

FIG. 1 | EGON SCHIELE
Der Häuserbogen II („Inselstadt“) | 1915
Crescent of Houses II (Island Town)
Leopold Museum, Wien | Vienna



Carla Carmona

ETHICS AND AESTHETICS ARE ONE. EGON SCHIELE IN THE LIGHT OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN AND THE THEORY OF MUSICAL COMPOSITION OF ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG

The question of the limits of language is deeply connected to one of the pillars of modern art, that is, the desire to extend the formal possibilities of an artistic medium. One could read under that light the relationship between the ready-made and modern sculpture. As Hermann Broch pointed out, the development ought to take place from within the medium itself:

ALL ART STRIVES FOR THE EXTENSION OF ITS MEDIUM. THAT END MUST ALSO BE ITS FULFILLMENT; IT MUST GIVE ART ALL ITS METHODS. THE WORK OF ART CAN ONLY FOLLOW THE LAW OF INNER NECESSITY . . . IN THAT LAW LIES [ITS] UNITY . . . BALANCE . . . [AND] UNIVERSALITY. . . STYLE, THE CONCISE EXPRESSION OF BALANCE, WILL [THUS] BE VANQUISHED AND WITH IT ORNAMENT.¹

This is precisely how the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein approached both ethics and language in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.² What appeared to be a treatise on logic was much more than that. Wittgenstein wrote that the purpose of the book was ethical and explained that it consisted of two parts, the written and the unwritten.³ Wittgenstein considered that the unwritten part was the most important. The key was the very thing that was missing in the text, and the gesture to keep quiet about it. One of the aims of the *Tractatus* was to delimit the field of ethics, and that could only be done from within. Wittgenstein thought he had settled those limits by precisely remaining silent about ethical issues. His demarcation between the world of facts and the world of value intended to make clear that logic, and consequently philosophy, could only deal with facts. The language of logic could not go further than that, and thus the world of value – that is, of ethics – was out of its reach. Facts belonged to the realm of saying, and value to that of showing. There were certain things that could only be shown, and art was an appropriate path toward that domain.

How could art lead us toward the realm of value? Let us go back to the quotation by Broch. What does it mean? It is very simple: We ought not to forget that poetry is

words in a specific position, that painting is line and color, that music is the tension between the notes. And this has much to do with Wittgenstein's idea that the work of art (in a broad sense, including musical compositions, poetry, and literature) "does not seek to convey something else, just itself," that the work of art is "a felt expression."⁴ In other words, representation and content cannot be isolated from each other in art: they are two sides of the same coin. The ultimate quality of a work of art ought to be this singular kind of self-reference, and its integrity determined by it.

Modern art's longing for self-reference, its aspiration to stay within the limits outlined by the very artwork, can be read against the background of Wittgenstein's criticism of Cartesianism and its derivation into a radical critique of dualism.⁵ For Wittgenstein, thought cannot be separated from the process of thinking. Can the expression of sadness on a face be isolated from that particular face? Likewise, a work of art cannot be separated from what it depicts. Hence, a painting cannot be translated into words, and in art paraphrasing will always result in simplification. The work of art is irreplaceable. Wittgenstein explains that understanding a poem involves grasping something that is expressed only by those words in those positions.⁶ The key lies in the organization of the material. In painting, too.

In order to ensure the rigor of the organization, one ought to stay within the limits of the language game developed. The idea of limit is essential for the understanding of Wittgenstein's notion of language game. As it happens with other games, language has intrinsic pragmatic limits. In any game, there are moves that are possible and others that are not.⁷ Consider checkers. The game pieces cannot be moved either vertically or horizontally. Similarly, every artistic language creates a sphere of possible moves and as a result a series of impossible ones. Take the example of Mark Rothko. Would it make sense if an object went through one of his canvases in the way the Cadillacs of Wolf Vostell go through walls or crash into rocks?

