

FIG. 1 | EGON SCHIELE

Tod und Mädchen (Mann und Mädchen) | 1915

Death and the Maiden (Man and Girl)

Belvedere, Wien | Vienna



## A dialogue between Allan Janik and Carla Carmona

# EGON SCHIELE'S PLACE IN WITTGENSTEIN'S VIENNA

**Allan Janik:** It is very hard to know where to begin because the story I want to tell is a long one. And it is important that it is a long one. About

half a year after the book *Wittgenstein's Vienna*<sup>2</sup> appeared, I was in Innsbruck and I was being sent the reviews of *Wittgenstein's Vienna* by our literary agent. There was a review in which the reviewer claimed that ours was an amazing book with all sorts of innovative aspects, for example, he found exciting the way we as philosophers took up art history. He added that it was a great pity though that so much space was devoted to Gustav Klimt and so little to Egon Schiele. That was sometime around the beginning of 1974. I didn't have the slightest idea what that might have meant, but because it was unusual and not the kind of comment that I expected, it stayed in my head for a very long time. I began to get some kind of an idea of what I had missed out then, what I had to miss out on, because you have to remember that when I was here in Vienna in 1969 you could more or less read all the books you could find in a bookshop on art in Vienna c. 1900 in an afternoon. And most of the time they didn't tell you much beyond biographical details. There was little about "how art was made" and I will not mention the sad state of my knowledge of German at that time. Many years later, Patrick Werkner asked me if I would review the Stanford Schiele Symposium volume that he had edited. We were working together in the context of the *Österreichische Forschungsgemeinschaft* then and so I got the book. I didn't have it very long, before I began to see that there was a great deal to say that I had indeed totally missed out on and I made some mental notes and also some written ones about Schiele and *Wittgenstein's Vienna*. For instance, Albert Elsen's article on Schiele's employment of Rodin's technique of "continuous drawing" and Leon Botstein's contribution on Schiele and Arnold Schönberg were particularly fascinating. I am not an art historian and discussing Ludwig Wittgenstein together with Schiele wouldn't have been the kind of theme that I would ever have picked up on my own.

About ten years later still Carla Carmona contacted me and said that she was in Vienna, working on Schiele and Wittgenstein, and that she was quite isolated because she simply could not find people to talk to there about Schiele in those terms, so she asked me if I could help her. Our chat about the links between Schiele and Wittgenstein was a revelation and our conversation has been going on for ten years now and it continues to become more and more exciting. What mostly surprised and thrilled me was her statement, "I want to write the chapter on Schiele in *Wittgenstein's Vienna*". That's the background to our dialogue.

Now *Wittgenstein's Vienna* is a very strange book to begin with. I am a professional historian of philosophy, a dying breed. Most of what historians of philosophy do is analyzing texts in their context, work out constellations of ideas and document their dynamism. Regarding Wittgenstein, if you look at the *Tractatus* (and for that matter the *Philosophical Investigations* or other texts such as *On Certainty*) as an outsider, it is like banging your head against a wall because although you might read and understand some of Wittgenstein's striking sentences, it is devilishly difficult for a layman to figure out where it is all supposed to go. The task that Stephen Toulmin and I set for ourselves was to employ Viennese cultural history to help make that intelligible.

The historical technique is to establish an illuminating context for reading the work anew, but we didn't really have a background that could be empirically established as directly relevant to Wittgenstein's texts. What we had then in 1970 when we began to write letters to Paul Engelmann, the first letters that ever appeared from Wittgenstein, which contained references to Vienna, to Karl Kraus and Adolf Loos, which Engelmann had commented upon. My *Doktorvater* Toulmin turned up with an idea one day: "Here is a ticket to Vienna and 800 dollars. Stay there as long as you can with that. Above all I want you to meet Wittgenstein's family, his friends, as far as there are any there, and find out about how his family and friends there perceived his most intimate concerns and deep interests". So I came to Vienna in the cold January of 1969. What came out of that trip was a huge amount of material that I scarcely knew what to do with. I was banging my head against the wall for a long time trying to figure out how to use it to illuminate Wittgenstein's cryptic text.

Out of curiosity I began to read Schönberg at just about the time I began writing my dissertation in 1970. And then things started to become very interesting. In Schönberg you could see astonishing parallels to Wittgenstein's thoughts about philosophy coming from a composer. He writes a kind of music that is more than a set of notes on a page, that clearly has a spiritual and ethical dimension. Putting that then into Schnitzler's Vienna, with its concerns about hypocrisy, the double standard of values and integrity, it was a matter of constantly posing the question what does it mean to be honest? What does it mean to be honest with yourself? And what does it mean to be an honest artist? To be honest with your art? And regarding Wittgenstein, what does it mean to be an honest thinker? These questions emerged clearly and dramatically. Focusing on the neglected ethical dimension of Wittgenstein's philosophy became a must.

