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PAOLOZZI
AND WITTGENSTEIN

The Artist and the Philosopher

Paolozzi and Wittgenstein

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An Introduction to the Artist Who "Needed" Wittgenstein

Diego Mantoan and Luigi Perissinotto

1 A Precursor in Contemporary Art and Philosophy of Language

According to a deeply rooted and still widespread belief in the artworld, it appears that the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy on visual arts was first invoked—so to speak—in relation to Conceptual Art, both in its American matrix, as in the case of Joseph Kosuth's *Art After Philosophy* (Kosuth 1991), as well as in the English version through the artist collective

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This introduction has been mutually agreed on by the two authors, although it is possible to discern their authorship: Sects. 1, 3 and 4 were written by Diego Mantoan, while Sect. 2 was written by Luigi Perissinotto.

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Art & Language and its international magazine bearing the same name (Harrison 2001). It isn't difficult to understand the reasons for this association between Wittgenstein and the conceptual artists of the late 1960s and early 1970s, since there are at least three features derived from the writings of the Austrian philosopher that fit neatly into the purpose of this kind of art, such as: a prevailing interest in logical analysis, the methodological approach to language game and, eventually, the purpose of dematerialization. As a matter of fact, the model of linguistics introduced by the Viennese philosopher—complete with terms and phrases such as isomorphism, aspect–seeing, language–game, investigation, etc.—was immediately appealing for those British and American artists who endeavoured to further develop the field of artistic theory and practice. However, artists such as Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner in the USA, Mel Ramsden and Terry Atkinson in the UK were by no means the first who employed or applied Wittgenstein's thought in the realm of visual arts; nor do they seem the ones who succeeded in appropriately interpreting, through artistic means, the writings of the Austrian philosopher. These artists were indeed neither interpreters nor scholarly exegetes of Wittgenstein's writings; they rather used excerpts from the texts of the Austrian philosopher. Sometimes they even manipulated them, transforming the quotes into aphorisms for their own artistic concerns, particularly in reaction to Clement Greenberg, whose influence was perceived in the mid 1960s as suffocating both for art critics and artists (Battcock 1968; Alberro and Stimson 1999).

Although this book is not set to claim the presence or absence of originality and correctness in the way Conceptual Art approached Wittgenstein, it serves as a good starting point, because it immediately pictures the place and years of a peculiar encounter between an artist, Eduardo Paolozzi, and a philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein—both as a man and as far as his philosophy is concerned. Indeed, this "kind of happening" took place years before the generation of future conceptual artists had even entered art school (Spencer 2000: 150). This metaphorical—though very real—encounter came about after the philosopher's death in 1951 and slowly worked its way up in Paolozzi's readings and imagination for an entire decade, until it reached a climax in the explicitly "Wittgensteinian" works of the British artist at the beginning of the 1960s (Spencer 2000: 127, 147). Not only was Paolozzi the first and

perhaps still is the only artist who devoted a substantial part of his oeuvre to the Austrian philosopher, his works still impress even a philosophically qualified audience for the level of expertise and intuitiveness with which the writings of Wittgenstein are handled. For that reason, this book pursues a twofold aim: on the one side, to present the artist Paolozzi as a precursor in reading Wittgenstein in the field of contemporary art, influencing or forestalling the then-upcoming generation of conceptual artists; on the other side, to demonstrate how the reader Paolozzi may even be seen as a precursor as regards the interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Indeed, Paolozzi's rich artistic production about and *with* Wittgenstein is neither accidental nor spurious; on the contrary, it amounts to a true relationship, something very much like a deep friendship or a mutual partnership; that is, between two people that share certain belief and interests, lifestyles and preferences, moments and deeds. Like two people meeting and then walking side by side for quite a bit on the path of their reciprocal lives.

Such a twofold objective can hardly be accomplished in a monocular perspective; hence, as far as methodology is concerned, the book blends different approaches and alternates scholars from various disciplines—spanning from philosophers to art historians—such as to provide an integrated view on Paolozzi's oeuvre and on Wittgenstein's view or influence on visual arts. In fact, given this complex relationship between an artist and a philosopher, we believe it is unavoidable to cover a wide array of methodological stances—ranging from language philosophy to art theory, from contemporary art history to art criticism. As might already be clear from the table of contents, each contributor pursues a particular topic as seen from his or her peculiar research field, in order to jointly deliver the various aspects of a deep and fruitful relationship, both for philosophy and for contemporary art.

