Serial images: The Modern Art of Iteration

Dyer, J.H.


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Chapter Five

The Serial Self-Portrait:
Egon Schiele's Performative Subject

Schiele’s Exposure of the Modern Subject
The exhibition “Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis”, held at London’s Tate Modern in 2001, featured Vienna between the years 1908 and 1918 as the “city of analysis”, one of nine “crucibles for innovation” (Observer, 3). Viennese artists were understood to have initiated a ‘global tendency’ for psychological introspection, a search for meaning hidden under deceptive appearances. This would not only expose the chaos hidden behind the apparently immutable, unyielding, and genteel façade of the Austro-Hungarian empire, but also the true nature of modern subjects hidden behind social convention. The exhibition presented Oskar Kokoschka, Adolph Loos, Arnold Schonberg, Richard Gerstl, and above all Egon Schiele as the artists who revealed the turbulence and discord of modern Western culture. The curators interpreted the shift by Kokoschka, Gerstl and Schiele from Jugendstil design to expressionist representations of human subjects, aggressively depicted as naked, ugly, solitary, and sexualized, in terms of a psychoanalytically informed existentialism.

The centrepiece of the exhibition was the images by Kokoschka, Gerstl, and Schiele of naked human subjects, including men, women, and children, in an erotically charged room of dimly-lit blood-red walls. Viewers were positioned voyeuristically to explore the
starkly sexualized images on display. The exhibition interpreted the images in terms of the history of their reception, a history dominated by psychoanalytical and existentialist theories of the self and by charges of obscene eroticism. Viewers were made to face the unromanticized, overt sexuality of a modern tradition of the nude, understood to strip away pretence and to probe beneath society’s acceptable surface ... [through a] particularly dissonant form of Expressionism, with its emphasis on uncompromising subject matter, unsuppressed sexuality and psychological introspection (Observer, 8).

The practice of artists like Schiele was primarily presented as an exploration and exposure of modern subjectivity.

In the case of Schiele, this is not surprising. By the time of his death in 1918, he had completed more than 250 self-portraits, more than any artist since Rembrandt. The series of images presents Schiele almost always alone in the picture plane without any contextualizing background. Most of them are nude self-portraits that dramatically present him with the familiar, fixed stare one has looking into a mirror. The gaze of Schiele’s self-portraits is captivating because it challenges and holds the viewer’s reciprocal gaze, obliging the viewer to look at the ugly and emaciated body he exposes and the contorted acts he performs. Schiele overtly addresses the viewer, involving the viewer in the performative display of his self.¹ His

¹ On the notion of performativity in relation to subject formation, see Butler. Butler’s analysis of the formation of the subject as performative maintains that the subject always exceeds the formative matrix in which it is situated, and therefore
series of self portraits enacts the structure of his self as an iterative process of active existence. The mirroring effect achieved in relation to viewers not only involves the viewer in the iterative activity of his subjectivity, but implicates the subjectivity of the viewer in that structure as well. Schiele's series of self-portraits enacts a structure of iteratively interactive subjectivity.

Like the Tate Modern exhibition, critical analyses of Schiele's performative self-presentation interpret his images in terms of the Freudian psychoanalysis and Nietzschean existentialism contemporary with the artist. Schiele's work is considered by way of sexual angst, repression, pathology and the search for the true nature of the self. In many ways, the overt sexuality of Schiele's portraits and self-portraits parallels Sigmund Freud's contemporary developments in psychoanalysis, making Freud an obvious route into the meaning of Schiele's images. Schiele produced so many self-portraits of

is never completely realized as a subject. This excess and incompletion is the basis of freedom, understood as resistance to formative matrices. In my view, the performativity emphasized in the serially iterative activity structure of Schiele's images, and also found in the images of Degas, Mondrian, Bacon and (as will be shown) Warhol, provides a model for positively re-conceiving freedom as a central feature of interactive subjectivity, in contrast to Butler's negative description of it as an unassimilable, extra-social remainder.

