The Appearance of A Material Object

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I. Appearances

What is an appearance? Some will say: there is no such thing; counselling us not to be bemused by what is a mere manner of speaking. Whether or not this is how matters stand, the concept of the appearance seems nonetheless to be completely indispensable to us, given the kind of life that humans lead. How could we make use of the sense of sight if we could not register and compare the look or appearance of things? In any case, it is certain that appearances matter vastly to us. Think of “the face that launched a thousand ships.” Here we are talking of the peculiar efficacy in human life of a mere visual appearance. It was the look of Helen’s face, rather than its chemical or electrical or pheromonic properties, that caused such a furore. Again, the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture, are exclusively concerned with visual appearances; while drama, the film, and even opera, address themselves in part to our capacity to respond to visual appearances. Importance may not be everything, but it strongly suggests we are dealing with something more than an illusion.

The next thing to be said about appearances is, that the concept gives every sign of being at once bona fide and rule governed. For example, we would all of us I think agree that, short of radical change in the human species as a whole, appearances necessarily supervene upon the physical properties of the bearer; so that if the look of a painting changes in any respect whatsoever, something absolutely
must have happened to the paint. In addition, we have the precise and valuable concept of the visual facsimile or “double,” which is the concept of one who is visually indistinguishable from another, and therefore of one who shares a visual appearance with another. Now this latter observation gives us a clue to the real nature of the appearance. For it suggests that one and the same visual appearance can find instantiation in distinct individuals, which in turn suggests that a visual appearance may be a complex universal—compounded presumably out of colour, brightness, and spatial appearance. Accordingly, the claim that there are no such things as visual appearances, ought perhaps to be re-cast in the following way. It is not that the word “appearance” is devoid of meaning. Neither is it that those who individuate appearances are the bemused victims of a manner of speaking. It is that the complex universal that is a visual appearance does not find instantiation in individuals through designating some subsidiary individual that stands in close and special relation to the bearer of the appearance. In other words, a visual appearance is not something of the ilk of an ineffable suit of clothing, a fine covering skin, an ethereal outer shell; nor is it an inner psychological analogue of these last: for instance, a construct out of sensations or anything of that kind. The reason being, that it is not an individual.

It is interesting how we drift all the time from talking of appearances to talking of visual appearances. Why? Is it because of a simple prejudice in favour of the visual? I think it is for a better reason than that. I think it is because the only appearances that material objects ever have are visual appearances. This is not to say that the only sensory qualities that they have are visual. Rather, it is to deny to smell and taste and sound, and the properties disclosed to touch, the property of being part of the appearance of their material object owner. What is the rationale of this exclusion? Better, why is there such a thing as a visual appearance? Two properties, both possessed by sight, are responsible. The first is, that when in sight the attention lands upon a colour it lands thereby in addition upon its material object bearer; the second is, that it lands upon the material object in and through (or “in virtue of”) landing upon its colour or brightness etc. In other words, the visual attention manages to pick out material objects, and does so through picking out the secondary qualities of the sense. It differs in the first respect from smell, taste, and hearing; and differs in the second respect from touch. Thus, when I notice
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a smell I do not thereby notice the giant cheese object that is its source; and this is because, thanks to the inexistence of anything one could call a "smell field," and a fortiori the absence of mapping relations from object onto such a field, attentive individuation of smell sources is not possible. While the attention encounters the appearance-clothing (as one might say) in the case of the three sensuous senses, it does not encounter a material object owner to suit. It is precisely the other way around in the non-sensuous sense of touch. While the attention does in touch manage to land upon individual material objects, it does not do so in and through (or "in virtue of") landing upon any tactile analogue of colour or brightness: for example, through landing upon its furry feel or coolness; and this feature of touch is doubtless internally linked with the fact that tactiley we individuate objects across time through spatial phenomena rather than instantaneously through phenomena of sense. Various philosophers have noted this fact. Berkeley in "A New Theory of Vision" when he claimed that the "proper and immediate object of touch" is the material object itself, which is to say that no secondary quality is or could be to touch what colour or brightness are to sight; Wittgenstein also it may be, when in his 1946-7 lectures he described the idea of "tactile sense-data" as a mere "stunt" (though we will shortly give reason why the concepts of appearance and of sense-datum must be sharply distinguished.) In a word, in touch the attention encounters the potential owner of the appearance-clothes (as one might say), but no sense-clothes to match. Only in sight do these properties come together, only here is the dual requirement satisfied. And this is why I claim that material objects have but one appearance: a visual appearance. It may be that coffee-stuff has an olfactory appearance, and this turns on whether the attention passes automatically from smell to bearer; and it is in any case certain that light and movement share with material objects the property of having a visual appearance. Yet neither fact affects the centrally important truth, that the only appearance that material objects possess is their look.

