

# Philosophical Method as a Technique of Art

## Cato Wittusen

People nowadays think that scientists exist to instruct them, poets, musicians, etc. to give them pleasure. The idea *that these have something to teach them* – that does not occur to them.

Writing in the right style is setting the carriage straight on the rails.

Ludwig Wittgenstein<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

It is widely assumed that there is a literary aspect to Ludwig Wittgenstein's writings. Famously, Wittgenstein once wrote, "I think I summed up my position on philosophy when I said: one should really do philosophy as a poetic composition."<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I will focus on the question of *how* the alleged literariness of the *Investigations* contributes to its philosophical achievements. The main objective of this article is to argue for the relevance of viewing the literariness of Wittgenstein's methodological procedures against the backdrop of the work of the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky. In 'The Resurrection of the Word' (1914) and 'Art as Technique' (1917), Shklovsky takes pains to make clear a way of differentiating between *poetic* and *prosaic* language. Importantly, the distinction between poetic (or literary) and prosaic discourses in Shklovsky's treatment does not coincide with the distinction between the literary genres of poetry and prose. He pursues the question in discussing what it is to perceive a piece of prose in a poetic way. For Shklovsky, poetic and prosaic language have different *functions*. What is more, in Shklovsky's work, we also find some interesting references to Tolstoy's writings that may illuminate aspects of Wittgenstein's literary way of philosophising. Famously, Wittgenstein was himself a devoted reader of Tolstoy's writings.

My discussion will be prefaced by some remarks about how the question about the literariness in Wittgenstein has been responded to in, among others, Stanley Cavell and Marjorie Perloff. For the most part, I find myself in sympathy with Cavell's thoughts on this issue. Even so, a worry that I want to

---

Cato Wittusen is an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Stavanger (Department of Media, Culture and Social Sciences), Norway.

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. and trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 36 and 39.

<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 24.

articulate in this paper is that he focuses chiefly on Wittgenstein's aphorisms (and to some extent his parables), at least in the essays that I consider here. I take it that Cavell's perspective ought to be expanded.<sup>3</sup> Perloff, on the other hand, focuses on Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations in trying to clarify the role of the literary in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Even though I agree with her view that his grammatical investigations should be taken into consideration when we discuss the literary dimension of Wittgenstein's writings, I do oppose her overtly cognitive take on the issue.

I would like to point out that my intention is neither to defend nor to give a thorough exposition of Shklovsky's formalist and rather essentialist theory of the literary. Neither is my aim to pin down a definition of the literariness of Wittgenstein's later writings. As for the last point, I may put my reservation this way: I will not attempt to formulate some kind of aesthetics for the *Investigations*. This is something Cavell has (rightly, in my view) warned us against.<sup>4</sup> What I will be urging is that the formalist standpoint, in particular as this is developed in Shklovsky, may open *some* interesting perspectives on Wittgenstein's writings and thus illuminate how his style may contribute to some of the insights that we gain in dealing with his work. It is widely believed that Wittgenstein wanted his readers to reconceive their notion of philosophy and philosophical methods. The comparison with Shklovsky may help us see

---

<sup>3</sup> As for the distinction between poetry and other genres of literature, Wolfgang Huemer argues in the introduction to *The Literary Wittgenstein*, eds John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), that philosophers dealing with literature are usually interested in texts with narrative structures. He contends that the value of poetry is just as important. Through violating rules of meaning, poetry might explore and extend the limits of our language. However, both poetry- and narration-based literature draw attention to language itself. Literature can thus "illuminate our understanding of the workings of language; it can become a tool of grammatical investigations," p. 6. According to Huemer, poetry and prose (for example, novels and short stories) fulfill this role in different ways. Literature based on narration, for example, gives us depictions of unusual episodes and circumstances that might help us acquire new perspectives on everyday practices and situations. In poetry, metaphors are developed that help us question and improve our way of expressing ourselves. Metaphors help us draw attention to our habitual perception of our surroundings. Thus, poetry too may help us acquire new perspectives. Nevertheless, it is unclear where Huemer sees Wittgenstein operating— within the domain of poetry or narrative fiction? As for Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, he says that the new form of exposition is appropriate to "express his ideas and in general to convey philosophical information," p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Stanley Cavell, 'The *Investigations*' Everyday Aesthetics of Itself', in *The Literary Wittgenstein*, eds. John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 24.

how many of Wittgenstein's reminders and remarks carry philosophical weight, without having to understand them as philosophical statements.

