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## Wittgenstein on Life, Art, and the “Right Perspective”

In this paper I would like to offer an interpretation of a remark Wittgenstein wrote in 1930. This text has already appeared in *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, edited by Georg H. von Wright, and has found a new context in the so called KRINGEL-BUCH – a collection of remarks by Wittgenstein recently put together with extraordinary philological expertise by Joseph Rothhaupt. Here, it appears as section 52. Though to strip the section from its larger context and consider it as a sort of autonomous piece is disputable, I hope this move is excusable on the one hand on the ground that the KRINGEL-BUCH as *Initialtext* or book-project has a relatively loose structure and on the other hand, because section 52 – if I am not mistaken, the longest in the KRINGEL-BUCH – conveys a sense of completeness.<sup>1</sup>

The paper is divided into five sections. In the first section, I present the structure and themes of KB #52. As we shall see, KB #52 mainly deals with the nature of a certain way of looking at things – a way that transforms ordinary things, actions and events into something significant or wonderful. The remaining sections are devoted to the interpretation of the text. In the second section, I comment on the thought experiment Wittgenstein suggests to the reader, which consists in imagining a certain scene represented on a theatre stage. This is a crucial passage in KB #52, since it introduces the question of the relation between art and value. I concentrate on this question in the third section of the paper, while in the fourth section, in order to explore the implications of a specific passage in Wittgenstein’s text, I suggest a comparison with XVII century Dutch painting and pursue the point further by recalling Hegel’s interpretation of this episode in the history of western art. I do not mean to suggest that Wittgenstein may have been influenced by Hegel. Wittgenstein was a reader of Schopenhauer and was aware of the

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<sup>1</sup> From now on I shall use the abbreviation KB #52 in order to refer to the remark at issue. Abbreviations for Wittgenstein’s works in the text are as follows: *LC* = *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology & Religious Belief*, ed. by Cyril Barrett, Blackwell, Oxford 1966; *LE* = “Wittgenstein’s Lecture on Ethics”, *The Philosophical Review*, 74 (1965), pp. 3-12; *TB* = *Tagebücher 1914–1916*, in *Ludwig Wittgenstein Werkausgabe*, Band 1, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1984, pp. 87–187; *TLP* = *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, in *Ludwig Wittgenstein Werkausgabe*, Band 1, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1984, pp. 9–85; *WWK* = *Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis*, in *Ludwig Wittgenstein Werkausgabe*, Band 3, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1984. References to *LE* and *WWK* are by page number; references to *LC* and *TLP* are to section number; references to *TB* are by entry date.

latter's conception of art, while he had probably no idea about Hegel's aesthetics. However, I believe that juxtaposing Wittgenstein's (Schopenhauerian) conception of art as a way of looking at things with Hegel's interpretation of XVII century Dutch painting could be illuminating, since Hegel's interpretation is very powerful in casting light on how art can give significance to the ordinary. Finally, in the fifth and conclusive section I hint at some problems with Wittgenstein's (early) idea that ethics and aesthetics – or art and life – are connected with each other.

## 1 Structure and themes of KB #52

KB #52 seems to be the record of an actual conversation Wittgenstein had and it probably conveys Wittgenstein's considerations on an issue concerning himself. At the same time, it is a piece of philosophical reflection, although a strange one: it was written in 1930 but, at times, it sounds as if it came from the past, like a fragment from the early Wittgenstein. In particular, it reminds the reader of some entries in the *Tagebücher* or in the *Tractatus*, because it shows a conception of art and artwork that seems reminiscent of the “transcendental” aesthetics typical of the early Wittgenstein.<sup>2</sup> However, as we shall see, the core of the section is introduced by „Ich sagte wir hätten hier einen Fall ähnlich folgendem [...]“, a phrasing typical of a later Wittgenstein and in line with his conviction that we can understand a phenomenon by focusing our attention on the resemblance it has with other phenomena – a conviction that underlies many among Wittgenstein's critical notes on Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* collected in the KRINGEL-BUCH (see, for instance, KB #169). Stylistic features aside, I do not believe KB #52 is a sort of relic. Rather, I am inclined to think that it illustrates some points that are deeply rooted in Wittgenstein's outlook, even though his conception of aesthetics was undergoing a change at the time he wrote the remark.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein states that ethics is transcendental and that ethics and aesthetics are one (*TLP* 6.421). Aesthetics too, then, is transcendental. In my interpretation, by qualifying aesthetics in this way Wittgenstein means to emphasize that it is connected to the world and, at the same time, that its “content” disappears if we try to make it part of the world. In this sense, aesthetics is also “transcendent” (cf. *TB* 30.7.16). Aesthetics is connected to the world in a way similar to that of logic, i.e. as a condition of the world (cf. *TB* 24.7.16). If logic mirrors the formal properties of the world it fills (cf. *TLP* 5.61, 6.12), aesthetics is a point of view on the meaning or value of the world. And, just like logic, aesthetics does not have representational content, it is not about a particular kind of facts. According to Wittgenstein, the value of the world must lie outside the world (cf. *TLP* 6.41).

<sup>3</sup> Wittgenstein's 1938 lecture on aesthetics suggests that he developed a conception of aesthetics as grammar, that is, as a kind of conceptual inquiry primarily concerned with the ways practices

The text can be divided into two parts. The first part can be regarded as a story or a plot. The second part is a sort of theoretical development of the story told in the first part. I shall quote from the first part of the text, following its narrative structure. It opens with the account of a conversation between Wittgenstein and his friend Paul Engelmann:

Engelmann sagte mir, wenn er <zu Hause> in seiner Lade voll von seinen Manuscripten krame so kämen sie ihm so wunderschön vor daß er denke sie wären es wert den anderen Menschen gegeben zu werden. (Das sei auch der Fall wenn er Briefe seiner verstorbenen Verwandten durchsehe). <Wenn er sich aber eine Auswahl davon herausgegeben denkt so verliere die Sache jeden Reiz & Wert & werde unmöglich.>

From a narrative point of view, the opening is the exposition: it provides the reader with the elements that will be developed and clarified throughout the rest

