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ANDROGYNOUS ASPECTS OF THE
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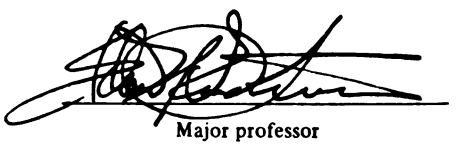

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ANDROGYNOUS ASPECTS OF THE SELF-PORTRAITS OF EGON SCHIELE

By

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ABSTRACT

ANDROGYNOUS ASPECTS OF THE SELF-PORTRAITS
OF
EGON SCHIELE

By

Joseph Alexander Magil

The works of the Austrian Expressionist painter Egon Schiele have an arresting, disturbing effect due to their distortions, emaciation, and overt sexuality, creating an oeuvre of super-personal psychological revelations as Stephen Walrod has shown. There is, however, another aspect of Schiele's works which gives to what is often seen as powerfully painted pornography a philosophical and even elevating element. It is due to this that the most significant works of Egon Schiele are his self-portraits. He regularly represented himself nude with peculiar alterations of his anatomy which make him an androgyne. These alterations, as well as numerous hand gestures which Schiele performs, have their roots in earlier art, and especially in art of a religious or mystical nature. These appropriations lead the viewer to conclude that Schiele was familiar with various, earlier conceptions of the androgyne, and especially with those of the Late Romantics and Decadents.

I would like to dedicate this work

to the memory of my parents,

Mary F. Magil and J. Mendel Magil

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Introduction

Egon Schiele lived and worked at a time when Europe had a profound and pervasive fascination with sex and sexuality. The art, music, literature, and science of this time convey the concept of a humanity fatally dominated by sexual impulses and desires.

In the 1890s, Edvard Munch illustrated the human life cycle in a series of paintings which he called his Frieze of Life. Such works as Puberty (1894), The Voice (1893), Madonna (1894), and Dead Mother and Child (1893) reveal a view of life in which sex is an overpowering imperative and death awaits us once we complete our procreative duty. A grimly fatalistic attitude towards sex is manifested in the works of this painter whom Schiele admired.

The composer Arnold Schoenberg achieved fame and notoriety at two stages of his career with works dealing with sexual relationships. His Transfigured Night (1899), a tone poem for string sextet based on a poem by Richard Dehmel, evokes a moonlit scene in the woods in which a woman confesses to her fiance that she is pregnant by another man

and receives his forgiveness. Schoenberg's monodrama Erwartung (1909), written after his move into the sound world of atonality, depicts a disturbed woman waiting to meet her lover in the woods. When she chances upon his body, she is not certain whether or not she herself murdered him.

The playwright Frank Wedekind dealt with the conflict between adolescent desires and adult expectations in his first play, the semi-autobiographical Spring's Awakening (1891), premiered in Vienna 1907.[1] In the play a fourteen year old girl, Wandla Bergmann, becomes pregnant by Melchior Gabor, a self-portrait of the young Wedekind. The girl's mother procures the services of an abortionist who causes the girl's death. Melchior is also expelled from school when it is discovered that he had told the facts of life to a classmate of his who subsequently committed suicide. The school authorities blame the suicide on Melchior's revelation, whereas the real reason was his friend's fear of academic failure. In the final scene Melchior escapes from reform school and visits the graveyard where his two friends are buried. The ghost of Moritz, the suicide, appears to him there and tells him of the peace and security of death, urging him also to commit suicide. At this point a new

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[1] Helen O. Borowitz, "Youth as Metaphor and Image in Wedekind, Kokoschka and Schiele." Art Journal, vol. 33 no. 3, (Spring 1974), p.221.

character appears -a masked man who talks Melchior out of committing suicide. He argues that morality is not an absolute, but is, rather, the maintenance of a state of equilibrium between one's instincts and the demands of society, and that Melchior has just momentarily lost his equilibrium.[2] It was Wedekind's desire to expose the hypocrisy of a society that fears and cannot deal with the instincts of its members, the same society that imprisoned Egon Schiele in 1912 when he lost his "equilibrium".

Leopold von Sacher-Masoch provided a glimpse into the workings of his own psyche in the short story Venus in Furs (1870) in which he described his relationship with the Baroness Fanny Pistor with whom he had signed an agreement in December 1869 to be her slave for six months.[3] Von Sacher-Masoch's name was subsequently appropriated in the form masochism to refer to the obtaining of sexual pleasure from the receipt of pain, and this term has largely replaced the venerable Latin algolagnia. Sacher-Masoch's writings were admired by the psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing, whose Psychopathia Sexualis: A Clinical-Forensic Study (1884) detailed numerous cases of sexual aberrations, mostly culled from courtroom files. This linking of sexual

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[2] Borowitz, pp.219-220.

[3] William M. Johnston, The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History 1848-1938, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), p.233.

abnormality with criminal behavior made for juicy reading, and the book gained instant fame. It was quickly translated into seven languages from its original Latin; was expanded to three times its original length; and reached its seventeenth edition in 1924.[4] In this book, Krafft-Ebing details case histories of individuals driven to crime and self ruin due to irresistible sexual urges.

In The Interpretation of Dreams (1900), Sigmund Freud puts forth his theories that sexual feelings have their roots in infancy and develop through childhood, and that neuroses result from a lack of agreement between reality and the individual's unconscious desires. Freud saw neuroses as having mental rather than physical causes and that they thus required psychological rather than medical treatment. To Freud, failure to acknowledge and deal with one's sexuality could have a deleterious effect on one's health.

Schiele's own family history was decisively shaped by sexual circumstances. Schiele's father, Adolf, had contracted syphilis before he married Schiele's mother, Marie Soukup. He kept the disease a secret and refused to submit to treatment, with the result that his wife became infected and their first two children were stillborn. Adolf's syphilis eventually destroyed his sanity. At times

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[4] Johnston, p.233.

he would hallucinate that there were guests at the dinner table and insisted that the family include them in conversation. Finally, on the evening of December 31, 1904, he threw all of the family's stocks and bonds on the fire in a delirious fit of rage, and succumbed to the disease later that night.

Egon himself had an incestuous relationship with his younger sister Gerti. She regularly posed nude for him while she was an adolescent and when he was sixteen and she was twelve he took her by train to Trieste where they spent the night in the same hotel at which their parents had spent their honeymoon.

Schiele the artist was thus a product of his time as well as his family history, as far as his interest in sexual themes. The easily titillated yet equally easily censorious public of fin-de-siecle Austria provided the perfect audience for Schiele's exploration of his own angst-ridden sexuality. Upon leaving the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts in 1909 at the age of nineteen, Schiele began to produce one of the most personal, self-analytical oeuvres in the history of art. Schiele's great achievement was that he was able at a remarkably tender age to forge a fully mature style and to discover his preferred subjects along with his own characteristic treatment of them. Schiele was thus able to

chronicle his feelings and experiences as they occurred and so did not have to wait until later when these memories would likely be colored by hindsight.

Chapter One

The Concept of Androgyny

One of Schiele's early masterpieces is his Self-Portrait Sitting with Raised Arms of 1910 (fig. 1). At first glance one notices the emaciation and bony angularity of much Expressionist art, of which Schiele was an early exponent. One soon notices, however, a peculiar treatment of the sex organs which seems inconsistent with the carefully described anatomy of the rest of the figure. First, there is the ambiguous form of the genitals, the penis is missing, and what is there bears a not wholly convincing resemblance to a scrotum. The left breast is also much larger and fuller than the right one, and looks much like a woman's breast viewed straight on. These alterations of Schiele's anatomy are puzzling at first, but they yield much of their mystery if we study the concept of androgyny and the history of its representation in art.

The concept of androgyny dates back to antiquity and manifests itself in cultures all over the world and is a peculiar concept, in that it deals with the union of both sexes, or, more accurately, of their qualities or powers, within one person. This is frequently celebrated as an ideal, blissful state, and is often claimed as the goal of mystical adepts.

Androgyny should not be confused with hermaphroditism, in which a person is born with both ovarian and testicular tissue, or pseudohermaphroditism, in which the sex organs resemble those of the opposite sex.

True hermaphroditism is an extremely rare condition with only sixty cases reported in medical literature worldwide in this century before 1980.[5] Such an individual may have one testicle and one ovary, or sex glands that contain a mixture of ovarian and testicular tissues. Hermaphrodites usually have masculine genitals and feminine breasts. Often there is some sort of vaginal opening beneath the penis, and many hermaphrodites menstruate. Frequently the uterus is incompletely developed, with, for example, only one fallopian tube present. Genetically, true hermaphrodites are usually females, possessing two X chromosomes.[6] Figure 2 is a photograph of a true hermaphrodite who is genetically female, with a right testicle and a left ovary as well as breast development.

Pseudohermaphrodites do not have both ovarian and testicular tissue, but do have sex organs resembling those of the opposite sex. This results from the simultaneous

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[5] Herant A. Katchadourian and Donald T. Lunde, Biological Aspects of Human Sexuality, 2nd edition, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), p.100.

[6] Ibid. p.100.

presence, in significant amounts, of both male and female sex hormones during embryological development. In females, exposure to large amounts of androgens will often result in enlargement of the clitoris (fig. 3) and even fusion of the labia so as to resemble a scrotum. Such females are often reared as males and may also become further masculinized at puberty. Normal internal female organs may, however, be present. In males, the testicles may not descend into the scrotum and the halves of the scrotum may not have fused. There may be a vagina, but no uterus, and at puberty there is breast development. There may be a clitoris-like penis with a urethral opening at its base. Such males may resemble females to a remarkable degree (fig. 4).[7]

While hermaphrodites may have influenced the representation of the mythical figure of Hermaphroditus in ancient art (see below), their existence is probably not responsible for the development of the concept of androgyny. In fact, the birth of hermaphrodites was taken as a bad omen in ancient Greece and such infants were routinely left to die of exposure.[8]

The concept of androgyny is, at root, one of wholeness, the stimulus for which is a primal sense of loss or

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[7] Katchadourian and Lunde, pp.100-102.

[8] A. J. L. Busst, "The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century," in Romantic Mythologies, Ed. Ian Fletcher, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p.2.

separateness which many scholars and religious thinkers perceive as the lot of humankind. This sense of loss is said to stem from the time of creation. Many myths in fact portray the creative act as one of separation. At certain points the creation story found in Genesis 1:1-2:4a presents it as such. The first creative acts of God involve separation:

> When God began to create the heaven and the earth -the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water -God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day. On the next day God separated the waters above the firmament from those below, and on the third day God separated the waters on the earth from the dry land.[9]

The second creation story in Genesis, given in the second chapter, contains another act of creation/separation which was to have far reaching consequences. Here, Yahweh removed a rib from slumbering Adam's side and fashioned it into a woman. The result was an implied sense of loss, as this separation resulted in a powerful attraction due to which men and women join together in marriage to become one "flesh" or one "body" (Hebrew has no word for "body").[10]

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[9] Genesis 1:1-5, The Torah, 2nd edition, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967).

[10] cf. Genesis 2:24, New American Bible, (Camden: Thomas Nelson, 1971).