I have put forward a parallelism between the speakable and the playable, thus bringing closer the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein to the distinction established in the *Tractatus* between saying and showing.⁸ The language games of art also have rules, limits. It is thanks to our familiarity with the rules of the language game of a particular artist that we recognize a picture we have never seen before as part of the oeuvre of a painter we know well. The movements we see in the picture hitherto unknown to us bear a strong family resemblance to other paintings we do know by the same artist. In the picture we see for the first time we recognize the language game

of that particular artist, the fundamental aspects of his artistic practice. It makes no sense to abandon pictorial grammar in order to portray a particular content. The unspeakable is nothing but the unplayable, a purely grammatical matter. One ought to focus on representation, on the organization of the material, on the game, after all, on the showing, since all the content is already there. And here we turn to the beautiful idea of the young Wittgenstein that the inexpressible – for example, the meaning of a poem – rests peacefully in the expressed, that is, in representation.⁹

THE PICTORIAL IDEA OF EGON SCHIELE

The search for precision guided the compositional practice of Arnold Schönberg. The composer disagreed with the expressionist character that had been attributed to his work. Schönberg tried to free the musical composition from its subordination to the transmission of a message, that is, he rejected the idea that musical material ought to be organized according to something outside itself.

I have extended Schönberg's concept of the musical idea to Schiele's mastery of pictorial composition.¹⁰ The (musical) idea could be understood as a thread that demands to be developed up to its full articulation. The composition ought to grow out of inner necessity, for example, according to the requirements of the existing notes or taking into consideration how a note is loaded with meaning when it is repeated along the piece, just like the meaning of an adjective gets transformed in the course of a poem.

For Schönberg, the objectivity of art, its ethical dimension, lies in the strict precision of its language. Like Wittgenstein, Schönberg identified ethics and aesthetics. The artist's quest for objectivity ought to be directly related to his integrity. One ought to compose with a view to self-expression, and this means developing a personal relationship with the artistic medium in question, that is, one's own artistic program. Schönberg believed that musical compositions reflect the moral character of their composers. His concern for authenticity, closely linked to a respect for the rules of the game, did not match with convention. Schönberg's work opposed the aestheticism of his time. Atonality defied convention by means of its most rigorous discipline. And this particular kind of objectivity walks hand in hand with the self-reference touched upon earlier. Paying attention to the pictorial idea of a picture involves focusing on its syntax, on how the elements that constitute the oeuvre of that particular artist relate to one another. I will focus on two hallmarks of Schiele's syntax: repetition and ornamentation.

FIG. 2 | EGON SCHIELE
Sonnenblume II | 1910
Sunflower II
Wien Museum



FIG. 3 | EGON SCHIELE
Herbstbaum in bewegter Luft („Winterbaum“) | 1912
Autumn Tree in Stirred Air (Winter Tree)
Leopold Museum, Wien | Vienna



OF ELEMENTS AND RELATIONS

By elements, I mean the objects constituting Schiele's oeuvre, such as human figures, trees, buildings, chairs, rugs, or vases. However, it is useful to distinguish between two types of elements. Regarding a building, one could consider it as a whole or each of its parts separately, for example, a window or a chimney. In fact, it is the painting, how the elements in it are organized, that makes the difference. At times, a painting approaches the element "building" as a whole, and in other cases mere tiles, doors, or railings play the role of elements. Likewise, a plant can be approached in a given painting as a whole (Fig. 2)¹¹ or it can become one with the grammar of the composition (Fig. 3)¹². I refer to the first type of element as *elemental* and to the second type as *nonelemental*.

It is easy to identify elements of the first type, which in turn can be divided into three groups: figures, structures, and background. Figures are beings, whether animate or inanimate. The depiction always takes place against a background. And structures mediate between figures and background. Although we tend to give priority to figures, particularly if they have human form, they do not have priority over either structures or background. Observe the canvas from 1915–1916 *Death and the Maiden* (Fig. 5. 100)¹³: two humanlike figures rise above a confusing and undefined background by means

of a sheet that functions both as an island and as a flying carpet. The two figures have the same weight in the composition as the soulless and overwhelming background. In fact, their desperate embrace could be read as a reaction of helplessness toward their surroundings. The sheet, giving form to rhythms and directions, is the membrane that protects them from the background. However, the three elements are easily distinguishable.