For instance, Freudian psychoanalysis and Nietzschean existentialism are the theoretical bases of the interpretations put forward by Comini, Wilson (1980), Danto (1990), and Schröder.

See Comini and particularly Knafo. Knafo (a psychoanalyst) identifies Schiele's preoccupation with self-identity, sex, and death as the specific themes in his art which she interprets in terms of Freudian psychoanalysis.
himself naked, sexually charged, and in unconventional poses, that it is tempting to read something about the man into the self-portrait. Moreover, he produced many similarly graphic nudes of his sister, other children, and other adults. When Schiele's graphically intimate nudes are read in relation both to his stated concerns about sexual repression and to his essentialist belief that real truths are hidden behind the world’s veil of appearances, the interpretation of Schiele’s work in the fin-de-siècle Viennese context of Freudian psychoanalysis seems inevitable.

Existentialist interpretations of Schiele’s images also take his cultural context seriously, focusing on the significance of Nietzschean existentialism in turn-of-the-century Vienna. Schiele’s images are interpreted with reference to his anxiety about social conventions, his

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4 In contrast to the decorative romanticism of Klimt’s nudes, Danto claims Schiele’s nudes betray a pathological view of the sexualized body. “For him”, Danto claims, “sex was something done on soiled sheets in hard beds: it was draining and addictive, and his dried, emaciated men and women look as though they had fucked themselves, literally, to death” (1990: 40-41).

5 Comini’s biography of Schiele provides a detailed account of his life and ideas, including many extant writings by Schiele. Schiele’s essentialist ideas easily connect with the ideas expressed by Mondrian, Gauguin, and Kandinsky, which Cheetham critically analyzes in terms of a modernist “rhetoric of purity” in his book of the same name. In my view, understanding Schiele’s work in terms of essentialism and purity takes him too much at his word and detracts from the significance of his artworks.

6 There are numerous accounts of Nietzsche’s influence on early twentieth-century Viennese culture. Of particular interest here are Cacciari, Werkner, and Taylor.

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essentialist views, and his consequent rejection of jugendstil decoration in favour of communicating the true nature of his subjects. He is understood to follow Nietzsche's claim that art must necessarily be connected to the activities of life and so must be affective. Thus Schiele's figures are seen as agonizing under the strain of upholding preconceived social ideals of decency, propriety, beauty, and harmony. As Comini argues, there is in

7 Kimberly A. Smith takes the connection between Nietzsche and Schiele seriously, arguing that "expression and communication are the goals of Schiele's art ... Schiele consistently addresses the intertwining of work and world, art and life" (2000: 257). Smith claims that Schiele's art is bound to the context of Vienna, an artistic culture strongly influenced by Nietzsche's claim that art must be tied to life. It was a culture immersed in a language crisis, where "for some intellectuals and artists the image provided a possible source of meaning in a world where language had become suspect as a viable means of interchange" (233). Therefore Schiele's artworks are understood to communicate non-linguistic meaning to the viewer by breaking down the space between image and viewer. Paying special attention to Schiele's treescapes, Smith argues his images extend into the world to invade the real space of the viewer and draw the viewer into the two-dimensional space of the image, thereby intertwining the two dimensions. It is the form of Schiele's images that are important in Smith's analysis, for the form presents a way to express inarticulable meaning. By contrast, I argue that the form of Schiele's images is their structure, and that their structure is not only meaningful but its meaning can be articulated.

8 Nietzsche's insistence on the necessity of connecting art and life can be found in his Thus Spoke Zarathustra and The Birth of Tragedy, both of which were widely read in Vienna at this time.

9 In September 1911, Schiele wrote about his art to Oskar Riechel:
The transitoriness of the material is determined in the
Schiele no suggestion of a façade enshrouding the real identity of his figures. Existentialist interpretations of his sense of an existence: a sure becoming and passing away, a coming; life, in which concept one should understand the endless disintegration which, however, can be kept in life through organic means, yes, [life] can become retroactive, far back, so that it, by these means, can give no complete death.