Plato's Symposium also contains such a primeval act of separation, and this too is the cause of sexual longing. The character Aristophanes relates a fanciful story about the nature of early humankind. At that time people were round, with four arms and four legs, one head with two faces facing in opposite directions, two pairs of ears, and two sets of genitals. There were at that time three sexes rather than two, with male joined to male, female to female, and male joined to female, which last type Aristophanes calls the Androgyne. Primeval humans had great strength and intelligence and even dared to scale heaven to attack the gods. The gods held a council to see if a way could be found to restrain humankind, and eventually Zeus came up with a solution. He decided to sunder them in two, which would greatly reduce their strength. After this division the two separated parts, each desiring the other, came together and threw their arms about each other, not desiring to do anything apart from the other, and thus literally began dying from hunger and self-neglect. Zeus then devised a new plan to save humankind. He turned the sex organs around to the front, thus allowing sexual intercourse as it is done today,both between men and women and between men. This way, unlike the original method of procreation by which they sowed their seed on the ground, they could now experience satisfaction, and then rest and get on with their business. We are given the origins not only of sexual

attraction, but also of sexual preference, as Aristophanes informs us that those men who are descendants of the original male/male humans are attracted to men, women descended from female/female forebears are attracted to other women, and men and women who descend from the Androgynes are each attracted to the opposite sex.[11] For Plato's Aristophanes, then, sexual attraction and the momentary bliss attending sexual intercourse are all that remain of the primeval contentment of early mankind.

Aristophanes goes on to claim that, given a divinely offered opportunity, a pair of lovers would choose to be joined together into one body and one soul, never again to be separated in this life or the next.[12] Such in fact was the fate of Hermaphroditus -son of the incestuous union of Hermes and Aphrodite- and the Naiad Salmakis. In fact, it is from this character that hermaphrodites derive their name. One day when Hermaphroditus went to bathe in a spring, Salmakis saw him and fell passionately in love with the handsome youth. She then seized him and prayed to the gods that they might be united forever, and her prayer was immediately answered, as the two were fused into a single being possessing both sexes. In Hellenistic representations

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[11]Plato, The Dialogues of Plato, vol. 1, translated by B. Jowett, (New York: Random House, 1937), pp.316-319.

[12]Ibid., p. 319.

Hermaphroditus possesses feminine breasts as well as a penis and scrotum, and is sometimes ithyphallic (fig. 5). This type of hermaphrodite thus shows a horizontal division of sex, with female organs above and male organs below.

The hermaphrodite appears again as a major figure in the late Middle Ages in alchemy. Alchemy was an attempt to unite the material and spiritual realms by finding a common underlying order to which both adhered. The famous Emerald Table of Hermes Trismegistus, a text purportedly by the legendary Egyptian mystic, states, "What is below is like that which is above, and what is above is like that which is below to accomplish the miracles of one thing."[13] As a result, alchemical texts tend to have a daunting complexity coupled with a capricious use of symbols. These texts often state that they are not intended to be wholly intelligible to the uninitiated.

The alchemical work was an attempt to refine gold out of base matter, but the difficulty in interpreting an alchemical text is that all the operations are to be understood as references to events in both the material world and the soul of the adept. Alchemists sought to free the soul from its imprisonment in the body just as they

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[13]June Singer, Androgyny: Toward a New Theory of Sexuality, (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1976), p.128.

sought to free gold from its imprisonment within base matter. To accomplish this, it was necessary to reduce matter to the condition it was in before God began His work of creation, that is, to the state of undifferentiated unity of chaos, which the alchemists called the prima materia. The alchemist then began his own process of creation. The production of the prima materia happened in a stage called the nigredo, which is characterized by the utter blackness of the original chaos. Being often referred to in the alchemical literature as a period of destruction and despair, it parallels the "dark night of the soul" of mystical literature, or the descent into the underworld in some mythologies. It may be experienced by the individual as deep depression and hopelessness. A process of purification follows which leads to a state called albedo or "whitening". In this stage opposites are joined together under the agency of operations personified by the androgynous deity Mercury. Spiritually, one may experience the pain of realizing that one is living a lie, or that life seems to be without meaning and that a painful self-analysis must be undertaken. The person must learn to integrate forces in his psyche which he has neglected. Alchemists often refer to the conjunction of sulphur and salt at this stage. Sulphur is characterized as masculine and is related to fire and the sun. Salt is feminine and comes from the sea, whose tides are governed by the aspect of the moon.

This stage has been called the coniunctio oppositorum or the "conjunction of opposites". The final stage is called rubedo, when the red "philosopher's stone" appears. The stone, often described as a red powder, was said to yield unlimited quantities of gold when combined with a baser metal, such as lead. A full reintegration of the psyche will have been achieved at this point, and the subject will know a new happiness.[14]

Hermaphrodites occur frequently in alchemical illustrations, often bearing the name "Rebis", meaning "double being", and representing the stage of the work called the coniunctio oppositorum. The hermaphrodite generally has two heads, a man's and a woman's, and, if nude, will often have one feminine breast and two different sets of genitals (fig. 6). Unlike the ancient Greek Hermaphroditus, this hermaphrodite is not so harmonious in appearance, due to a distinct vertical division between its sexes.

The androgyne is a significant image in non-Western cultures as well. In India the god Siva is known to fuse with his wife Parvati, creating the hermaphroditic deity known as Ardhanarisvara, i.e., "The Lord who is half a

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[14]Singer., pp.128-143.

woman".[15] Like Salmakis, Siva acts under the spur of lust.[16] Like the alchemical Rebis, Ardhanarisvara is another "vertical" hermaphrodite. In fact, depictions of this god often exhibit a deliberate tendency to emphasize this "splicing" together of male and female down an imaginary center line. Even the penis of this usually ithyphallic deity is "sliced" in half, as it were, and masculine and feminine dress, jewelry, and hairstyle distinguish each half (fig. 7).

An abstract representation of androgyny is found in the image of the T'ai Chi of Taoism (fig. 8). Here is a circle out of which "the principles of reality" develop. The light side (Yang) balances the dark side (Yin). These principles of darkness and light can represent all opposites, however. Yin is usually described as warm, moist, and feminine, while Yang is cold, dry, and masculine. The surging, active Yang is met and absorbed by the passive Yin, which takes over as Yang begins to diminish. As one cannot exist without the other, a small dot of its opposite is found in the center of

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[15]Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p.317.

[16]Alain Danielou, The Gods of India: Hindu Polytheism, (New York: Inner Traditions International, 1985), p.203.

each principle. The T'ai Chi represents the rhythmic interplay of these polarities.[17]

The androgyne assumes a somewhat sinister character in the Late Romantic and Decadent culture of nineteenth century Europe. This trend began with the publication of Theophile Gautier's Mademoiselle de Maupin in 1835. It is an historical romance based on the life of Madeleine de Maupin d'Aubigny, a bisexual actress and transvestite of the seventeenth century. Its basic structure parallels that of Balzac's Seraphita, written at the same time, in which a man and a woman fall in love with an androgyne who rejects them both and, before disappearing forever, commands the two to unite in his/her name. The difference is that Gautier ignores the spiritual perfection of Balzac's androgyne and makes his a paradigm of neo-pagan beauty. Gautier's preface to the book is the first manifesto of aestheticism, in which he attacks bourgeois notions of the social utility of art and its need for moral content and declares that beauty alone is the goal of art.[18] Henceforth, the androgyne would appear as a self-contained, and, very often, self-absorbed, object of beauty in nineteenth century art and literature.

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[17]Gail Gelburd, Androgyny in Art, (Hempstead, N. Y.: Emily Lowe Gallery, 1982), no pagination.

[18]Camille Paglia, Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp.408-409.

The concept of androgyny made a splash in Western popular consciousness with a pseudo-scientific work published shortly after the turn of the century by a remarkable character named Otto Weininger. His Sex and Character of 1903 posited that men and women contain mixtures of masculine and feminine qualities in varying proportions and that these even manifest themselves on the cellular level. Weininger's book is, however, in no way a celebration of the concept of androgyny, but is steeped in misogyny and even anti-Semitism. Weininger, himself a Jew, claimed that the Jews were the most "womanish", and therefore least virtuous, of races and, because of the self-loathing largely inspired by this belief, he took his own life after completing the book in his twenty-third year.

The androgyne appears to have been born out of a commonly felt desire for wholeness and for an end to any sense of separateness from one's beloved. Perhaps the myth of Ardhanarisvara best captures the early spirit of the androgyne in representing the desire of lovers to capture and sustain forever the intimacy and emotional nakedness of orgasm. Mystics exalted the androgyne as the symbol of spiritual union with the godhead and all of creation. In the nineteenth century the androgyne assumed a new significance with the advent of aestheticism. Self-sufficiency turned into self-absorption, narcissism,

voyeurism, and obsessive masturbation. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe was gripped by a morbid fascination with sex (by the end of the nineteenth century the incidence of syphilis had reached epidemic proportions) as well as by misogyny. One's own sexual desires were feared and mistrusted as they could only lead one down a road to ruin.[19]

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[19]for an in-depth account of fin-de-siecle misogyny and fear of sex, cf. Bram Dijkstra, Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siecle Culture, (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986).

Chapter Two

Schiele the Androgyne

Schiele's approach to the nude self-portrait developed gradually, one might even say cautiously, in two paintings of 1909-1910. The first, Self Portrait I, (fig. 9) is an oil revealing traces of Gustav Klimt's influence in the leafy, flowery area on the left and in the curling patterns applied to the frock that Schiele appears to be shedding in an act which has been likened to the emergence from a chrysalis.[20] Schiele still allows his genitals to be covered by a section of cloth that appears to be held up by a sheer act of will. Schiele's gaze,leering at the viewer, seems as much threatening as engaging, as if warning him of the torrential outpouring of sexual angst that will appear in subsequent self-portraits. Here, as in his seated portrait of Gerti of the same year, we begin to see the assertion of an existential void in his portraiture.

In a somewhat later oil titled Self-Portrait with Trousers Pulled Down (fig. 10), Schiele is shown reclining wearing a brief shirt or vest with his pants pulled down below his knees, and he turns his head to gaze at the viewer. Again, as in the earlier self-portrait, we do not

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[20]Frank Whitford, Egon Schiele, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p. 51.

yet have an image of the artist completely nude, but rather partially naked, his penis erect, his hand covering his mouth in shame as if he had been caught in the act of masturbating. A number of Schiele's self-portraits deal with the subject of masturbation, and thus he seems to have been preoccupied with not only the practice,but also with observing himself in the act with the purpose of depicting it. Indeed, the emaciated physique and the sunken, heavy-lidded eyes could be meant to show the deleterious physical effects that "self-abuse" was believed to cause. During Schiele's childhood and adolescence one could still find numerous books and articles written by the clergy and, incredibly, medical professionals, recounting horror stories of how many individuals had lost their health, sanity, and even their lives as a result of addiction to this "vice". No less remarkable were the treatments advocated for the habit, including restraint with chastity belts or strait jackets, castration, circumcision for both men and women, and cauterization and even surgical removal of the clitoris.[21] None of the literature on Schiele addresses his actual masturbatory habits or how these were dealt with by his parents, however, those paintings which

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[21]For a history of these practices cf. Chapter Three of Alex Comfort, The Anxiety Makers: Some Curious Preoccupations of the Medical Profession, (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1967).

treat this part of his life show no sign of sensual enjoyment or even any humor in his depiction of it.

Two paintings of 1911 show more clearly Schiele's preoccupation with the subject of masturbation. Self-Portrait Masturbating (fig. 11) shows Schiele engaged in the act itself. His right hand touches his penis, while his left hand covers his scrotum with a stiff fingered gesture that begs to be read as a sign and will be discussed later. Stephen Walrod quotes a study by Phyllis Greenacre of some unusually gifted patients of hers:

> I have thought that such children were eroticized early and if subjected to extreme frustration, sickness, or bad handling got readily into states of frenzied masturbation, sometimes of a compulsive sort.[22]

Walrod goes on to say that masturbation may have provided Schiele with an outlet for relieving psychological tension associated with such frustrations as the sickness of his mother after his birth, the death of his elder sister Elvira, his father's gradual loss of sanity and, finally, his father's death. Besides these, other more immediate circumstances could account for tensions at this time, such as Schiele's uncertain finances as an aspiring artist in his first years of living on his own, and the adamant refusal of any financial assistance from his well-to-do uncle and

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[22]Stephen T. Walrod, Egon Schiele: A Psychobiography, Ph.D. diss., (Berkeley: The California School of Professional Psychology, 1978), p.47.

guardian, Leopold Czihaczek. Schiele was also as yet without a mistress, having only made the acquaintance of Wally Neuzil in that year.