Every single day we found new stuff, we were euphoric. Of course, we got lots of things wrong, so many mistakes. And the journey was not always smooth. For instance, Arthur Koestler, who was one of my ideals, destroyed me by insisting that only what Toulmin wrote in the book was worth reading and that I was an "abominable stylist as well". I was devastated. But be that as it may, there was a challenge in all this to see the ethical dimension of his thought that inspired Wittgenstein's approach to analytical philosophy. And that was the part of the story I had to be able to tell.

This was what we had done with Wittgenstein and it was what had to be done for Schiele if there was to be a place for him in *Wittgenstein's Vienna*. And this is what Carla intended to do ten years ago. I still remember when she said: "I want to show you a little chapter that makes the connection between Schiele's oeuvre and its ethical dimension" and she picked absolutely the right one. She picked her analysis of Schiele's use of chairs, the different meanings that chairs acquired in his compositions, the way they define space and indeed the way they help to structure his painterly language. And that totally convinced me. And I hope it will totally convince you.

**Carla Carmona:** I will begin with the remark that the Schiele-Wittgenstein connection is very important, not only for research on Schiele but also for research on Wittgenstein. I think that the connection makes Schiele appear as less of an expressionist and Wittgenstein's philosophy seems to be closer to everyday human concerns, thus less intellectual, existential. I also think that the Schiele-Wittgenstein connection shows that much has to be done in both directions and would forge a closer link between philosophy and art.

I have tried to do several things. I will focus on three of them. But first of all I want you to keep in mind the word *Übersichtlichkeit* because it is the background for everything I have done in the field. One of the things I did was to explain the fundamental role that Schiele played in *Wittgenstein's Vienna*. Allan made very clear in *Wittgenstein's Vienna* and later works such as *Assembling Reminders*, how intimately connected Wittgenstein's philosophy was to Karl Kraus' understanding of how journalism, or literature in general should be. Or for that matter to Loos' conception of architecture. I think it is important and much needed to look at Schiele under the same light.

I also tried to show that Schiele's art illustrates with surprising accuracy many of the philosophical problems of his contemporaries, of people like Loos or Wittgenstein. For example, the all too present concern for ethics in Vienna 1900. This concern is precisely

what led Wittgenstein to the mystical dimension of the *Tractatus*, and to the fundamental demarcation between “what can be said and what can only be shown”. In Schiele’s pictorial language we also find that ethical concern and consequences of a similar kind to that crucial demarcation. Moreover, Schiele’s art also illustrates very well Wittgenstein’s notion of use, a fundamental concept of his mature philosophy.

One third thing that I tried to do was to make explicit Schiele’s pictorial idea by means of using Schönberg’s concept of musical idea, which I would like to define here as the internal coherence of a piece of music, as the structure of the piece, from which every note develops in a cohesive way. One could also compare it to a thread that demands to be developed up to its full articulation. One can find the same kind of inner structure in Schiele’s painterly compositions, and understanding that structure involves becoming aware of his pictorial syntax and the kinds of elements related by its syntactical relations.

Here Wittgenstein’s conception of *Übersichtlichkeit* and the *übersichtliche Darstellung*, the synoptic view or the overview that we get by reflecting upon practice, is crucial. Wittgenstein believed that philosophical problems involved posing questions that we cannot possibly answer because they are simply inappropriate despite their perplexing character. The most dramatic case is the inquiry into the meaning of an important concept like, say, truth in the way that scientists do, i.e., by seeking a definition for it and ultimately a theory. The history of philosophy shows us the results of such thinking: a plethora of mutually contradicting theories sharply demarcating “appearance” from “reality” that leave the original object of investigation at least as obscure as it was at the beginning. Wittgenstein, like Nietzsche, insisted with Goethe that the real philosophical achievement was to come to see the appearances themselves in all their multiplicity and variation as the reality.

To do that we have to compare and contrast lots of examples of what we do with words, and that allows us to get a perspective on things that makes undertaking the metaphysical search for definitions and theories superfluous in the first place. This means taking a hard look at what we actually do with words in normal circumstances. So philosophical activity is all about collecting, comparing and contrasting relevant examples in order to realize how things that are superficially different are not “really the same” as the metaphysician would claim but related to one another in a significant way.