I possess the immediate means within myself that can draw [depict], in order to record, to wish, to fathom, to invent, to discover, with means within myself, which already have the great power to kindle themselves, to burn themselves up and to shine like a thought out of the eternal light...

When I see myself completely, I shall have to see myself...but also how far I have the ability to see what means are mine, out of what puzzling substances I am made, out of how much of the more, what I recognize, what I have so far recognized within myself (Schiele, in Comini, 93-94).

Schiele’s statements reveal his existentialism, which I argue is reinterpreted as participatory and interactive subjectivity in his series of self-portrait images.

Comini also analyzes Schiele’s work in Nietzschean terms. She claims Schiele expresses the desire “for a self-annihilation through conscious participation in a flow of continuous creation in which the joy of becoming contains intrinsically the joy of destruction” (95). Examining Schiele's letters for some insight into the thoughts and intentions behind the artist's work, Comini finds Schiele's intentions similar to Nietzsche's philosophy. Both emphasize the transitory nature of existence and the continuous, simultaneous birth and death of things out of themselves. Comini focusses on the letter by Schiele quoted in Note 9, arguing that his notion of becoming and self-invention are similar to Nietzsche's notions of tragedy, will to power, and eternal recurrence. In my view, there is some overlap between the becoming process he discusses in his letters and the structure of subjectivity presented in his images, but his letters do not explain how that structure works or how it relates to the viewer. The relationship between the images and the viewer
work seem as inevitable as the Freudian, and for exactly the opposite reason: Schiele's figures do not hide but explicitly enact their real identities.

Schiele's are active figures who tensely maintain or dramatically enact even the most uncomfortable contortions and gestures. Schiele depicts them roughly with mottled facture, shifting tonal values, broken contour lines, and foreshortened frames which make their skin appear to vibrate and their bodies to move. They are presented without concern for social formalities. Their comportment is neither decorous nor discreet. They perform contortions, grimaces, and explicitly sexualized gestures directly before the viewer. Very many of Schiele's portraits and self-portraits are acutely erotic. Moreover, Schiele's figures often look unhealthy, angular, emaciated, green, dirty, and unadorned. Yet they are intensely alive. Their organs, muscles and nerves appear to move under their skin, which makes them expressively physical. They also betray real interiority, either by a direct visual address of the viewer or by a distracted engagement in orgasmic pleasure or contorted pain. Schiele's figures are presented as embodied subjects who do not pose with self-conscious rectitude or perform heroic acts. Like Bacon's figures, Schiele's are profoundly ordinary figures performing mundane acts in extraordinary ways. Schiele's figures exist in the acts they perform.

is crucial to an understanding of Schiele's self-portraits.

11 Wilson describes Schiele's more sexually charged figures as "pure projections of male sexual feeling" (1980:34). The masculinist implications and the meaning of Schiele's sexually charged imagery will be analyzed in following sections.
Both the Freudian psychoanalytic and Nietzschean existentialist analyses of Schiele's images confine the interpretation of his work to his pre-World War One context because they primarily discuss his subject matter. They prioritize Schiele's essentialist search for the true nature of the self and his harsh and unreserved treatment of sexuality in order to situate his oeuvre in a respectable context of modernist innovation. Thus Comini's argument strives to exculpate Schiele from the charges of public indecency brought against him for exposing erotic material to minors. Smith argues that his work expressively communicates the "non-linguistic meaning" of the real which cannot be otherwise articulated (2000:233). And Knafo's analysis seeks to know the real Schiele that endures through his various self presentations.