The other self-portrait of 1911, titled Eros (fig. 12), shows Schiele again partly naked, wearing possibly the same dark robe as in the Self-Portrait Masturbating, holding his erect penis with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand while he touches his glans with his right forefinger. Unlike the Self Portrait Masturbating this portrait shows the artist leering out at the viewer, as if to direct his attention to what he is pointing at, making what was a private act before the mirror a public one. His genitals are exaggerated in size and are highlighted a bright pink, unlike the rest of his body, which is an ashen gray, with pale pink highlights on his lips, nose, ear, and partly concealed right nipple. Although not actually represented masturbating, Schiele is both sexually aroused and, significantly, alone.

Again we find Schiele making the same sign over his scrotum with his left hand that he made in the Self Portrait Masturbating, with a wide space between his index and middle fingers and his thumb extended. The significance of the gesture is somewhat clearer in other works which will be discussed later, but there is sufficient indication in this

work to conclude that the V-shape of the index and middle fingers is a symbol for the female genitals, reproducing as they do the appearance of the vulva with the labia spread apart. Significantly, Schiele performs this gesture over his scrotum, the part of the male anatomy homologous to the female labia majora. Another clue to the feminine nature of this sign, which appears in other of Schiele's works, is that directly above it his right breast appears swollen- "feminized"- in contrast to his left. Such an association may have been suggested to Schiele by certain images of Siva as Ardhanarisvara as discussed in chapter 1, although the sense of serene fulfillment seen in such images is evidently lacking in Schiele's work. Schiele is seated with his legs spread wide apart, which increases the work's exhibitionist character. If we study the painting for a few moments, however, we notice that Schiele's legs terminate below the knees. This , along with the deathly hue of the emaciated body, Schiele's insistence on directing our attention to his erect member, and his single breast, make for a disturbing, even a confusing image. Comini accounts for the amputations as representing the guilt -real or feigned, she does not discount that Schiele may have been "playing to the audience" of Freud's Vienna- that he felt about his masturbation.[23] Such an hypothesis has obvious merits,

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[23]Alessandra Comini, Egon Schiele's Portraits, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), p.62.

while Walrod posits, based on a similar phenomenon in the earlier Self-Portrait Sitting with Raised Arms that Schiele found himself abandoned and helpless in "a confining intrusive void" from which he could not escape.[24] Schiele was indeed lonely at this time, and his reputation and finances were far from secure, so he may have felt a certain powerlessness that compelled him to represent himself in his self-portraits this way. In light of the present portrait's title -Eros- and the fact that both paintings discussed here are nudes dealing with sexual themes, yet another interpretation may be possible. Certainly, the amputation of legs or feet effectively suggest the inability to escape, but to escape from what? "Our nature as sexual beings," may be the answer which Schiele gives in Eros. The contrast between the erect, brightly colored penis and the aura of decomposition of the rest of Schiele's body may give the clue to the main theme of the work-i.e. that our urge to procreate as well as our mortality are, as it were, two sides of the same coin. We are not immortal, so we must reproduce to maintain our species, and by the same token, if we reproduce, we must make way for the new generation by dying. Certainly, there is nothing new in such a statement: turn-of-the century art is rife with associations of sex and death. One could argue, for example, that this very theme is the basis for Edvard Munch's oeuvre. The explicitness of

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[24]Walrod, p. 58.

Schiele's image as well as what could be termed his iconographic terseness- no setting, no other figures, just the artist's own body, goes far beyond Munch's admittedly disturbing images.

Such an interpretation helps clarify certain motifs and stylistic peculiarities in Schiele's works. The frequent use of sickly, unnatural colors for the flesh passages of his works may be an acknowledgement of our mortal nature. One can see a similar juxtaposition of deathly skin tones with a bright pink healthy color in the mother and baby, respectively, of The Dead Mother I of 1910 (fig. 13). The "secret gesture" that Schiele makes throughout his works may allude to the need for the opposite sex which is implanted in us and which manifests itself in all of our sexual feelings and actions, even when a member of the opposite sex is not available.

A much more personal interpretation, that does not necessarily exclude either of those just given, is also plausible. Schiele may have wished to emphasize the obsessive/destructive aspects of sex, showing himself with decaying flesh in spite of, or perhaps because of, his sexual arousal. The destructive force of sexuality would certainly have been a concern of Schiele's, given his family history. Considering the toll that syphilis had exacted

from his own family, as well as from numerous important figures at that time, a reference to it in Schiele's art should come as no surprise. Walrod suggests that Schiele, who idolized his deceased father, may have identified with the sexually "guilty" parent and felt compelled to perform what was then generally regarded as a similarly self-destructive sexual act, i.e., masturbation, regardless of the outcome.[25] Thus, the sapping away of vitality may be what is meant by the use of sickly, unnatural flesh colors in this and other self-portraits.

Moving back in time, we may now more easily understand a series of four paintings from 1910. The works were bought by the industrialist Carl Reininghaus, whom Comini describes as "an avid collector of 'sensational' pictures"[26], and these certainly fit that category. These are three self portraits and a portrait of his sister Gerti, all painted on square canvasses, in which the figures, completely nude, are placed in a void. Only one of the paintings, the Self-Portrait Sitting with Raised Arms, is extant, but black-and-white photographs of all of the originals survive, along with watercolor studies for some. (A deplorable number Schiele's most important oils are lost, many surviving only

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[25]Walrod, p.47.

[26]Comini, p.49.

in black and white photographs or reproductions, thus making their interpretation problematic.)

When one looks at these works, one cannot help but notice the peculiar forms of Schiele's genitals. In the Self-Portrait Kneeling with Raised Hands (fig. 14) the genitals actually appear to be much more like a woman's than a man's, and comparison with the companion Self-Portrait with Hands on Hips (fig. 15) will reveal the extent to which the breasts have been feminized rather like the right breast in Eros. As exposed as the problematic genitals are the bony angularity of the isolated pose causes the figure to set on the canvas like a letter on a page- like a sign to be read, and at the ends of those emaciated arms are hand gestures that stand out starkly against the background as if these are also signals that modify the sign of the body and beg the observer to crack the code and read the message that is so bluntly stated and yet hermetic. Here we also encounter the V-shape gesture in the ring and little fingers of his right hand. All trace of masculinity has not left his body, however, as there appears to be the outline of a huge erect phallus in his abdomen, terminating at the sternum. This is perhaps clearer in the surviving watercolor sketch, in which this phallus is colored a bright yellow in contrast to the darker flesh tone of the rest of the body. Schiele may have been aware of early Gothic

Italian Crucifixes, such as the Cross Number 15 of the School of Pisa, of the late twelfth century (fig. 16). Here the phallicization of the abdomen is highly detailed and very similar to the manner of Schiele.

Turning to the Self-Portrait Sitting with Raised Arms (fig. 1) we again encounter the phallicized abdomen (a motif which Schiele will frequently employ). At the base of the phallus appears a rounded form suggesting a scrotum or possibly, as Walrod suggests, a womb-like circle.[27] Again, the left breast is feminized and, as Walrod points out, the left shoulder blade next to it also projects in a breast-like profile.[28] Walrod sees the suggestion of female breast also in the soft flesh of Schiele's right biceps, which he is biting or nuzzling. Schiele must rely on himself for comfort and sustenance, he is forced into an "androgynous" state of self sufficiency.[29] The intensity of the artist's desires is underscored here by the fiery red glow of his navel, nipples, and eyelid. Again, we see that the genitals, unlike the rest of the figure, are not clearly delineated. Here they appear to be neither specifically male nor female. Walrod suggests that the painting is an image of self-punishment from sexual guilt, that the ill-

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[27]Walrod, p.59.

[28]Ibid. p.58.

[29]Ibid., p.58.

defined genitals are reddened scar tissue from castration and that the lopping off of the feet is a further displacement of this act. Walrod claims that Schiele craved to exhibit his sexual and aggressive strivings but, fearing punishment, he instead chose to expose his castrated state, hiding his true desires in the phallus of his abdomen.[30] The body certainly has a strong sense of being divided into two halves, i.e., the lower half male and the upper half female. The "masculine" half of Schiele's character, failing in its role of self-assertion, forces Schiele to turn to the "feminine" aspects of his character for sustenance and protection. Perhaps an attempt at integration of the masculine and feminine components of his psyche are what Schiele suggests in the thrusting of the phallus into the rib cage between his breasts, or perhaps it is an aggressive attempt to re-establish masculine dominance over the feminine part of his psyche, which had a prominent role in his life at that time.

Significantly, a portrait of Schiele's sister Gerti was also included in this group. The Portrait of Gerti Nude (fig. 17) is a stark image of adolescent vulnerability and self absorption. Gerti stands in the center of the canvas, her arms wrapped around herself in an awkward embrace. Her face is turned away from us and her eyes are closed, just as

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[30]Walrod, pp. 59-60.

Schiele had posed her in another major portrait the previous year. Her seeming reverie is not entirely peaceful, nor her self embrace one of self-satisfaction, for her right hand reaches out in a clawing or grasping gesture while the left forms a fist and appears to push away. The placement of her arms now seems not merely self-caressing, but also self-protecting, shielding her recently matured breasts. The pose is a variation on that of the Belgian sculptor Georges Minnes' famous Kneeling Boy (fig. 18) which Schiele would have seen when it was exhibited in Vienna at the International Kunstschau of 1909. Schiele altered the position of the hands to suggest his subject's internal struggle between submission to her new-found sexual desire, signified by the grasping gesture that she makes with her left hand and towards which she turns her face, and the resistance engendered by fear of the new feelings, from which she turns away and against which she pushes with her right hand. He also changed the placement of the arms to produce a strongly emphasized V-shape before Gerti's breasts. This arm gesture is an attempt to shield her feminine nature, yet it is ultimately revealing of it, as it may relate directly to the V-shaped finger gestures which Schiele used in his Self-Portrait Clothed of 1909 (fig. 19). Again, as in the Self-Portrait Sitting with Raised Arms, the subject's feet are cut off, this time more subtly, as the "cutting" is done by the edge of the canvass, and similarly,

the top of the head is missing, thus presenting the figure as locked in place-caught at a time of life when one's urges are both most exciting and most frightening.

Interestingly, Schiele presents the girl in a pose originally assigned to a boy in Minne's work, and this is not the only time in 1910 that we shall see a gender-switch among Schiele's appropriation of poses from other artists. The gender-switch in this instance may point to Gerti's character as Schiele's feminine alter-ego or "completer". In his study of incest, Jean Renvoize notes that such a completing relationship may occur between children in families in which there is a lack of healthy touching and reassurance, where a brother and a sister might choose to turn to one another for warmth. He also notes that children in a dominant position, such as older brothers, may even take what they desire by force[31], though this may not have been the case here, as Gerti continued to be a willing model for Schiele even after he moved away from home and into his own studio in 1907.[32] Schiele indeed may have shared certain sentiments with a Romantic, such as Percy Bysshe Shelley, who extols sibling incest in certain of his poems, such as Laon and Cythna. Shelley was himself reputed to

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[31]Jean Renvoize, Incest: A Family Pattern, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p.138.

