There is no 'I' in 'Image': Wittgenstein's Image Forming, the Visual Room and the Boundaries of Language and Space

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Introduction

When Wittgenstein addressed the question 'what is the mental image?' he quickly dismisses it for more pressing issues like image forming and images and sensations (Wittgenstein, 1967/1981, paragraph 621). He realized that images are not concrete phenomena, but psychological concepts; the act of conjuring up an image of something. The example he uses is the visual room, an object with spatial and architectonic qualities (Wittgenstein, 1958/ 2009, paragraph 398). This is significant as it shows spatial concepts to be essential to the philosophy of the image and image forming. The importance of the spatial construal of Wittgenstein's philosophy, with regards not only to images and image forming, but to his private/public issues and the inner/outer issue can be shown through an analysis of the Stonborough-Wittgenstein House. In fact, it is significant that Wittgenstein theorized about the image only after his experiment into architecture. After working in the spatial and architectonic dimensions that architecture is concerned with, Wittgenstein returned to philosophy with the empirical, as opposed to solely analytical and spatial approach to philosophical problems, including image forming. With its foundations in visual space, the visual room concept is an example of Wittgenstein's spatial approach to philosophy influenced by and integral to his work in architectonics and design. The discussion of the visual room is the "strongest evidence for Wittgenstein's association of the spatial and the linguistic" (Last, 2008, p. 185), leading to a crossing back and forth of concepts between the realms of philosophy and architecture.

1. Images and Image Forming

Wittgenstein's aphorisms regarding the image were characteristically rooted in a concern with the use of words that describe the concept. He differentiated the image from sensations; auditory images and visual images are distinct from heard sounds and the sensation of sight (Wittgenstein, 1967/1981, paragraph 621). Wittgenstein rejects that images are derived from perception and considers imaging as a unique phenomenon.

Rather than regarding the image as a thing, Wittgenstein suggests that image forming is temporal, occurring over time and is therefore an action or activity. Moreover, image forming is voluntary, unlike the observation involved in sense-impressions and hallucinations (Kose & Corriss, 1996). He concludes that the image cannot be a concrete thing inside our consciousness, because if this were the case, we would passively receive images rather than wilfully conceive of them. This image forming process, Wittgenstein says, should be thought of as "visual experience in terms of our each having access to images that no one else is privy to" (1997, p. 183). This visual experience is unique as it transcends qualities that can be applied to other real-world experiences. Wittgenstein's example to show these characteristics of visual experiences is the visual room.

2. The Visual Room

"The 'visual room' is the one that has no owner. I can as little own it as I can walk about it, or look at it, or point to it" (Wittgenstein, 1958/2009, paragraph 398). It is significant that the example Wittgenstein gives for visual impressions is a room – a three-dimensional, spatial, architectonic thing rather than anything else. It is the objective of this paper to show the spatial nature of the image and image forming and the role of architecture in this aspect of philosophy.

The visual room is the visual impression one constructs when trying to understand what someone means, when they say they are sitting in a room. By saying you know what they mean, you are saying you know how to think of the object that they mean (McGinn, 1996). We are compelled to think of the visual room as a quasi-physical thing; as possessing physical qualities, relationships in space and the ability to be assigned grammatical concepts. However these qualities for which a real-world room may be true are inappropriate and nonsensical for the visual room. For example, it makes no sense to possess a visual impression, nor to speak of its outside if the impression is of the inside. One cannot enter or exit the visual room in the sense one can in the world.

3. The Spatial Room

Wittgenstein concludes that the visual room shows "a new way of speaking, a new comparison" (Wittgenstein, 1958/2009, paragraph 400). He compares the visual experience of the room with a picture of it: both appear to be perspectival in nature. In addition to the visual impression being incapable of having features its real-world counterpart exerts, the visual impression has its own objective features that are not also features of the object it is an image of. The perfectly cubic room does not appear as a symmetrical object with edges of equal length, the image from inside the cubic room appears with a vanishing point, the image is with a one or two point perspective. Similarly artefacts in the room like tables act in the same way. The visual impression of a square table is not a square, it is seen in perspective. This comparison, between the visual room and a picture of it, is a comparison of two-dimensional representations and relies on the spatial qualities of the three dimensional objects being represented. The visual room shows that the problem of image forming is a spatial one.

The visual room shows that this particular philosophical problem, of image forming, is sited in space. This is not altogether conflicting with the notion that philosophical problems are situated within language. It is perhaps evidence of an inclusive realm where language and space intersect, what Nana Last calls a "shared territory between the spatial and the linguistic" (Last, 2008, p. 183). The intention of the visual room is to address private mental imagery, the relation between inner and outer and no doubt publicly accessible language, language is no longer

the "specific outward criterion" (Last, 2008, p. 184). Other criteria, such as space, vision and architectonics become frameworks for comparison. This somewhat more generous gesture of Wittgenstein's to allow for a foundation for definition other than language could not have occurred in the Tractatus. In fact, the first documentation of Wittgenstein's overt change in thinking and return to philosophy are dated in the months immediately following the house's completion (Wijdeveld, 1993, p. 183). It is significant that only after his work designing the Stonborough-Wittgenstein House did he use visual space as a foundation for the solution to a philosophical problem. Wittgenstein had more freedom to discuss philosophical tasks in spatio-visual terms, and the spatial realm was a new framework in which philosophy could situate itself.