I have tried to offer such a synoptic view of Schiele’s pictorial language by establishing the most varied connections, mostly within Schiele’s oeuvre, but also between Schiele’s

painting and the philosophy of Wittgenstein, the music of Schönberg or the architecture of Loos, and between Schiele’s painterly work and the oeuvres of other artists, such as Marc Rothko or Francis Bacon. For instance, I have compared how Schiele uses different elements, such as carpets, chairs or pieces of clothing. Behind my attempt to define Schiele’s pictorial language, there is a basic question about what understanding a picture involves. And I think that understanding a picture involves seeing connections: both similarities and dissimilarities.

Let us go back to the concept of “pictorial idea”. For Schönberg a musical composition ought to develop itself out of inner necessity. It was not a matter of ornamentation; it was a question of integrity. So the coming note had to be truthful to the previous note. Wittgenstein’s notion of language game can be helpful in order to understand this. Schiele’s pictorial oeuvre could be seen as a language game, one way, among many, of speaking a pictorial language. When I have tried to make Schiele’s language explicit I have found very useful to talk about three kinds of elements. In the painting *Death and the Maiden* (Fig. 1)<sup>2</sup> of 1915-1916, you can observe a structure: the sheet. Figures are easily distinguishable too, the male figure, Death, and the female figure. There is also a background that holds everything together.

When people talk about *Death and the Maiden*, they always focus on the story. The story behind it is well known. Schiele, on the left, masquerades as death, and Wally Neuzil, Schiele’s model and lover before he married Edith Harms, is embracing him. A widespread interpretation of the picture is that Schiele was able to foresee that he was sending his companion to death by leaving her when he decided to marry his wife. I think it’s more interesting to focus on the painting and to forget about the story. The meaning of the painting is in the painting and not in the story. And the painting can be much more precise than the story. It is all about how the composition is structured, its grammar.

This grammatical approach is an invitation to focus on the syntax while trying to decipher a painting. The secret of a picture is not in a coded message that only one knowledgeable of the artist’s biography can decipher. The set of pictorial relationships that can be perceived in the work of art is also a genuine guide to the painting. They are what remains unsaid and give form to it. And sometimes those syntactical relationships are the fundamental story behind the painting, as in Schiele’s landscapes.

Let us observe the syntax of *Death and the Maiden*. The figures are separated by a diagonal that defines the movement in the painting, from the lower right corner to the upper

left one. Although at first glance you think that the figures are united, the compositional device is there to show a separation. The diagonal functions as a compositional force that divides the painting into two parts and traverses the canvas. Each figure is on a different side of the line. Besides, each figure is formed by a set of triangles that reveals its individuality. Given that the triangle is the most cohesive structure, one gets the feeling that the two figures can stand on their own. They don't need the embrace, which turns out to be superficial. Observe that the lace can be undone at any moment. On the one hand, the embrace of the figures gets lost in the clothes of the male figure, since there is only a very fragile line left of the arms of the female figure. On the other hand, the fingers of the female figure close that weak circle in a very forced manner, resembling an awkward lock or a grenade ready to be used. The use of color also differentiates. You have dark colors, black, in the portrait of death, and a palette of colors on the other side. Observe that how color is applied in the male figure leaves no room for volume. By contrast, the way in which color is applied in the female figure makes you appreciate volume in it.

If we pay attention to its language, we can listen to what the painting is telling us. United and separated, the male figure, Death, is both the contrary and the destiny of the female figure. Somehow they need the structure, the sheet in order to be rescued from the hostile background surrounding them. What the canvas tells us coincides with Schiele's biography in this case; the canvas represents with unparalleled accuracy the lovers' tragic breakup.

**Allan Janik:** I would like to remind you here of one of my favorite quotations of Wittgenstein. He said: Good Austrian work is more subtle than the work of others. And it's never on the side of probability. Never what you expect. It is probably said about himself. But it's also said about people like Lenau and Anton Bruckner that he admired very much and many Austrian figures that he particularly cared about. So tell us about the chairs...

**Carla Carmona:** In a moment. Let us go back to Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, in particular to the concept of use. One of the fundamental ideas in the *Philosophical Investigations* is that meaning is use. The meaning of a word lies in how that word is used. It means that a word doesn't have a fixed meaning. The meaning of a word depends on how that word is used in a particular context. It's interesting to see how that problem is also there in Schiele, and it is particularly well illustrated by how Schiele uses chairs in his art. Chairs do not always have the same meaning, they do not always function in the same way. As a consequence, one cannot really define what a chair is. It is always used in a given context and its meaning, its function responds to it.