[32]Comini, p.30.

have had an incestuous relationship with his younger sister Elizabeth, and his poems are often paeans to the power of such relationships to restore "the primal unities where male and female are no longer oppositions but continuities."[33] Twitchell notes that incestuous situations such as those in the Shelley family may have been as much a consequence of a "confined area of social movement"[34] as anything else, and such an explanation may apply also to the Schiele family, who lived in rural villages until a move to Vienna in 1906. Such alienation may have been intensified by frequent moves, as well as by the fact that Schiele had been held back in school.[35]

A colored drawing of 1911 may reveal the close affinity Schiele felt for his sister. The Self-Portrait with Raised Leg (fig. 20) shows Schiele reclining languidly, with his body slightly inclined toward the viewer, and his head leaning back with a dreamy expression on his face. The penis is here flaccid, but once again we find an enormous erect phallus, this time constituting the entire abdomen from the hips to the ribs. The rest of the body is filled in with water color, except for the head, and the few sparse

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[33]James B. Twitchell, Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p.119.

[34]Ibid., p.119.

[35]Comini, p.192 n.19.

lines in this part of the figure describe a woman's face. Comini notes that a number of such drawings exist in which he/she caresses an erect penis or the disembodied face performs fellatio on "its" own body.[36] She remarks that the features could be those of Wally Neuzil or of another model whom Schiele used in the latter half of 1910 and 1911,[37] but the features as rendered here are not unlike those of Gerti as frequently recorded by Schiele. Here we have an instance of a kind of union of two individuals rather like that of Siva and Parvati or of Hermaphroditus and the naiad Salmakis, but again, as we saw in Eros, there is a curious absence of the serene cessation of desire that characterizes the hermaphroditic state in mythology.

Two other watercolors of 1910 give significant examples of Schiele's iconography of androgyny. The Self-Portrait with Head Bent to the Left (fig 21) shows the artist standing erect, but tilted to the left. Again, we find the hidden phallus and scrotum in the abdomen, this time with a very clear indication of the glans at the tip. There is also a slight emphasis on the feminine character of the right breast, with a thick circle of red framing the nipple. Walrod remarks that the whole body is phallicized, being so erect and elongated, with the arms and legs "cut off", as it

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[36]Comini, p.92.

[37]Ibid., p.92.

were. He also finds indications again of masturbatory guilt in the amputation of the arms, so that they could not touch the genitals were they there, as well, of course, in the very absence of the genitals themselves.[38] Schiele seems once again to reveal a conflict between his subconscious desires and his conscious feelings about them. Although he "punishes" himself by amputating limbs and genitals, his desire cannot be hidden or extinguished and it still manages to assert itself throughout the rest of his body. Perhaps something of this conflict can be read in Schiele's peculiar facial expression. If one covers over the left side of his face, the right appears to regard us with a cool, aloof gaze. With the right half covered, the left leers at us with a lubricious grin.

The Self-Portrait Nude Facing Front (fig. 22) is the masterpiece of the watercolor self-portraits executed in this year. As in the Self-Portrait Seated with Raised Arms the genitals are rendered ambiguously. Above them are the giant scrotum and phallus, although here they are not so easily recognizable. The right breast appears somewhat feminine compared to the left. In the center of his chest, and apparently the "goal" to which the giant phallus points, is a bright green tinted object resembling a vulva. The hand gestures again have sexual significance, as Walrod

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[38]Walrod, p.67.

says: "[Schiele] helplessly watches while behind his back the traitorous hands perform a symbolic sexual act."[39] We see the "female" spread fingers in both hands here, as well as the right thumb performing as phallus, according to Walrod. Schiele gazes out at us with a grimace in which Walrod finds a combination of disgust, revulsion, and pain. He finds that Schiele's placement of his hands behind himself is a desperate attempt to prevent himself from masturbating, but that they-and his whole body, in fact-betray him.[40] His expression may be read as his reaction to this failure.

The thumb as phallus is encountered in his Portrait of Eduard Kosmack (fig. 23) from earlier that same year. Here the hands are placed between the knees and considerable prominence is given to the thumbnails, recalling a flaccid penis and its glans. Schiele played a similar trick with the thumbs in his Portrait of Poldi Lodzinsky (fig. 24), also of 1910, in which the thumbs are placed next to one another so that the space between them suggests the parting of the labia majora. In these two portraits Schiele seems to have been using the thumbs to suggest that a person's sexuality remains naked and exposed even when that person is clothed. No doubt the pose as well as the message of these

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[39]Walrod, p.72.

[40]Ibid., pp.70-72.

two portraits derive from Edvard Munch's Puberty (fig. 25), which depicts the sexual awakening and attendant fear of an adolescent girl. The shadow which she casts looms up to take on a presence indicating the girl's sexual destiny, but Schiele here replaces this with the thumb signs. The thumbs are also employed as phalluses in two later portraits which have already been discussed, i.e., the Self-Portrait Masturbating and Eros. Here the thumbs are strangely bent and do not insert into the V-shape of the spread fingers, but in both, they point directly to the penis and, in the Self-Portrait Masturbating, the thumb helps form a V-shape with the right hand opposing and counter balancing that in the left. Perhaps the tension of the bent thumb is intended as analogous to that of an erect penis. Again, we can trace this gesture back to the Self-Portrait Clothed of 1909.

Chapter Three

Schiele and the Language of Gesture

In assessing Schiele's oeuvre, the viewer cannot help noticing the degree to which the artist employs gesture in his works. Both for the frequency of and degree of emphasis given to highly self-conscious gestures, Schiele's works are remarkable and perhaps even singular. Often, the hands are given such prominence in the compositions that they simply must be meant to convey essential information (cf. Self-Portrait Clothed and Self-Portrait Nude Facing Front). Even after the most casual examination of Schiele's works, the viewer wonders what significance these gestures may have had for the artist and what he may have wanted them to communicate to the viewer.

An exaggerated importance given to gesture was certainly one of the hallmarks of Viennese Expressionism. Kokoschksa's famous Hans and Erika Tietze of 1909 (fig. 26) is a good example, and the nervously gesturing figures of Kokoschka were certainly known to Schiele. It is apparent, however, that Schiele's interest in hands and gesturing goes back farther than the early portraits of Kokoschka and even before the move to Vienna. Around 1906, while still living in Klosterneuburg, Schiele produced a Madonna and Child (fig. 27) under the tutelage of the local drawing

instructor, Professor Ludwig Karl Strauch. It is a work of remarkable power and concentration, and all the more so when one considers the tender age of its creator. With thin, skeletal hands the Madonna presents the Child to us while He in turn seems to address us with His upturned hand. In this one chalk drawing we are introduced to Schiele's fascination with gesture and religious subjects.

There is a definite consistency in the types of hand gestures depicted by Schiele, making possible the classification of some. Schiele has a preference for gestures that show the hand with the fingers held straight out, often in a manner which appears stiff, unnatural, and deliberately self-conscious.

Figure 28 illustrates the principle gestures of this type which Schiele employs. I do not wish to claim that my list is complete or that these "stiff fingered" gestures are the only ones which Schiele uses or to which he may assign significance. I list them because they seem to constitute the most significant group of gestures in Schiele's works.

I. Space between index and middle fingers.
II. Space between middle and ring fingers.
III. Space between ring and little fingers.
IV. Space between index and middle fingers, and between ring and little fingers.
V. Space between all fingers.
VI. All fingers held together.
VII. Space between index and middle fingers, and between middle and ring fingers.

In all cases the thumb is tucked into the palm and, as Schiele presents these gestures with the back of the hand towards the viewer, the effect is that the thumb (a phallus?) is amputated.

Looking at the arrangements of the fingers in these gestures, it appears that their positioning could be systematic, that is, that their arrangement could depend on a significance assigned to each finger. We have no record of what system, if any, Schiele may have had in mind, but there are some which are fairly well-known and which he easily could have discovered.

The first system, and the one certainly most likely known by a person raised as a Catholic in a Catholic country, is that of the significance assigned to the fingers of the right hand when a Catholic crosses himself. In performing this act, he may hold his thumb, forefinger, and middle finger together at their tips, while letting his ring finger and little finger rest against his palm. The first group of fingers signifies the Trinity, with the thumb representing God the Father, the index representing God the Holy Ghost, and the middle finger representing God the Son. The remaining two fingers are emblematic of Christ's dual

nature, the ring finger standing for His divine nature and the little finger for His human nature.[41]

Palmistry presents another system, in which each finger is associated with a particular deity. The thumb is the finger of vitality and energy. It is associated with Hercules for virility, and the ball at its base is the Mount of Venus, which governs increase and creativity.[42] Here is a possible source for Schiele's use of the thumb as phallus. The index is the finger of Jupiter, and governs an individual's relation to "external" life. The middle finger is the finger of Saturn, and straddles those halves of the hand dealing with the "external" and "internal" life,i.e., the social and emotional parts of life. The ring finger is the finger of Apollo and is associated with artistic ability. The little finger is the finger of Mercury and is related to our intimate relationships with other people.[43] No significance is assigned to groupings of fingers in palmistry texts, but interestingly, a tendency to hide the thumb is said to be a symptom of anxiety and unhappiness,

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[41]Ad de Vries, Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery, (Amsterdam and London: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1974), p.184-85.

[42]Ibid., p.184.

[43]Fred Gettings, The Book of the Hand: An Illustrated History of Palmistry, (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1965), pp.78-111.

and this is exactly what characterizes so many of Schiele's pictures.[44]

The first of Schiele's gestures which we will look at, gesture I, occurs quite frequently in his works. It sometimes occurs alone, as in Delirium (fig. 29), Death and the Maiden (fig. 30), or The Poet (fig. 31), but it also appears combined with other gestures, as in Melancholy (fig. 32), The Hermits (fig. 33), The Embrace (fig. 34), and Preacher (fig. 35). Schiele even had himself photographed performing this gesture (fig. 36), and yet he is not without precedent in his use of it. In the frontispiece to Europe (fig. 37), William Blake's creator God performs this gesture, also with the thumb hidden. Standing for the split in man's character between the spiritual and the material, with the middle, ring, and little fingers representing the Trinity and thus man's spiritual aspect, and the index finger representing man's fallen, material state, it is apparent that the gesture would have appealed to Schiele, as some of the pictures which contain it show a religious preoccupation that is emphasized by the titles that he gave them, e.g., The Hermits and Preacher, while others deal with sexual angst, e.g., Melancholy, Delirium, and Death and the Maiden. If Schiele was sensitive to Blake's Neoplatonic proclivities, he easily could have chosen to use this sign

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[44]Ibid., p.85-86.

in connection with sexual activity, i.e., those acts which most strongly affirm and perpetuate our fallen, material nature. This indication of a duality through a hand gesture enriches the dominant theme of sexual duality and the union of the sexes in the androgyne discussed in Chapter One.

Schiele may have been alerting us to his understanding of human nature by the gesture which he uses in Melancholy. Not only is he performing gesture I, but he is using his index finger to pull down his lower eyelid. This eyelid pull is a gesture common in central Europe, meaning either "be alert" or "I am alert".[45] Schiele employs this gesture elsewhere, as in Self-Portrait with Hair Band (fig. 38), Self-Portrait with Hand to Cheek (fig. 39), and Levitation (fig. 40). Schiele is perhaps indicating the artist's nature as one who is alert to matters escaping the attention of the ordinary person.

Gesture II is also common in Schiele's oeuvre. One finds it in works with a religious connotation such as Mother and Child (fig. 41), Self-Seers I (fig. 42), and Two Hermits Praying (fig. 43). It also occurs in a nude portrait of Mime van Osen (fig. 44) as well as Self-Portrait

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[45]Desmond Morris et. al., Gestures: Their Origins and Distribution, (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), pp.69-78.

with Spread Fingers (fig. 45), Melancholy, and Self-Portrait with Hand to Cheek.