2   Paolozzi Featuring Wittgenstein

At a point in art history, when Eduardo Paolozzi's oeuvre is eventually being celebrated, years after his departure, thanks to his definitive studio reconstruction at the National Galleries of Scotland in Edinburgh

and to the first retrospective exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in London, it is about time to investigate the artist's predilection for Ludwig Wittgenstein—both for his writings and biography. Indeed, the articulated relationship between the British artist, credited as "godfather" of Pop Art, and the Austrian philosopher, who counts among the twentieth-century celebrity thinkers, has never been analysed thoroughly. Given the wide array of Wittgenstein-inspired works in Paolozzi's production, as well as his testimonies on the philosopher's influence on his art, for instance in the interviews with Richard Hamilton and William Lipke (Spencer 2000: 125–128, 147–150), it is quite surprising that no scholarly publication—neither art historical nor philosophical—has ever retraced and critically pondered the influence of Wittgenstein's philosophy on the idea of art in Paolozzi, but mostly on his artistic production over the years. As a matter of fact, the encounter with Wittgenstein—specifically with the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, as well as with writings of his disciple Norman Malcolm—originated the well-known series of screenprints titled *As Is When* (1964–1965), of which one edition finds today its place at the Tate Modern in London. However, the following chapters argue that the British artist drew inspiration also from the *Philosophical Investigations*, such that even later works bare the marks of a direct reference to Wittgenstein's thought or biography: so for instance the sculpture *Wittgenstein at Cassino* (1963) or the collages and screenprints of the mid 1990s that were subsumed under the title *A logical picture of facts is a thought (3) Tractatus '21–'22*.

Besides disclosing a deeper understanding of Paolozzi's artistic production, another reason to thoroughly explore his long-time fascination with Wittgenstein lies in the insight this research may provide as regards a reassessment of the philosopher's actual impact on visual arts and its theory in the second half of the twentieth century. Hence, in discussing Paolozzi's attraction to Wittgenstein, the book examines an early example—perhaps the earliest—of the Austrian philosopher's influence on a contemporary artist, as well as the interpretation that an artist may provide of his philosophical thought. In this perspective, Paolozzi as an artist is taken as a true reader or interpreter of Wittgenstein, pursuing his theories with artistic means. In doing so, the volume eventually discloses an unprecedented perspective on Wittgenstein's philosophy

applied to contemporary art, particularly his considerations on form, aspects, image and rules. The guiding star is, thus, the influence of Wittgenstein on Paolozzi, though investigated from a broader perspective than previously done. In fact, the purpose is to go beyond the mere works by Paolozzi with an explicitly "Wittgensteinian" title. Our hypothesis is that the artist remained fascinated also by the *Philosophical Investigations*, as well as by other texts and various episodes in the philosopher's biography. Compared to the state of the art, this book focuses on the entire oeuvre of Paolozzi—comprising the wide array of media and techniques employed: from sculpture to print, from film to music, from collage to environmental installations. Hence, the book aims at deepening the critical search on one of last century's most intriguing, though less analysed artists, further becoming a privileged occasion to reflect on the possible influence of a philosopher on an artist, as well as on the interpretation that an artist may provide as regards a philosophical thought.

3   A Choral Work of "Aspect-Seeing"

Conceived as a collection of essays, this edited volume exceptionally brings together philosophers and art historians of different geographic and generational backgrounds to discuss Wittgenstein and Paolozzi, giving voice to a variety of disciplinary approaches and shaping diverse topics that may arouse the interest of a twofold audience. As a matter of fact, the following chapters offer both a unique take on Paolozzi's oeuvre, reassessing his pivotal importance in the second half of the twentieth century—especially as far as medium diversity and the use of popular culture are concerned—and a convenient opportunity to explore Wittgenstein's thought related to visual arts and his influence on contemporary artists, that is, how artists received or interpreted his writings with creative means. Furthermore, the book is the result of an on-going scholarly discussion among experts on Wittgenstein and Paolozzi, selected after an international conference organised in Venice in 2016. The latter meeting helped to steer this communal research work, refining the chosen cross-disciplinary topic to create a fertile

combination of research perspectives and finding a coherent *fil rouge* around the necessity to look at the relationship between Paolozzi and Wittgenstein from various angles or—so to speak—"see" various aspects of it and perceive its constitutional fluidity or potential indeterminateness. Eventually, this group effort led to twelve original chapters and one translated, as well as extensively rearranged essay, published for the first time in English. Contributors come from prestigious institutions across Europe and bring together different age cohorts, thus allowing a cross-generational and likely long-lasting discussion on the relevance of Paolozzi in twentieth-century art history and the impact of Wittgenstein on the visual arts of the same period.