### **Cavell and Perloff on Wittgenstein**

In 'The Wittgensteinian Event,' Cavell suggests that one of Wittgenstein's ambitions for his *Philosophical Investigations* is to present perspicuous presentations. Cavell argues that this ambition is not only present in connection with his so-called "signature philosophical procedures" that he considers the grammatical investigations (and formal proofs) to constitute. His sense is that Wittgenstein's aphorisms and parables also should be recognised as presentations in this mode.<sup>5</sup> For Cavell, three things are important in this context: "The criteria I emphasise in identifying such instances as perspicuous is that they provide pleasure, that they compose a unity, and that they break off a line of thought."<sup>6</sup> Yet, for Cavell, there is an important difference between Wittgenstein's signature philosophical procedures and his *literary* gestures.<sup>7</sup> Understanding Wittgenstein's aphorisms requires aesthetic attention and sensibilities.<sup>8</sup> Their composition demands a specific literary talent as well. They may, in other words, be much harder to take in than, for example, his depictions of language games. Interestingly, Cavell suggests that Wittgenstein's literary gestures tend to bring the conversation to a halt. I take this to mean that, in contrast to the grammatical investigations, the literary gestures tend to *slow* down our reading and perception. My sense is that the same could be said of many of his grammatical remarks as well. This is something that will be further illuminated below.

In Cavell, the important question is not what makes the aphorisms *literary*. It is taken for granted that they have such a quality. The question is *how* they contribute to Wittgenstein's philosophising. Here is Cavell: "I describe what I am after as the *Investigations*' everyday aesthetics of itself to register at once that I know of no standing aesthetic theory that promises help in understanding the literariness of the *Investigations* – I mean the literary conditions of its philosophical aims."<sup>9</sup> The aesthetic dimension of the *Investigations* must, as Cavell is suggesting in the same context, be considered

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Stanley Cavell, 'The Wittgensteinian Event', in *Reading Cavell*, eds Alice Crary and Sanford Shieh (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Cavell, 'The Wittgensteinian Event', p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> For Cavell, examples of such gestures in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* are §§52; 107; 217; 268; 309 and pp. 178 and 224; see Cavell, 'The Wittgensteinian Event', p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> Cavell, 'Investigations' Everyday Aesthetics', pp. 24-25.

<sup>9</sup> Cavell, 'Investigations' Everyday Aesthetics', p. 21.

in relation to its achievements and the way the work shapes our conception of philosophical problems and their solutions. His unwillingness to speak of an aesthetic theory that can help us understand the literariness of the *Investigations* notwithstanding, he wants to draw attention to the power of the aphoristic, the power it exercises on us. Cavell puts it this way:

The power of the aphoristic is a function of its granting the appeal, even in a sense the reality, of the metaphysical. It is a mode of reflecting the clarity brought by grammatical methods, one that in itself, as itself, exhibits this clarity, together with a satisfaction or acknowledgement of the obscurity from which clarity comes.<sup>10</sup>

Through his aphorisms, Wittgenstein is able to give voice to and recognise the torment and obscurity from which our philosophical problems arise. The aphorisms speak to us in a way that brings acknowledgement of the depth of our philosophical problems and how they exercise a strong grip on us. Cavell says that they manage to bring about an experience of pleasure, of liberation (from a mood, which seems to have a therapeutic dimension), and an experience of anxiety about exposure. The last point, I take it, relates to our fear of taking wrong steps, that is, of being misled by phoney voices.<sup>11</sup> We should here note that from Cavell's vantage point, the aphorisms and parables in Wittgenstein are capable of eliciting responses in the reader that are *only* reachable through their literary form.

Thus, although we are not presented with an aesthetic theory in Cavell, we are indeed presented with a view of how Wittgenstein's aphorisms affect the reader, what methodical role they are supposed to perform, and how form and content are to be considered inseparable. For Cavell, it is essential to point out that the very claim about the expressiveness of the aphoristic is not something that can be demonstrated, since its own perspicuousness rests upon experience.<sup>12</sup>

Perloff's take on this issue is very different from Cavell's. She is concerned with how the literary or poetic in Wittgenstein is to be understood. Perloff asks us to take into consideration the fact that many poetic expressions do not seem *translatable*, at least not in a satisfying way. According to Perloff, we very often think of the poetic as something not translatable. A slippage of meaning is very often involved in translations of poetry and other forms of literature. Thus, provided that we want to consider Wittgenstein's philosophical procedures as poetic, it is, according to Perloff, interesting to note that problems related to untranslatability seldom arise in connection with

---

<sup>10</sup> Cavell, 'Investigations' *Everyday Aesthetics*, p 29.

<sup>11</sup> Cavell, 'Investigations' *Everyday Aesthetics*, p 29.