Both types of analysis reveal important aspects of Schiele's oeuvre. The psychoanalytic reading reveals notions of identity, subjectivity, and sexuality which are undoubtedly concerns in Schiele's art. The existentialist reading reveals that his presentation of the self is essentially active, and that it is rendered as possessing something that is incommunicable. Further, the nature of the self has an impact on others. These are all integral features of his artworks and can be combined in an analysis which shows how Schiele's oeuvre is to be critically interpreted in terms of his presentation of the self as iteratively interactive subjectivity. First, in a series of images in which Schiele is dynamically rendered and performs for the viewer, he iteratively presents himself as a subject to be understood through his acts. Secondly, he presents himself in the significant art historical tradition of the nude, but as highly sexualized in a complex variety of ways. Thirdly, he presents himself in grimacing pain and
orgasmic distraction, states which viewers recognize as private and interior. Moreover, these states are complicated by the fact that Schiele’s image appears to be looking at the viewer in a specular way, as if in a mirror. Fourthly, his self-portrait images directly confront the viewer as if challenging her to look at his public self-display and thereby implicating her in his performative self-presentation. It is thus my contention that the serial structure of Schiele’s self-portraits presents an account of the modern subject as an iterative becoming-process that is communal and interactive.

The Serially Iterative Activity of the Self
Of Schiele’s series of more than 250 different images of himself, not only is each image differentiated from the others by the acts the figure performs, but each figure differentiates himself in terms of his acts. Each serial presentation is actively differentiating within the image and is differentiated throughout the series of images. Each figure is an enactment of Schiele’s self in an unordered series of acts. There is no fixed telos or end given to the series; it is pushed forward only by the continual enactment of Schiele’s self and only his death arbitrarily ends it. Within the self-portrait series, each image presents a performance of his self that is always novel or different. Schiele’s self-portrait series is a differentiating series which presents the structure of the self as an active process of continual actualization.

Schiele’s figures are active because his expressionist style self-reflexively reveals his activity of making. This activity is simultaneously part of his self-presentation and part of the structure by which he presents
himself. His dynamic facture is quick and variegated, providing the viewer with shifting tonal values in the neutral background wash that surrounds the figures and in the luminous gouache that articulates their physical volume. The space of each figural body is demarcated within vigorous and heavy black contours. However, the contours are often broken, which means they do not completely delimit the figure’s volume. Where the contour arbitrarily stops, the tonal values of the body can escape. At the same time, the demarcation of the contour usually coincides with the articulation of volume, which means that where the contour breaks, the representation of bodily volume ceases to emerge. Schiele’s facture at once indicates his active nature and renders him incompletely realized.

This effect is enhanced by the muted white contours that further circumscribe the figure. Like the black lines, the white contours are fragmented and therefore simultaneously delimit the body, release it, and render it incomplete. However, the white contours are also indexical, for their presence illuminates areas of tension and activity in the figure’s performance of its acts. Further, the white contours surround the black lines like halos, transforming the substantiality of the black lines into shadows.\(^{12}\) The white halos illuminate the figure from

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\(^{12}\) Comini’s analysis reveals Schiele’s interest in theosophy and she argues that Schiele’s use of white halos can be understood in terms of an astral glow, the unique spirit of individuals which emanates their existence from within throughout their evolution towards the universal. By contrast, I find the white halo to underscore the figure’s incomplete realization and to illuminate his continual differentiation rather than his enduring stability within those differentiations. Welsh provides a clear account of theosophy in his analysis of
behind. They contrast intensely with the neutral background wash both because the halo has a brighter chromatic value and because the halo, like the bodily volume, is rendered in more opaque gouache. Light reflects off the paint rather than the paper, which adds both depth and luminescence to the halo and the body. The figure's body is thus substantiated by light.\textsuperscript{13} Presented in terms of the immaterial force of light, Schiele's figures are not constructed by the density of corporeal matter but the movement of active forces. Because they are made of immaterial light, Schiele's figures are intrinsically active. They can neither be stabilized nor fixed because they are not presented as substantial bodies. Rather, they are presented as light effects, as an active, moving concentration of forces that do not substantiate a body but only present it. In this way, Schiele like Bacon exploits the visuality of his medium: because Schiele's bodies are incorporated by light, viewers can only access them in terms of light. Yet this does not mean the bodies of Schiele's figures are mere optical effects which can only be seen. Light is both visual and thermal: light not only allows things to be seen, but it gives off heat, making things feel hot.