By contrast, it is not so easy to differentiate between the elements in the canvas from 1914 *Houses with Laundry* (Fig. 4), where one cannot speak in terms of figure, background, and structure. Think about it. Can one actually distinguish a background? Firstly, the vertical arrangement of the composition makes it impossible to separate the elements of the landscape from the houses, the clotheslines, or the quay. Nor does it seem right to treat each building separately, since the buildings that constitute each group of houses are mixed up and formed by elements of the same type. For instance, in all buildings there are small square windows that are sometimes painted the same color, such as white. In addition, the existence of similar items on the clotheslines makes it difficult to distinguish between the clotheslines and the groups of buildings. Those modest elements are not supported by any structure and seem to be equivalent. So there is neither background nor structure. Likewise, there are no figures.

Notice that there are no separate buildings, but rather groups of buildings. And in these groups, details overtake the whole. Our eyes move from red chimneys to whitish windows that make us think of eyes. It is really difficult not to get lost while counting the number of windows, and also not to confuse windows, doors, and chimneys. Or chimneys and poles, regardless of whether the poles stand independently or are part of the clotheslines. Or poles and the red pieces of laundry hanging on the lines. There are only equivalent elements – an endless number of them.

It is a very peculiar countlessness: it is purely syntactical. What comes first in this kind of composition are not the elements but the syntax. If in works such as *Death and the Maiden* there are clear and distinct interrelated elements, in landscapes like *Houses with Laundry* what prevails is the syntax, the set of relations ordering what is happening in the picture. Let us observe which relationships predominate in such a landscape. The framework of horizontal stripes that constitute the countryside and the mountains is evident. There are also noticeable vertical brushstrokes in chimneys, poles, and roofs that balance such horizontality. Repetition is another resource that brings together apparently disparate elements. The frequent use of the same shade of red makes windows,

FIG. 4 | EGON SCHIELE
Häuser mit Wäsche (Vorstadt II) | 1914
Houses with Laundry (Suburb II)
Privatbesitz | Private collection



poles, and chimneys look alike. How difficult would it be to distinguish between chimneys and poles if the former were not placed on the roofs? These relationships, which comprise Schiele's language game, make room for the development of his pictorial idea.

OF REPETITION AND VERSATILITY

Let us gain more insight into the use of repetition in *Houses with Laundry*¹⁴. Notice the behavior of the red poles. There are poles supporting clotheslines, and others that appear as solitary notes in a stratified landscape that is reminiscent of a pentagram. All the chimneys in those groups of houses, without exception, and many of the garments hanging on those friendly clotheslines share the same shade of red, a remarkably pure color. Poles and chimneys are vertical forces that strengthen each other. The clothes hanging on the clotheslines, like in counterpoint, reinforce the horizontal stratification of the landscape and the quay. But the deep red garments seem to have the capacity of treacherously blowing up the clothesline at isolated points, as if they were supporters of verticalness. The arrangement of the boats at the quay could be read as a vertical echo. Similarly, the buildings could be understood as vertical forces in need of coming together in order not to be subdued by the plentiful horizontal segments in the canvas. I have already mentioned the stratification of the land. We could distinguish the ground surrounding the

houses, the mountains, and the field displayed vertically behind the houses as if in the background. I have also spoken of the clotheslines. We should add the sky, the hedges, and the quay.

These layers are to be understood as syntactic parallels that make room for the small variations that Schönberg considered necessary in the use of repetition in musical composition. Schönberg rejected strict repetition in music. Every repetition ought to involve a degree of variation, either vertically or horizontally.¹⁵ Let us go back to the painting. Each layer of the soil has its own inclination. The use of color also introduces variations. There is a parallel between the layer of shrubs just above the quay and the brownish strata of the soil or those of the quay. There are also dissimilarities in thickness. This can explain the tiny differences between chimneys, poles, and windows. Variation is even more evident when the parallels are curved, as they are in the 1915-1916 canvas *Island Town* (Fig. 1)¹⁶.