Although we do not have much time, we will go through a few examples of Schiele's use of chairs. Just like the sheet in *Death and the Maiden*, chairs can generally be understood as structures that mediate between the figure and the background. However, that is not always the case and they do not always do it in the same way. Look carefully at this 1918 portrait of Paris Gütersloh<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 2). Observe that the chair fuses with the background thanks to the abstract treatment it receives. The chair is like a bridge between the figure and the background. Figure and background are perfectly harmonized due to the palette they share and the undefined seat, which could be understood as an extra plane in the background. In other cases, like in the portrait of Hugo Koller of 1918 (Fig. 3)<sup>4</sup>, the chair works as an isolating force. It seems that Koller has to be rescued from that chaotic library and it is the role of the chair to do that. Moreover, Schiele also painted chairs as entities in their own right, like in the prison drawings of 1912. They are beautiful examples of the best art of portraiture.

Now look at the chair in this portrait of Anton Peschka of 1909 (Fig. 4)<sup>5</sup>. It reminds us of the Secessionist style, and of Klimt. Before 1910 Schiele was very much influenced by Jugendstil. But is it a real chair? Does it really work as a chair? This man is not really sitting there. This is not actually a chair. It is just a flat surface. It is decorative, pure ornamentation. Schiele's use of chairs doesn't only illustrate Wittgenstein's concern for the relationship between meaning and use but also some of Loos' problems. Loos understood that the roof of a building had to be designed according to the weather of the particular place where it was going to be built, that is, taking into consideration how much it rained and snowed, how often and in which proportion. Architecture was not a question of beauty, but of function. I can tell you that Loos would have been very unhappy with this chair.

It is well-known that Klimt used to give a bi-dimensional treatment to certain elements of his canvases, such as pieces of clothing, headdresses or seats. In fact, the opposition between the bi-dimensional and the three-dimensional is a powerful compositional device in Klimt's mature oeuvre. It is there even in his landscapes. Although Schiele's control over volume in 1909 was not as developed as in his later works, the confrontation between the bi-dimensional, in the depiction of the chair, and the tridimensional, in the depiction of the sitter, is unquestionable. The chair in this portrait of Peschka is not there for itself, but as something added, as a complement, to the specific posture that the sitter holds. We do sit differently if we are in a soft chair than if the seat is rigid. The way we sit depends on many factors regarding the tool we are sitting on. However, in this painting Peschka's posture is not a consequence of the features of the chair. By contrast, the chair seems to respond to that singular depiction of

FIG. 2 | EGON SCHIELE

Bildnis des Malers Paris von Gütersloh | 1918  
Portrait of the Painter Paris von Gütersloh  
Minneapolis Institute of Art



Peschka. Had the artist decided to depict Peschka with his arms slightly more elevated, he would have made the armchair taller. Had Schiele painted Peschka in a more reclined position, he would have exaggerated the curve of the armchair's back.

In the canvas *Mother with Two Children* of 1917<sup>6</sup>, the main figure is sitting, unlike in the portrait of Peschka, where the chair is only a decorative element. And yet you don't see any chair. The figures are sitting without a visible chair. Besides, the colorful, highly textured decoration of the dresses of the figures makes us think of the upholstery of a piece of furniture. Moreover, the halo that can be perceived around the figures reminds us of the back of a chair. Furthermore, the fact that the whole set has a triangular composition reinforces the structural character of a chair that is not there, that is latent. Given that the figures incarnate the chair, there is no need for the chair to be physically there, even though there are still some traces of it left.

There is still another fundamental role that chairs play in Schiele's oeuvre that I have not mentioned. In the canvas *Seated Male Nude* of 1910<sup>7</sup>, the figure represents use in itself. Schiele manages to paint the use of a seat by incorporating the xyz-coordinate system into the figure. The structure in this particular canvas is so much there that it doesn't need to be at all there. So it's a wonderful illustration of Wittgenstein's notion of use.

FIG. 3 | EGON SCHIELE

Dr. Hugo Koller | 1918  
Belvedere, Wien | Vienna



I would leave Schiele's use of chairs here. I would like to add that although it is often very useful to talk about structures, background and figures in Schiele's oeuvre, it is not always the appropriate approach to his works because there are certain canvases, and many drawings, especially among his landscapes, where you cannot distinguish those three elements. In those cases, all elements lose their singularity and everything becomes pure grammar. For instance, in his landscapes every element, no matter how trivial, is fundamental and yet equivalent to all the others in the composition. What really matters is the set of syntactical relations between them. The more rigorous the syntax, the more ethical it will be, and this has much to do with Allan's concept of 'critical modernism'.