This is a contingent proposition. First of all, it is a contingent proposition that objects have an appearance at all; indeed, it is sheer contingency that anything has any appearance whatsoever. Thus, material objects would have had no appearance if sight had either not existed or else had taken a more primitive form in which mapping relations were non-existent; while appearances would in general be
non-existent if sense-perception was confined to touch (something which would constitute a mighty privation for animal kind, but scarcely a metaphysical disaster for the world). The second thing to note is, that material objects might have had a number of distinct appearances. For example, if other senses had existed which shared with sight the property of enabling us differentially to individuate material objects in a sense-field. In that case the good looking might simultaneously be bad something-else-ing; for though there would need to be mapping relations between the two senses, so that a formal similarity would exist between sight and the novel sense, that resemblance need not suffice to overcome the possibly deleterious effect of a wholly dissimilar sense-content, i.e., dissimilar mediating secondary quality and sensation. (Think of the effect of garish make-up).

Then because sight is a contingent attribute of animality; while touch, taken as it seems we must take it in a broad enough sense to encompass our sheer capacity to encounter and locate obstacles through awareness of our own limbs, in all probability is not; we may make the following summary claim. Paradoxically, it is because there need not have been such a thing as sight that there can be such a thing as a visual appearance, while it is because there had to be such a thing as touch that there can be no such thing as a tactile appearance. This is because appearances necessitate secondary qualities and therefore senses which are contingencies.

In sum: an appearance exists when an item can in the first place come to the attention, and in the second place do so in and through the coming to the attention of its secondary qualities, which is to say in and through the coming to attention of the quale of a sensation. When a veridical transaction of this sort takes place, that experience is the experiencing of the appearance of the item, and the character of that appearance is determined by the internal object of the experience. More exactly: in the first place, by that element of the internal object that records the secondary quality attributed to the object of consciousness; and secondly, when the formal properties of the secondary quality are the means whereby the attention individuates its object, by those formal properties also. This enables us to say what an appearance is. It is in this restricted sense the character with which an item is endowed for the attention, when the item comes veridically to the attention through its secondary qualities.
This formula affirms that, when an item comes to the attention through its secondary qualities and is individuated for the attention through their formal layout, the formal properties will join the secondary quality in constituting the appearance. This is not applicable to red light as such, which merely looks red, nor to the red after-image as such, which does the same; but it holds of material objects. Is it not part of the look of a face that it encompasses the retroussé look contributed by a nose? Thus, I characterize the look of a balloon, not merely by stating that it looks red, but also by saying that it looks spherical. The latter formal look joins the former sensuous look of which it is form and without which it cannot exist, in constituting the look or visual appearance of the balloon. While an appearance necessitates that the attention individuates its bearer through its sensuous qualities, it is clear that in the case of material objects it cannot do so through those sensuous qualities alone, but must in addition put to use the formal characteristics of the sensuous property. It is because space is the framework within which we individuate material objects that “looks spherical” enters the characterization of the visual appearance, and it is because colour-brightness is the sensuous quality through which we experience the object that “looks red and bright” completes it. In short, it is no accident that the visual appearance is exhausted by the colour-brightness look and the spatial look. Suppose one asks: why should there be two and not twenty-two appearance variables? The answer is, I suggest, simple: colour-brightness comes from the sensuousness of the sense, spatial look from the sense’s unique capacity to projectively map the individuating spatial properties of the object. Then out of these flimsy two properties, behind which lie a dense and perhaps limitless array of other properties about which they are silent, we assemble the appearance. This functions like a badge or marker through the aid of which we gain epistemological access to those other multitudinous and ultimately more significant properties. Ultimately, our relation to The World is and must be first and foremost non-contemplative. However important appearances in their own right may be—and our interest in beauty and art and general surface glitter show how much—such matters pale in significance besides life and reality (with which we must engage). It is as a guide to such ultimates that appearances find their appointed place in the scheme of things. The natural function of the look is to generate knowledge of its bearer.
So appearances are something more than an illusion. And yet they are not individual existents like material objects, nor like light, nor even like sensations. Now each of the latter are I think objects of perception; indeed, are actually seen. Then do we actually see the look of material objects? We see their colour, which is part of their appearance, and we see their sphericity (say), which is no part of their appearance, even though there is a sphericity look which we at least experience when we see their sphericity. But do we see the sphericity look? This is tantamount to asking: is the sphericity look something that is there, situated at the end of the gaze, waiting to be noticed (as the colour is)? Well, all that seems actually to be there is, first the colour of the object, second the sphericity of the object, and third the experiencing of the colour as hemispherically laid out in space. Then it may well be a stipulation about the use of “appearance” when I say that the internal object of the latter attentive experience gives us the content of the appearance of the object. But it is certainly not stipulation when I claim that noticing the sphericity look is, first of all noticing the sphericity of the bearer, and second is not the noticing of a something that is the sphericity look. These are issues of substance. Accordingly, it is I believe muddled to think: what a funny thing an appearance must be, compounded as it is out of a noticeable quality, a colour, and a non-noticeable non-quality, a sphericity-look! The look of an after-image is one of its qualities, and so in all probability is the look of The Mona Lisa; but the look of a red balloon is not I think amongst its qualities, for it enters in no way into the description of the balloon. Are we to actually describe the balloon, say in a Lost and Found column, as at once round and round looking? Of course these facts are puzzling. But one ought not let that throw one. Then I suggest that the puzzle arises through the unthinking assumption that the appearance of a material object must be, either an existent individual or a complex quality. Neither view is acceptable. The truth is, that we have complex appearance-concepts, which find instantiation in existent individuals, whereupon we then say that the suitable perceptual experiencing of that individual is the experiencing of its appearance. It does not seem to me that we actually set eyes upon its visual appearance. The visual experiencing of the look of a material object is not the seeing of that look.