The luminescent gouache that articulates the physical volume of Schiele's bodies is rendered with shifting tonal values of very specific hues, namely reds,

\textsuperscript{13} For a discussion of white light as an immaterial force that desubstantiates bodies to make them intrinsically active and temporal, see Bal, Chapter Six. For an analysis of colour as it implicates the viewer, see Marin.
yellows and greens. The interaction of these colours modulates the presentation of Schiele’s bodies, raising lighter, brighter areas up from the picture plane and lowering heavier, darker ones down into its depths. Thus colour gives volume to Schiele’s figures and leads the viewer’s visual movement in and out of the picture plane and on and off the figure’s bodies. The light of the circumscribing halo illuminating Schiele’s figures raises their bodies off the neutral background wash. Because their bodies are made of light, the halo forces their emphatically visual or optical presentation up off the ground and towards the visual space of the viewer where the juxtaposition of Schiele’s shifting tonal values of red, yellow, and green give their bodies voluminous depth. However, the creation of a visual space in which the viewer can visually travel is not all that is happening here. Red, yellow, and green have iconic meanings, not least of which are variations in thermal affect. Red is fiery hot; yellow is malleably warm; green is wiltingly cool; the variations in thermal effect that happens with their different tonal juxtapositions are endless. While heat produced by light cannot be physically grasped, it can be physically felt: the heat of the midday sun feels hotter than the cool of dusk. For this reason, the bodies of Schiele’s figures are not just actively animated by light, they are rendered physically tactile. Viewers are made to feel Schiele’s body when they see it.

The visual experience of the bodies of Schiele’s figure is therefore physical, tactile, and active. The thermal aspect of their light effect means that visually engaging with his figures involves visually feeling them; this is what Mieke Bal calls the image’s “metasensuous” effect or its “visual touch”, because here vision is a form of physical
contact (Bal, 195). Visually to feel Schiele’s bodies is to move with the expressionist activity of Schiele’s penumbral contour lines, the shifting tonal values and modulating depths of his hues, and the iconically physical feel of the figure. Visual experience of his bodies is physical, tactile and active because viewing his figures involves visually moving with the movement of the figures, visually navigating the spatial depths of their bodies, and feeling their heat. This points to yet another aspect of the thermal-dynamic of Schiele’s figures. Thermal activity refers not only to the physical force of heat, but also to emotional passion. Schiele’s images are erotic. The immateriality of light and heat act as forces in the image because they construct the figure as a concentration of activity, raising the figure off the picture plane and differentiating its spatial volumes. The visual and thermal aspects of light also act as forces on the viewer: by enabling the viewer to see the images, they compel the viewer feel them. In Schiele’s images, seeing the figure is touching it because the light that incorporates his bodies as visible incorporates them as sensuous. Viewing Schiele’s figures thus implicates the viewer in their sensuous activity.

For instance, the Leopold Museum’s Self-Portrait, 1911 [Fig. 15], presents an emaciated bony figure half-turned in three-quarter profile against a modulated, neutral-toned background. His head reaches up to the top edge; the bottom edge truncates the figure at the top of his thighs. The figure is outlined in sharp, black, sketchy contours which delineate the space of his body without containing it. They make it appear fitful and intense, as if the body cannot be presented as stable and static because it is shaky and moving. Moreover, these lines are sharp and angular, emphasizing the figure’s body hair and the
shifting tension of the bones, tendons and muscles underneath his skin. The fragmented black contours overlap in their delineation of the figure. They minimally establish a perspectival scheme which moves back from the viewer towards the figure’s body, which starts at the foregrounded elbow. There, the deep red-ochre contrasts with the neutral pink tones of the figure’s skin, creating deep ridges in his ribcage, back, and shoulders that feel feverishly warm, as if the emaciated body is physically pained with malnutrition.