<sup>12</sup> Cavell, 'Investigations' *Everyday Aesthetics*, p 29.

understanding his work. She says that Wittgenstein is actually read around the world without scholars worrying much about their reading translations of his work. This might be correct. In my view, though, the urgency of the complex issue of translatability that Perloff raises is related to our philosophical sensibilities and our notion of Wittgenstein should be read. In the great bulk of commentaries on Wittgenstein's *Investigations* and later philosophy, there are plentiful examples of philosophical theses and doctrines being extrapolated from his writings. Construals of the alleged use-theory of meaning and the private language argument are both examples of such endeavours. The writers of these commentaries do insist more or less explicitly that the objective of their scholarly enterprises is to formulate the concealed theses and theories of Wittgenstein's work. Due to the unusual and quirky style of his work, the lack of jargon and the absence of a traditional vocabulary of philosophy, this is regarded a difficult task that takes hermeneutical ingenuity to accomplish. Yet, if we do not take it that Wittgenstein attempted to expound theories and theses, but rather aimed at administering reminders that might help us see important aspects of phenomena in our lives, we might be more willing to accept that Wittgenstein's words attain as it were different *physiognomies* in different languages. Thus, they may *speak* to us differently, something that may even affect the way we are involved in the philosophical questions. Famously, Wittgenstein himself was very concerned with this dimension of language.<sup>13</sup>

According to Perloff, in inventing his aphorisms, Wittgenstein was first and foremost concerned with the "denotative properties" of his words. Here is Perloff: "In formulating his aphoristic propositions, Wittgenstein is not interested in connotation, nuance, or in word choice based on considerations of rhythm and sound, but in the uses of the denotative properties of words."<sup>14</sup> However, this does not mean that Perloff thinks there are no problems whatsoever with how to translate Wittgenstein's words. What she is driving at is that Wittgenstein's writings are not untranslatable in the way, for example, the poetry of Rainer Marie Rilke and Robert Lowell are.<sup>15</sup> In any case, the central question Perloff's article seeks to answer is how Wittgenstein's remarks can be taken as poetic when they are so stripped of the usual poetic trappings. She suggests a distinction between a poetic use of language that is based on

---

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), §§531-32, pp. 218-19.

<sup>14</sup> Marjorie Perloff, "'But Isn't the Same at Least the Same?'" Wittgenstein and the Question of Poetic Translatability', in *The Literary Wittgenstein*, eds. John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 36.

<sup>15</sup> It should be pointed out that Perloff takes pains to discuss a number of instances exemplifying this kind of poetic untranslatability.

connotative and rhythmic qualities and a conceptual and abstract use of language. Wittgenstein's philosophy belongs to the last category. However, this seems to prevent us from crediting Wittgenstein with any literary or poetic aspects. Not necessarily so. For Perloff, the poetic or artistic aspects of Wittgenstein's writings should rather be seen against the backdrop of conceptual art. Perloff's strategy is to consider his way of philosophising as a form of conceptual art. For her, Wittgenstein is the poet of *thinking* through language:

In Wittgenstein's practice, conceptual art begins with the investigation of grammar, the description of the actual relations between words and phrases in the larger unit in which they are embedded. The surface word order, of course, will vary from language to language, according to the rules that language prescribes for the relationship between parts of speech. But the basic relationship of parts of speech – nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions – *to one another* will remain the same.<sup>16</sup>

If I understand Perloff correctly, she is arguing that the artistic dimension of Wittgenstein's work is to be located in the ideas and conceptual relations to which his writings draw our attention. The material quality of his words is not important. Here is Perloff:

The *poetic*, as I remarked earlier, is not, for Wittgenstein, a question of heightening, of removing language from its everyday use by means of appropriate troping or rhetorical device. Rather, what makes philosophy poetic is its potential for invention, its status as what we now call *conceptual art* – the art that, in Sol LeWitt's words, "is made to engage the mind of the viewer rather than his eye" – or, more broadly speaking, his senses – the art, as it were, that tracks the process of *thinking* itself.<sup>17</sup>

For the conceptual artist, though, the interest of a piece of art does not reside in the artistic treatment of some kind of material. The idea is that everyone could, on instruction, produce the material gesturing at the idea behind the artwork. As we see, this approach differs radically from Cavell's, which argued that Wittgenstein's style is internal to his philosophising, that they constitute a unity, and that literary sensibility is required to understand this unity. The strategy that Perloff pursues is to dematerialise Wittgenstein's language. To her, the *idea*, the cognitive content, is what matters. She even quotes David Antin's statement that Wittgenstein is "a poet of nearly pure cognition."<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Perloff, 'Wittgenstein and Poetic Translatability', p. 43.