Two things follow from this conclusion. First, regarding sense-data; second, regarding consciousness.
Thus, we do not actually see the appearance of a material object. Rather, we visually experience its appearance when we see the bearer to be endowed with precisely the visible qualities which visually individuate it. Roughly, the appearance is "how" or with-what-character the bearer veridically comes through sensation to attentive consciousness. So to say, it is clothing without any clothes. What does this tell us about the sense-datum? In particular, might the appearance be identical with the sense-datum? I think the suggestion can be rejected forthwith. The reason is, if the sense-datum exists it must be an individual, and on one reading of "sense-datum" an individual that is seen. Whether the sense-datum is taken to be nothing more problematic than the visual impression, or nothing less problematic than the visual sensation, it remains in either case an individual existent: on the first reading an individual of type, episode of consciousness, which is of course not seen; on the second reading an individual of type, sensation phenomenon, which is I believe seen and in any case certainly noticed. Meanwhile, the appearance of the material object is the character with which it is endowed for the attention when the object comes veridically to the attention through its secondary qualities. On either reading of "sense-datum," the appearance is not a sense-datum.

The second thing to be noted on the present account of the appearance is, its close tie with attentive consciousness. If appearances are necessarily mediated through secondary qualities, appearances must from the start be relative to the minds that experience them, since secondary qualities are essentially relative to the beings for whom they exist. But appearances are relative, not merely to minds, but to actual episodes of the type of awareness-of or consciousness-of, and this is a stronger sense than applies with secondary qualities which are ultimately determined merely in terms of sensation. I think this strong relativity to consciousness is responsible for some of the more interesting properties of appearances. Thus, our interest in the appearance, why we have the concept at all, stems from the fact that epistemologically it is sandwiched between sensation and knowledge. Not being aesthetes to the core, we recognize that the natural function of the appearance and hence also of the perceptual sensation, is to generate knowledge of the bearer of the appearance. Then this function can be satisfactorily discharged only if the understanding has a causal role to play in its genesis. This is how it comes about that the appearance
is defined in terms of particular consciousnesses which are causally sensitive to cognitive factors as well as to sensation. In so far as we tend to hypostatise the appearance, construing it as an existent individual of the type of sense-datum, we neglect the vital role played by the intellect in its constituting. The full force of this truth only becomes properly apparent when we consider in more detail what sort of thing a material object appearance really is.

2. Looks In The Round

(a) Introducing the concept

The following has emerged about the appearance of a material object. In the first place, it is not an individual. Therefore it is neither the object itself, nor any kind of mediator entity through which we make epistemological contact with the object; and in particular no kind of internal or psychological entity of the type of sense-datum or complex sensation-construct. Again, it is not a quality of the object, nor even a descriptive conception of the object. Then what is it? It enters experience when the attention encounters the material object through the mediation of its secondary qualities, and therefore through the mediation of sensation, indeed through the mediation of the quale of sensation. Then the experience is not just of the object, and neither is it just of the sensation, but is an experience of the object in a certain sensuous presentation, it is an experience of the object "thus" sensuously presented. Then that the object can come through to consciousness via such a mode of presentation is at once a contingent property of that object and consciousness-dependent in a strong sense. The appearance is essentially tied to episodes in consciousness, to episodes of consciousness; and it is this latter feature which enables concepts and sectors of the intellect to play their part in the phenomenon of presentation. Rather than being a descriptive conception of the object, the appearance is a way or guise in which we encounter the object "in the flesh" or intuitively, which is to say attentively. The appearance is no representor-entity, but may perhaps be characterized as a representor-way: as it were the object simultaneously filtered through sense and mind.