As regards the structure of this volume, we chose to distribute the essays in three separate though still cross-disciplinary parts, each one approaching or "seeing" the relationship between Paolozzi and Wittgenstein from a peculiar angle. Part I, titled *Aesthetic Grammar: From Wittgenstein to Paolozzi*, is set to investigate what can be extracted from the philosopher's writings for the use of an artist such as Paolozzi; hence, what of Wittgenstein's philosophy may have fascinated the British artist and influenced his artistic grammar. Silvana Borutti addresses the idea of an aesthetic, non-logico-formal understanding of meaning in Wittgenstein as a trigger for Paolozzi's working method. Wolfgang Huemer stresses the impression upon the artist made by Wittgenstein's philosophical style, conceived not as an abstract theory detached from ordinary life, but rather as a central element of our form of life. Alessandro Del Puppo attempts a first evaluation of the aesthetic grammar Paolozzi derived from Wittgenstein, shifting the focus from the formalistic nature of the medium towards a pragmatic approach to the object and to reality. As a closure to this part, Maren Wienigk looks at the technique of collage as a possible link between the mode of thinking and working of both Paolozzi and Wittgenstein, a sort of underlying structure.

Part II, titled *Paolozzi: On Reading Wittgenstein*, analyses the encounter between the British artist and Wittgenstein's philosophy, as well as his biography. The aim is to retrace the origins and development of Paolozzi's fascination with the Austrian philosopher, while looking at the entire scope of the artist's production—including media such as

sculpture, collage, print, film, music and installations—throughout his long career; hence, not only in the 1960s. Luigi Perissinotto opens the part by looking at the way this encounter happened, discovering in Paolozzi's *As Is When* series—as well as in other works—a true and expert "reader" of Wittgenstein. Rachel Stratton observes Wittgenstein's influence—particularly mediated through Richard Wollheim—on the British artist milieu at Paolozzi's beginnings retracing several of his works of the 1950s that show him already experimenting with a visual language keen on "family resemblances". Stefanie Stallschus analyses Paolozzi's animated films through the lens of Wittgenstein suggesting variable connections between the different propositions, and thereby allowing for new insights. Diego Mantoan closes this part retracing Paolozzi's Wittgensteinian habit of "Assembling Reminders for a particular Purpose", that is collecting objects and toys drawn from popular culture, eventually putting them together as an archive (in the 1970s) and later as environmental installations (in the 1980s and 1990s).

Part III, titled *Wittgenstein: On Influencing Art*, offers an ample perspective on further developments in art theory and contemporary art that relate directly to the influence of the Austrian philosopher. Indeed, the contributions help to ponder the relevance of Paolozzi's outcomes for the interpretation of Wittgenstein and for his impact on later developments in the visual arts. Michael Lüthy interrogates Wittgenstein on the definition of "aspect-seeing" to find what is essential to the experience of art, which is experiencing a change in aspect and evaluating the latter. Roberta Dreon draws on the post-Wittgensteinian reconfiguration of the definition of art and suggests considering Joseph Margolis' aesthetics as an insightful way of drawing a critical balance with a crucial reference to Wittgenstein's legacy. Eventually, the last two contributions look at historic examples, other than Paolozzi's, which overtly claim Wittgenstein's influence, thus embarking in a (philosophically) very problematic game of source referencing. Davide Dal Sasso scrutinises various artists, particularly in the field of Conceptual Art, to find the influence of two opposing Wittgensteinian teachings: the strengthening of form and its impoverishment. Francesco Guzzetti retraces the wide usage of language games in the international post-minimalist

research, seen also as a reaction to the influence of Clement Greenberg's criticism.

The final Appendix by Huemer and Mantoan presents a meticulous philological work on all quotes from Wittgenstein that can be found in the series *As Is When*, while the subsequent index may help the readers navigate through the chapters, as it has been prepared to retrace all artworks by Paolozzi and all writings by Wittgenstein discussed by the contributors.

4   Paolozzi, Wittgenstein and Beyond

In conclusion, it is important to acknowledge the growing scholarly literature on Wittgenstein and contemporary art, as well as on the aesthetics that can be derived from his writings. In this regards, very recent publications address the significance of Wittgenstein's philosophy for aesthetic understanding, especially in connection to contemporary currents in aesthetic thinking (Hagberg 2017), or the modernist *Geist* permeating Wittgenstein's work, both early and late (Matar 2017). Among other sources, new insight on Wittgenstein's influence on the visual arts is contained in recent proceedings of the International Wittgenstein Symposium, which analysed the topic of Wittgenstein and the Avant-garde, in order to address contemporary approaches to the aesthetics of nature and of arts (Majetschak and Weiberg 2017). There is further a collection of essays examining an influential thesis drawn from Wittgenstein, which is that the core of pictorial representation is not resemblance but rather "seeing-as" and "seeing-in", especially as found in the work of Richard Wollheim (Kemp and Mras 2016). Previous volumes include a collective exploration of the implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy for understanding the arts and cultural criticism, exemplifying the method of conceptual investigation and highlighting his therapeutic notion of philosophy (Turvey and Allen 2006). One should further mention Garry Hagberg's extensive critique of aesthetic theories from a Wittgensteinian perspective, hence stressing the relevance of his work and the use of language as a point of reference for interpreting art (Hagberg 1998). None of the above, however,