Through horizontal and vertical parallelisms, Schiele favored another technique, the lack of framing, a refined way of subordinating pictorial elements to pictorial syntax (Fig. 3). The extremely well demarcated areas of his landscapes and cities point to infinity. Seemingly endless, they go beyond the limits of the canvas and consequently tear the concept of limit apart. Observe once more *Houses with Laundry* (Fig. 4). The horizontal fragments that constitute the landscape go beyond both the left and the right edges. At first glance, despite their imperfections, it seems that they would never converge, that chance would correct their course in order to avoid any possible intersection. In other works, the tops of the trees exceed the upper edge of the canvas, or a structure, like a sheet or a jumble of fabric, surpasses the lower edge. Even human figures, in particular their limbs, exceed the composition. This lack of framing is a way of giving prominence to how things are organized in the picture and not to the pictorial elements themselves.

OF ORNAMENTATION AND NECESSITY

Writing about Schiele's oeuvre, Achille Bonito Oliva explained that ornamentation is a process that provokes a fragmentation of the comprehensive idea of the artwork in question, that it is a projection of the fragmentation behind every comprehensive idea of the world.¹⁷ The overview is brushed off by individual details that invite the spectator to explore the work in a thousand diverse ways, jumping from one ornament to another as if they were tiles of different colors that created various codes depending on how they

FIG. 5 | EGON SCHIELE

Bildnis Friederike Maria Beer | 1914
Portrait of Friederike Maria Beer
Privatbesitz | Private collection



were combined. True depths emerge between one detail and the next. Remember what I said in relation to the bright red garments in *Houses with Laundry*. It seems that those little dots of color are able to make the clotheslines explode with admirable precision.

Take in the apparently innocent tiny flowers of the 1915–1916 canvas *Levitation* (Fig. 7)¹⁸. The very ornament that serves as entrance and toe-hold in the composition interrupts our journey and makes us notice the halt. Those details, at first glance merely ornamental, are powerful fragmentary forces, authentic bombs of color. Their repetition generates coherence in the composition, although it introduces small breaks that are reminiscent of the contradictions and divisions discussed by Schönberg. Just like a simple garment is able to blow up a clothesline, these tiny flowers, spread vertically and horizontally along the canvas, succeed in making the composition explode. Observe their color and form. They are always of bright colors that have nothing to do with the dull tones of the rest of the picture. Their form is no less extraordinary. They consist of irregular, discontinuous, unblended brushstrokes that are treated linearly, while the rest of the composition receives a more pictorial treatment.

These minute flowers are a wonderful antidote to laziness. Could we resist these colorful musical notes that so mischievously guide our way along the composition? They force us to look at the painting for each and every one of them, creating an endless number of rhythms to follow and opening innumerable perspectives from which to contemplate the work. This is done in such a way that any attempt on our part to focus on the center of the composition is blocked. Wittgenstein could well have used this painting in order to illustrate his battle against philosophical stiffness.¹⁹ But those little candies scattered throughout the composition are particularly austere. In fact, Schiele's use of ornamentation is never overdone. These flowers could not be either more spontaneous or more lighthearted. Our imagination is determined to bring their petals together in perfect circles, though they consist of only a few uneven lines.

No less explosive are the South American motifs scattered along the dress of the figure in the portrait that Schiele painted of Friederike Maria Beer in 1914 (Fig. 5)²⁰. Schiele, inspired by the dolls that Miss Beer had brought from a trip to South America, made them compete with the geometric composition of her dress, which was designed by the Wiener Werkstätte. What was Schiele aiming at by such a combination? Breaking

FIG. 6 | GUSTAV KLIMT

Bildnis Friederike Maria Beer | 1916
Portrait of Friederike Maria Beer
Sammlung Mizne-Blumental | Mizne-Blumental Collection, Tel Aviv Museum of Art



the colorful monotony of the dress and strengthening the withering character of each one of the individual segments designed by the Wiener Werkstätte, they are a feature that could pass unnoticed given the geometric ocean predominant in the garment. Those figures, minimally defined, appear as ornaments on a dress that is itself full of abstract adornment. Notice how precisely the little figures are distributed. Schiele's artistic practice takes part in the rejection of superfluity shared by many of his contemporaries, such as Schönberg or the architect Adolf Loos.

