* of course, is an *extended object*. And, about *that physical object* one can always demand further and further specifications. We can *scrutinize* its structure more and more. For example, we can locate the *middle point* of the *diagonal* which links the *handle* to the *upper-right corner* of the door. And we can ask *about that area* whether it happens to have, say, a small red drop of paint. We could even go back to the entrance and verify that claim (mentally tracing the diagonal, locating the area and checking it). But would it make sense to *do that* with our *momentary visual impression*? We did approach the door, that day. And the section, in the upper middle part of the door was clearly within our *visual cone*. So, what about that part of our "visual representation"? *Did it include* the information about the presence of a red dot? Or was our field of vision "*empty*" there? But then, what color *could ever cover* an empty area of a visual field?

In the previous paragraph we treated both the *physical door* and our *visual impression* of it as being "extended". But, and this is the first point Wittgenstein would make, the two senses of "extended" are sharply different:

> This false idea [of a "perfect visual representation"] can in the end be blamed on confusing the target picture [the visual impression] with a physical picture. It has a quite different meaning to say 'The description ought to approximate to a painted picture' than to say 'The description ought to approximate to a visual image'. In the first case I could copy the picture, and indeed well enough, and here it makes sense to say that the copy exactly reproduces the original. But applied to the visual image, this expression loses its sense. (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 317)

For Wittgenstein, it doesn't make sense to treat the *target picture* and the *physical picture* as both *pictures*, i.e. *extended objects*, in *exactly the same acceptation*. This is because, as the philosopher is fond of saying, the *grammar* that applies to both kinds of "objects"[11] is *different*. In other words, what it makes sense to *ask*, *verify*, *disagree*, etc, is different regarding these two kinds of entities. His prime example of these differences between the two grammars involves the dichotomy *roughness/exactness*.

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[11] As we know, in the end Wittgenstein recommend us refraining from treating *visual impressions* as *objects.*

Two senses of **roughness** and of **exactness**

One can say our *visual impression* is in some sense "extended". In other words, the grammar of the *part/whole distinction* is sometimes applicable to it. It even happens occasionally that, if one has seen some *whole* and a smaller *area* is *part of that whole*, one has also *seen that sub-area*. But not always. In the example above, we did see the door, the upper middle section of the door was certainly *part* of that whole, but we could not say whether there was a blob of paint within it. In some sense of "seeing" we *didn't see that part*.

It is here that the notion of *roughness* comes in: we might try to explain our failure by saying that we just had a "*rough visual impression* of the door". True enough. We can in fact say that we had a *rough impression*. But for Wittgenstein it is very important to distinguish that use of the word *rough* from the ones qualifying *physical determinations*. We can say, for example, that a rod is *roughly 20 cm long*. According to the philosopher, these two senses of *rough* are completely different:

> One is very aware of this indeterminacy and says accordingly: 'That is *roughly* what it looked like'. But what does 'roughly' mean here? Does it mean that a closer approximation is always conceivable? Or does it mean that every picture is a rough one? In other words, is this roughness to be compared with the case where someone looks at a line and says that it is roughly 20 cm long? In this case 'roughly' corresponds to 'exactly' in the sense that one can say: 'Let us measure it, and then we will see whether it is really that long'. Is the situation the same with the description of my visual field? (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 315)

The key difference between the two notions of *roughness* lies in their contrast with the notion of *exactness*. When *roughness* is used to qualify a physical description, it *normally makes sense* to oppose it with a more *thorough, exact, description*.[12] This is not so in the case of a *visual impression*. One can verify the *physical door* to check for a (possible) red blob. But does it make sense to "internally verify our (memory's) past visual impression" to check if it includes a red blob?

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[12] The situation is even more complex than that: there is also a *third* notion of the *rough/exact* pair: the *mathematical usage*. We can say "This is a rough *approximation* of Pi" or "There is no *exact* decimal representation of Pi". But these involve a third, different grammar altogether. Cf. Porto, 2007.