Let us at this point consider the appearance of a material object in a little more detail. What goes to make it up? Not just secondary qualities, but also spatial appearances, indeed three-dimensional
spatial appearances. For there can be no doubt that the dimension of depth contributes to the look of things. Thus, there is such a thing as “the convex look”; and surely also a distinctive look that we experience whenever we see a sphere, “the sphericity look.” Then is there such a thing as “the cubical look?” In the sense in which there is “the sphericity look” there is not, for the cube looks different from different angles but the sphere does not. Then if no views reveal “the cubical look,” do some reveal “a cubical look?” Because only some looks can be presented by cubes while others such as “the sphericity look” can never be, we could quite naturally stipulate of any of the looks the cube does present that it is “a cubical look.” But it would be a misleading expression. For it seems to imply that if a look rates as “a cubical look,” then it cannot also rate as “a pyramidal look” or any of a limitless array of other looks. And this must be false. Absolutely any three-dimensional look, including the sphericity look, can be presented by any of an infinity of different shapes. Every three-dimensional view is limitlessly ambiguous. While every such look is necessarily not a look of an infinity of figures, for the sphericity look is necessarily never presented by cube or pyramid, etc., it also necessarily is a look presented by an infinity of other figures.

Therefore the cube must be typical of the species as the sphere in not. And we have just now noted that what we see in a single view of any shape is something infinitely ambiguous. Clearly, we make a mighty leap beyond the visual given in recognizing cube or sphere or any shape whatsoever. Then how to close the epistemological gap? If we had no other resources but the sense of sight, the only method would be by resort to the visual data given to other points of view in three-dimensional space. Well, we have other resources, and identify shapes on the spot; and yet we may in general say that when we identify a shape by a single look, the presumption is that it will present the required array of looks to other points of view. And this presumption, far from being “unthinking,” functions as a cornerstone in the visual determination of shape. In a word, a relation of profound dependence holds between the visual discoveries of the instant and visual appearances in the round.

These simple facts about the visual appearances of material objects, and generally the primacy of appearances in the round, tend to be recessive and neglected. When we think of appearances our minds fly at once to what meets the gaze: we talk of views, of elliptical
pennies, of perspective, and suchlike. Then why this obsession with the single view? Is it that civilized devices like photographs and paintings and signs generally lead us away from the real data of experience? After all, these images likewise show their “all” to a single look. Whether or not this is a factor I cannot say. But that it can scarcely be the whole truth, seems likely when we press the question: why in the first place do we respond to two-dimensional visual representations? And the answer to this question must surely be: that in a good sense (which I shall not here attempt to spell out), the visual given is two-dimensional; which in turn probably derives from the fact that the sense of sight is essentially directional in character. In any case, we most of the time identify objects and therefore presumably also shapes as well by no more than a single look. It seems to me then that it is the character of sight itself, rather than the influences of civilization, that is largely responsible for our tendency to underestimate the extent to which sight is three-dimensional in outlook. Indeed, it is difficult to see how sight could have its colossal informational virtues, ranging as it does across light-years of space, and not be directional in character. So it may be that indirectly we are paying for the assets of the sense in our tendency to underestimate the full extent of its three-dimensional commitments. This paper may be seen as an attempt to redress something of the wrong that we tend to do to this sense, arising out of its peculiar fusion of the two-dimensional with the three-dimensional. For it is I suggest above all the fact that we see depth only directionally, that leads to a neglect of the equally vital truth that the visual data of the single view rests firmly on a foundation of seeing in the round, or, as one might better express it, seeing in the spherical.

Now these facts are of more than philosophical interest. They have been remarked far and wide, and most especially in the arts, probably for the reason that a whole world-outlook can find symbolic expression in our methods of representation. Cubism for example has to its credit that it reminds us of the artificiality of a mode of representation that is concerned to reveal no more than a single aspect of its object. After all, we most of the time see material objects as such as to present to other points of view aspects of which we ourselves are apprised. For example, we would see what we took to be a mere facade of a house differently if we were to discover it to be a whole house. Then cubism, or more precisely the later
paintings of Picasso in which this doctrine receives its ultimate justification, works a few such aspects into a visible synthesis which represents something wider than the visual experience of the moment. It goes beyond the visual experience of the moment, but not beyond the momentary experience of the one who sees; that is, beyond the visual brand of seeing-as, but not beyond that extra-visual variety in which we see the pillow as soft and the pool as inviting. All painting in this sense goes beyond the visual experience of the moment, so that a whole extra-visual world of experience can with luck show in a representation of a single aspect. What is novel about cubism is that the added dimension that goes beyond the visual experience of the moment, is itself visual in character. I do not mean to suggest that it is merely visual, for in hands as great as Picasso's cubism was a device for liberating into the art of painting forces which had lain dormant under a great tradition, but at the very least visual.

(b) The cubical look itself

(1) We have already noted that, in the sense in which there is such a thing as "the sphericity look," nothing counts as "the cubical look." And yet it is certain that "cubes look one way and spheres another." Therefore there must in another sense be something that is the cubical look. Hitherto, in speaking of "the sphericity look," we have been speaking of the look we experience in the instant, which is a particular aspect-appearance. Then of what do we speak when in a legitimate sense we talk of "the cubical look"? Evidently, of the look in the round. That is, of something of the same general type as whatever it is that two visually indistinguishable material objects must share. In short, a whole-object appearance in contradistinction to an aspect-appearance. For the look in the round is no artificially concocted creation, no fashionable analogue of theatre in the round or even cubism. It precisely is the look of a material object. In other words, the pre-eminent appearance amongst all appearances.