**Allan Janik:** In case of Vienna 1900 and its continuation until today, you have in this society a number of cultural layers. The *Wiener Moderne*, associated with Klimt and the Secession, and the *Wiener Werkstätte*, represents one constellation of cultural and aesthetic values in which ornament was a crucial structural element, but we also have another such constellation of cultural and aesthetic values that was vehemently opposed to ornamentation for its own sake. I have termed it critical modernism. This tendency which you have in the culture, which is not terribly easily recognized immediately, is the tendency to self-criticism which above all Kraus represented and which he

inspired in a lot of people around him. But he and his friends weren't the only critical modernists. Robert Musil, for whom Kraus was a problematic figure, had the same kind of mentality, and you find it in the best work of Arthur Schnitzler as well, such as *A Far Country*. This sense that, what is said, what is under the surface, what we mean, has to be evaluated and reflected upon. It is very important for philosophy, also today, because more than ever we are bombarded with clichés of all sorts. The so-called social media are chuck-full of these clichés and live from them. For me, the meaning of Viennese critical modernism is “slow down”, one of Wittgenstein's favorite mottos, which runs roughly ‘take a look at what is really going on here’. We have lost our overview. Schiele shares that deeply. Especially in his later works, where he is looking at himself. Like Wittgenstein, Schiele looks as hard at himself as anybody ever has and, again like Wittgenstein, is always disappointed with what he sees.

**Carla Carmona:** I would like to point out that the invitation to slow down is very present in Schiele's landscapes and that it is a direct consequence of his powerful syntax. The many relations we perceive between different elements in the canvases force us to slow down if we do not want to miss out important stuff. And we are aware we will be missing fundamental things if we do not make extra effort to follow up all the interconnections. And Schiele's use of ornamentation and detailing is also an invitation to move to a different dimension, with its own sense of time and space. In a painting like *Levitation* of 1915-1916<sup>8</sup>, the apparently innocent tiny flowers interrupt our journey along the composition once again. They are pauses, halts that introduce the most versatile ways of traveling across the canvas. Those details, at first glance merely ornamental, are powerful fragmentary forces. Their repetition and the differences between them in color and form generate both coherence and dissonance in the composition. Schiele's use of ornamentation is reminiscent of the contradictions and divisions discussed by Schönberg regarding ornamentation in musical composition. These tiny flowers, spread throughout the canvas, succeed in making the composition explode.

When I think of this painting, Wittgenstein's preface to the *Philosophical Investigations* always comes to mind, the paragraph where he talks about the fragmented character of the text, the fact that he could only write an interrelated collection of remarks and that this fact was related to the very nature of his investigation. *Levitation*, particularly its background, is a wonderful illustration of the nature of thought.

**Allan Janik:** Fundamentally, the arts are also modes of thinking. A nice aphorism of Wittgenstein's runs: People today think that art should be there to entertain us. And

that science and technology are there to teach us. They are missing the point. We learn to be human from the arts. It's a question of how. We need teachers. And I would say that Schiele is one of the very important teachers, teaching us how to look at human beings. He has the extraordinary capacity to show us human beings like ourselves, stripped down to their bare humanity. And that is exactly what Wittgenstein is after, in a very different way. Wittgenstein, by the way, had no contact with Schiele, or Schönberg. He probably wouldn't have liked Schiele. And Schiele probably wouldn't have liked him. Wittgenstein was a very difficult man who made enormous, almost superhuman demands upon his friends, just as he did on himself.

If you are interested in art today, you are supposed to be interested in everything that's art. And that is nonsense, because there are no limits and if you are interested in everything today, you are interested in nothing. A serious interest in literature and in art involves following lines of clarity and illumination that help individuals to orient themselves in a world that gets more and more difficult to grasp. Wittgenstein couldn't understand jazz music, but he used to go and listen to it every week. He wanted to find out what was going on. He couldn't understand Shakespeare but he never stopped reading him because he knew that there was something deep there. And these kinds of lessons are what saves culture in a world of advertising and merchandising. That is why we have to be thankful to people like him and Schiele who show us how to see things that we have failed to observe *for ourselves*. This is the crucial point of connection between Wittgenstein's philosophy and Schiele's art.

## OPEN DISCUSSION

**Question 1:** Regarding *Death and the Maiden*, you told us that the meaning of the painting is in the painting itself. But I noticed that your explanation of the painting then actually affirmed the story very much. This makes me think of the study of Vienna 1900 today, so unlike when Herr Janik arrived here now quite a few years ago. There are so many stories about Vienna 1900, especially about the world-famous Egon Schiele. Is it at all possible to consider his oeuvre and eliminate the stories?