<sup>17</sup> Perloff, 'Wittgenstein and Poetic Translatability', p. 43.

<sup>18</sup> Perloff, 'Wittgenstein and Poetic Translatability', p. 45.

To sum up my stance so far, my take on the issue of the literariness in the *Investigations* should not be seen as an overall rejection of Cavell's view. My purpose is rather to widen the scope. Yet I do not think it is clear that we ought to draw a sharp line between the aphorisms and his grammatical investigations in discussing the literary achievements of the *Investigations*. As for Perloff, her treatment seems to undermine a literary interest in aphorisms altogether. Her issue about translatability raises interesting questions, but I think she too quickly rejects the poetic or literary achievements of the aphorisms in Wittgenstein. I do, however, welcome Perloff's suggestion that we should focus more on Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations, although her thought that Wittgenstein should be seen as engaged in some kind of conceptual art seems to undermine his sense that philosophy should provide reminders that might help us *see* the familiar, might help us undermine philosophical problems, in Wittgenstein's sense. The literary aspects of Wittgenstein's writings do not only conspire to engage the mind of the reader, but also his *senses*.

Nothing is more important for teaching us to understand the concepts we have than constructing fictitious ones.

It's only by thinking even more crazily than philosophers do that you can solve their problems.<sup>19</sup>

### **Shklovsky and Wittgenstein**

For Shklovsky, when perception becomes routine and habitual, it also tends to become *automatic*.<sup>20</sup> After we have perceived an object several times, Shklovsky argues, we only *recognise* it—instead of *seeing* it. Here is Shklovsky: “We do not sense the familiar, we do not see it, but recognise it.”<sup>21</sup> The object might be in front of us; we *know* about it, but we do not see it. What's more, we have nothing significant to say about it. Wittgenstein's notion that aspects of the phenomena we want to investigate become lost because we are so familiar with them is something that suggests an affinity between him and Shklovsky. Wittgenstein shares Shklovsky's sense that our perceptions of our surroundings and the phenomena in front of us tend to lose their density when we are confronted with them every day. Take for instance the following

---

<sup>19</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>20</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’, in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge (London; New York: Longman, 1988), p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, ‘The Resurrection of the Word (1914)’, in *Russian Formalism: A Collection of Articles and Texts in Translation*, eds Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlt (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973), pp. 41-42.

section from the *Investigations* and the two subsequent aphorisms from *Culture and Value*:

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one’s eyes.) The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless *that* fact has at some time struck him. And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and powerful.<sup>22</sup>

How hard I find it to see what is *right in front of my eyes!*...  
God grant the philosopher insight into what lies in front of everyone’s eyes.<sup>23</sup>

Shklovsky attempts to shed light on *how* readers perceive literary expressions, that is to say, how these induce in us a strengthened perception, both of the verbal expression and of what the expression is about. He is fascinated with the ways language is capable of shaping our perception. For Shklovsky, the crucial function of poetic devices is to *slow* down the perception and to create a vision of the object. It is important to note that the distinction between the prosaic and the poetic in Shklovsky is a matter of function, of whether it has been successfully created to remove the automatism of our perception. Moreover, whether a string of words has such a poetic force depends on such things as context and the expectations of the reader. Interestingly, in *Zettel*, we find Wittgenstein making a remark suggesting a similar view: “The way music speaks. Do not forget that a poem, even though it is composed in the language of information, is not *used* in the language game of giving information.”<sup>24</sup>

An important point in Shklovsky is that the difference between the language of prose and that of poetry must be contextually defined. He speaks in this connection of poetry as “roughened, impeded language,” which is something he dubs the principle of the “roughened form.” In some cases, the language of poetry comes near the language of prose. In discussing Pushkin’s trivial style, Shklovsky notes, “The usual poetic language for Pushkin’s contemporaries was the elegant style of Derzhavin; but Pushkin’s style, because it seemed trivial then, was unexpectedly difficult for them.”<sup>25</sup> I think it is rewarding here to view Wittgenstein’s language and style as roughened and having an impeding function. It is supposed to slow down both the reading and

---

<sup>22</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §129.

<sup>23</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 39, p. 63.

<sup>24</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, eds G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), §64.

<sup>25</sup> Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’, p. 28.



our perception of the surroundings. The unusual and, in some respects, trivial style of his work, the absence of a traditional vocabulary of philosophy, is something that makes it difficult to come to terms with the work and its treatments of philosophical problems.