> We have to do here with inexactness in a *quite different sense*. One can call the memory image indistinct, only this indistinctness is not contrasted with a sharper image. The words 'indistinct', 'rough', 'inexact' and all similar ones have here a different grammar. (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 317)

> We must ask: can a more exact representation be imagined? *Have we a criterion for this*? In one case we do, in another we don't, and then it loses any sense to speak of a 'possibly greater exactitude', and hence too of the 'approximateness' of the representation. (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 321)

And here Wittgenstein warns us against a desperate move by his interlocutor: crediting everything to the ideas of *memory* and *attention*. One could retort that somehow his visual representation of the door *was really complete at that time. Then*, there were "*no holes*" in it. The information *was there*. It is just that one was not "very attentive" and now one "can't recall *exactly* the *totality* of visual impression anymore". Wittgenstein is very dismissive about this rejoinder. For him, this is just a strategy to maintain the idea of *completeness* of both kinds of "extended objects" *at any cost*, through a forceful postulation of an *existent* but *non-recallable representation*:

> What is always irritating is the thought that it is no longer possible for *me* to determine this number, but that the experience is fixed in every respect and that, at the moment when I was looking, I really did see a definite number of points of light. It seems as if there is only a *technical* difficulty here, the difficulty of remembering something or of establishing what the experience was, and that this difficulty is not essentially different in kind from the one of ascertaining whether there is a man in the neighboring room when the door into this room is walled up. (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 319)

According to Wittgenstein, we are here *mislead by an analogy* and we end up *pursuing mirages* instead of properly distinguishing grammars of homographs.

> Now we are beginning to get a grip on the whole misconception which underlies the search for such an ideal language. Anyone who wants to use signs to capture an experience is misled by the ambiguity of the words 'roughly', 'approximately', etc. He fails to notice that the word 'roughly' plays an entirely different role in the description of an experience than it does (say) in measuring a distance. In the latter case (here again in *one* definite sense) to every 'roughly' there corresponds an 'exactly'. He seeks also in the former case for an 'exactly' –

and he pursues a mirage which perpetually eludes him. (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 317)

Visual impressions and Wittgenstein's new treatment of *generality*

We can finally connect the two main threads in this paper: Wittgenstein's *new treatment of generality* and his criticism of the idea of a *complete phenomenological description*. In *Phenomenal* Language, he uses the example of a starry sky.[13] We will use the idea of a *multitude*. Our question would then read: when one sees a *multitude of people*, does one see *each person constituting that multitude*? Obviously not! One can even stare at a (not so large) group of people and fail to see the waving hand of a friend! We even have expressions design precisely to deal with just such situations. Think of: *If it was a snake, it would have bit you* or *Hidden in plain sight*.

If we know describe the multitude-situation in the logical terms we were employing before, we can say that here we have a prime example of a *generality* (a visual impression of a *bunch of people*) which *cannot be substituted* by a *list of individualities*, of *persons*, because in our case the individualities are *just not there*. We do see the crowd, but we certainly do not see each and every person within it. Wittgenstein's interlocutor would be left in the awkward position of having to argue something along these lines: "*But you claim to see the multitude and you even accept that a multitude is composed by people! So, how can you fail to see each and every person involved?*". But, of course, this is just what happens normally when we see a crowd: we see the *people*, but not *each person*.

Going back to Wittgenstein's starry-sky example, we find the philosopher saying:

> The problem becomes very clear in the following example. Let us imagine that someone stares at the sky for a moment and then is asked how many points of light he has seen. Is there here an answer in the form: 'I have seen n points of light'? That is, 'I do not know how many points of light there were, but I must surely have seen some definite number'? We would say: here it makes no sense at all to speak of a definite number. Strange as it may sound, the only accurate description would be of the form: 'I have seen innumerable stars' and not: 'I have seen n stars'. One could with good cause say that we have here before us another system of arithmetic, a system that runs (say) '1, 2, 3, 4, 5, many', yet