**Carla Carmona:** I don't think that you have to eliminate the stories, but I think that they are secondary; it is more interesting to focus on pictorial language, and that is what my reading of the painting has tried to show. There is no story in the best paintings of Schiele. Think about his landscapes. It's just about grammar, pure grammar. And

if there is a story to a painting, the composition will be the most neutral storyteller. That is my point of view. Of course, it is interesting to know about the biography of an artist, and that applies to the case of Schiele too. But the general approach among the scholars in the field has been biographical and highly expressionist in itself. (I think that the adjective “expressionist” is more suitable for those working on Schiele than for Schiele himself.)

It is time to move away from that. There are many stories about Vienna 1900. Some of them have become canonical, and every canon has to be questioned. I think that one has to look much more carefully at Schiele’s oeuvre, leaving the stories aside, trying to see the paintings anew, as if for the first time. That is always a good exercise, certainly there is no harm in doing that and one might benefit much from it, and get a clearer picture of things.

**Question 2:** I was thinking of your invitation to look at pictures as if they were a text. For every book you have a title. And then you have the words and the rules to use them correctly in the language. In Vienna, in art history we have a tradition of structural analysis. That’s very positivist. When I was a student, I was trained to ignore the context and analyze the pictures. If you look at *Death and the Maiden*, you have the embrace. You can see it in the painting and if you compare *Death and the Maiden* to the 1907-1908 painting *The Kiss* by Gustav Klimt, you can appreciate the same kind of melting formal structure. However, if you consider the title, there is a break in the narration: there is *Death* and there is the *Maiden*. And your description moves away from formal items.

**Carla Carmona:** I disagree. I do not think that my description differs from a close reading of the formal syntax of the painting. However, we did not have the time to get into it in great detail. I think that staying at the level of the embrace, of the fact that the two figures are somehow embracing each other, is too superficial. One has to analyze the embrace, and see how powerful it is, how convincing. One could apply here the distinction between depth and surface grammar of the later Wittgenstein. The apparent embrace would be equivalent to the surface grammar of the painting, and analyzing the embrace would mean to get involved with the depth grammar of Schiele’s pictorial language.

I think that your idea of comparing *Death and the Maiden* and *The Kiss* is definitely important but I believe that a careful contrast between the two will show serious dissimilarities.

I would also like to point out that *Death and the Maiden* is an allegory that has been used time and again in the history of art. So it’s a part of our traditional language. Language is not only grammar. Language is also about meaning. The pair *Death/the Maiden* has been charged with a lot of meaning throughout the course of history. So looking deep into the roots of the composition cannot be reduced to any sort of formalism. I would like to add that Schiele didn’t always give names to his paintings.

**Allan Janik:** The truth hides in the detail. Why would somebody want to paint the motif *Death and the Maiden* in this particular way and not in another way? Once again there are all these options possible.

**Question 3:** If I understand your book correctly, Allan, for me one of the most interesting and convincing themes is that people like Schönberg, Loos, Kraus and Wittgenstein had something in common which can maybe be expressed as a hidden ethical convention, an ethical movement. This kind of critique of the society they lived within. If this is correct: Do you also see the same ethical fundamentals, the same ethical intention in Schiele’s work? Is there the same kind of critique of society?

**Allan Janik:** Yes, definitely. The place where I am at home here is less painting than poetry. I translated Trakl for that reason. I worked together with one of the leading Trakl scholars in the world for many years. We gave courses on Wittgenstein and Trakl. There are a number of chapters missing in *Wittgenstein’s Vienna* and I knew it already when we wrote the book. When I was writing *Wittgenstein’s Vienna* I was under pressure to get things done quickly. One of the chapters that is missing is on Trakl. Another one, Carla convinced me, is on Schiele. The most important one is on Otto Weininger, who first insisted in the face of the *Wiener Moderne* that ethics and aesthetics are one.

**Carla Carmona:** I think that the chapter you dedicated to Otto Weininger in *Assembling Reminders* has made up for that.

**Allan Janik:** Otto Weininger was the philosophical source of all of Viennese critical modernism. He is a very strange figure and is at best only half-understood. He wrote lots of dangerous silly things about women and Jews, but he wrote a lot of profound things as well. Unfortunately, he is better known for the former. It’s not for nothing that a very serious man, like the young Schönberg, talked about Weininger along with August Strindberg and Maurice Maeterlinck as one of the few serious opponents of the

mind-killing aesthetic of comfort that dominated the *Wiener Moderne* in his youth. In any case, there is a lot more to *Wittgenstein's Vienna* than I had the chance to put in to it when writing it.