Around the black contour is the broad white halo, which is also fragmented, lifting the figure from the neutral background up towards the viewer again. The halo luminously raises tense and active points of the figure’s body, such as the face which gazes at the viewer. Perspectivally, his head leans back behind his shoulder, but the thick white halo and the figure’s red hot ear raise the head towards the viewer. The ear stands out, drawing the viewer’s attention to the bruised, coldly pale face against which it is juxtaposed and which addresses the viewer with a sensuous, heavy-lidded gaze. The halo also lifts the figure’s hands. The linear perspective which presumes to organize the figure’s body would suggest the hands should be smaller than they are because they are further away from the viewer. But the white halo acts as an opposing force, denying a stable depiction of the body. The white halo pushes the figure’s hands out of the picture plane and presents them to the viewer’s visual touch. The viewer is led to feel the hot and inflamed hands which also gesture in a symbolic v-sign. Even if viewer cannot interpret what this sign means, its indexicality still hails the viewer as a visual address, demanding that the figure be looked at, engaged with. The white halo operates contrary
to the contour's linear perspective; the contrast stimulates
the viewer's acts of looking, making the head unexpectedly
appear to lean forward and the hands to push out of their
stultifying perspectival barriers. However, the linear
perspective of the sketchy black lines also leads the viewer
onto the figure's body from the foremost areas of the
picture plane into the darker recesses. Here the mutable
tones of red, yellow, and green differentiate the palpable,
almost bruised spatial volumes of his variably warm,
clammy, and turgidly cool body. The colours and lines that
articulate the figure's body render it palpable to the viewer.
His insistent visual address to the viewer urges the viewer
visually to feel what he feels.

The erotic aspect of Schiele's images is forcefully
driven home by the acts his figures perform. Their acts are
erotic, but not entirely for the reasons viewers might think.
Schiele's figures certainly perform erotic acts, such as self-
caressing and masturbation. Usually, however, they are
similar to Bacon's figures, for they perform mundane,
everyday activities such as stretching, sitting, screaming,
wondering, scratching, and touching. They are not static
and motionless because they are actively presented as
enacting what they are doing, no matter how routine. And
like Bacon's figures Schiele's perform these mundane acts
in extraordinary ways. Yet while Bacon's active figures are
extraordinary because something happens to them while
they perform their mundane acts, namely destruction,
Schiele's are extraordinary precisely in their very
performance of mundane acts. Moreover, Schiele's figures
are neither caught at one moment in the performance of
an act nor are they presented in the process of performing
an act. This would leave the viewer far too removed from
Schiele's erotic self-presentation. The figures in Schiele's
series are not caught because each image is a different iteration of the figure's performance of its erotic self-presentation to the viewer. Instead, the viewer is caught by their differently iterated performances. The viewer is implicated in the erotic experience of visually touching the bodies of Schiele's figures by the intertwined forces of light and heat that construct the figures as visually tactile. The viewer is caught also by the figures' self-conscious eroticism. Schiele's figures want the viewer to look at and feel the activity that differentiates their bodies. The series iterates the figures' self-objectification as active and tactile objects of looking. This combination of objectification and activity makes the paintings performative.