4. The House

Issues involved in the visual room example have their application in the architecture of the House. The act of envisioning a room that is not there is the task of the architect, and Wittgenstein's role as 'architect' influenced his use of the visual room and the topic of the image. Furthermore, the topic of the image and its example of the visual room is evidence for the spatial nature of these kinds of philosophical problems and the language we use to describe them. Rather than considering the House as a distinct entity from Wittgenstein's philosophy, it is considered here as an extension of the visual room. The House is an experiment with spatial limits that blends the boundaries of architecture, philosophy and language.

However, with regards to the philosophy of imaging, when Wittgenstein says of the visual room "it has no master outside it, and none inside it either" (Wittgenstein, 1958/2009, paragraph 398) he discloses the image's absence of true spatial qualities: its lack of ownership as well as the non-existence of boundaries. He eludes to spatial and visual, as well as material and non-material, conflict. Seemingly the visual room can be inhabited, if the image conjured is of someone in a room, but it does not make sense for its boundaries to be crossed. This is a problem with language and exposes the latent spatial nature of language itself. This kind of language is introduced after the completion of the house and contains implicit spatial interpretations. In using language that refers to space, Wittgenstein is showing the significance of spatial relationships in language and hence philosophy. He writes in the Investigations that the relationship language has with the world is not the "formal unity" he had previously imagined; rather "we are talking about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not about some non-spatial, non-temporal phantasm" (Wittgenstein, 1958/2009, paragraph 108). From this we can infer that discussion of boundaries, inhabitation and accessibility need not be separated from their spatial connotations.

5. Thresholds

The articulation of boundaries, an issue Wittgenstein finds with the visual room, is also a significant aspect of the design of the Stonborough-Wittgenstein House. All of the interior doors between rooms are double-layered, like the exterior doors. However, unlike the exterior doors, this is not a functional solution. The interior doors are metal framed with either glass or metal infill. The glass is either transparent or opaque. This creates a hierarchy of thresholds throughout the House. Boundaries between rooms are completely opaque and solid, entirely transparent and fluid or partially translucent. Moreover, due to the double

layering the threshold is different depending on which way you are crossing the boundary. The doors represent the complexity, and sometimes difficulty, involved in dealing with boundaries, both physical and metaphorical. Wittgenstein does not refer only to architectural boundaries with the doors in the House but also to the boundaries of language.

The materiality of the numerous double-layered doors in the house refers to the concept of privacy. Margarethe's private rooms are separated from the salon by doors with transparent glass on the inside and opaque sheet metal on the outside, the most complex boundary for the most private section of the House. Protecting the personal spaces with visually and spatially impenetrable materials links the House to the notion of private mental space portrayed on the visual room example. Image forming is an exclusive or privileged act, shown to be performed in private mental space, a realm analogous to the demarcation of private space in the House. Again the House has blurred the distinction between architectonics and language by exploring private mental space and private personal space literally as space. The privacy of one's exclusive image of the visual room is analogous to the privacy of the boudoir.

The floor plan of the House refers to the concepts of inhabitation and accessibility. To reach Margarethe's bedroom from the hall, one must pass through the salon and then her private living room. Spatially, the salon acts with connective properties between the hall and Margarethe's private living room, and her private living room mediates access from the salon to her bedroom. The delayed accessibility into the private rooms is reminiscent of the difficulty of entering or inhabiting the visual impression of a physical space. Accessibility is an issue that blends the physical and spatial with language.

The use of various mechanical systems to achieve precise results is essential in the House. The metal runner between the inner and outer door leaves allowed the double-layered doors to open in both directions smoothly and seemingly weightlessly. The metal curtains for covering the windows are raised by a "precisely calculated counterweight … With the up and down movement of the opaque curtains, one gets a haptic feeling of light" (Zou, 2005, p. 27-28). The movement of these door and curtain mechanisms creates a temporal gesture by the architecture. A sense of time is brought into the building with the smooth motion of the vertical and horizontal sliding planes. Similarly, image forming is temporal; it is an action that occurs over time. The act of opening and closing can be likened to the forming of an image and conversely one can form an image of a blind or door opening and closing. While the visual room embodies these atmospheric attributes, recall that language too is a "spatial and temporal phenomenon" (Wittgenstein, 1958/2009, paragraph 108). Just as architecture permits time and motion, so too are language and philosophy inextricably entangled with these properties. The visual room highlights the complexity of the philosophical problem of a private mental image and its dependence on our understanding of space.

Conclusion

The image forming process, a private psychological action, is the activity of construing visual impressions of objects in the real world. Wittgenstein's philosophy of the image is bound to language when attempting to describe the concept, and now it is shown as bound to another formwork: the realm of architectural space. The aphorism of the vis-

ual room undergoes analyses of space and language, and in conjunction with the Stonborough-Wittgenstein House it is evidence for the inseparable links of linguistics and space. The visual room is not a mere metaphor that is by chance a room; it is its spatial nature that lends itself to a description of imaging. Wittgenstein is describing philosophy within a blurred boundary of language and space. The characteristics of the visual room as an analogy for language are explored further in the Stonborough-Wittgenstein House, showing the spatial nature of language and philosophical problems. The visual room describes language, but it has its limits. What is beyond the limits of the visual room is described by the architecture of the House. Architecture, the physical construal of the spatial nature of language, is the perfect framework for a philosophy grounded in language. Perhaps the only limits to Wittgenstein's philosophy are the limits of architecture.

Literature

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