Many years later I tried to add a few chapters, but you could not do anything but ruin the book's integrity by altering it in a major way. So in order to fill the gap I had to write another book which I called *Wittgenstein's Vienna Revisited*. There is more to the story, more to the culture, much more, than we were capable of handling when we wrote it forty-five years ago. And it's astonishing how much there is still around of the old times. And how similar the attitudes of people are. Especially in politics, in the relationship between journalism and politics. There are lots of other examples. Who was it that said of the "dead past" that it is not dead, indeed, it is not past.

**Carla Carmona:** Let me add something in reply to the question. Egon Schiele had an astonishing concern for ethics and that shows in his poetry and in his letters. He wanted to create his own art association towards the end of his life, and he worked very hard in that direction. It was quite a movement that involved very interesting people, Schönberg, for instance, was part of it. It did not have a definitive name. Schiele referred to it as the *Kunsthalle*<sup>9</sup>, which indicates how important the exhibition space was to the whole thing and in particular to Schiele's conception of the practice of art. The idea was to be able to reconstruct the arts after the Great War. Art was considered as a fight in what could be understood as the *Kunsthalle Manifesto*. The *Kunsthalle* wanted to promote an artistic war in order to foster the wellbeing of humankind.

Moreover, Schiele always expressed his artistic ideas and principles in ethical terms. And ethics and religion were very close for him. He was a very spiritual character, and in his writings he often refers to the transcendental. He understood that the artist was a manifestation of the transcendental. I always found very revealing the fact that he wanted to create a mausoleum in order to erect a temple for those who had fallen in the First World War. So in a way Schiele established an important connection between art, ethics, and religion. A very particular religion; his own religion, somehow. And it is no coincidence that we find such a connection between the three also in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. What was there in what Wittgenstein termed the world of value? What was *das Mystische*? Ethics, aesthetics and religion. And in Wittgenstein, aesthetics is nothing but artistic practice itself, not what philosophers or anybody else says about it.

I believe that Schiele's ethical concerns manifest themselves in his pictorial grammar. In the silence there is in his best work, when there is nothing but grammar showing itself: when Schiele doesn't try to add anything to the message. And in that way his art resonates well with the last propositions of the *Tractatus*, those that were a mystery for somebody like Bertrand Russell. Like Wittgenstein did in philosophy, Schiele made explicit the limits of pictorial language from within that language.

**Allan Janik:** That reminds me of something important that I have nearly forgotten here. Our discussion here is only half of what I originally planned to present. I know another Spanish lady, who is an art historian and wrote her dissertation on Schiele, on the theme *Das unrettbare Ich* and the philosophical background to Schiele's concept of the Self. Unfortunately, Helena Pereña has a vernissage in Innsbruck tonight, where she is the curator of the *Tiroler Landesmuseen*, and as a result could not be here with us. The purpose of this discussion, and the discussion I hope I shall have with Dr. Pereña in the future, is the philosophical background to and the philosophical dimension of Schiele.

When I look at Schiele, the thinker who jumps into my mind is in fact not Wittgenstein. It's a man called Ferdinand Ebner, an Austrian who is completely forgotten. Ebner was the first person to develop a dialogical philosophy. Martin Buber, who was writing at the same time, took over the notions of I and Thou. Ebner says we are driven to the other because the more we try to live for ourselves, the more we get encapsulated in ourselves, the more we become a victim of a self-destructive drive to what he called *Ich-Einsamkeit*.

**Carla Carmona:** Last year I gave a talk at the Egon Schiele Research Symposium titled *Art as Religion: On the Eternal View of Things*, where I explored the connection between Schiele and Ebner, motivated by the many times that Allan invited me to go in that direction, and I found out many interesting things. Although Schiele could not have been influenced by Ebner's writings, given that Ebner did not publish his first work till after Schiele was already dead, one could say that there was something in the atmosphere that both of them perceived and responded to in a similar way.

Ebner uses a concept that relates body and language: *Wortleib*, word-body. Ebner understands human flesh as a point of convergence between the word and the human body. According to him, the human body is involved in an intense longing for dialogue and communicates it. In fact, according to Ebner, that longing is incarnated in our anatomical structure and it manifests itself in our gestures, in our body language. In fact, body language presupposes word in man, its meaning and man's intimate relationship



with it. That explains the expressivity of gestures and body language in general. It is interesting to notice the resemblance with the last writings of Wittgenstein, since for Wittgenstein at the core of language was gesture. Ebner did not understand the body as a corporeal instrument, but as a verbal and spiritual, in his terms, pneumatological reality. Hence, man can identify himself with his body because the body is also the word.