Schiele's Specular Erotics of Implication
Indeed, the viewer is initially caught by Schiele's images because the structure of his figures is performative: the activity of light and heat that constructs the figure also constructs the experience of them. This means that viewing Schiele's figures implicates the viewer in the visually tactile activity of perceptually feeling their bodies and moving with the activity that makes the figures what they are. Viewing the figure, then, becomes itself performative. Viewing it implies enacting its active, visual, and physical structure, not just by moving with the figure but also by participating in its specific movement. And because the viewer's visual relationship with the figure is participatory, Schiele's figures are represented in the present tense. The figure's self-presentation makes it present to the viewer who directly engages with the figure's performance of himself.
The viewer initially becomes engaged in enacting the self-presentation of the figure through the figure’s visual address to the viewer. Schiele’s figures both address their viewers, obliging them to look, and show their viewers how to reciprocate that look. Primarily this address is visual in the form of the figure’s direct, intense gaze out of the picture plane and into the viewer’s space, soliciting the viewer’s reciprocal visual engagement. The figure’s gaze is steady and penetrating. It does not gaze through the viewer; its gaze is directed out of the picture plane like a hook to ensnare the responsive viewer. Occasionally, the figure’s eyes are closed or his back is turned, preventing a directly visual engagement and therefore a direct visual address. Yet even here Schiele’s figures hail the viewer. Physical gestures, like waving, raising a fist, or nodding one’s head, are bodily enactments of visual address. Schiele’s figures hoist an elbow, gesture towards body-parts, or raise their hands in a v-sign, hailing the viewer to pay attention to them. Moreover, Schiele’s figures always perform these physical gestures even when they are also visually soliciting the

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14 See Bal (1999:ch.2). For an analysis of various interpretations of performativity and visual address, see John Tagg (94-96). For an interpretation of physical gestures as emotional signs of address, see Meyer (2003).

15 To the best of my knowledge, there is no clear explanation of the recurrent gesture of raising his hand and splaying his fingers in a ‘V’, found particularly in Schiele’s self-portraits. Comini, Wilson (1980), and Schroeder interpret it in terms of what they hold to be his theosophically oriented religious beliefs. Roland Barthes sees in such gestures an absent cigarette that is a secretive erotic invitation (1970: 72,191). For a commentary on Barthes’ analysis of the “V” as an erotic gap, see Schor (95-97).
viewer’s visual engagement. For instance, the figure in the Metropolitan Self-Portrait, 1911 [Fig. 16], alluringly looks directly at the viewer and dramatically raises his elbow, as if summoning the viewer to look at it. Similarly, the Leopold Self-Portrait addresses the viewer with his hand in the v-sign, thereby hailing the viewer to stop and look while holding the viewer in a direct visual engagement. By addressing the viewer, Schiele’s figures oblige the viewer to reciprocate that address. Moreover, like their penetrating gazes, the figures’ physical acts of addressing the viewer are dramatic. They do not just casually wave to the viewer. Their physical gestures are directed out of the canvas at the viewer. The figure’s bodies dramatically perform the visual address.

The physical gestures which address the viewer are also indexical signs which tell the viewer where and how to look. This is because the figure’s body performs the visual address, which indicates where to look by the very fact that both the address and the look solicited are physical. The physicality of the orienting gestures is underscored by the fact that not only is there nothing else in the picture plane besides the figure’s body, but that the body dramatizes itself as active by dramatically enacting the call to the viewer. By physically addressing the viewer, Schiele’s figures indicate that the viewer is to look physically, that is, in a tactile way. They show the viewer how to look by enacting the look as physical and by indexically pointing to their bodies.

For example, Standing Male Nude, Back View, 1910 [Fig. 17], has his back to the viewer, preventing a visual address. Yet the figure thrusts out his fiery buttocks toward the viewer. In terms of the linear perspective of the image, the figure’s red hot rump is closest to the viewer in
the foreground and is pushed out to invade the viewer’s space by its sharp juxtaposition with the green that pulsates throughout the figure’s lower back. Guided into the picture plane and onto the figure, the viewer is led to feel the heat of the figure’s buttocks and his tepid blotchy brown legs in part by the contours that contain the articulation of the body and most of all by the shifting tones. The contrast of the chilling green of his lower back not only makes it recede tensely from his buttocks, but moves the viewer upwards to feel the dark, deeply recessed ridges of the figure’s spine. The clammy green of the extended arm catches the viewer’s eye on account of the contrast with the otherwise flushed pinks of his body.