In his best known article, “Art as technique,” Shklovsky expounds his view on the literary technique thus: “The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.”<sup>26</sup> I think we actually should say that Shklovsky is discussing two different albeit related techniques in his paper or that we at least could say that there are two aspects to the *technique of art* he is addressing.<sup>27</sup> The first aspect is primarily related to the way our absorption of the literary expressions is slowed down on account of the impeding and roughening texture of the linguistic material. The second one is linked with the way our common and capitalised perception of an object or a phenomenon is made more deep-focused and dense due to the artwork making us imagine it in an *unfamiliar* way. The aim of the device is in either way to remove the automatism of perception:

In studying poetic speech in its poetic and lexical structure as well as its characteristic distribution of words and in the characteristic thought structures compounded from the words, we find everywhere the artistic trademark – that is, we find material obviously created to remove the automatism of perception: the author’s purpose is to create the vision which results from that deautomatized perception.<sup>28</sup>

I think that both elements are present in Wittgenstein’s work as well. As for the first aspect, there are some interesting aphorisms in *Culture and Value* that we should consider (emphasis mine):

In philosophy the winner of the race is the one who can run most *slowly*. Or: the one who gets there last.<sup>29</sup>

Sometimes a sentence can be understood only if it is read at the *right tempo*. My sentences are all supposed to be read *slowly*.<sup>30</sup>

I really want my copious punctuation marks to *slow down* the speed of reading. Because I should like to be read *slowly*.<sup>31</sup> (As I myself read.)

---

<sup>26</sup> Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> See Shklovsky, ‘The Resurrection of the Word (1914)’, pp. 36-37.

<sup>28</sup> Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 34.

<sup>30</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 57.

This is how philosophers should salute each other: “*Take your time!*”<sup>32</sup>

As for the second aspect, there are abundant weird examples, parables, descriptions and comparisons in Wittgenstein’s work. We are, for example, invited to imagine people apparently trading wood but where the setting of price is incomprehensible to us, a country that existed only for two minutes that was a projection of a part of England, a cave-man producing regular marks for himself, communication systems of builders, a child with deviant responses trying to follow a rule, people unacquainted with games sitting at a table performing the moves of a chess game, a speaking lion, and so on.<sup>33</sup> I will discuss a few examples further down. My understanding is that Wittgenstein is here concerned with ordinary phenomena, such as understanding and meaning, but in ways very foreign to mainstream philosophers’ ways of addressing them. Many of Wittgenstein’s descriptions could, in my view, be said to have a defamiliarising effect that induces in us a sharpened perception of the phenomena being discussed.

Interestingly, Shklovsky suggests that we draw attention to the difference between “prose perception” and “poetic perception.”<sup>34</sup> In prose perception, the density and the texture of things vanish. Interestingly, Shklovsky refers to a passage in Tolstoy (*Diary*, 1897), one of Wittgenstein’s favourite writers, to illustrate his point:

I was cleaning a room and, meandering about, approached the divan and couldn’t remember whether or not I had dusted it. Since these movements are habitual and unconscious, I could not remember and felt that it was impossible to remember – so that if I had dusted it and forgot – that is, had acted unconsciously, then it was the same as if I had not. If some conscious person had been watching, then the fact could be established. If, however, no one was looking, or looking on unconsciously, if the whole complex lives of people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been.<sup>35</sup>

For Shklovsky, art is supposed to be able to bring back the sensation of life. Art is, Shklovsky argues, “the crooked road, the road on which the foot senses

---

<sup>31</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 68.

<sup>32</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 80.

<sup>33</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics* (Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 94, 336, 344, and the *Investigations* §§2, 185, 200, and p. 223.

<sup>34</sup> See Shklovsky, ‘The Resurrection of the Word (1914)’, p. 42 and Shklovsky ‘Art as Technique’, p. 20.

<sup>35</sup> Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’, p. 20.

the stones, the road which turns back on itself – this is the road of art.”<sup>36</sup> Shklovsky stresses that the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. There is for him an important contrast between vision and knowledge. This contrast between perception and knowledge is interesting on this score.<sup>37</sup> It is pertinent here to bring Wittgenstein’s reminders to mind. These are, among other things, supposed to help us *see* the physiognomy of the phenomena we are examining. By my understanding, they speak to our perceptual capacities. Their aim is to slow down the perception. The goal is to create a vision, not to serve as a medium of philosophical *knowledge*.