Once again, Schiele's use of a gesture is not without precedents. In Judaism, when the priests, or kohanim, deliver the Priestly Blessing, they hold out both hands at shoulder height with palms facing forward. The thumbs extend and touch each other at their tips, and there is a space between the middle and ring fingers of both hands. This device has become the emblem of the kohanim and is often carved on their tombstones (fig. 46).[46]

Gesture II also occurs in a very different context. In 1910 Arthur Edward Waite published his version of the tarot deck. Card XV shows the Devil with his right hand raised with the space between the middle and ring fingers (fig.47). Traditionally, the Devil in the tarot is an androgyne, a fact which can be seen more clearly in an eighteenth-century design by Court de Gebelin, which was reprinted in 1888 by Ely Star in Les Mysteres de l'Horoscope (fig. 48).[47] Here the Devil clearly has feminine breasts and also raises his hand in a gesture very similar to that in the Waite tarot. The Devil's androgyny is emphasized further in a design

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[46]Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. "Priestly Blessing".

[47]Stuart R. Kaplan, The Encyclopedia of Tarot, (New York: U.S. Games Systems, 1978), p. 23.

published by the Swiss occultist Oswald Wirth in 1889 in which the planetary sign for Mercury, the alchemical androgyne, is placed at his groin (fig. 49).[48]

The theme of androgyny was, as we have seen, of great significance for Schiele. The appropriation of a sign from another androgynous being may have had great appeal for him. The artist's androgyny can thus be underlined, as it were, in a nude self-portrait like the lost Self-Seers I in which the artist appears to possess female genitals. Androgyny can also be established as a theme in such works as Mother and Child I, Melancholy, and Self-Portrait with Spread Fingers in which the revelation of the anatomy is absent or incomplete. A further indication of the possible duality signified by the gesture can be found in the black vase in the background of Self-Portrait with Spread Fingers, in which the vase, which possesses a human facial profile, seems to grow out of the back of Schiele's head. The actual vase used in this painting has been photographed. Unlike its shadowy apparition in the painting, the vase possesses definite features, and is composed of a series of faces, each with a distinct expression, yet each linked to its neighbor by a common eye (fig. 50). The vase itself may thus have provided Schiele with the inspiration for the composition.

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[48]Ibid., p. 23.

Given the publication date of 1910 for the Waite tarot and the appearance a year earlier of the gesture in Mother and Child I, the source and significance of the gesture remain problematic. Perhaps this gesture is derived from the design by Court de Gebelin. Gesture II may ultimately derive, however, from the Jewish Priestly Blessing. Just as this gesture became a device for identifying the priests, so Schiele may have appropriated it with the aim of emphasizing the priestly nature of the artist. Certainly, Schiele's oeuvre is rife with religious subjects, and the gesture can be found in such pictures as Self-Seers I, Two Hermits Praying and Mother and Child I, with its strong Madonna and Child associations. The Christ Child has traditionally been understood to be a priest who grows up to sacrifice himself.

Gesture III can be found in the Self-Portrait Nude Facing Front, and in Striding Torso-Back View (fig. 51). As we have seen in palmistry, the little finger is connected with intimate relationships with others. Interestingly, this gesture in Schiele is often performed at or near the level of the genitals. In Coitus (fig. 52) the woman's little finger points at the ring formed by the thumb and index finger of her left hand -a phallic gesture. Obviously Schiele felt that this sign was important in this composition as the woman's left arm would have to be

lengthened to a remarkable degree in order for her to reach around her lover. Schiele may have also have been familiar with other examples of the use of this gesture in a sexual context. Fred Gettings draws our attention to the Annunciation with St. Emidius by Carlo Crivelli (fig. 53) in which the little fingers of both Mary's hands are held apart from the others. In this context, Gettings claims that this gesture is a symbol of the Incarnation.[49]

Gesture IV is one of Schiele's favorites, judging from the frequency with which he employs it. We have seen it before in the Self-Portrait Masturbating, the Self-Portrait Kneeling with Raised Hands, the Self-Portrait Clothed, the Self-Portrait Nude Facing Front, The Hermits, and Levitation. This gesture also happens to be one of the most frequently encountered in previous works of art.

The earliest use known to me of Gesture IV is found in Italian art of the Twelfth century. The Christ Pantocrator mosaic in the conch of the apse of the Cathedral of Cefalu in Sicily, dated 1148 by Frederick Hartt, [50] shows Christ making the gesture with His left hand, in which He holds a Bible (fig. 54). Later, on a cross of the Christus

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[49]Gettings, p.109.

[50]Frederick Hartt, History of Italian Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture. 3rd ed., (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), P.28, fig. 18.

Triumphans type from the early thirteenth century by Berlinghiero Berlinghieri, Christ makes the gesture with both hands (fig. 55). Schiele may have been aware of this cross as well as the Christ on the cross in figure 16 as the abdomen is phallicized as in some of Schiele's self-portraits (e.g. Self-Portrait Sitting with Raised Arms, and Self-Portrait with Head Bent to the Left). Much later, in Verrocchio's famous Baptism of Christ (fig. 56), John the Baptist makes the gesture. Most often by far, one encounters the gesture in representations of the Madonna and Child. A notable example is the Madonna della Candelletta of the early 1490s by Carlo Crivelli (fig. 57), in which the Madonna's fingers are elongated almost to the degree one finds in Schiele.

The gesture is more pronounced in Caravaggio's Madonna of Loreto (fig. 58). One even finds it in Raphael's famous Sistine Madonna (fig. 59), as well as in a 19th century work that is obviously dependant upon it for inspiration - Bouguereau's Madonna of the Angels (fig. 60). In this case the gesture is moved to the left hand and made even more pronounced. Bouguereau's adjustment leads one to conclude that he was aware the gesture possessed some significance. Michelangelo used the gesture in his Bruges Madonna (fig. 61), but he assigned it to the Christ Child and placed it in a slightly obscure location (detail, fig. 62). In a later

work, in a different context, the gesture appears on the Sistine Ceiling in the two most famous hands in the history of art -those of God and Adam in The Creation of Adam (detail, fig. 63).

Once again we find a source for Schiele's gesture occurring in the work of the mystic poet/artist William Blake, who was also much enamored of the work of Michelangelo. God performs it with his left hand in God Writing upon the Tables of the Covenant (fig. 64). Here the fingers are drawn in a manner strongly reminiscent of Carlo Crivelli's Madonna della Candeletta. It appears again in The Reunion of the Soul and the Body in both of the upraised hands of the lower figure (fig. 65).

Gesture IV is not confined to religious art; it is also found in portraiture. Bronzino was fond of it, and one can find it in his Portrait of a Young Man (fig. 66) as well as his Portrait of Maria de'Medici as a Girl (fig. 67). Artists of lesser note also exploited it. The seventeenth century English physician and hermetic scholar Robert Fludd performs it in an engraved portrait (fig. 68), as does the Elector Palatine Frederick V in an engraved portrait of himself and Princess Elizabeth of England, produced to commemorate their marriage (fig. 69).

These last two portraits link the use of this gesture with the leading figures of an emerging hermetic movement in the early seventeenth century. Robert Fludd did a prodigious amount of writing, including the monumental Utriusque cosmi majoris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica, atque technica historia (Technical, Physical, and Metaphysical History of the Macrocosm and the Microcosm), the first part of which was published in 1617.[51] Frederick V made his court the center of hermetic scholarship in the second decade of the seventeenth century, and it appears that the Rosicrucians, who were heavily involved with alchemy, originated there.[52]

The connection with alchemy again points significantly to Schiele's interest in androgyny. The androgyne was one of the most prominent symbols in alchemical thought, and it was used to illustrate various stages of the process of refining base metals into the so-called philosopher's stone. The emphasis in alchemy on the union of the sexes was so great, in fact, that it was believed that the work had to be conducted by the alchemist together with a female assistant, his "soror".

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[51]For details on the career of Robert Fludd, see William H. Huffman, Robert Fludd and the End of the Renaissance, (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

[52]cf. Frances A. Yates' fascinating The Rosicrucian Enlightenment, (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

An alchemical hermaphrodite appears in the engraving from Michael Maier's Symbola aureae mensae, published in Frankfurt in 1617, which we looked at in Chapter one (fig. 1). The hermaphrodite clearly performs gesture IV with its left hand, and does so with a stiffness that gives it the quality of a sign. The gesture appears to have had a definite association with hermaphrodites. It occurs also in an engraving of hermaphrodite Siamese twins from Caspar Bauhinus' De hermaphroditum monstrosorumque published in Frankfurt in 1600 (fig. 70), in which all four hands perform the gesture.

We see the gesture again in another alchemical work by Michael Maier, in Emblem 38 of Atalanta fugiens (fig. 71), also published in Frankfurt in 1617. Here the myth of Hermaphroditus is illustrated. Here Hermaphroditus' parents are shown just prior to their lovemaking, and in the background Hermaphroditus the androgyne stands astride Parnassus, the two-peaked mountain, through which passes the axis of the world.[53] Again, gesture IV appears both in Hermaphroditus' left hand as well as in Hermes' right.

Other elements of alchemical iconography may have been known to Schiele, for example the representation of the

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[53]Elemire Zolla, The Androgyne: Reconciliation of Male and Female, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p.45.

fixation of the element mercury, here taken from an alchemical treatise published in 1572 titled Della Transmutatione Metallica (fig. 72). Here the metal is represented in the person of the god Mercury, whose fixation is represented by the loss of his hands and feet. Schiele is in much the same condition in his Self-Portrait with Raised Arms (fig. 1). His feet are missing, and his hands are hidden from our view, so that it is not clear whether he actually possesses them or not. Interestingly too, Mercury -both the god and the metal- were consistently understood in alchemy as androgynes, whether physically represented as such in illustrations or not. Few of Schiele's self-portraits have projected his androgyny as strongly as this one.

Another symbol used in alchemy, which may have had a personal appeal for Schiele, was that of the marriage of brother and sister. Again, the theme of androgyny was given emphasis through the sexual union of siblings. The event is depicted in Emblem 4 from Atalanta fugiens (fig. 73). Here the woman embraces her brother while clearly performing gesture IV with her left hand.

We do not know what prompted Schiele's apparent interest in alchemical illustrations, but the incest theme

may have had a strong attraction for him. One artist whose work Schiele knew may provide the key.

The Belgian artist Fernand Khnopff's works were known and admired in Vienna and, like Schiele, he had a powerful attraction to his own sister. Khnopff frequently employed his sister Marguerite's likeness in paintings with androgynous themes.[54] One portrait dating from 1887 has her standing, holding her left arm behind her back (fig. 74). The pose is reminiscent of Schiele's Self-Portrait Nude Facing Front (fig. 22). If it served him as inspiration it is interesting to note that Schiele performs gesture IV with his left hand, which is the same gesture used in the alchemical illustration of the marriage of brother and sister. Khnopff was one of the artists exhibiting at Josephin Peladan's Rosicrucian Salons held in Paris during the 1890's. Peladan himself was a writer whose entire oeuvre was devoted to the ideal of the androgyne, and he played a key role in launching the Rosicrucian revival of the late nineteenth century, setting himself up as high priest and prophet and assuming the title "sar".[55] Peladan's writings were in fact known to Schiele's early

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[54]cf. William R. Olander, "Fernand Khnopff's Art or the Caresses: the Artist as Androgyne," Marsyas 18 (1975-76).

[55]cf. Robert Pincus-Witten, Occult Symbolism in France: Josephin Peladan and the Salons de la Rose-Croix,(New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1976).

mentor, Gustav Klimt, since 1901, and Schiele may have learned of them through Klimt.[56] Khnopff, Peladan, and the Rosicrucian revival may well have directed Schiele towards the early seventeenth century origins of the Rosicrucians, and from there to the alchemical texts in which this movement was so keenly interested.

Another possible source for gesture IV is in the work of Aubrey Beardsley, in which it is practically ubiquitous, however subtle (fig. 75). In 1912-13 Schiele painted a portrait of then fifteen-year-old Erich Lederer, son of a well-to-do Jewish family with whom Schiele was staying at the time (fig. 76). Erich possessed artistic proclivities, and in a letter to Arthur Roessler Schiele mentions that the boy draws "like Beardsley".[57] Perhaps this is the reason Schiele includes gesture IV in the boy's portrait, making it so pronounced. The portrait also recalls Bronzino's Portrait of a Young Man in the subject's pose, and this picture seems to be Schiele's most direct source.