Then what is it, this look of a material object? At first blush it hardly fits our definition of a visual appearance as "the internal object of the veridical visual consciousness of the bearer." For we see objects from angles, but the look in the round is never released to particular standpoints. Still, it does manage to reveal itself as we look at the object from diverse standpoints; and we can at least say which visual phenomena reveal which look in the round. Accordingly, I will begin
this inquiry into the look of an object, by addressing myself to a
subsidiary question concerning the visual data which reveal that look.
Namely: what are the visual implications of (say) looking cubical?
To attribute a cubical appearance is, at least by implication, to
attribute an infinity, not of possible looks from possible positions,
but actual looks from actual positions. For example, straight out from
any face the cube looks exactly as does a square face on a rectangular
parallelepiped from the same angle. And so on ad infinitum.
Whatever it is to have a cubical appearance, it must be such that
the bearer presents an infinite set of determinate three-dimensional
aspect-looks to an infinity of points of view. Whatever the having
of a single visual appearance of the type possessed by material objects
actually is, necessarily it is such that the bearer is the possessor of
such an infinitely complex property.

These are the visual implications, in some sense the very content,
of having a particular appearance in the round. Indeed, sometimes
a logical equivalence links attributions of the two kinds of looks: for
example, “X looks spherical” is logically equivalent to “X presents
a sphericity look to all places and angles from which its shape can
be seen.” So the connection between the two kinds of look must be
particularly close. In fact, one wonders whether looks in the round
may not actually be reducible to aspect-looks. Whether or not this
is so, a puzzle has arisen both over the character of the look in the
round, and its relation to the aspect-looks through which it is revealed.

(2) One lead to understanding the look in the round is, our
undoubted capacity to specify particular examples of the kind. Thus,
one imagines that the rules by which we do so ought to put on display
the rules by which a whole set of aspect-looks come together to
realize some single determinate look in the round. So how is it that
we specify looks in the round? Well, we have merely to append the
operator, “the look of,” to the name of an object, “a rose,” and the
task is accomplished. But this valid enough answer already helps itself
to the concept. What we rather want is a specification which is
independent of its bearer, we want a specification which assembles
a determinate look on its own. The most natural answer to this is
something absurdly complex. Theoretically, we achieve this goal by
listing an infinite set of triples, consisting of direction out from some
arbitrary point in the object, distance out from that point, and
attendant three-dimensional aspect-look; and the set must encompass
all directions and all distances from which it is visible (for objects
look not merely of different size, but different anyway from different distances). Now this answer gives us what we have asked for, but suffers all the same from certain defects, quite apart from the factor of infinitude. One disadvantage is, that we all of us know the look of thousands of objects, but neither think of those appearances in such terms, nor come to learn of them in such terms, nor specify them to others in such terms.

It is worth remembering what we would do to either learn or else acquaint someone else with the look of some material object. Perhaps this will reveal a secret "structure" binding together those aspect-looks which reveal the object-look. Mostly, if the object is large we would go for a walk or flight around the object, while if it is small we might revolve it within the field of view on a disparate series of axes. It will be admitted that for every path followed an infinitude of possible other paths remain neglected. Nevertheless, a few such circumambulations will often suffice to give the other a fair idea of the look. But it is worth noting that it is one thing to specify a look, another to fully display its content. Even if after a certain stage it is from the point of view of specification otiose to mention other aspect-looks from other places, from the point of view of revelation of content such itemizing can never be otiose. For the visual appearance is expressed, not by an infinite set which suffices to ensure that it is the visual appearance it is, but by an infinite set which encompasses all possible views of the bearer. In any case, we often "structure" our knowledge of appearances in terms of paths followed by observers, to which are appended a corresponding ordered series of aspect-appearances. These schemas are at once more limited and more local than a total itemizing of positions and views, and are often direct relics of our epistemological history in relation to the object. Thus, our knowledge of the look of a tract of landscape is mostly organized along such lines. For example, my knowledge of the look of Hampstead Heath is in the first place limited or partial, since I have little idea what to expect visually from helicopter height let alone worm-wards, and is secondly specified largely in terms of particular paths through which I have come to know this land.

So here we have one familiar organizing principle whereby spatial paths are used to structure our visual knowledge. But it must be recognized that other schemas are possible. For example, we would use a different schema if we were astronauts bent on discovering the look of an illuminated object in dark outer space with no fixed
stars to guide us. Here we would rely above all on regular repeatable
sets of aspect-looks, coming up regularly as we intentionally flew
by compass in chosen directions around the object. What is especially
interesting about this schema is, that the whole investigatory
procedure and the knowledge it leads to, lean openly and explicitly
upon the law-abiding character of nature. It reminds us of the great
truth that, if we are to come to know something as seemingly
subjective and consciousness-dependent as the mere look or
appearance of things, we must depend absolutely upon physical
natural law, whether in connection with the bearers or the
discoverers of those appearances.