According to Shklovsky, Tolstoy describes things and phenomena in a way that makes us feel we are seeing them for the first time. One of the examples Shklovsky wants to draw our attention to is a short story that is told from the point of view of a horse. This is something, according to Shklovsky, that makes the content of the story seem very unfamiliar and strange. According to Shklovsky, there are numerous similar passages in Tolstoy. The following passage from Tolstoy’s short story “Strider” draws our attention to the institution of private property. Here is the horse speaking:

I understand well what they said about whipping and Christianity. But then I was absolutely in the dark. What’s the meaning of his ‘own,’ ‘his colt’? From these phrases I saw that people thought there was some sort of connection between me and the stable. At the time I simply could not understand the connection. Only much later, when they separated me from the other horses, did I begin to understand. But even then I simply could not see what it meant when they called me ‘man’s property.’ The words ‘my horse’ referred to me, a living horse, and seemed as strange to me as the words ‘my land,’ ‘my air,’ ‘my water.’

But the words made a strong impression on me. I thought about them constantly, and only after the most diverse experiences with people did I understand, finally, what they meant. They meant this: In life people are guided by words, not by deeds. It’s not so much that they love the possibility of doing or not doing something as it is the possibility of speaking with words, agreed on among themselves, about various topics. Such are the words ‘my’ and ‘mine,’ which they apply to different things, creatures, objects, and even to land, people, and horses. They agree that only one may say ‘mine’ about

---

<sup>36</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, ‘Poetika’, quoted from Richard Sherwood, ‘Viktor Shklovsky and the Development of Early Formalist Theory’, in *Russian Formalism: A Collection of Articles and Texts in Translation*, eds Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlt (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press) p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§ 126-129.

his, that, or the other thing. And the one who says 'mine' about the greatest number of things is, according to the game which they've agreed to among themselves, the one they consider the most happy. I don't know the point of all this, but it's true. For a long time I tried to explain it to myself in terms of some kind of real gain, but I had to reject that explanation because it was wrong. Many of those, for instance, who called me their own never rode on me - although others did. And so with those who fed me. Then again, the coachman, the veterinarians, and the outsiders in general treated me kindly, yet those who called me their own did not. In due time, having widened the scope of my observations, I satisfied myself that the notion 'my,' not only in relation to horses, has no other basis than a narrow human instinct which is called a sense of or right to private property. A man says 'this house is mine' and never lives in it; he only worries about its construction and upkeep. A merchant says 'my shop,' 'my dry goods shop,' for instance, and does not even wear clothes made from the better cloth he keeps in his own shop.<sup>38</sup>

This passage may help us see the institution of ownership in a new light. Important aspects of this phenomenon remain unseen, because they are always before our eyes.<sup>39</sup> There is something uncanny and upsetting about the perspective of the horse. The horse investigates, as it were, in a Wittgensteinian way the grammar and use of words, such as, "my" and "mine." The non-human perspective of the horse paradoxically helps us see our own conceptual practices. The horse's considerations force us to see our automatised conceptual practices as our *own*. Moreover, no knowledge, at least not in the ordinary sense of the word, about this institution is conveyed through the passage. I am more inclined to say that Tolstoy's descriptions sharpen our perception. Our perception of this phenomenon is momentarily slowed down. My sense is that we find a great number of comparable passages in the *Investigations*. Take for instance the first paragraph of the *Investigations*. The quote from Augustine's *Confessions* and his childhood recollections of what it is like to be initiated into language is in itself remarkable (as is the very choice of starting with a quotation from an autobiographical book). Yet, the picture of language he extracts from the passage he sums up rather flatly:

In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea:  
Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.

The question why Wittgenstein included the passage from Augustine is discussed in innumerable interpretations. One might think that it simply serves

---

<sup>38</sup> Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', pp. 21-22.

<sup>39</sup> See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 129.

as an example of the picture of language that he endeavours to undermine. I am more tempted to think that the passage is deliberately included to force us to slow down our reading and strengthen our attention to phenomena such as meaning, words and language learning. The summing up of the picture does not engage us in the same way as Augustine's words. My understanding is that the inclusion of the passage, this shocking *philosophical montage*, could be considered a literary device. We feel puzzled, and perhaps even a bit lost, by the very perspective from which the story is told. I think it might be instructive to consider the very prologue of the *Investigations* against the backdrop of Tolstoy's talkative horse and his story. This child, we are supposed to think, was observing the traffic of words from an external point of view. We are invited to imagine a child operating in a world of inert sounds and objects, which is a very uncanny thought.<sup>40</sup> In my view, this first paragraph and many of the consecutive sections are not made to convey some pieces of philosophical information or theses. Rather, they facilitate finely tuned attention to our own ways with words. Yet, there is more to be said about the opening section of the *Investigations* on this score. In the same passage, we are invited to imagine the following case:

Now think of the following use of language: I send someone shopping. I give him a slip marked 'five red apples.' He takes the slip to the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked "apples"; then he looks up the word "red" in a table and finds a colour sample opposite it; then he says the series of cardinal numbers – I assume he knows them by heart – up to the word "five" and for each number he takes an apple of the same colour as the sample out of the drawer. –It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words.