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like appreciation, criticism, discussion or other direct forms of involvement with artwork are interwoven with language (cf. Johannessen 2004). In the opening remark of the *Lectures*, Wittgenstein states that the subject, i.e. Aesthetics, “as far as” he could see, is “entirely misunderstood” (LC I 1). It is not easy to specify what misunderstandings Wittgenstein had in mind. However, among them there was certainly the consideration of aesthetics as a branch of psychology. For Wittgenstein, the idea of a science of aesthetics was ridiculous or stupid (cf. LC II 1, 2 e 35). I think we can draw a parallel between a central aspect of Wittgenstein’s critique of Frazer’s *Golden Bough* and his critique of the idea that some kind of scientific aesthetics is possible. In a nutshell, the core of the criticism towards this idea is that “aesthetic explanation is not causal explanation” (LC II 38). Wittgenstein addresses a similar objection against Frazer’s treatment of primitive rituals. He claims that Frazer assimilates the understanding of ritual customs to a problem of scientific explanation and maintains that this is a wrong move, since it brings to represent the ritual in question as nonsense (cf. KB #102). The point, for Wittgenstein, is that, when we consider primitive rituals, we can gain the satisfaction we seek in an explanation by means either of describing a way of acting, arranging in the right way what we already know, or of considering the relation that links the ritual in question to us. Once a ritual or a custom is brought into connection with something that finds an echo in our experience, we get the desired explanation (cf. KB #104). Wittgenstein’s point is not only methodological; what he tries to show is that if we seek to explain a ritual we mistake the exact nature of what we are supposed to explain (cf. De Lara 2003 and Bouveresse 2007). A remark by G. E. Moore, which appears in his account of Wittgenstein’s 1930–1933 lectures, documents the connection between Wittgenstein’s remarks on the understanding of rituals and the conception of aesthetics he developed through the Thirties. Moore writes: “His discussion of Aesthetics [...] was mingled in a curious way with criticism of assumptions which he said were constantly made by Frazer in the *Golden Bough*, and also with criticism of Freud”. According to Moore’s notes, for Wittgenstein “what Aesthetics tries to do [...] is to give reasons, e.g. for having this word rather than that in a particular place in a poem, or for having this musical phrase rather than that in a particular place in a piece of music. [...] Reasons, he said, in Aesthetics, are of the nature of further description” (Moore 1955: 16, 19). This sounds very similar to what Wittgenstein also maintains for understanding primitive rituals (cf. KB #105).

of the story. It must be noted that Wittgenstein is not explicit on the nature of Engelmann's manuscripts: evidently, this is not relevant to the story. He limits himself to describe the changes in Engelmann's feelings when he looks at the drawer full of his own manuscripts: when he considers them as a whole, he thinks they are certainly valuable and worth publishing; if he considers publishing a selection from the manuscripts however, "the whole business loses its charm and value". Why is it so? This is the problem that will find a (partial) solution at the end of the story.

The story goes on with Wittgenstein's reply to Engelmann:

Ich sagte wir hätten hier einen Fall ähnlich folgendem: Es könnte nichts merkwürdiger sein als einen Menschen bei irgend einer ganz einfachen alltäglichen Tätigkeit wenn er sich unbeobachtet glaubt zu sehen.

From a narrative point of view, this is the rising action: the element that builds up tension and leads to the climax of the story, which comes immediately afterwards. Wittgenstein suggests a thought experiment:

Denken wir uns ein Theater, der Vorhang ginge auf & wir sähen einen Menschen allein in seinem Zimmer auf & ab gehen, sich eine Zigarette anzünden, sich niedersetzen u.s.f. so daß wir plötzlich von außen einen Menschen sähen wie man sich sonst nie sehen kann; wenn wir ę quasi ein Kapitel einer Biographie mit eigenen Augen sähen, – das müßte unheimlich & wunderbar zugleich sein. Wunderbarer als irgend etwas was ein Dichter auf der Bühne spielen oder sprechen lassen könnte. Wir würden das Leben selbst sehen.

Unlike the man who is unaware of being watched, the man on the stage is well aware of being watched. However, in a sense the theatrical situation gives structure to the former case and Wittgenstein focuses his attention on the effect of the vision „von außen“ we have in both cases: an ordinary scene becomes extraordinary, remarkable. He thus suggests that the way we look at things can have a sort of power of transformation on them. Hinting at the nature of this way of seeing with the theatre thought experiment, Wittgenstein collocates the turning point of the story, its climax, at the level of our attitude towards things.

The story ends with an answer to an objection:

– Aber das sehen wir ja alle Tage & es macht uns nicht den mindesten Eindruck! Ja, aber wir sehen es nicht in der Perspektive.

The conclusion confirms that at the level of our attitude towards objects, a transformation of the value or meaning they have for us can occur. Maybe this does not completely dissolve the trouble in Engelmann's case. Still, when we consider Wittgenstein's interpretation of the story we can see that it explains one of the two ways Engelmann feels towards his manuscripts:

So wenn E. seine Schriften ansieht & sie herrlich /<wunderbar>/ findet (die er doch einzeln nicht veröffentlichen möchte) so sieht er sein Leben, als ein Kunstwerk Gottes, & als das ist es allerdings betrachtenswert, jedes Leben & Alles.

This passage can be seen as the narrator’s commentary on the story, his meditation on the reported events; it also marks the beginning of the second part of the section – the theoretical one. It is a passage packed with ideas. Wittgenstein introduces new concepts. As the above lines document, there’s a change in the description of the object of Engelmann’s sight. Wittgenstein suddenly shifts from considering Engelmann’s attitude towards his own manuscripts to claiming that, while looking at the manuscripts in the drawer, his friend was taking a certain attitude towards his life. It is as if, when Engelmann gives value to his manuscripts, what he actually finds valuable is his own life. To express this idea, Wittgenstein claims that Engelmann could see his life as a work of art created by God. From this standpoint, Wittgenstein comments, life is certainly worth contemplating. This suggests that looking at one’s life from the outside – as one would look at an actor on a theatre stage – is like seeing it as a divine work of art.

Wittgenstein goes on to articulate two general theses: one concerning the work of the artist, and the other concerning artworks. It is worth quoting Wittgenstein at length:

Doch kann nur der Künstler das Einzelne so darstellen daß es uns als Kunstwerk erscheint; jene Manuscripte verlieren mit Recht ihren Wert wenn man sie einzeln & überhaupt wenn man sie unvoreingenommen, das heißt ohne schon vorher begeistert zu sein, betrachtet. Das Kunstwerk zwingt uns – sozusagen – zu der richtigen Perspektive, ohne die Kunst aber ist der Gegenstand nur <ein Stück> Natur wie jedes andre & daß wir es durch die Begeisterung erheben können das berechtigt niemand es uns vorzusetzen. (Ich muß immer an eine jener faden Naturaufnahmen denken die der, der sie aufgenommen interessant findet weil er dort <selbst war,> etwas erlebt hat, der dritte aber mit berechtigter Kälte betrachtet; wenn es überhaupt gerechtfertigt ist ein Ding mit Kälte zu betrachten).

As a sort of conclusive comment, Wittgenstein mentions a way of looking at things that he considers similar to the one typical of the artist:

Nun scheint uns aber, gibt es außer dem Kü der Arbeit /<Tätigkeit>/ /<Funktion>/ des Künstlers noch eine andere, die Welt sub specie aeterni einzufangen. Es ist – glaube ich – der Weg des Gedankens der gleichsam über die Welt hinfliegt & sie <so> läßt wie sie ist, – sie von oben im /<vom>/ Fluge betrachtend. [sie vom Fluge betrachtend] [sie von oben vom Fluge betrachtend].

The observation is of some importance for the topic of the text. The presence of the expression *sub specie aeterni* in these last lines of KB #52 brings us back to the *Tractatus*, where the expression is used in relation to the (metaphorical) act of

seeing the world as a whole (cf. *TLP* 6.45), and above all to a well known entry from Wittgenstein's *Tagebücher 1914–1916*, which I shall quote below. As for now, it is interesting to note that while in the previous part of KB #52 Wittgenstein speaks of art as directed to particular objects, in the closing lines of the text he mentions the world as object of the artist's work. The shift parallels that in the Engelmann's anecdote, where Wittgenstein first considers his friend's manuscripts and then his life. This last part of the discourse evokes the young Wittgenstein's thesis that life and the world are the same (cf. *TLP* 5.621).