In each of the above cases we "structure" our knowledge in terms
of paths traced out by observers. Often, but not necessarily, those
paths will be actively and intentionally followed by an observer who
perhaps walks or flies, or maybe turns the item around with his hand;
indeed, sometimes the structuring path will take account of the speed
at which the observer moves around the observed. As we have
already noted, knowledge schemas of this kind are usually relics of
our epistemological and often active history in relation to the object.
Such schemas have this importance, that they guarantee the observer
a reliable way of getting from one aspect at one point to another
at another, and all in the absence of a mental map of the region;
so that in effect, the schema constitutes a sort of epistemological short-
cut. But the schema has this additional importance, that it puts on
display an ordering principle whereby out of a knowledge of aspect-
looks we arrive at a knowledge of a look in the round.

In cases of this sort a limited, associatively bonded, and regional
type of knowledge is acquired; and the units of the structure are,
that look L₁ at P₁ follows look L₀ at P₀ and is followed by L₂ at P₂,
and suchlike. What is missing is knowledge, both spatial and visual,
of relations that are independent of particular associative inroads:
for example, whether a more distant prospect would show the
constituents of L₁ and L₁₀ as near or far from one another, or the
constituents of L₁, L₅ and L₁₀ as lying in a straight line. And so on.
Visually this object has been mapped by no more than a few
associative threads, and the resultant knowledge is both limited and
regional. Then common and interesting as such cases are, it is clear
they cannot be a satisfactory model for the understanding of the look
of material objects. It may be that our early acquaintance with the
look of things took some such form, so that the infant first learned
to know a (regional) mere segment of the look of the table and drinking mug (say) via a ritualized sequence of acts on his part. But if this is how things were, and often still are in early stages, in the case of most objects these practical paths into the space and appearance of things have vanished without trace, are transcended by something universal and a-historical, the epistemological ladder has simply been thrown away. The smaller and more familiar the object under consideration, the more this is likely to be the position. Since I am confident I could recognize a teapot from almost any position, my knowledge of its appearance must have transcended any such ordering principle. All I need to know about the teapot is my relation in space to it, and I will know what look to expect; and conversely all I need do is see it from any angle, and I will know that this look is a look that teapots present.

(3) So the practical-path model, through which we hoped to understand how a set of aspect-looks come together to realize some single look in the round, proves to be inadequate. The model is too primitive. A simple object like a teapot refutes it, and returns us to the account in terms of an infinite set of triples. Yet earlier this struck us as unsatisfactory. At this point another theory suggests itself. Thus, we know that the cube cannot as such present the sphericity look, and that the sphere cannot as such present any of the looks the cube presents. So it seems that there are entailment relations between attributions of looks and attributions of spatial qualities to the bearers of those looks. Then may we legitimately deduce from this that aspect-looks are merely a priori-determinable projections, and the look in the round no more than the figure thus projected? Has it not become increasingly difficult to keep apart knowledge of looks and knowledge of spatial traits? May we not therefore dispense with these infinite lists and replace them by a single succinct formula or shape? The answer is, that we may not. And the reason is, that the sense of sight and therefore visual appearances generally are mere contingent presences in the world; indeed, even in a world with sight, visibility remains a contingent property of the individuals that have it. In a word, looks in general and looks in particular need not have existed. By contrast, those geometrical projections are sense-independent necessities, just as it is a necessity that a sphere projects onto a plane as a circle. And yet it must be acknowledged that the link between a priori-determinable projection and aspect-appearance is extremely tight. For corresponding to each projection is a look,
which could not be other than it is if sight is a sense in which, as we earlier claimed, linear projective mapping relations exist from material objects into the visual field. So we could succinctly specify a recipe for the look in the round when we are dealing with easily defined shapes like the cube: we simply say that it is "the look of a cube," and add that this is such that the cube presents the look corresponding to each a priori-determinable projection. Yet having said this it must be noted that not all shapes are expressible by simple formulae; second, that each new detail of a shape relates contingently to its fellows; and third, we should simply repeat that looks are contingent properties of their bearers. In a word, appearance-specification must in general adopt the piecemeal form we have used.

At this point I must record that all this talk of an infinity of distinct appearances is an idealization, designed for perfect viewers, always supposing the concept of perfect eyesight is viable. However, it is not. The infinite divisibility of matter may or may not be a viable concept, the infinite divisibility of sensation is surely not, because of the essential bond between sensation and awareness. As the hoary but very perspicacious empiricist doctrine of the minimum visibilium reminds us, the senses are not limitlessly fine-grained, in fact or in principle. When I say that an infinity of appearances show us the appearance of a material object, I am illicitly extrapolating from an infinity of distinct geometrical projections to a supposed infinity of distinct corresponding looks. No matter. While plenty of supposed looks must merge, plenty of real looks remain.