The situation we are asked to imagine is supposed to draw attention to the difference between types of words, that is, how diverse our ways with words are. But who is this person that the "I" sends off with a shopping list? Is it a child? Since the list is remarkably short, why did he have to write it out? What happens when the shopper returns? The little story contains no philosophical jargon or difficult terminology. Nevertheless, we are brought to a halt. We are presented with a concrete but strange situation. However, statements simply to the effect that words have different operative functions in language would have come out very flatly compared to this "curiously mechanical errand," to borrow a description from Cavell.<sup>41</sup> Once more, the desired upshot of using

---

<sup>40</sup> At a later moment, Wittgenstein points out, "Augustine describes learning of human language as if the child came into a strange country and did not understand the language of the country: that is, as if the child could already think, only not yet speak," Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §32.

<sup>41</sup> Cavell, 'Investigations' *Everyday Aesthetics*, p. 26.

this literary device is, in my view, to provide a kind of *vision* of our own practices that we are paradoxically not able to see since they are in front of our eyes all the time.

My second example is also related to the way we fail to take the complexity of life into consideration. Let us consider the following remarks by Wittgenstein:

What is a *deep* feeling? Could someone have a feeling or ardent love or hope for the space of one second – *no matter what* preceded or followed this second?

What is happening now has significance – in these surroundings. The surroundings give it importance. And the word “hope” refers to a phenomenon of human life. (A smiling mouth smiles only in a human face.)

Now suppose I sit in my room and hope that N.N. will come and bring me some money, and suppose one minute of this state could be isolated, cut out of its context; would what happened in it then not be hope? – Think, for example, of the words which you perhaps utter in this space of time. They are no longer part of this language. And in different surroundings the institution of money doesn’t exist either.

A coronation is the picture of pomp and dignity. Cut one minute of this proceeding out of its surroundings: the crown is being placed on the head of the king in his coronation robes. – But in different surroundings gold is the cheapest of metals, its gleam is thought vulgar. There the fabric of robe is cheap to produce. A crown is a parody of a respectable hat. And so on.<sup>42</sup>

These two sections contain questions, an aphorism, grammatical reminders and puzzling situations we are to consider. In order to make us think about the importance of paying attention to the surroundings, Wittgenstein urges us to imagine rather unfamiliar situations, for example, an isolated moment and a coronation in a land in which gold is the cheapest of metals and a crown is a parody of a headdress. Wittgenstein’s language contains no technical or difficult jargon. The thoughts we are supposed to entertain are demanding in spite of their concreteness. Many of Wittgenstein’s remarks ask us to engage thoughts (“thought structures”) that are not easy to absorb. His rather modest descriptions of the situations challenge us in a way not unlike the way minimalist literature does. In both cases, the reader is called upon to participate in the meaning of the work. Thus, instead of advancing theses, we might say that Wittgenstein attempts to assemble “reminders for a particular purpose.”<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §583-584.

<sup>43</sup> See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §127.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I will draw attention to a puzzling excerpt from *Culture and Value* that I take to have some bearing on my discussion:

Engelmann told me that when he rummages round at home in a drawer full of his own manuscripts, they strike him as so glorious that he thinks they would be worth presenting to other people. (He said it's the same when he is reading through letters from his dead relations.) But when he imagines a selection of them published he said the whole business loses its charm and value, and becomes impossible I said this case was like the following one: Nothing could be more remarkable than seeing someone who thinks himself unobserved engaged in some quite simple everyday activity. Let's imagine a theatre, the curtain goes up and we see someone alone in his room walking up and down, lighting a cigarette, seating himself etc. so that suddenly we are observing a human being from outside in a way that ordinarily we can never observe ourselves; as if we were watching a chapter from a biography with our own eyes, surely this would be at once uncanny and wonderful. More wonderful than anything a playwright could cause to be acted or spoken on the stage. We should be seeing life itself. But then we do see this every day and it makes not the slightest impression on us! True enough, but we do not see it from *that* point of view. Similarly when E. looks at his writings and finds them splendid (even though he would not care to publish any of the pieces individually) he is seeing his life as God's work of art, and as such it is certainly worth contemplating, as is every life and everything whatever. But only the artist can represent the individual thing so that it appears to us as a work of art; those manuscripts *rightly* lose their value if we contemplate them *singly* and in any case without *prejudice*, i.e. without being enthusiastic about them in advance. The work of art compels us – as one might say – to see it in the right perspective, but without art the object is a piece of nature like any other, and the fact that we may exalt it through our enthusiasm does not give anyone the right to display it to us. (I am always reminded of one of those insipid photographs of a piece of scenery which is interesting to the person who took it because he was there himself, experienced something, but which a third party looks at with justifiable coldness; in so far as it is ever justifiable to look at something with coldness.)