Ebner pays special attention to the gesture of pointing towards something. Concretely, he uses the verb *deuten*. He considers that particular gesture as something characteristic of the human being and attributes a spiritual character to it. In fact, he believes that the gestural ability of the hand is a distinctive feature of the human being, in comparison to animals. I believe that the resemblance between these ideas and the role that hands play in Schiele's oeuvre is crystal-clear.

**Allan Janik:** Yes, it's really impossible for me to look at Schiele's self-portraits without thinking of Ebner. I hope we can continue this discussion another time. There is a lot more to say.

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1 | Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*. New York 1973. German translation: Wittgensteins Wien, München 1984.

2 | Egon Schiele, *Death and the Maiden (Man and Girl)*, 1915. Oil on canvas, 150 × 180 cm (59 × 70<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in). Belvedere, Vienna, Inv. no. 3171, Jane Kallir: *Egon Schiele. The Complete Works*, New York 1998, K P.289.

3 | Egon Schiele, *Portrait of the Painter Paris von Gütersloh*, 1918, oil on canvas, 140.3 × 109.9 cm (55<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 43<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in), Minneapolis Institute of Art, Kallir 1998 (see note 2) K P.322.

4 | Egon Schiele, *Dr. Hugo Koller*, 1918, oil on canvas, 140.3 × 110 cm (55<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 43<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in), Belvedere Vienna, Inv.no. 4296, Kallir 1998 (see note 2), K P.320.

5 | Egon Schiele, *Portrait of the Painter Anton Peschka*,

1909, oil and metallic paint, 110, 2 × 100 cm (43<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 39<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in), Private collection, Kallir 1998, (see note 2), K P.150.

6 | Egon Schiele: *Mother with Two Children III*, 1915–1917, oil on canvas, 150 × 159.8 cm (59 × 62<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in), Belvedere, Vienna, Inv. 4473, Kallir 1998, (see note 2) K P.303.

7 | Egon Schiele, *Seated Male Nude (Self-portrait)*, 1910, Oil, opaque color on canvas, 152.5 × 150 cm (60 × 59 in), Leopold Museum, Vienna, Inv. 465, Kallir 1998, (see note 2) K P. 172.

8 | Egon Schiele: *Levitiation (The Blind II)*, 1915–1916. Oil on canvas, 200 × 172 cm (78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 67<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in). Leopold Museum, Vienna, Inv. 467, Kallir 1998 (see note 2), K P.288.

9 | Letter from Egon Schiele to Anton Peschka, 02.03.1917, Privatbesitz/USA, in: Egon Schiele Datenbank der Autographen (ESDA), ID: 1263, online: <http://www.egonschiele.at>

FIG. 4 | EGON SCHIELE

Bildnis des Malers Anton Peschka | 1909

Portrait of the Painter Anton Peschka

Privatsammlung | Private collection



## EGON SCHIELE IN WITTGENSTEINS WIEN

Warum sollen wir Egon Schiele und Ludwig Wittgenstein gemeinsam betrachten, wo doch die zwei weder einander gekannt noch zur Kenntnis genommen haben? Worin liegt der

Sinn, Schiele innerhalb der kulturellen Konstellation, die man „Wittgensteins Wien“ nennt, zu situieren? In Rahmen des Gesprächs erklärt Allan Janik, warum er erst durch Carla Carmona Escaleras Dissertation die Bedeutung von Schiele in der geistigen Welt Wittgensteins erkannt hat. Die prinzipielle Verbindung des Malers und des Philosophen hängt mit der strengen Distinktion Wittgensteins zwischen dem zusammen, was ein Satz sagt und was ein Satz zeigt. Ein Satz besagt, dass ein bestimmter Sachverhalt besteht, und er zeigt zugleich durch seine Grammatik etwas stillschweigend an. Das, was sich zeigt, ist nicht zuletzt auch ein Verweis darauf, wo sich das Ethische im tieferen Sinn verorten lässt. So ist der Satz für Wittgenstein ein Bild der Welt, und was für Sätze im strengen Sinn gilt, gilt auch für Bilder – einschließlich aller Kunstbilder. Die künstlerische Grammatik Schieles besteht aus seiner Weise, Strukturen, Figuren und Farben zu verwenden. Diese Perspektive auf Schiele fokussiert unsere Aufmerksamkeit auf seine künstlerischen Leistungen und führt sie weg von ablenkenden biografischen Details. Dass Schiele – wie auch Arnold Schönberg – tiefgehende Ähnlichkeiten mit Wittgenstein aufweist, hilft uns einzusehen, wie profund das ethische Schweigen Wittgensteins tatsächlich ist.