(c) Experiencing the appearance

The puzzle is: just what sort of a thing is a look in the round? And how does it relate to the aspect-looks through which it reveals itself? We have concentrated on the second question, in the belief that answering it will answer the first question. The undoubted fact that the look in the round is rigorously specified by an infinite set of triples, did not seem to get us any nearer understanding the nature of the look, nor its relation to those triples. The reason being, that object appearances are a centrally important part of our life, but such infinite sets are not; and, anyway, our knowledge of looks in the round is an ordered or "structured" knowledge, whereas there is no mention of any ordering principle in the infinite set. It was precisely this lack of structure in the infinite set that drove us to turn to certain ordered
phenomena in human life, and to ask the question: How do we learn, and how do we communicate to others, particular appearances in the round? Here we managed to discover an order, that of associative threads; but while this account fitted certain cases of limited regional knowledge, it was too primitive a model to apply to those vastly familiar and numerous cases in which we have thrown away all epistemological ladders.

But at this juncture I think we should ask ourselves a question concerning procedure. Why, in discussing what can be rigorously specified by a randomly arranged infinite set, do we take our cue from human knowledge of that item and the supposedly orderly character of its object? Why should the orderliness of the latter be of any relevance to the character of the former? Well, if the look in the round were a thing, a very complicated thing to be sure, it is difficult to see how the one could be of any relevance to the other. But the look of the object is not a thing, being no kind of individual; and, if aspect-looks are any guide, is probably determined by the internal object of a veridical attentive consciousness of the bearer of the look. Therefore consciousness and its objects must be our guide, only in such a way that it leads directly outwards onto the bearer of the look. The difficulty is to steer a path between a subjectivism that is only concerned with inner entities, and an objectivism that refuses to recognize the essentially mind-dependent character of appearances. We must grasp that the look does not get between one and the bearer, and yet only has reality for consciousness. Without falling backwards into ourselves and hypostatizing the look as an internal entity, nor falling forwards into an objectivism that makes of the look a mind-irrelative quality of the bearer like its shape, we must allot to it a status such that this consciousness-relative non-individual something is given in visual attentive experience of its object through its secondary qualities first of all and thereby also through its formal or spatial properties.

Accordingly, the character of the experience of the look in the round becomes now of the very essence. Then when do we experience the look in the round? Necessarily, not in an instant from a particular point of view. Necessarily, we experience the look in the round only if the object is seen, over a period of time, and across a tract of space, from all visually differentiable angles. But is this enough? Suppose I see every possible view, but have no idea whether I am north, south, east, or west; whether a foot away now, or a mile
away then; and so on. Have I seen the object? I have, repeatedly. 
Have I had a good look at it? I have seen all there is to see of it. 
But do I know what it looks like? I do not. Indeed, I have not the 
slightest idea. And even if this procedure is repeated many, many 
times; and most especially if the order is different each time; I will 
come nowhere nearer to learning it. And this seems true, even if 
I can call to mind every one of those disjointed views.

Suppose now that I am told where I am whenever I see a view. 
But suppose also that the places are a random selection of positions 
in three-dimensional space; and second, that the aspects presented 
to view seem as unrelated as a hippopotamus head and a car wheel. 
Once again I have seen all there is to see of the object. Yet once 
again I have no idea of what it looks like. And even if the process 
is repeated many times, and most especially if the order is different 
each time, I will come no nearer to learning it. Indeed, it seems to 
me that I have not learned it even if I can call to mind every one 
of these many disjointed views together with the position in space 
from which it is seen. After all, I have no idea of the object’s shape. 
I do not know whether from afar it looks like a porcupine or the 
interior of a television set. I have not the faintest idea what it looks 
like. How can I be said to have discovered its look in the round?

The next question to ask is: have I managed nonetheless to make 
the visual acquaintance of the object’s appearance? The trouble with 
this suggestion is, that this experience seems to leave no relic in the 
memory. If I have experienced the object’s appearance, indeed have 
done so repeatedly, how come I have not learned what it is? And 
how else may one be expected to learn the look of a thing but by 
repeatedly experiencing it? If I hear every word of a sentence, but 
with such vast intervals in between that I forget the last word, do 
I hear the sentence? I hear its parts, but not I think it. It seems we 
need to perceive certain relations, such as that this word follows that 
word, if we are to hear the sentence; and not just some relations, 
we need to hear the right relations. Similarly, if I am to make the 
acquaintance over time of an object’s visual appearance, I must 
perceive such relations as that this look greets me as I turn the cor-
ner of what shows at the edge of that look. It is not that a material 
object is an inherently meaningful progression across space as an 
audible sentence is across time. It seems nonetheless to be true that 
making the acquaintance of an object’s visual appearance must be 
an ordered and intelligibly bonded procedure. Above all, it ought
to be such that repetition tends to generate knowledge of its individual character. Above all therefore, it ought to be such that repetition tends to generate knowledge of the bearer's colour and spatial character. This is why order is essential.