But now it seems to me too that besides the work of the artist there is another through which the world may be captured *sub specie aeterni*. It is – as I believe – the way of thought which, as it were, flies above

the world and leaves it the way it is, contemplating it from above in its flight.<sup>44</sup>

This is a long and rich excerpt, but let me say a few things about why I think it is important for my discussion. In Wittgenstein's company, Engelmann seemed to have given voice to his frustration toward the experience in which something all of a sudden loses its value and attractiveness (for example, his own manuscripts and letters from dead relatives). In his response to the problem, Wittgenstein reminds us that the point of view, that is, our particular prejudgments or enthusiasm for something, may make something appear attractive and wonderful. The mystical and remarkable situation Wittgenstein asks us to consider is meant to elucidate exactly this phenomenon. Wittgenstein urges us to imagine some everyday activities, such as a person walking back and forth on a stage, lighting a cigarette, etc. from a peculiar point of view. In fact, we are supposed to imagine these activities taking place on a scene and the person not being aware of our presence. Actually, there is an interesting connection between the excerpt and the passage in Tolstoy's *Diary* where we are asked to consider our daily activities seen from the outside.

Moreover, what we would see, Wittgenstein suggests, would just be life itself. But why would we find life itself so interesting? When we normally see such incidents and actions, they make no impressions on us. The point of view is different in this case. Viewed from such a strange point of view, the person's behaviour would indeed make a deep impression on us. When Engelmann finds his manuscripts glorious, his point of view consists of seeing his life as God's work of art. From such a point of view, everything is worth contemplating. Engelmann is, as it were, prejudiced and subjective. Due to his enthusiasm, the manuscripts appear glorious. Yet, it is, Wittgenstein notes, an important difference between seeing something as a work of art (here, God's work of art) and actually *representing* something so that it appears as a work of art. Engelmann is not representing anything (he is only enthusiastic about something). His enthusiasm might be infectious, but in contrast to a work of art, Wittgenstein suggests, there is nothing compelling about his way of seeing the manuscripts. A work of art, on the other hand, compels us to see the thing in the right perspective. In my view, Wittgenstein is interested in how our prejudices, our thoughts about (and attitude toward) what we see, contribute to what we actually *see*. Engelmann, for example, sees the letters for a short time in a particular perspective. He manages for a brief moment to see his life as an artwork created by God. His enthusiasm makes him see the pictures in a

---

<sup>44</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 6-7.



particular way. It is from this perspective that we should understand the last sentences of the excerpt:

But now it seems to me too that besides the work of the artist there is another through which the world may be captured sub specie aeterni. It is—as I believe—the way of thought which, as it were, flies above the world and leaves it the way it is, contemplating it from above in its flight.<sup>45</sup>

For Wittgenstein, our prejudices and thoughts about phenomena constitute porous and personal points of view. In contrast, art is able to provide *compelling* perspectives. As for my discussion in this paper, I think Wittgenstein wanted to create remarks and aphorisms that had the power to bring about deautomatising perspectives in the reader. He was very concerned about his own style. Remarks in the right style may engage us and provide valuable perspectives. Such perspectives may sensitise us to aspects that we tend to ignore or overlook because of their familiarity.<sup>46</sup> As we remember, Tolstoy focused on a similar problem in his *Diary*: “If, however, no one was looking, or looking on unconsciously, if the whole complex lives of people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been.”<sup>47</sup>

In this paper, I have suggested that we obtain a broader perspective on the literariness in Wittgenstein’s later writings. Shklovsky’s formalist focus on the literary function in discussing the *literariness* of prose literature is instructive as far as illuminating Wittgenstein’s non-doctrinal and therapeutic conception of philosophy goes. Many of Wittgenstein’s grammatical investigations and reminders may challenge our imagination and perception. They are, among other things, meant to help us slow down so that we think about the issues more thoroughly. This is often true of works of literature that we find worthwhile to engage as well.

---

<sup>45</sup> Toward the end of the excerpt, he mentions that the artist captures the world sub specie aeterni. It is instructive to compare this with remarks from *Notebooks 1914-1916*, in which Wittgenstein says that the ordinary point of view we assume is to see them from their midst. The work of art, on the other hand, sees the things from the outside. In such cases, the rest of the world constitutes a background. The artistic representation separates the thing from the rest of the world.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 24 and Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §129.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’, p. 12.