The use of ornamentation we have observed in those two canvases has nothing to do with the Secessionist stylization of Schiele's early works, prior to 1910, when Schiele had not yet found himself as a painter. In those days, his sunflowers and figures wore robes of filigree and his friends sat on papier-mâché thrones. Later on, that ostentation resolved into simplified suits, latent seats, and surgical nudity. This more developed ornamentation is structural and constructive, of the kind that Schönberg sought in his compositions.

The constitutive character of ornamentation in the portrait of Miss Beer is particularly evident when it is compared with another that Gustav Klimt made of her in 1916²¹ (Fig. 6)²². We find the figure in Schiele's canvas in an unachievable position

against an empty background. The verticality of the figure is unprecedented. It is unlikely that the sitter could keep her balance in such a position. In fact, Schiele painted Miss Beer lying down and later changed the position of the canvas. By contrast, Klimt painted her against a background that shares the *horror vacui* that is typical of his landscapes. Klimt even painted the ground and adorned it with flowers. The background in Klimt's painting is filled with Asian motifs and the figure wears a garment with organic adornments. Such a complex setting should provide support for the figure, but it does not. In fact, the figure seems to be floating and its clumsy, stretched feet do not seem real.

By contrast, the figure in Schiele's portrait seems to have a solid toehold, although an invisible one. What could be holding the figure in this case? The only thing that there is: her garment. In this canvas, clothes have a structural character that enables them to uphold and define the figure. In fact, it is the dress that gives shape to the figure (notice that the only parts we see of the sitter are her head, hands, and feet). The use that Klimt made of women's clothes has nothing to do with this. In fact, Klimt's treatment of clothes is not able to separate the figure from the background; it confuses them.

1 | Hermann Broch, "Notizen zu einer systematischen Ästhetik," quoted in Walter Methlagl, "'Der Brenner'. Beispiel eines Durchbruchs zur Moderne", *Mitteilungen aus dem Brenner-Archiv*, no. 2 (1983): pp. 11–12.

2 | Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. Charles Kay Ogden, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1922.

3 | Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Prototractatus: An Early Version of Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, ed. Bernard Francis McGuinness, Tore Nyberg, and Georg Henrik von Wright; trans. David F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, Routledge, London 1996, p. 16.

4 | Ludwig Wittgenstein, MS 134 106: 05.04.1947, in *Culture and Value*, rev. ed., ed. Georg Henrik von Wright; trans. Peter Winch, Blackwell, Oxford 2006, p. 67e. *Italic in the original.*

5 | Wittgenstein's early distinction between value and facts would not pass his own test against dualism. He could well have included such a pair in the list of examples of words to bring back from their metaphysical to their everyday use. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th ed., ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, Blackwell, Oxford 2009, §116, p. 53e.

6 | *Ibid.*, §531, p. 152e.

7 | See Garry Hagberg, *Meaning and Interpretation:*

Wittgenstein, Henry James, and Literary Knowledge, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1994, pp. 17–24.

8 | Carla Carmona, *La idea pictórica de Egon Schiele. Un ensayo sobre lógica representacional*, Genuève, Pamplona 2012, pp. 23–24.

9 | Ludwig Wittgenstein to Paul Engelmann, 9 April 1917, in Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein, with a Memoir*, trans. Lux Furtmüller, Blackwell, Oxford 1967, p. 7.

10 | See Carmona 2012 (see note 8).

11 | Egon Schiele, *Sunflower II*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 150 × 29.8 cm (59 × 11¾ in.). Wien Museum, Vienna, Inv. no. 117523, *Jane Kallir: Egon Schiele. The Complete Works*, New York 1998, K P.159.

12 | Egon Schiele, *Autumn Tree in Stirred Air (Winter Tree)*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 80 × 80 cm (31½ × 31½ in.). Leopold Museum, Vienna, Inv. no. 449, Kallir 1998 (see note 11), K P.239.

13 | Egon Schiele, *Death and the Maiden (Man and Girl)*, 1915. Oil on canvas, 150 × 180 cm (59 × 70⅞ in.). Belvedere, Vienna, Inv. no. 3171, Kallir 1998 (see note 11), K P.289.