(d) The appearance itself

So what is this look in the round? What is the look of a material object? We at least know the following about it: that it is necessarily experiencable through sight; necessarily experiencable only across time, rather as a melody is necessarily experiencable only across time; necessarily experiencable only across space, whether it be viewer or object that mutates in position; necessarily experiencable only through an ordered comprehending viewing procedure which ensures that the spatial relations between elements of views are also perceived; necessarily not experiencable from a single direction; such that repetition of the experience leads naturally to knowledge of the look; and thereby also of the colour and spatial qualities of the bearer of the look; and so on. It is not the sum total of the aspect-looks through which it reveals itself, else making the acquaintance of a haphazard array of aspect-looks would be making its acquaintance. It is not the view cast in the mind of God, for it is no kind of view at all. A fortiori it is not a view given in an instant to some impossible awful encompassing gaze of many eyes that closes around the object from all directions at once, rather as does a hand around a pebble. It is not this last, precisely because such an encompassing gaze is an impossibility; for whenever we set eyes upon something it must in principle be possible to set something behind it as background, but this imploding vision buries its object in a pocket of its own, set against nothing. Then what is it? It seems to me that the aforementioned definition of the appearance applies here, despite the added complexities of the case. I see no reason, in the case of appearances in the round, to dispute the claim that "the appearance of a material object is the character with which that object is endowed for the attention, when the bearer of the appearance comes to the attention through and as endowed with the secondary and thereby also the formal or spatial qualities which individuate it for that sense." An object coming to attention in a single view satisfies this formula, for we experience its aspect-look in seeing that aspect of the object to be endowed with the colour and contour which visually individuate
it. Equally, the formula holds for the more complex phenomenon of appearance in the round. Thus, we experience that appearance when the object so comes to the attention, across space and across time, that we perceive it to be endowed with the three-dimensional colour and spatial qualities which visually single it out from its fellows in the world as given to sight. Then we can succinctly describe that highly complex visual character by saying of the object something like "it looks red and cubical," and a whole world of experience is condensed in that nutshell, a condensation that could not have occurred without the active intervention of the intellect or understanding.

Yet it is difficult not to feel one is being denied something in these answers. One keeps searching for some kind of apparitional thing, set somehow in three-dimensions and from no particular direction, that one encounters in experiencing the look in the round. But such a quest is fundamentally misguided. We must shake off the idea that the look in the round is an entity that might in the instant be given to intuition, however bizarre in type. At the same time we should realize that it has of necessity to be given or experiencable in intuition. We must recognize that time, and for that matter public physical space, are of the very essence in the revelation of this something: time for the necessary unfolding to the attention of the complex visual data; space for the due relating and comprehending of the data that thus unfolds to view. It follows that this datum of sense cannot be assimilated to the immediate private givens of consciousness. Here we are in the public world of physical space and time right from the start. One should not, of course, over-estimate this fact, and suppose that it dissolves in a trice such epistemological problems as troubled Descartes and others. Doubtless it is an epistemological achievement of moment to arrive at the look of a material object. Nonetheless, it is also of moment that this is the natural function of the sense of sight, that it is accomplished all the time by animals of many types, and that in all probability we begin our visual life doing so.

3. A Summary Statement

The visual appearance of a material object is not the object itself. Indeed, it is not any kind of individual; a fortiori not an internal individual such as a construct of visual sensations—in two or three
quasi-spatial internal dimensions; and a fortiori no kind of shell, spatial or qualitative or sensational, that somehow in the visual field fits the object like a skin. It is not a quality, and a fortiori not the qualities of colour and shape revealed to sight. It is not the sum-total of the aspect-appearances through which it reveals itself. In fact, it is not even seen.

And yet it is not nothing. For it is experiencable, through sight, across time, across space, via an ordered and comprehending viewing of aspects, which is such that it culminates in a veridical seeming to have seen the colour and spatial qualities of the bearer. Acquaintance with the appearance mediates the looking procedure and the resultant experience of seeming to have seen the colour and shape; yet not as an intervening event-effect of looking—like a sudden flash of insight. (A dawning, rather). To experience the appearance ("seeing what it looks like") is so to visually experience the object that seeming to see—and, normally, knowledge of—its colour and shape transparently ensue. One must so assemble the aspect-looks in one's mind that awareness of colour and shape come out at the end. Experiencing the appearance is seeing the visible colour and shape. Now such a procedure necessitates intellection or understanding, for looking cannot lead to this perception in the absence of knowledge of one's spatial position in relation to the object—which must therefore help to cause both the perception and resultant knowledge—intelligibly. Then that which one thus comes to experience (—not to be confused with the complex quality, colour-and-shape) is a contingent, consciousness-relative, sight-dependent property of the object. This is because it is the character with which the object is endowed for the visual attention, when the object comes to the attention through its visual secondary and thereby also its formal spatial qualities.