Before we analyse the text in some detail, let us recall the problem it addresses. KB #52 begins by discussing an experience that happened to Paul Engelmann, a close friend of Wittgenstein, when he was looking at his manuscripts. He noted a sharp difference in the attribution of value to the writing depending on whether he looked at all of the manuscripts in a drawer, or considers the hypothesis of publishing a selection of them. As Engelmann feels that in the latter case his writings lose their charm and value, the former case contrasts with the latter. However, maybe the feeling that the manuscripts seem to lose their value is not due to the fact that Engelmann contemplates them singly, but that he thinks about publishing them. In other words, I suggest that what determines the change in Engelmann's feelings when he considers the hypothesis of publishing a selection from his manuscripts is that in this circumstance he withdraws from his detachment.

Since Wittgenstein identifies the whole of Engelmann's manuscripts with his life, if the point were singularity, it would follow that one's life is worth being contemplated only if taken as a whole, while episodes of a life, considered singularly, have no value. However, this is not plausible, because if we look at an episode from the "right perspective", the episode can become our world or our life, according to Wittgenstein. It is just like in the theatre experiment: when we observe a fragment of life, we see life itself.

At this point it is worth quoting the above mentioned entry from the *Tagebücher*:

Das Kunstwerk ist der Gegenstand *sub specie aeternitatis* gesehen; und das gute Leben ist die Welt *sub specie aeternitatis* gesehen. Dies ist der Zusammenhang zwischen Kunst und Ethik. Die gewöhnliche Betrachtungsweise sieht die Gegenstände gleichsam aus ihrer Mitte, die Betrachtungsweise *sub specie aeternitatis* von außerhalb. (*TB* 7.10.16)

According to this note, a work of art is a way of seeing an object. The entry from the following day suggests that a work of art basically is a way of seeing that strips the object from its context – the state of affairs – and makes it the world of the observer. Wittgenstein writes: „Als Ding unter Dingen ist jedes Ding gleich unbedeutend, als Welt jedes gleichbedeutend“ (*TB* 8.10.16). I shall come back to this entry below. As for now, I would like to point out that Wittgenstein's words seem

to confirm that what is relevant in Engelmann’s case is the change in attitude. If this is correct, then also the selection of Engelmann’s writings could be seen, at least in principle, in its singularity, as a work of art, i.e. as something worth contemplating. This obviously does not mean that, in virtue of the way it would be looked at, it would be transformed into a valuable piece of literature. Suppose the selection is a collection of poetry of little artistic value. When it is seen as a work of art, its poor artistic value does not change. Nevertheless, it receives value in virtue of how it is seen, i.e. because of the fact that it is seen from the outside, as one’s world or life.

In the closing lines of KB #52, Wittgenstein metaphorically describes the „Weg des Gedankens“ as a way of looking at the world from above, as if thought could fly above the world. This is an image that suggests a sense of detachment. Moreover, according to the entry I have just quoted, this is the way of seeing that characterizes a good, happy life. This may sound rather odd. After all, when observed from the outside, our life does not look like *ours*; moreover, such a view “from above” seems to strip life of its (human) character. It is hard to think that this is the very point of view from which our life should look special to us.<sup>4</sup> But this is what Wittgenstein seems to suggest, and he sees a connection between detachment and happiness (cf. e.g. *TB* 13.8.16). However, this point is not emphasized in KB #52; rather, the point of the text is the description of a way of seeing that allows for appreciating ordinary life, the commonplace. The everyday – a man walking up and down, lighting a cigarette, etc. – turns out to be of aesthetic value, if looked at in the “right perspective” or *sub specie aeternitatis*. Whatever else this expression means, it seems to suggest that we behold the object – what Wittgenstein calls “a chapter from a biography” – as if it had nothing to do with us. Art exemplifies the nature of this way of seeing. Wittgenstein, as we have seen, speaks of Engelmann seeing his life “as a work of art created by God” and therefore as “worth contemplating”. Moreover, he suggests that “every life & everything whatever” is worth contemplating. Art is the topic of the theoretical part of the section. But it is in the first part of the section, with the narration of Engelmann’s anecdote and the proposal of the theatre thought experiment that Wittgenstein seeks to evoke the nature of the way of seeing that art exemplifies. Let us now analyse this part of the text in more detail, beginning from the transformative action, i.e. from Wittgenstein’s suggestion to imagine a scene represented on a theatre stage.

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4 For a different reading see Landau 2011.

## 2 Theatre and life

The thought experiment Wittgenstein engages the reader in is rather intriguing. He does not ask us to imagine watching the sequence of a play; apparently he wants us merely to imagine the theatrical framing of an ordinary activity. Hence, what he asks us to imagine would essentially be a “theatre” in the very Greek meaning of the word, i. e. a “theatron”, a “place for seeing”. In a sense, the theatre situation formalizes the scene Wittgenstein evokes in his reply to Engelmann, where someone is looking at someone else who is unaware of being watched. There is a degree of voyeurism in the situation Wittgenstein wants us to imagine. However, in this case, to see and not to be seen seems to be a necessary condition for the vision „von außen“ to take place. If the person who is being watched were aware of being watched, then the viewer would enter the scene, and one could not speak of a vision “from outside”. That the point of Wittgenstein’s voyeurism is not an interest in truth of expression as, for example, in traditional approaches to photography, is made clear by his comment on the theatre experiment. But before getting to this, let us consider a complication in the thought experiment.

The text does not exclude that what Wittgenstein is asking us to imagine is not the mere theatrical framing of an ordinary activity, but ourselves watching an actor performing. For example, “someone alone in his room walking up and down, lighting a cigarette, seating himself etc.”. The meaning of this interpretation becomes clear if we consider the artistry involved in this performance together with Wittgenstein’s idea that art compels us to see an object in the right perspective – an idea I shall examine below.<sup>5</sup> It is not difficult to imagine that a variety of skills are required in order for us to observe, in Wittgenstein’s words, “a human being”: not an illusion of reality, or a pretence, but a full-blooded presence, and a presence regarded “from outside in a way that ordinarily we can never observe ourselves”.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> If we were looking at an actor’s performance, then that we were able to see a human being “from the outside”, would be part of the effect of art. Michael Fried recalls that according to Diderot, actors should use all the skills at their command “in order to create the dramatic stage *tableaux* that will secure the overarching illusion that the audience has not been taken into account” (Fried 2008: 27). Since absorption goes hand in hand with unawareness of being beheld, we can understand why Fried sees Wittgenstein’s thought experiment as belonging to the cast of mind he calls “antitheatrical” (cf. *ivi*, 77).