Schiele must have been aware of the connection between gesture IV and religious art, as evinced by his self-portrait as a latter day St. Sebastian in the poster which he designed for an exhibition at the Arnot Gallery (fig. 77)

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[56]Comini, p.217 n.33.

[57]Comini, p.114.

-an apparent reference to his imprisonment in 1912 on grounds of "immorality" and "seduction". Here both hands are raised, but unlike the traditional representations of the saint with his gaze directed heavenward, Schiele's eyes are closed and his head hangs as if he had already expired. He thus appears as though nailed to an invisible cross, and both hands perform gesture IV. Schiele appears to have wanted to combine the figures of Christ and St. Sebastian, perhaps seeing the execution and miraculous revival of both as parallel to his prison experience.

The last three gestures are more resistant to interpretation than the first four, owing to the fact that Schiele employs them less frequently than he does gestures I-IV (I have only two examples of gesture VII) and, with the possible exception of gesture VII, I have found no convincing examples of their application in earlier works of art. Therefore it is difficult to establish a context for these gestures.

Part of the difficulty in finding an art historical context for the use of a gesture is being able to determine whether a certain configuration of the fingers is actually intended to be read as a sign or not. In Blake's frontispiece to Europe gesture I is obviously meant as such. What do we make of the goddess' right hand in Botticelli's Birth of Venus (fig. 78), however, in which this gesture

seems so unforced and spontaneous? Gestures such as II and IV which, depending on the degree of the spread, are not so easy to do, present us with somewhat less of a problem when we encounter them.

Gesture V can be found in the rear figure in Self-Seers I, in the subject's right hand in the Portrait of Arthur Roessler (fig. 79), in the Madonna's left hand in the Holy Family (fig. 80), in Self-Seers II (fig. 81), and even in a photograph taken of Schiele by Anton Romako (fig. 82).

Gesture VI appears in the Portrait of Gerti Schiele (fig. 83), Agony (fig. 84), Cardinal and Nun (fig. 85), and Conversion (fig. 86).

As with the other gestures, we find that V and VI are found in both portraits and religious or allegorical works. Beyond that, it is difficult to make any iconographic distinctions between them.

Gesture VII appears in the father's left hand in Holy Family as well as the hand of the central figure of Conversion, both religious works. I have found one possible precedent for its use in the St. Barbara Altarpiece of 1479 by the Sienese artist Matteo di Giovanni (fig. 87), in which the enthroned saint performs the gesture with the hand with which she holds her attribute, the tower.

Conclusion

Egon Schiele was very much a product of his time. Fin-de-siecle Europe viewed sex in all its aspects with a mixture of fascination and dread. Schiele combines both outlooks brilliantly in his self-portraits. One could say that he was his own most perfect subject as, naturally, one is more sensitive to one's own feelings than one is to anyone else's, and thus better able to portray them. The self-portrait therefore allowed Schiele to capture fully the tense, febrile sexuality of youth, compounded by its attendant yearning and loneliness.

The theme of androgyny had a powerful appeal for Schiele, especially while he produced the self-portraits of 1910-1911. Schiele was living alone at this time and would not meet Valerie Neuzil until sometime in 1911, so it appears likely that masturbation was the primary outlet for Schiele's sexual feelings at this time. In a situation where he had to be, in effect, his own lover, Schiele must have been aware of the androgynous task this imposed on his own psyche. The literature of the Late Romantics and Decadents was not unknown to Schiele, and their theme of the masturbatory self-sufficiency and self-absorption of the androgyne may have had a strong appeal for him at this time. Although masturbation could serve as an outlet for sexual

tension, it could not substitute for love, and we frequently encounter a sense of shame (Self-Portrait with Trousers Pulled Down), panic (Delirium), and even self-loathing (Self-Portrait Nude Facing Front) in the self-portraits. Clearly, masturbation was not adequate to meet Schiele's emotional needs. For this reason the androgyne of the Decadents appears to have appealed to him the most, and to have colored his appropriations from earlier images of the androgyne. Thus, the androgyne appears in Schiele's art as a very personal expression of adolescent suffering and longing.

There remains, however a peculiar tension in Schiele's images. Very often his poses and expressions convey an angst which is at odds with the messages of bliss and inner peace inherent in the sources of his androgynous imagery. Surely, the significance of his sources could not have eluded Schiele, and therefore this tension must have been deliberate, so one is left with the question of what he may have meant by it. Perhaps Schiele meant to depict a sense of longing for a state of peace which was so different, as well as distant, from the anguish which he felt on account of his loneliness and longing. One could also take this a step further and claim that it may have been the irony inherent in the unattainability of this state for Schiele which he actually wished to highlight, contrasting it with

the highly unsatisfactory, "androgynous" state of masturbatory self-sufficiency which was his lot in the years 1910-1911. Whatever the significance of this tension, it is clear that Schiele's works do not reveal their meaning easily. Schiele's paintings, so highly personal and rich in allegory, may finally remain a closed book. Here may lie the ultimate tension in Schiele's works, in that they seem to cry out for interpretation, and yet resist it so strongly.

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FIGURES

Fig. 1. Schiele, Self-Portrait Sitting with Raised Arms.

Fig. 2. Hermaphrodite.

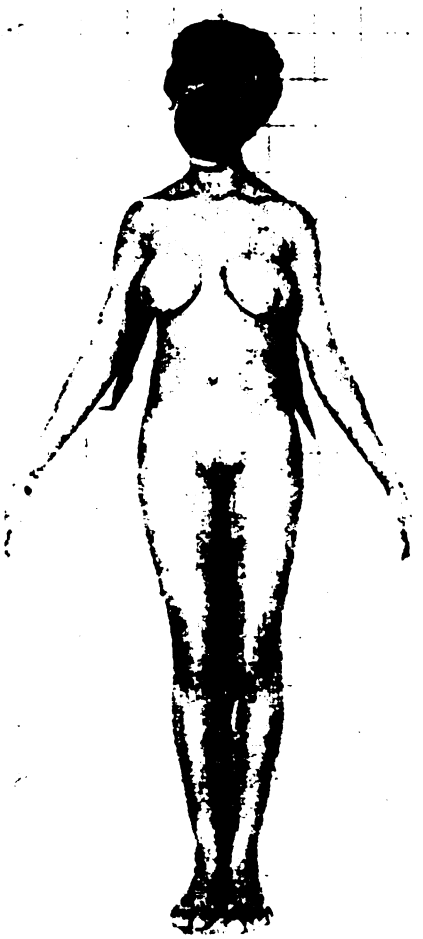

Fig. 3. Female Pseudohermaphrodite.

Fig. 4. Male Pseudohermaphrodite.

Fig. 5. Greek Statue of Hermaphroditus.

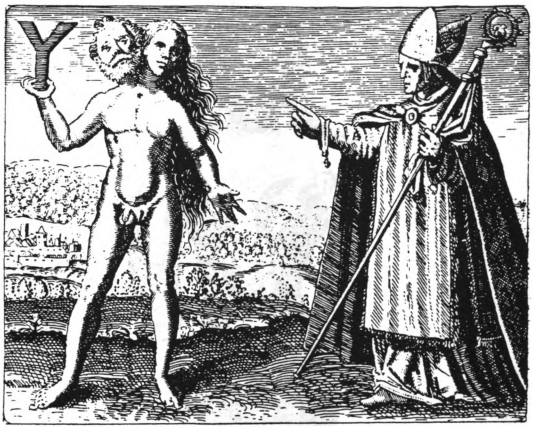

Fig. 6. Alchemical Hermaphrodite.

Fig. 7. Indian Statue of Ardhanarisvara, 12th century.

Fig. 8. T'ai Chi.

Fig. 9. Schiele, Self-Portrait I.

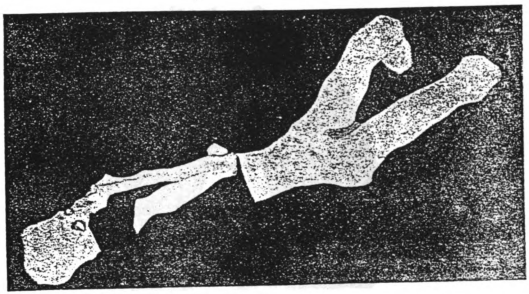

Fig. 10. Schiele, Self-Portrait with Trousers Pulled Down.

Fig. 11. Schiele, Self-Portrait Masturbating.

Fig. 12. Schiele, Eros.

Fig. 13. Schiele, The Dead Mother I.

Fig. 14. Schiele, Self-Portrait Sitting with Raised Arms.

Fig. 15. Schiele, Self-Portrait with Hands on Hips.

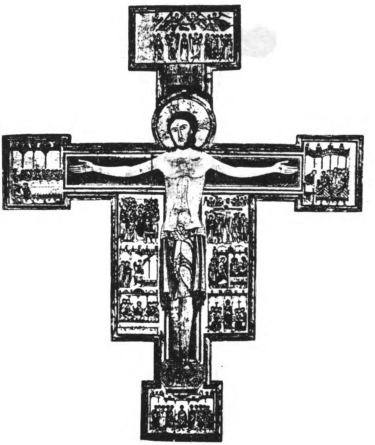

Fig. 16. School of Pisa, Cross No. 15, late 12th century.

Fig. 17. Schiele, Portrait of Gerti Nude.

Fig. 18. Georges Minne, Kneeling Boy.

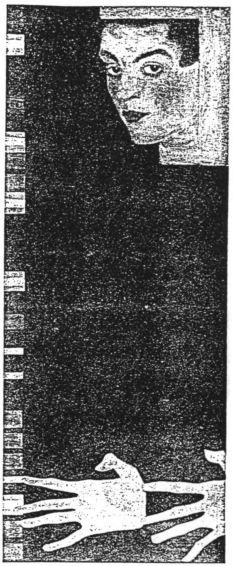

Fig. 19. Schiele, Self-Portrait Clothed.

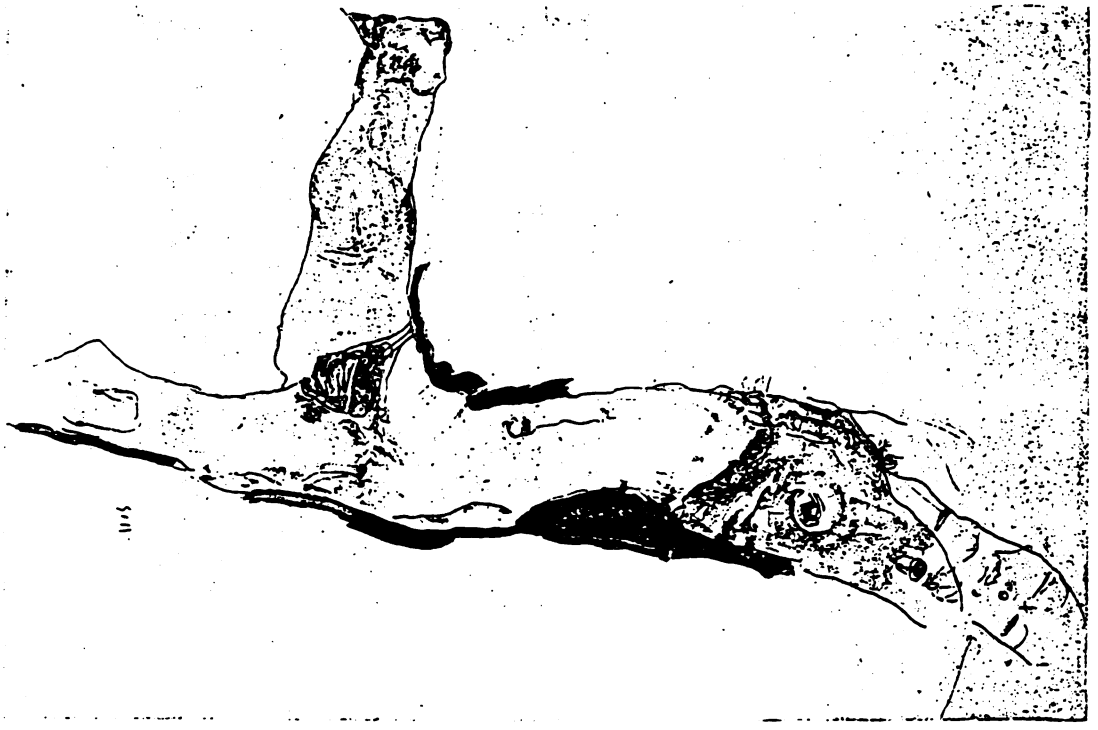

Fig. 20. Schiele, Self-Portrait with Raised Leg.