deals directly with an artist or artists that paired or "collaborated" with Wittgenstein, his writings and biography, as extensively done by Paolozzi. At a biographical level, there is however quite some literature on Wittgenstein's own personal interest in the visual arts, especially through his friendship with various artists, such as sculptor Michael Drobil: he experimented with photography, with sculpture and of course in architecture (Klagge and Nordmann 2003). It should further be noted that Wittgenstein's father was a notable Viennese collector and there was an important family connection with Gustav Klimt, thus several studies have highlighted the artist milieu young Ludwig had been exposed to (Janik and Veigl 1998). With regard to the many and articulated influences, both philosophical and experiential, on Wittgenstein's life it seems impossible not to mention the monumental biography written by Ray Monk, which still is one of the most profoundly faceted descriptions of the Austrian "genius" (Monk 1990). To complete the picture, the reader might get deeper insight into the man and scholar Wittgenstein thanks to the recent as well as rich collection of portraits and personal recollections of philosophers, students, friends and acquaintances that give a vivid depiction of his character (Flowers and Ground 2016).

As regards Paolozzi, unfortunately the list of books dedicated to the British artist is not particularly long, which is rather surprising given his relevance as a founding father of Pop Art, as well as his impressive international career, which included participations at the Venice Biennale and the documenta in Kassel, as well as solo exhibitions at the MoMA in New York and at the Tate in London. Likely the most complete and recent monograph, Judith Collins' book on Paolozzi meticulously retraces his entire career spanning over the artist's various stylistic innovations throughout the decades and capturing all different media he experimented with (Collins 2014). The author even acknowledges the influence of Wittgenstein on the British artist (Collins 2014: 148), although with a lack of critical insight: in the pages devoted to the series *As Is When*, for instance, the screenprints are described individually, but the rich Wittgensteinian references in the works are rather taken as ornaments, while the series is presented as a biographical survey on Wittgenstein (Collins 2014: 184–190). Eventually, Collins is

not aware of the thorough knowledge Paolozzi had of Wittgenstein's writings and misinterprets various aspects of specific screenprints, if not of the whole series: in the case of screenprint X, titled *The Spirit of the Snake*, she connects the entailed quotation of Wittgenstein—intuitively but mistakenly—to some sort of Eastern philosophy (Collins 2014: 187). To the contrary of Collins' interpretation, as will be shown in Part II of this book, Wittgenstein's excerpt on snakes, lions, elephants and wasps relates directly to the very Austrian philosopher Otto Weininger, not to some unspecified oriental philosophy. Thanks to the extensive retrospective exhibition curated by Daniel Herrmann at Whitechapel Gallery in 2017, later touring to the Berlinische Galerie, a well structured and richly illustrated exhibition catalogue on Paolozzi's entire oeuvre was finally published, shedding light also on various aspects that had not been analysed so far: for instance, his interest in science-fiction and the friendship with novelist J. G. Ballard, or his late interventions and assemblages at the Museum of Mankind (Herrmann 2017). However, the catalogue completely omits mentioning Wittgenstein as an important source of influence on Paolozzi, save indicating the screenprint series *As Is When*. Hence, there is virtually no bibliography dedicated to Paolozzi's fascination with Wittgenstein and, in the light of Paolozzi's progressive rediscovery and of the renewed scholarly interest in Wittgenstein's aesthetic implications, this represents today a matter of some urgency, in order to fill a visible gap in the academic fields of both philosophy and art history.

This collection of essays—we hope—shall thus come at a convenient time in the scholarly debate on Eduardo Paolozzi's work and on Ludwig Wittgenstein's writings, especially in connection to visual arts and aesthetics. We further trust that this choral effort may shed some light on the relationship between Paolozzi and Wittgenstein, eventually serving as a model for future cross-boundary research touching upon the fields of philosophy and contemporary art. However, if there was one single aim we wish to accomplish with this book, that would certainly be explaining why an artist such as Paolozzi—at the height of his success in conversation with Richard Hamilton—could ever claim that: "Some people need, perhaps, Greenberg, I need Wittgenstein" (Spencer 2000: 128).

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