<sup>6</sup> The theatre thought experiment suggests that Wittgenstein, in line with the beliefs of modernist theatre, assumes that the actor must not be perceived as be acting, whereas he must be the character onstage. This is indirectly confirmed by a recollection by John King, a former student of Wittgenstein’s. King writes: Wittgenstein “never would go to any British film; and if we passed a



What we observe in this case, then, is a fragment of life, “a chapter from a biography” or “life itself”. And we observe it as if we were external spectators, as if we were not taking part in it. This has aesthetic consequences. Wittgenstein comments that the sight of an utterly ordinary activity from this perspective is more wonderful than any story a playwright could arrange to be acted on a stage. Wittgenstein is thus suggesting that (and how) the everyday can become a domain for the aesthetic.

As we have seen, he anticipates an objection that might be raised against this idea: life – one might say – is something we see every day, but it does not impress us much. Every day we see other human beings busy performing some action, we come upon someone absorbed in their activity who, at least for a few moments, is unaware of being observed, but we are not in the least impressed by what we see. However – Wittgenstein’s reply goes – this is not equivalent to looking at a scene from a detached point of view, objectively, so to speak. Detachment makes the difference. If seen with detachment – Wittgenstein maintains – an ordinary scene looks at the same time *unheimlich* and *wunderbar*.

This merits some comment. As for the former, it is quite obvious to think of the Freudian *Unheimliches*. According to Freud, what is *unheimlich* belongs to the class of the frightening, which leads us back to what is known of old and has been familiar to us for a long time.<sup>7</sup> Wittgenstein, though, uses the term to refer to a rather different situation. Nevertheless, Freud’s choice to trace back the *unheimlich* to something familiar is consonant with Wittgenstein’s use of the term. What we find uncanny is something that, in a sense, we know well: it is life itself. The point is that it loses its familiar character by virtue of the perspective from which we look at it: our perspective on it is separate from that of the person being observed, as if we were inhabiting different worlds, or better, as if we were seeing life from the outside. To see life in this way is to see it *sub specie aeternitatis*, and this is the reason why what we see is not only uncanny, but is “at once” wonderful. In an entry from his *Tagebücher 1914–1916* Wittgenstein writes: „Das künstlerische Wunder ist, daß es die Welt gibt. Daß es das gibt, was es gibt“. (TB 20.10.16) In a sense, nothing is more familiar to us than the existence of the world. Nevertheless, *that* the world is, may be seen as a wonder. It is interesting that just at this juncture of KB #52, art and the artist enter the scene.

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cinema advertising one he pointed out how the actor looked dressed-up, unnatural, unconvincing, obviously play-acting, while, in comparison, in the American films the actors were the part, with no pretence” (“Recollections of Wittgenstein” in Rhees 1984: 71 quoted in Fried 2008: 365).  
7 Cf. Freud 2005.

### 3 The transfiguring power of art

In what I have called the “resolution” of the narrative portion of KB #52, Wittgenstein, going back to Engelmann’s anecdote, introduces the concept of art. He claims that when Engelmann looks at what he has written and finds it marvelous, he is seeing his life as God’s work of art and, as such, as certainly worth contemplating. It seems that Wittgenstein here draws a parallel between Aesthetics and Ethics that recalls the one drawn in the above quoted 7.10.16 entry from the *Tagebücher*. However, we must observe that by speaking of life as a work of art created by God he also stresses the fact that – as Carolyn Wilde writes – “one does not produce one’s life as one produces a work of art”.<sup>8</sup> Engelmann did not create his life in the same way he produced his manuscripts, nevertheless he can look at his life as if it were a work of art, provided that he sees it from a certain point of view. What follows in the text suggests that this point of view is that of the artist: “only the artist – Wittgenstein writes – can so represent the individual thing (*das Einzelne*) so that it appears to us as a work of art”.<sup>9</sup> With regards to life, the exercise of artistry consists in the adoption of a peculiar perspective on it – the view *sub specie aeternitatis* – as opposed to the idea of shaping it as if it were a work of art.

If it is seen in this way, life – any kind of life, Wittgenstein seems to be saying – can be seen as a work of art created by God, that is, as valuable. This suggests that for Wittgenstein the value of a life does not depend on its content, so to speak, but on its form. What makes the difference is *how* life is seen, that is, how it is accepted.

It is interesting that Wittgenstein not only attributes to the artist the ability to “represent the individual thing so that it appears to us as a work of art”; furthermore, he claims that a work of art compels us to see things in the right perspective. The terms “art” and “work of art” are used interchangeably. Just like in the *Tagebücher*, in KB #52 Wittgenstein seems to conceive of art as a way of looking at things, and therefore to identify art with an attitude, more than an activity. If this is correct, it follows that what issues from an act of art-making is a change in the way we look at things. That as a result of that act, new objects are produced

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<sup>8</sup> Wilde 2004: 174.

<sup>9</sup> This recalls Schopenhauer’s description of the work of the genius in section 36 of book III of *The World*. However, as Wilhelm Vossenkuhl has pointed out to me, Kant had already depicted the artist, the genius, as someone who has the capacity to make an object appear (when, like the ideas of reason, it does not belong to the realm of experience), or appear under a new light (when it belongs to the realm of experience) (cfr. *Critique of Judgment*, sec. 49).

is secondary. First and foremost, the artist provides a way of viewing that turns things into works of art. To better articulate the point, let us look at how the work of the artist is characterized in the text.

### 3.1 Art and value

Wittgenstein maintains that a work of art compels us to see an object in the right perspective, while “without art, the object is a piece of nature like any other”. It is a Tractarian idea that any piece of the world merely considered as such is just an element of the *how* of the world, of the accidental „Geschehen und So-sein“, while value is non-accidental (*TLP* 6.41). Now, Wittgenstein is suggesting that art can turn an object that is a mere “piece of nature” into an object that is worth contemplating. This sounds like a theoretical translation of the thought experiment of framing an ordinary action within the box of a theatre stage. This idea of transformation is well illustrated by the following entry from the *Tagebücher*:

Als Ding unter Dingen ist jedes Ding gleich unbedeutend, als Welt jedes gleichbedeutend. Habe ich den Ofen kontempliert, und es wird mir nun gesagt: jetzt kennst du aber nur den Ofen, so scheint mein Resultat allerdings kleinlich. Denn das stellt es so dar, als hätte ich den Ofen unter den vielen, vielen Dingen der Welt studiert. Habe ich aber den Ofen kontempliert, so war er meine Welt, und alles Andere dagegen blaß. (*TB*, 8.10.16)

The entry develops the content of another entry quoted above, where Wittgenstein claims that the work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. There he explained that to view objects *sub specie aeternitatis* is to see them from the outside, „So daß sie die ganze Welt als Hintergrund haben“; and he closed the entry by adding: „(Es drängt sich der Gedanken auf): Das Ding *sub specie aeternitatis* gesehen ist das Ding mit den ganzen logischen Raum gesehen“ (*TB* 7.10.16).