14 | Egon Schiele, *Houses with Laundry (Suburb II)*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 100 × 120 cm (39⅜ × 47¼ in.). Private collection, Kallir 1998 (see note 11), K P.283.

15 | See Arnold Schönberg, "New Music: My Music" and

"Criteria for the Evaluation of Music," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schönberg*, ed. Leonard Stein; trans. Leo Black, University of California Press, Berkeley 1984, pp. 102–4, 129–30.

16 | Egon Schiele, *Island Town (Krumau Town Crescent II)*, 1915–1916. Oil on canvas, 110 × 140 cm (43¼ × 55⅞ in.). Leopold Museum, Vienna, Inv. no. 456, Kallir 1998 (see note 11), K P.293.

17 | Achille Bonito Oliva, "Estasi dell'eroticismo," in Exh. cat. *Egon Schiele*, ed. Rudy Chiappini, Skira, Milan 2003, p. 61.

18 | Egon Schiele, *Levitation (The Blind II)*, 1915–1916.

Oil on canvas, 200 × 172 cm (78¾ × 67¾ in.). Leopold Museum, Vienna, Inv. no. 467, Kallir 1998 (see note 11), K P.288.

19 | Wittgenstein, MS 118 45r c: 01.09.1937, *Culture and Value*, 32e (see note 4).

20 | Egon Schiele, *Portrait of Friederike Maria Beer*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 190 × 120.5 cm (74¾ × 47½ in.). Private collection, Kallir 1998 (see note 11), K P.276.

21 | For a more exhaustive analysis, see Carla Carmona, "A Comparison of the Portraits of Friederike Maria Beer Painted by Egon Schiele and Gustav Klimt: Differentiating Between Scenography and Grammar in Painting," *Egon Schiele Jahrbuch 2/3* (2012–2013): pp. 160–68.

22 | Gustav Klimt, *Portrait of Friederike Maria Beer*, 1916. Oil on canvas, 168 × 130 cm (66⅞ × 51⅞ in.). Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Mizne-Blumental Collection.

FIG. 7 | EGON SCHIELE

Entschwebung („Die Blinden“ II) | 1915

Levitation (The Blind II)

Leopold Museum, Wien | Vienna



ETHIK UND ÄSTHETIK SIND EINS. EGON SCHIELE VOR DEM HINTERGRUND VON LUDWIG WITTGENSTEINS PHILOSOPHIE UND ARNOLD SCHÖNBERGS KOMPOSITIONSTHEORIE

In dem vorliegenden Beitrag wird Egon Schieles Kunst vor dem Hintergrund von Ludwig Wittgensteins Philosophie und Arnold Schönbergs Kompositionstheorie beleuchtet. Die Autorin analysiert Schieles Bildaufbau und zeigt, dass dessen Strenge eng mit jenem Verhältnis zwischen Ethik und Ästhetik verbunden ist, das sowohl in Wittgensteins als

auch in Schönbergs Werken entfaltet wird. Um die Geistesverwandtschaft zwischen Schieles Kunst und Wittgensteins Philosophie aufzuzeigen, greift die Autorin einerseits auf Wittgensteins frühe Schriften zurück und bezieht andererseits grundlegende Konzepte seiner späteren Philosophie, wie etwa jenes der Sprachspiele, auf Schieles Werk. Um wiederum die Schnittstellen zwischen Schönbergs und Schieles Auffassungen von Kunst und ihrer ästhetischen Praktiken zu veranschaulichen, geht sie „Schieles Bild-idee“ – benannt nach Schönbergs Schriften – auf den Grund.

Will man die Bildidee hinter einem Bild verstehen, so muss man sich auf dessen Syntax konzentrieren, darauf, wie die einzelnen Elemente, die das Werk eines bestimmten Künstlers ausmachen, zueinander in Beziehung stehen. Das Hauptaugenmerk liegt dabei auf zwei wesentlichen Merkmalen von Schieles Bildaufbau, nämlich Wiederholung und Ornamentierung. Denn wenn wir genau analysieren, wie Schiele diese Merkmale einsetzt, wird deutlich, dass sie notwendige und grundlegende Teile seiner Bildkompositionen darstellen.