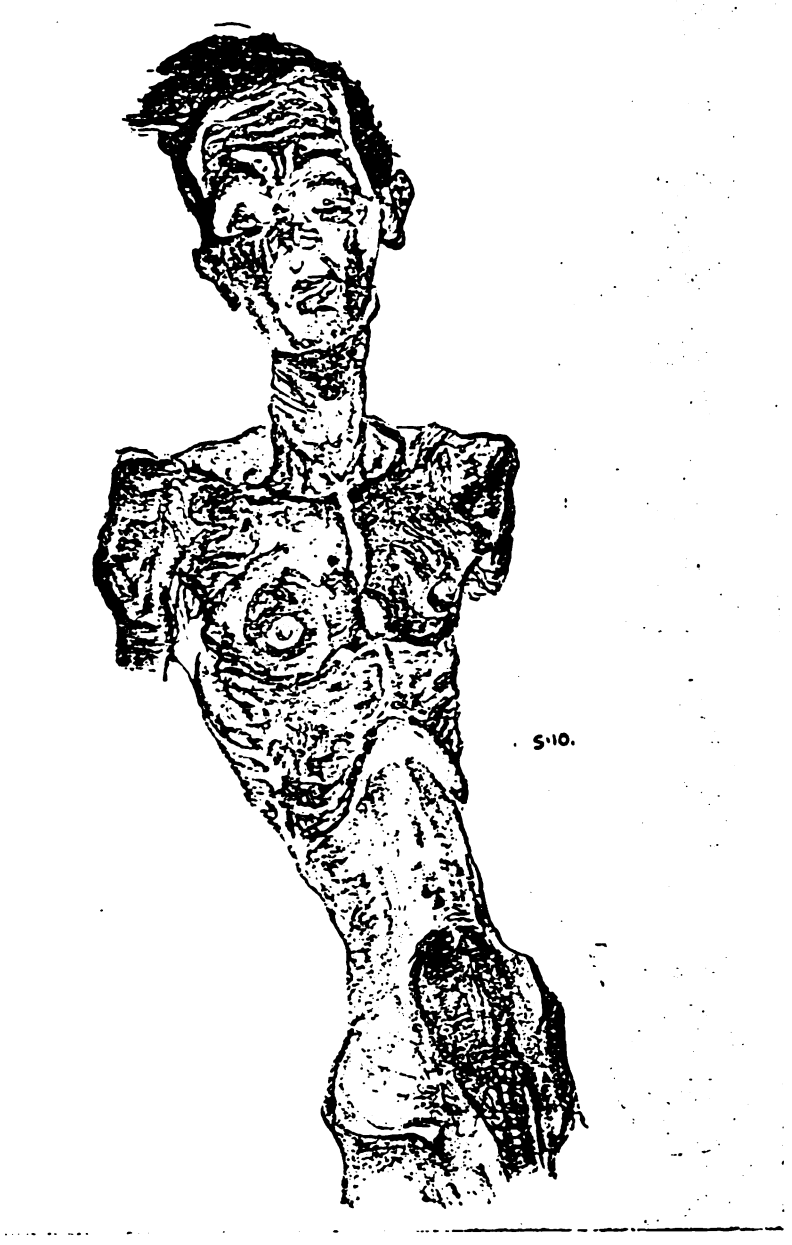

Fig. 21. Schiele, Self-Portrait with Head Bent to the Left.

Fig. 22. Schiele, Self-Portrait Nude Facing Front.

Fig. 23. Schiele, Portrait of Eduard Kosmack.

Fig. 24. Schiele, Portrait of Poldi Lodzinsky.

Fig. 25. Edvard Munch, Puberty.

Fig. 26. Oskar Kokoschka, Hans and Erika Tietze.

Fig. 27. Schiele, Madonna and Child.

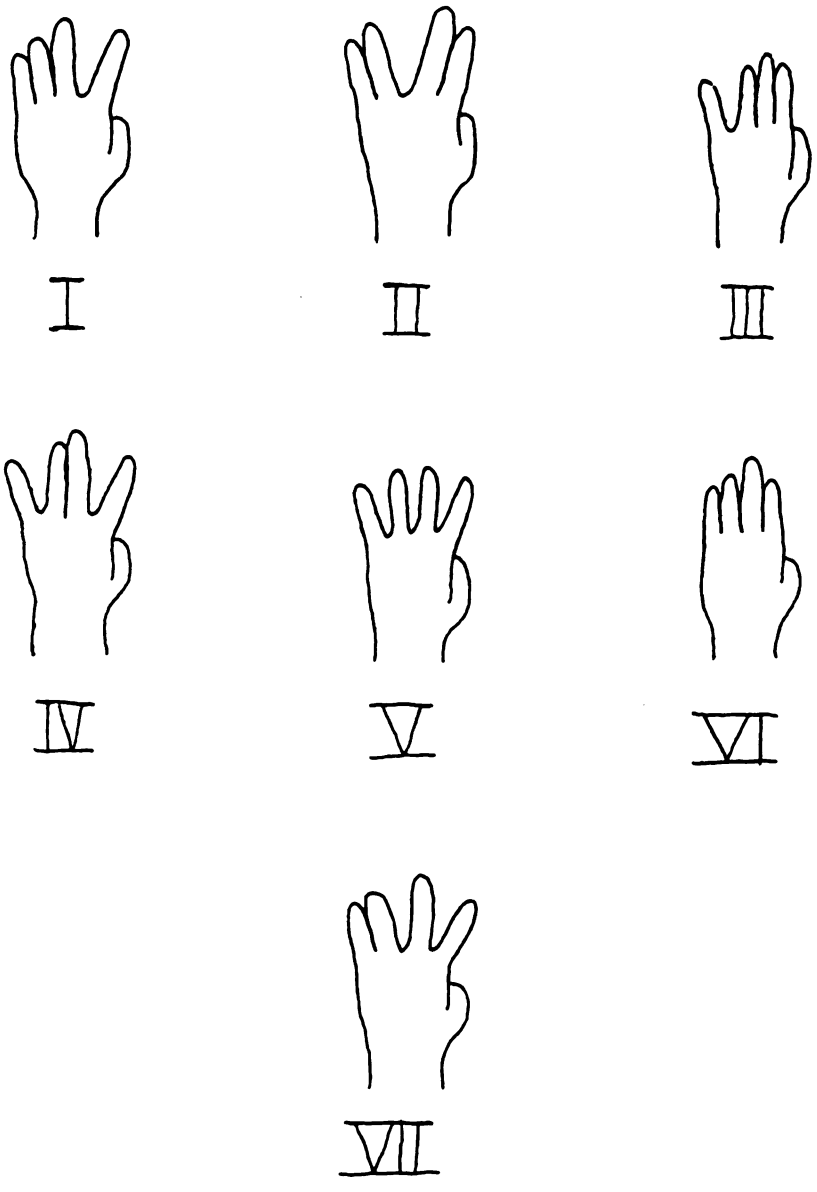

Fig. 28. Schiele's Principle Hand Gestures.

Fig. 29. Schiele, Delirium.

Fig. 30. Schiele, Death and the Maiden.

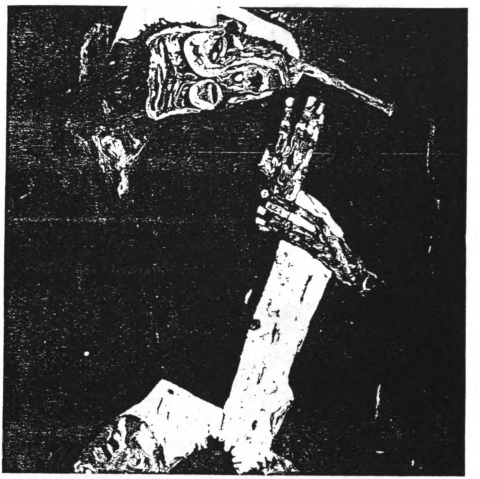

Fig. 31. Schiele, The Poet.

Fig. 32. Schiele, Melancholy.

Fig. 33. Schiele, The Hermits.

Fig. 34. Schiele, The Embrace.

Fig. 35. Schiele, The Preacher.

Fig. 36. Photograph of Egon Schiele, 1914.

Fig. 37. William Blake, Frontispiece to Europe.

Fig. 38. Schiele, Self-Portrait with Hair Band.

Fig. 39. Schiele, Self-Portrait with Hand to Cheek.

Fig. 40. Schiele, Levitation.

Fig. 41. Schiele, Mother and Child.

Fig. 42. Schiele, Self-Seers I.

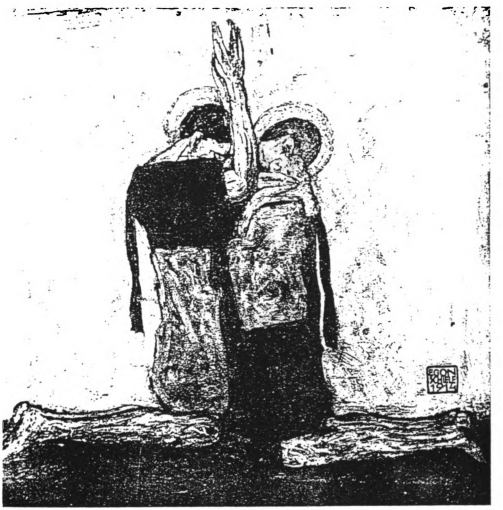

Fig. 43. Schiele, Two Hermits Praying.

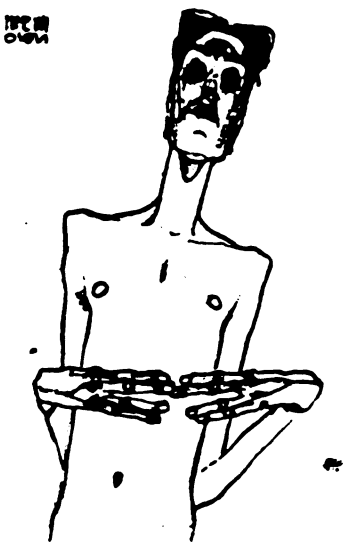

Fig. 44. Schiele, Portrait of Mime van Osen.

Fig. 45. Schiele, Self-Portrait with Spread Fingers.

Fig. 46. Jewish Tombstone with Emblem of Kohanim.

Fig. 47. Waite Tarot Card -The Devil.