Michael Morris comments that to see something in this way means seeing it “with a consciousness [...] of the way in which” it “can be combined with other things”.<sup>10</sup> Combinations of objects are facts, and facts in logical space are the world. When the stove is contemplated together with the whole logical space, or as being capable of shaping the logical space, it becomes the world of the observer. According to Wittgenstein, this is what makes it significant. We can hypothesize that, if Englemann were to look at a fragment from his manuscripts

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<sup>10</sup> Morris 2008: 326.

in this way, contemplating it as such, then the fragment would appear significant to him, because it would be his world, that is, his life.<sup>11</sup>

The above mentioned stove example looks like Wittgenstein's version of a thought by Schopenhauer. In *The World as Will and Representation* (1818<sup>1</sup>, 1844<sup>2</sup>) Schopenhauer writes:

Art [...] plucks the object of its contemplation from the stream of the world's course, and holds it isolated before it. This particular thing, which in the stream was an infinitesimal part, becomes for art a representative of the whole [...]. (Schopenhauer 1969, Book III, sec. 36, vol. I, 185)

Wittgenstein too can be said to think that art makes us perceive objects as if they were representative of the whole world. In his words, this means looking at objects together with the whole logical space. In the entry where the work of art is defined as the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*, he contrasts this way of seeing with another he calls „die gewöhnliche Betrachtungsweise“. The latter, Wittgenstein writes, „sieht die Gegenstände gleichsam aus ihrer Mitte“, considers the objects that are being seen as well as the relationship they have with other objects, it considers the facts being one specific way rather than another. By transforming an object into the world of the beholder, art brings to the fore not *how* the world is but *that* it is. According to Wittgenstein, aesthetically, the miracle is that there is what there is (cf. *TB* 20.10.16). In order to attempt to make sense of this idea, it is worth recalling that the experience *that* something is, does not properly count as an experience (cf. *TLP* 5.552). It is not a fact, and therefore it is not part of the (describable) content of experience. That Wittgenstein calls the being there of what there is “aesthetically, the miracle” suggests that art exemplifies the form of contemplation of the world that the *Tractatus* connects to the mystical feeling (cf. *TLP* 6.45).

As we have seen, Wittgenstein parallels art and ethics as forms of the vision *sub specie aeternitatis*. Since, according to Wittgenstein, the world seen in this way is the good life (cf. *TB* 7.10.16), it is quite obvious to assume that “work of art” is the expression of what – borrowing an expression by Michael Fried – we could call “good objecthood”.<sup>12</sup> A good life, is a life that has ethical or absolute value; a work of art is an object that has the same kind of value, that is, absolute value. If we recall that in the *Lecture on Ethics* Wittgenstein, to express what he means

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<sup>11</sup> The source of Engelmann's problem does not consist in the fact that he singles out a part from the whole of his manuscripts, but in the fact that he thinks about publishing that part. When this happens, he ceases to have a vision „von außen“. This is the reason why the manuscripts lose the value they appeared to have for him.

<sup>12</sup> Fried 2008: 303.

by “absolute value”, mentions the experience of wondering at the existence of the world (cf. *LE*, 8), we may get a glance of the reason why art confers value on things.<sup>13</sup> The idea is that by compelling us to see objects in the right perspective, art makes us capable of wondering at the existence of what there is and arouses in us a feeling about of the value of what there is.

This brings us back to the theatre thought experiment that plays a key-role in Wittgenstein’s reflection. When the curtain goes up, a scene opens up for our view: we see a space where something comes to presence or, better perhaps, where presence (or presentness) is felt more intensely. Sense and value, it seems, are packed together in this experience. I would like to elaborate on this point a little more by recalling a moment in western painterly tradition, XVII century Dutch painting, and the way it has been interpreted by Hegel – a philosopher whose way of thinking is very different from Wittgenstein’s.

## 4 Dutch painting and the everyday

In what Wittgenstein considers the artistic way of looking at things there is, I believe, something very similar to the attitude towards the world that we find in XVII century Dutch painting, where the most commonplace scenes are depicted with the greatest accuracy and skill, so that they look stunning and beautiful. Consider paintings such as *The Courtyard of a House in Delft* (1658) by Pieter De Hooch, *Woman Reading* (late 1660s) by Pieter Janssens Elinga, *Woman peeling apples* by Gerard Ter Borch (ca. 1660), or Johannes Vermeer’s *The Lacemaker* (1669–70). The way these works of art are painted expresses the acknowledgment that even the least interesting objects can also be seen – and depicted – as immensely valuable. Without getting into interpretative details, we can acknowledge a sort of implicit Spinozism in these paintings, for two reasons. In the first place, they show how even extremely ordinary scenes can be seen to embody the perfection of the world. There is a difference, though. As Tzvetan Todorov notices, while Spinoza claimed that reality in itself is perfect, it is actually the gaze of the painter that by means of selecting an object or a scene from the world and transforming it, put us in contact with beauty.<sup>14</sup> Paintings like the ones mentioned above show that beauty

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<sup>13</sup> While in the *Lecture* Wittgenstein stresses the altogether personal character of his connection between the experience of wondering at the existence of the world and the notion of absolute value, in his talk with Waismann he seems to give it a more extended significance (cf. Waismann’s records of his December 17<sup>th</sup> 1930 conversation with Wittgenstein, in WWK, 118).

<sup>14</sup> Todorov 2000: 88.

can be found in the most meaningless objects, in the most obvious gesture. But what makes it appear is the quality of the (artist's) gaze. In the second place, there is a sense of suspension of time in De Hooch as well as in Ter Borch and Vermeer that suggests a Spinozian vision *sub specie aeterni*, so that the transient is captured and becomes eternal. The depicted scenes are taken from ordinary life – a lady writing a letter, a woman peeling apples, people drinking in a courtyard, etc. – , but they look as if they did not belong to it anymore. Once again, this is the effect of the painter's gaze, a gaze full of grace that rejoices in the existence of things, that transforms life illuminating it with meaning and beauty.<sup>15</sup> It is, I believe, the same grace Wittgenstein evokes while speaking of art as of a way of looking at things *sub specie aeterni* or with a happy eye. The philosopher's stove example is, at least in spirit, near to the Dutch painterly experience that beauty can be found in the most common and humble objects.<sup>16</sup>

The artistic way of seeing is by no means an easy attitude to take. In KB #52, Wittgenstein maintains that art forces us into the right perspective<sup>17</sup> and, presumably to avoid misunderstandings, he opposes the artistic way of viewing to a way of viewing that we could call “the perspective of the enthusiastic”: while art can compel us to wonder at something, “we may exalt an object through our enthusiasm but – Wittgenstein writes – that does not give anyone else the right to confront us with it”. He explains the point with an example that is worth commenting on before going back to the analogy between Wittgenstein's conception of art and XVII century Dutch painting. In brackets Wittgenstein observes that he is “always reminded of one of those insipid snapshots of a piece of scenery which is of interest for the man who took it because he was there himself and experienced something; but someone else will look at it with justifiable coldness, in so far – he adds – it is ever justifiable to look at something with coldness”.

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15 Cf. *ivi*, 116.