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[13] This is a favorite illustration of his, when it comes to the discussion of *minima visibilia*. Cf. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 64)

one in which one can even speak of different degrees of magnitude in the sense in which one says: 'In this region there are more stars than in that one'. In *this* sense one could happily say that one sees thousands of stars, if only it is clear that one is thereby describing not a *number*, but rather an *impression*. (WITTGENSTEIN & WAISMANN, 2003, p. 319)

The idea of "painting *generality*" and the problem of the periphery of the visual field

This is why the idea of a *perfect physical representation* of a *visual impression* is a chimera: one would have to be able to represent *generality*. To elucidate that, let us take a problem that worried Wittgenstein for quite a long time: the problem of the *periphery of the visual field*. Would it be possible to represent (by, say, a drawing or a painting) that *impression of indefiniteness*? How could we represent its *formlessness*? Should we opt for the *blurring of the edges* of our drawing. Wittgenstein discusses quite thoroughly the case of the famous drawing by Ernest Mach (MACH, 1959, p. 19)[14]? Wittgenstein complains:

When speaking of the blurredness of images at the edge of one's visual field, one frequently has in mind an image of this visual field such as, say, sketched by Mach. But the blurredness of the edges of a picture on a paper surface is inherently different from that ascribed to the edges of the visual field. (WITTGENSTEIN, 2005, p. 336)

We cannot find an "external" equivalent for the "internal" visual impressions because every "external" picture is a *particular*, a *singular structure of colors and shapes*. But the "internal impression" involves *generality*, indeed, precisely a case of "non-refundable generality" that Wittgenstein alludes to in his "new treatment" of the notion.

There is no experience in the visual field that might correspond to what occurs when one allows one's glance to glide over a picture whose figures transition from being in focus to ever more blurred. (WITTGENSTEIN, 2005, p. 336)

To "represent" the periphery of our "field of vision" we would have to find an "external" picture with a very strange property: that of being a *non-particular*.

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[14] Cf. also (WITTGENSTEIN, 1975, p. 80).

To be sure, Wittgenstein accepts that we do have something we could call "*general pictures*". We do talk about *grey* sometimes as being a "less definite" color than, say, *red*. But, would that make it more "appropriate" to paint the periphery of our visual impressions? The catch is that we would have to take it as "general, non-specific color". And again, in *some sense*, every grey we find in our palette is *always a specific tone of grey*. The same would go for the *shapes*. We do sometimes take *scribbles* like

as being less *definite* (or even "*shapeless*") as compared to, say a "form" like:

But of course, *in some other sense,* both these figures do have quite *specific shapes!* How could they *fail* to have shapes?

We have a *name* for the latter shape, we call it a *triangle*. And we do not have one for the former scribble. But would that "take away" its shape? In this *latter acceptation*, it would be senseless to say that one "has more shape than the other". If we take this *stricter sense*, we would never be able to find the correct kind of *blurring* that would be "appropriate for representing the periphery of our visual field", just because we would need an "indefinite blurring", and all the blurring we can produce would always have a definite shape, like the scribble above.

This does not mean, to be sure, that we could not have pretty convincing *representations of fleeting immediate visual impressions*. The famous impressionists paintings, such as Degas' *4 dancers on stage* are just such representations. But they *have to be taken as representing a "general impression"*. And one could always be *hardheaded* and opt for the stricter (and absurd) interpretation and see those paintings as "realistic renderings" of a "completely deformed people".[15]

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[15] Apparently, it was just such a mistake which was responsible for the very bad reception the impressionists initially got from the general public.

Degas. 4 dancers on stage (detail).
São Paulo Museum of Art

Wittgenstein is perfectly aware that we do produce "general pictures". But they are *general pictures* only *relative to their correct interpretation*. As the philosopher says, they belong to "completely different grammars". And of course one is always free, just as in the case of the *Degas' dancers*, to interpret these *general pictures* as "realistic, non-general renderings" instead:

> … one can view the drawing |o| as representing the "general case". Not within the measured space, as it were, but in such a way that the distances of the circle from the straight lines make no difference at all. Taken that way, one sees the picture as belonging to a different system than when one sees it as representing a particular position of the circle between the straight lines. (WITTGENSTEIN, 2005, p. 241)

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