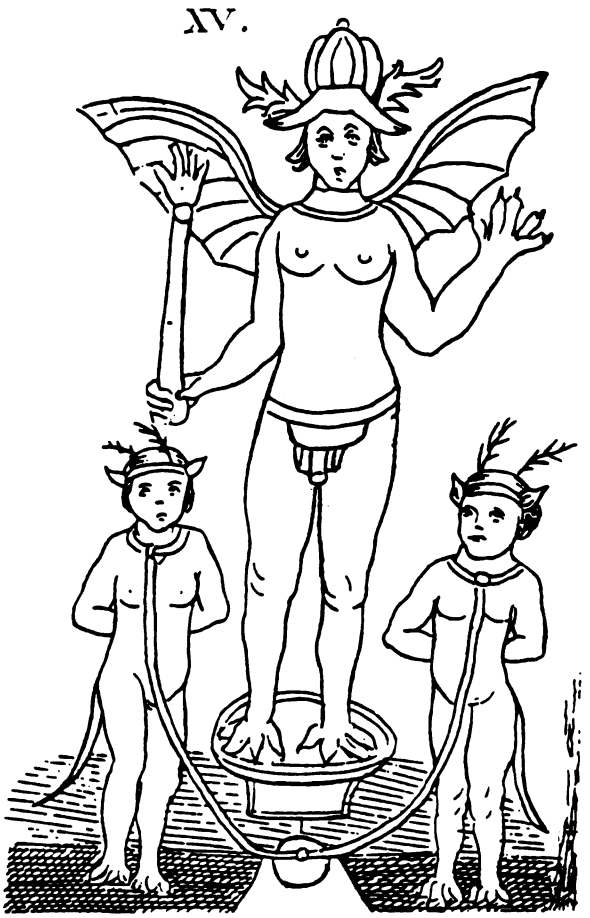

Fig. 48. Court de Gebelin Tarot Card -The Devil.

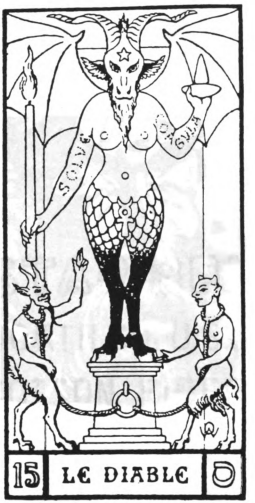

Fig. 49. Oswald Wirth Tarot Card -The Devil.

Fig. 50. Vase Belonging to Egon Schiele.

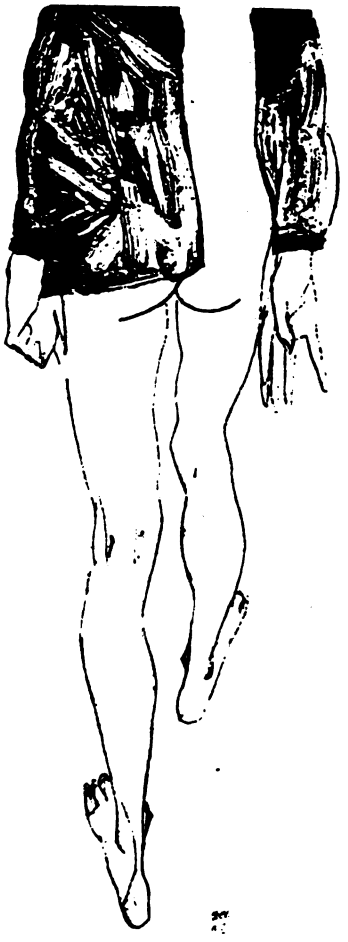

Fig. 51. Schiele, Striding Torso -Back View.

Fig. 52. Schiele, Coitus.

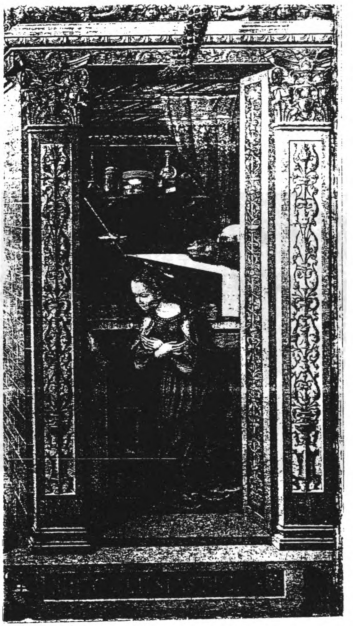

Fig. 53. Carlo Crivelli, Annunciation with St. Emidius.

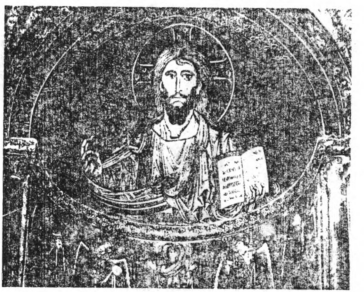

Fig. 54. Christ Pantocrator, Cathedral of Cefalu, Sicily.

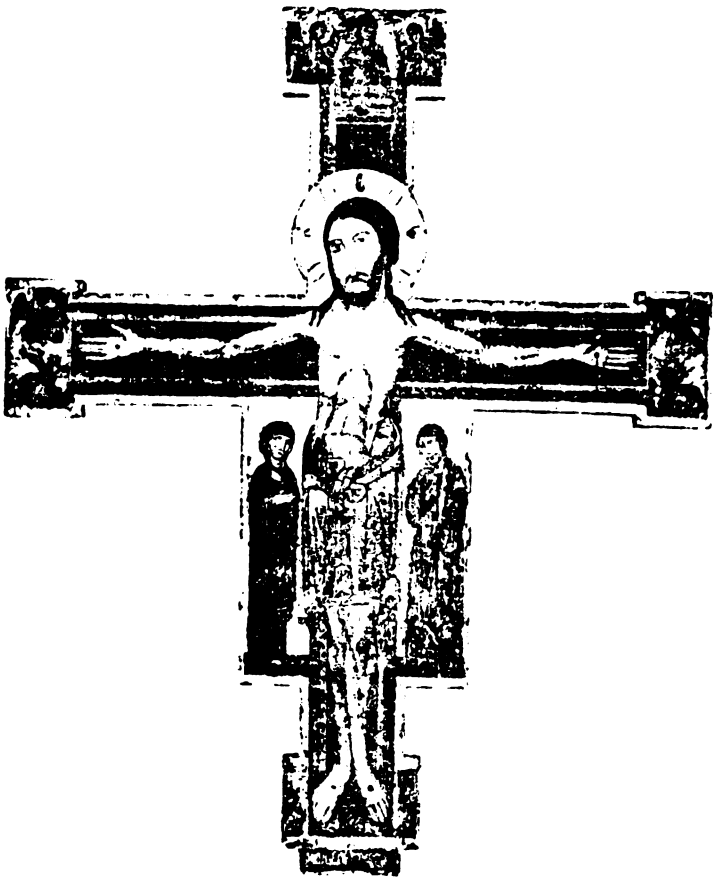

Fig. 55. Berlinghiero Berlinghieri, Cross.

Fig. 56. Verrochio, Baptism of Christ.

Fig. 57. Crivelli, Madonna della Candelletta.

Fig. 58. Caravaggio, Madonna of Loreto.

Fig. 59. Raphael, Sistine Madonna.

Fig. 60. Adolphe W. Bouguereau, Madonna of the Angels.

Fig. 61. Michelangelo, Bruges Madonna.

Fig. 62. Michelangelo, Bruges Madonna, detail.

Fig. 63. Michelangelo, The Creation of Adam, detail.

Fig. 64. Blake, God Writing upon the Tables of Covenant.

Fig. 65. Blake, The Reunion of the Soul and the Body.

Fig. 66. Agnolo Bronzino, Portrait of a Young Man.

Fig. 67. Bronzino, Portrait of Maria de'Medici as a Girl.

Fig. 68. Portrait of Robert Fludd.

Fig. 69. Wedding Portrait of Frederick and Elizabeth.

Fig. 70. Hermaphrodite Siamese Twins.

Fig. 71. Myth of Hermaphroditus from Atalanta fugiens.

Fig. 72. The Fixation of Mercury.

Fig. 73. Marriage of Brother and Sister.

Fig. 74. Fernand Khnopff, Portrait of Marquerite Khnopff.

Fig. 75. Aubrey Beardsley, Mademoiselle de Maupin.

Fig. 76. Schiele, Portrait of Erich Lederer.

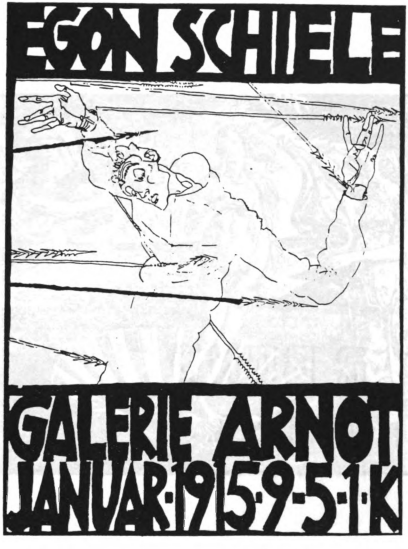

Fig. 77. Schiele, Poster for Arnot Gallery Exhibition.

Fig. 78. Botticelli, Birth of Venus.

Fig. 79. Schiele, Portrait of Arthur Roessler.

Fig. 80. Schiele, Holy Family.

Fig. 81. Schiele, Self-Seers II.

Fig. 82. Photograph of Egon Schiele, 1914.

Fig. 83. Schiele, Portrait of Gerti Schiele.

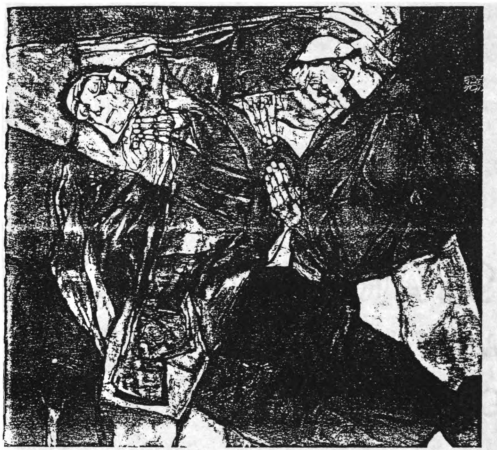

Fig. 84. Schiele, Agony.

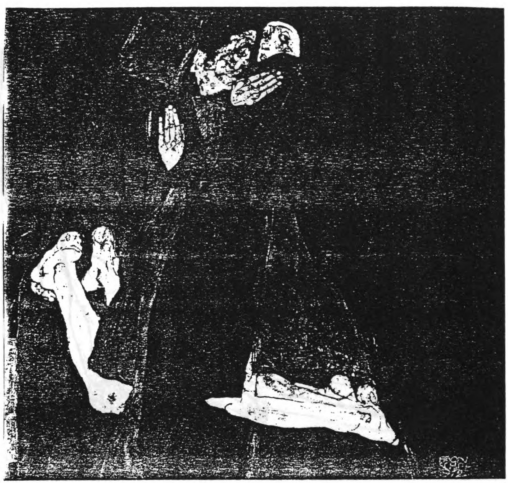

Fig. 85. Schiele, Cardinal and Nun.

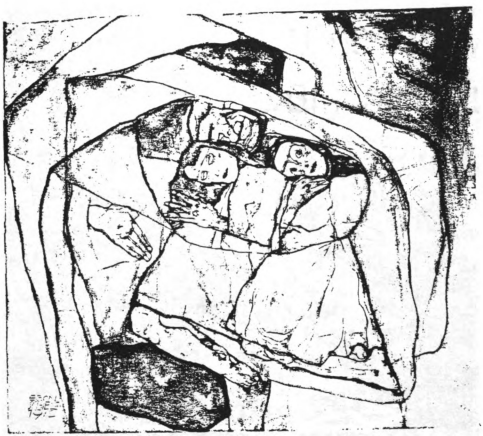

Fig. 86. Schiele, Conversion.

Fig. 87. Matteo di Giovanni, St. Barbara Altarpiece.