16 As a reader of Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein could have had in mind a passage from section 38 of book III of the *World*, where Schopenhauer hints at Dutch painting. Further, he may have found in the following passage an attitude similar to the one exemplified by Dutch painting: “Every state or condition, every person, every scene of life, needs to be apprehended only pure objectively, and made the object of a description or sketch, whether with brush or with words, in order to appear interesting, delightful, and enviable” (Schopenhauer 1969, Suppl., Book III, cap. 30, vol. II, 372). According to Schopenhauer, to objectively grasp something means understanding it not as a particular object or event, but as an *idea*, an eternal form. Wittgenstein's version of the idea is a way of looking at things so that they appear meaningful in themselves just for their existence, for being what there is, that is, *my world*, the world of the beholder.

17 How art can “force” us is an interesting question that I cannot pursue here. However, I will say something on this later in sect. 4.2.

## 4.1 The snapshot case

Sometimes things acquire value for idiosyncratic reasons. To me the dried flower that I placed in a book is not just a piece of nature. It is, instead, an object of great value because it reminds me of a distant summer in the mountains, of the friends I was with, and of the beauty of the place. However, looking at the flower as if it were something of great value is an entirely personal experience. There is no way to force someone else to look at that flower with enthusiasm, and there is no way someone can force me to look at it with enthusiasm. Suppose that I took some photographs of the mountains in that summer and that I am enthusiastic about them, whereas you cannot find anything interesting in them. This case is similar to the one Wittgenstein mentions. Often, the photos we take look insipid to others; they are interesting to us, because they are connected to an experience we had and find valuable in some way.

At the end of the above quoted passage, Wittgenstein is clear about the fact that we have no reason to show ordinary objects to other people and expect them to find those objects valuable. However, as Michael Fried points out, looking at something “with coldness (*mit Kälte*)” emerges from Wittgenstein’s words “as a (perhaps inevitable) failure of humanity”.<sup>18</sup> If coldness is a failure, coolness could be an ideal. Fried quotes the following entry from *Culture and Value*:

Mein Ideal ist eine gewisse Kühle. Ein Tempel, der den Leidenschaften als Umgebung dient, ohne in sie hineinzureden. (ca. 1929) (*VB*, 453)

The distinction between looking at something “with coldness” and looking at something “with coolness” is as ethical as it is aesthetic. It may hint at the (Kantian) ideal of the judgment of taste, or of a disinterested and distanced contemplation. Reference to this ideal may be implied by the passage in KB #52 we are commenting on. Speaking of an insipid snapshot of a scene that is of interest only to the man who took it, Wittgenstein implies that it would be possible to take a different, more interesting, “artistic” photograph of the same scene.<sup>19</sup> The way he builds up the opposition between the artistic and the enthusiastic way of viewing suggests that we must distinguish between the personal character of the artistic way of looking at things and those ways of looking at things, which depend on the feelings and interests of the viewers. The latter is a case of looking at things „aus ihrer Mitte“, from the perspective of our psychological self, instead that „von außen“. According to Wittgenstein, this is not the artistic way of seeing. The arti-

<sup>18</sup> Fried 2008: 78.

<sup>19</sup> I owe this point to Wilde 2004: 172.

stic point of view is a detached one, it is the point of view of a subject who is not „ein Teil der Welt“, since it shrank to the „Grenze der Welt“ (*TLP* 5.641).<sup>20</sup> As it is clear that the difference between an artistic photograph and an insipid snapshot does not depend on the nature of the object that is photographed, presumably an artistic photograph, according to Wittgenstein's conception, should embody the point of view „von außen“. It should be a photograph taken in such a way that it allows to focus one's attention on what it shows, so that the represented subject appears meaningful in itself, and not because it is associated with the viewer. Maybe such a photograph should allow for a way of seeing that transcends the limits of individual perspective in the sense intended by contemporary aesthetics of impassiveness. Works by Clare Richardson from the series *Sylvan* (2002), or the industrial structures photographed by Bernd and Hilla Becher may be examples of (Wittgensteinian) artistic photographs. However, the best example is probably provided by Jeff Wall's *Morning cleaning* (1999). It is not without reason that Michael Fried conjoins it to KB #52 in a revelatory and suggestive way.

*Morning cleaning*, a transparency in lightbox, depicts a window cleaner as he manipulates a long-handled squeegee inside the (reconstructed) Pavillon that Mies van der Rohe, together with Lily Reich, built for the German section of the Exposición Internacional in Barcelona in 1929. The work renders the merger of interior and exterior spaces by means of the transparent and translucent walls that characterize the Pavillon but, despite the richness and elegance of the building, “the principal focus of the work” is the window-cleaner,<sup>21</sup> that is, a man (who appears) unaware of being watched, while he is performing an ordinary activity, just like the man in Wittgenstein's thought experiment.

Actually, in *Morning cleaning* there is something that reminds one of the kind of gaze on ordinary scenes Wittgenstein evokes in KB #52, and I think it is not wrong to maintain that a work of art like this comes close to realizing (the young) Wittgenstein's ideal of art.<sup>22</sup> Fried links *Morning cleaning* to the “absorptive mode” exemplified by painters like Chardin, in which figures are immersed in their own world and activities and display no awareness of the construct of the picture and the necessary presence of the viewer.<sup>23</sup> But there is also a Dutch-painting char-

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**20** According to Schopenhauer, the artist is like a clear mirror of the object; s/he is no longer an individual among others in the world, whereas s/he becomes the pure subject of knowledge (cf. Schopenhauer 1969, Book III, sec. 34, vol. I, 178–179).

**21** Fried 2008: 67.

**22** Cf. the analysis of the work in Fried 2008: 63–93 and the critical commentary by Mulhall 2011: 95–98.

**23** According to Fried, “starting in the mid-1750s in France a new conception of painting came to the fore that required that personages depicted in a canvas appear genuinely absorbed in what-



acter to it. Although the van der Rohe’s Pavillon does not qualify as a domestic setting, *Morning Cleaning* recalls the scenes of ordinary people engaged in everyday activities in domestic interiors that we find in XVII century Dutch painting. Fried himself stresses the affinity between Wall’s picture and a painting such as *Interior with Painter, Reading Woman, and Sweeping Maid* (1665–70) by the Dutch painter Pieter Janssens Elinga. Like the Dutch painters, Wall discovers that the everyday, the commonplace, can be a domain of the aesthetic. Revealingly, Wall tells Jan Tumlir: “the everyday is a space in which meanings accumulate, but it’s the pictorial realization that carries the meanings into the realm of the pleasurable”.<sup>24</sup> As we have seen, in KB #52 Wittgenstein makes a similar point: only a work of art, compelling us to see life in the right perspective, can make it available for aesthetic contemplation and lets us perceive value in it. This last observation brings us back to the analogy between Wittgenstein’s conception of art and XVII century Dutch painting I have suggested above. Paintings belonging to that period of western art history embody the possibility of illuminating life with meaning and beauty, quite like the happy eye of the Wittgensteinian artist. I shall now further comment on this point, recalling some passages from Hegel that have partially inspired my proposal.

## 4.2 Hegel’s Dutch painters

I shall not go into details about Hegel’s interpretation of Dutch painting – which can be found above all in his *Aesthetics*, i.e. in the account of Hegel’s lectures on fine arts offered by H. G. Hotho – since it may suffice to recall some of its elements. The first thing to consider is that Hegel discusses XVII century Dutch painting in the context of his account of the romantic form of art. According to Hegel, the domain of romantic art is existent humanity, and the principle of the romantic form of art is *Innerlichkeit*, i.e. inwardness, and, more precisely, *Innigkeit*, intimacy.<sup>25</sup> As Benjamin Rutter points out, *Innigkeit* is a term that indicates

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ever they were doing, thinking, and feeling, which also meant that they had to appear wholly unaware of everything other than the objects of their absorption, including – and this was the crucial point – the beholder standing before the painting”. Any suggestion that a painted personage was acting for an audience “was considered theatrical in the pejorative sense of the term” and was regarded as a fault. Fried recalls that the double stress on absorption and anti-theatricality received a theoretical articulation in Diderot’s writings on drama and painting (Fried 2008: 26 and for an extensive discussion of the topic Fried 1986).

<sup>24</sup> The interview is quoted in Fried 2008: 64.

<sup>25</sup> Hegel 1975: 80–81, 801, 812.

the standpoint of feeling, of an affective mode of access to the world. This notion constitutes the structuring principle of Hegel's taxonomy of the forms of romantic painting, each of which "is defined by the class of objects to which it grants the viewer intimacy".<sup>26</sup> Dutch painting belongs to the third kind of romantic painting, the first one being religious painting, and the second landscape. While, according to Hegel, religious painting makes it possible to establish a felt relation "with the central figures of Christian ethical life", and landscape "expands the realm of intimacy" to what is "plainly external", therefore allowing us to "posses in nature a spiritual depth of our own", genre painting attempts to endow "a trivial content with significant human feeling" instead.<sup>27</sup>

For Hegel, it is a principle of the modern man, of the "free subjective individual", that he proves himself "in his own eyes to be concrete and living" only by his "involvement with concrete reality"<sup>28</sup>. Dutch painters show this attitude since they take "delight [...] in what is *there*"<sup>29</sup>, and in this way what they allow is intimacy with the finitude of human beings. However, in the interpretation of Dutch genre painting, Hegel must face an intriguing problem. The objects of this kind of painting are often trivial and insignificant, they belong to what he calls "the *prose of the world*",<sup>30</sup> where people are frequently means to others and depend upon external forces and purposes. As Rutter observes, "it is artistically impossible to invest such subjects with the thoroughgoing harmony of content and form" required by Hegel's strict definition of beauty.<sup>31</sup> The finitude of everyday life is not suited to the ideal. In a sense, Dutch painters renounce beauty by making the prose of life the content of their works. They depict liveliness, soulfulness; the challenge they take up is to present "the *life* and joy of independent existence in general which persists amid the greatest variety of individual aims and interests"<sup>32</sup>.

Dutch artists succeeded in creating this appearance of liveliness because they were able to imbue scenes of daily life with a sense of necessity, of a "living fit between the feeling and the scene".<sup>33</sup> For Hegel, in these paintings "something ephemeral is held fast and made stationary. [...] This is – he further comments –

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**26** Rutter 2010: 74–75.

**27** *Ivi*, 75–76. Rutter here is referring to Hegel 1975: 814–837. On Hegel on painting cf. also Houlgate 2000: 61–82.

**28** Hegel 1975: 803.

**29** *Ivi*, 573.

**30** *Ivi*, 150.

**31** Rutter 2010: 90 and Hegel 1975: 149. On Hegel's conception of beauty cf. *ivi*, 85–90.

**32** Hegel 1975: 833.

**33** Rutter 2010: 93–94.

the triumph of art over transience”<sup>34</sup>. It is interesting that, according to Hegel’s interpretation, Dutch artists could achieve such an effect, because they chose as the subject of their art the intimacy with the immediate present that results from one’s engagement in daily tasks.<sup>35</sup> Very often in Dutch paintings the subjects seem to exist for the particular task they are carrying out, as if they were devoted to it, as if they had put their whole selves into it. It is not without reason that, in regard to this, Rutter recalls Fried’s notion of “absorption”. According to Hegel, it is this intertwining of the individuals and the tasks they are performing that produces the harmony in which lies the attraction of Dutch painting. Rutter notices that the painter can overcome our resistance to recognize ourselves in the trivial scenes genre painting so often presented to us, by shifting our attention “from the particularity of the scene at hand, to its quality of absorption, of commitment to the form of life at hand”. And the painter can succeed in doing this not only because the depicted subjects are themselves absorbed in their actions, but also “by absorbing *himself* in their lives”.<sup>36</sup>

The notion of the artist’s concentration and commitment to “the world and its daily life” is crucial. The painter’s attentiveness and interest in the scene in question suggest the scene may deserve the beholder’s attention. Rutter, quoting Hotho’s Hegel, states: the painter is thus able to “make significant even what is in itself without significance”.<sup>37</sup> It is the artist’s own activity that confers value to works that cannot be – in Hegel’s sense – beautiful, since they depict the prosaic content of daily life. More radically, it is the artist’s activity that can make sig-

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34 Quoted in Rutter 2010: 93 from Hegel 1998: Ms. 186.

35 Cf. Rutter 2010: 94.

36 *Ivi*, 97. Rutter quotes the passage in Hegel’s *Aesthetics* where we read that “the final achievement of German and Flamish art is its utterly living absorption in the world and its daily life” (Hegel 1975: 884). Hegel speaks of “the subjective vivacity with which the artist, with his own spirit and heart, breathes life entirely into the existence of such [prosaic] topics [...] and presents them to our vision in this animation” (*ivi*, 596). By qualifying as “subjective” the liveliness of the scene, Hegel makes it clear that such liveliness is conferred by the artist. As we also read in *Aesthetics*, “[...] something new is [...] added to these commonplace subjects, namely the love, the mind and spirit, the soul, with which the artist seizes on them, makes them his own, and so breathes his own inspiration of production as a new life into what he creates” (*ivi*, 837). Incidentally, it is worth noticing that in this way Hegel somehow offers an indirect account of how the absorption of ordinary people in their common tasks is not simply imitated, but presented in its liveliness by Dutch painting.

37 *Ivi*, 98 (Hegel 1975: 596). This is not to ignore that daily life can be banal – not to say desperate and nonsensical, as many paintings show us. While acknowledging that the content of genre painting has an empirical justification in Dutch history, Hegel wants to clarify the role of the painter’s talent in the redemption of the everyday. See also Todorov 2000: 88–89.

nificant what is in itself insignificant. By painting individuals doing the most mundane tasks with meticulousness, commitment and intensity, the artist “forces us to see the painted subjects as absorbed”, as if their individuality existed precisely for the particular tasks in which they are engaged.<sup>38</sup>

This idea that what matters is the artist’s “way of seeing, his manner of treatment and elaboration, his living absorption”<sup>39</sup> in the execution of the work, is strikingly similar to Wittgenstein’s conception of the artistic way of looking at things and to his idea that art can force us to assume a certain perspective. As in (Hegel’s interpretation of) Dutch painting also for Wittgenstein it is the artist’s way of seeing which makes the trivial significant. However, for both philosophers, by achieving this transformation, the artist does not create something new; rather, s/he discovers significance, s/he suggests the perspective from which significance is revealed to our eyes. In this way, the artist makes life itself available for aesthetic contemplation. In Wall’s words, the artist “carries into the realm of the pleasurable” the meaning accumulated in the everyday.

## 5 Art and Life

Let me sum up briefly. In KB #52, with the theatre thought experiment – with curtains opening on a scene where an individual performs an utterly ordinary activity – Wittgenstein seeks to evoke a particular way of looking at things that allows one to take delight not in the fact that things are a certain way rather than another, but instead, in the simple fact that *there are* things. This way of seeing things allows to take delight in there being what there is, because it allows us to see it as a miracle. Wittgenstein thinks art exemplifies this way of seeing. I have suggested that XVII century Dutch painting – and, following Michael Fried, Jeff Wall’s photographs – may approximate Wittgenstein’s conception of the artistic

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<sup>38</sup> *Ivi*, 100. In their works of art, Dutch painters link “supreme freedom of artistic composition, fine feeling for incidentals, and perfect carefulness in execution, with freedom and fidelity of treatment, love for what is evidently momentary and trifling, the freshness of open vision, and the undivided concentration of the whole soul on the tiniest and most limited things. [...] And when it proceeds from the insignificant and the accidental to peasant life [...], these scenes appear so completely penetrated by a naïve cheerfulness and jollity that the real subject-matter is [...] this cheerfulness and naïveté [...]: it is the Sunday of life which equalizes everything and removes all evil” (Hegel 1975: 886–887). According to Hegel, by depicting the everyday what Dutch paintings present us with is how the modern individual comes to *feelingly* identify with daily life, or to feel reconciled with the instrumentality and banality of daily life.

<sup>39</sup> Hegel 1975:836.

way of looking. The relevance of the attitude Wittgenstein thematizes is ethical and aesthetic. That a fragment of daily life, of something we take part in, appears to us uncanny when it is seen from a detached perspective and that, at the same time, it looks – as it happens with many XVII Dutch paintings – more wonderful than anything a playwright may want to be acted or spoken on a stage, tells us an important thing about the source of meaning and value. Wittgenstein points out that the everyday, is both a basic and a rich artistic and ethical category: it is the place where beauty and value accumulate, although we can only enjoy them when looking from the right perspective, i. e. by means of adopting the artistic way of looking at things.

It is because Wittgenstein considers art as a way of looking at things that confers meaning and value to them, that he connects it to ethics. In the *Tagebücher* he writes:

Ist das Wesen der künstlerischen Betrachtungsweise, daß sie die Welt mit glücklichem Auge betrachtet?

To this question Wittgenstein answers with a quote from Schiller:

Ernst ist das Leben, heiter ist die Kunst. (TB 20.10.16)

The quote comes from the Prologue of *Wallenstein*, a drama set in the middle of the havoc, the robberies, the miseries of the Thirty Years' War. It reminds us that the serenity of art is not to be found in what it presents, but that rather it resides “in how it is presented”.<sup>40</sup> It is possible that by means of quoting Schiller, Wittgenstein may want to tell us something about the nature of the connection between art and ethics, namely that what is essential for art, that is, the perspective on things, is also essential for ethics, for the “enquiry into what is valuable, [...] or into the meaning of life” (LE, 5). It seems that for Wittgenstein, value resides “in an attitude or style, in one’s acceptance of all the facts”,<sup>41</sup> that there is a *view*, a way of *feeling* the world that amounts to an understanding of its sense.

Of course, this is a disputable idea; above all, there remains the crucial question of what is the relationship between the serenity of art, or the experience of art, and the seriousness of life, the “prosaic” structure that life has outside the artistic domain. Wittgenstein says that the artistic way of looking at things consists in looking at them with a happy eye, but he also maintains that the world of the happy is quite another world than that of the unhappy (cf. TLP 6.43), suggest-

<sup>40</sup> Wilde 2004: 173.

<sup>41</sup> Murdoch 1993: 28. Cf. also Majetschak 2000: 121–123.

ing that that relationship between the two worlds is one of mutual exclusion and incomprehensibility. How, then, can the experience of art be related to the rest of our experience? As the distinction between art and everyday life cannot collapse, it is not easy to understand how these existential domains can be co-ordinated or can belong to the same totality.<sup>42</sup>

According to Wittgenstein, art can offer us moments of grace in which the beauty and significance of the world, that is, of life, is revealed. However, more than of a form of integration he seems to be thinking of a sort of gestaltic change, by which the world changes its form, it becomes a happy world, although the facts are the same. This attitude – the attitude that, in Wittgenstein’s conception, art exemplifies – is one with seeing the world, that is, life, with wonder, like a miracle and not like a mere accident. As a response to the world, wonder is a sort of affective grasping of the *non accidentality* of the being of what there is, a way of feeling this non accidentality. Therefore, it is a way of experiencing value and sense.

A similar thought appears in other texts from the same period from which it results that for Wittgenstein, wonder does not arise from the perception of a problem, and therefore it is not something that an explanation can eradicate (cf. *WWK*, 68). We do not wonder because there is something we cannot explain, but we wonder because we look at something in a certain way.<sup>43</sup> However, suffering from a sort of “blindness to wonder” or “blindness to miracle”, many of us are inclined to think that a miracle is simply a fact that science has not yet explained. Wittgenstein argues that “the scientific way of looking at a fact is not the way to

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Gardner 2002: 295–296. This problem was clear to Hegel. By depicting the everyday, Dutch painting suggests a *feelingly* identification with daily life. However, what follows the “Sunday of life” are working days with their instrumental character and banality, and for Hegel romantic art is not able to integrate these two antagonistic domains of existence.

<sup>43</sup> Incidentally, it is interesting to observe that this idea also seems to operate in Wittgenstein’s criticism to Frazer’s work on primitive rituals – a criticism that occupies many among the remarks collected in the *KRINGEL-BUCH*. As already observed, Wittgenstein’s criticism is not merely methodological. When discussing Frazer’s explanation of primitive rituals, Wittgenstein sometimes suggests that any phenomenon can look mysterious and significant, and not because of our ignorance of its cause (cf. KB #134–135). He rejects the explanation of primitive amazement as a result of ignorance, calling it the “*dummen Aberglaube unserer Zeit*”, and he seems to assume that looking at something from a perspective that confers meaning to it is a distinctive feature of humanity. According to him, primitive rituals are based on an instinct, which is pervasive of human behaviour, a disposition to react in a certain way towards “significant phenomena”. This persuasion is the reason why Wittgenstein thinks that Frazer misunderstands the nature of the phenomena he seeks to explain and wrongly assimilates the understanding of rituals to the solution of a scientific problem.

look at it as a miracle” (*LE*, 10-11). Sure, facts are not miraculous as such, since they are not particularly significant as such. However, as Ronald Hall points out, “blindness to wonder” is a form of “blindness to reality”.<sup>44</sup> It is a blindness to that aspect of reality – call it significance or value – that art, by compelling us to the right perspective, makes us able to see. This is also the idea that lies at the heart of KB #52. We can summarize it by saying that the everyday can be surprising and wonderful only if seen under the right perspective.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Hall 2010: 290.

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