Linear perspective significantly gives way to the depths of colour values here, for the horizontally extended forearm unexpectedly recedes while the brighter dropped lower arm impossibly bends back towards the viewer. At the end of the forearm is another burning hot hand, deep red and aimed inwards and towards the figure’s body, maintaining the viewer’s visual focus on the movement of his body. The hand is the culmination of the two perspectival schemes. It is overlarge for its position in the linear perspective that delineates the body, and for this reason it stands out. It is also too heavily painted in deep red to be expected to push out from the surface of the image, but it does. Brighter than the body’s neutral flush and contrasted with the green arm, the figure’s large hand glows as it points back to his body, telling the viewer to look again with feeling. Where the figure’s red hot buttocks arrest the viewer’s visual attention and lead the look onto his body, the hand tells how to look while it points back to his body.
Yet Schiele's figures engage the viewer in the way they are presented. As performative, the figures' acts are directed out of the image into the space of the viewer. Schiele's figures are posed to be looked at, holding their bodies in positions that are awkward and that look uncomfortable, painful, or impossible to sustain for more than an instant. Further, the acts they perform are so mundane that they could only be visual presentations of physical acts. The figure's move to be seen as if they are already aware that seeing them means tangibly moving with them. Their acts are not heroic acts, nor do they present the viewer with the acts of existential authenticity performed in limit situations. As self-portraits, the figures' acts do not even present the viewer with the activity most often taken to be definitive of the artist's visual self-presentation, namely the activity of making his images. The acts Schiele's figures perform are the acts of which comprise everyday life, acts such as raising one's arm, stretching, screaming, and winking. There is little provided in the images to contextualize the interpretation of these acts as anything other than performances of different acts—except, of course, masculinity.

Schiele's self-portrait figures are images of the nude male, which at least conventionally situates his oeuvre in the tradition of the male nude. But recognizing this only makes his self-presentation more complicated. For he presents a startlingly different version of the tradition, neither idealized like Dürer's 1506 nude Self-Portrait, nor classically arranged like Gertl's Self-Portrait, Naked, 1908. Schiele's self-portraits figures are sickly, emaciated, and pained bodies. They are bony, often deformed, aggressive, and evocatively sexually charged. Solitary figures, they dramatically present themselves as
open and available to the viewer’s gaze. Even when presented with a sensuous gaze, caressing his body, hailing the viewer erotically with his V-sign, or masturbating, the figure’s act is part of an extended series in which each act is just one in a series of acts performed by apparently the same figure. In terms of the series, the iteration of the act surrenders their specificity to mundanity. They are different only in virtue of the difference of the act. What makes the figure’s acts exceptional is their presentation.

To be sure, these works do not only differ from the traditional self-portrait. They also stand out as male nudes. Schiele’s nude self-portrait figures share some of the primary features of canonical male nudes, such as the performance of acts. Yet not only are these acts mundane, they also have none of the formal rigour or heroic physical iconography that typifies the tradition of the male nude.¹⁶ This is because Schiele exploits features connected to the canon of the female nude. His figures are presented as visual objects directly for the viewer’s gaze, thereby situating the viewer in the thoroughly recognizable but unexpected position of gazing on the male nude body. Like the figure’s female nude counterparts, Schiele’s male nudes perform for the viewer. What they are doing is less important than how they do it: his self-portrait figures act

¹⁶ Here, I take Kenneth Clark’s analysis of the nude as the basis of my interpretation because he not only outlines what are still conceived of as the canons of male and female nude visual imagery, but he explains what is involved in the canonical traditions. It is the emphatic relation of Schiele’s nude self-portraits to both traditions that makes them intriguing. For an altogether different view of canons, see Pollock (1999) and Salomon.
and pose deliberately. Like canonical male nudes, Schiele's are delineated in strong contours. Yet I have shown the substantiality of these contours is undermined by their immateriality as light effects. They are thus more like female nudes, whose materiality is conceived to be so chaotic and unknowable that it must be restrained in formative double contour lines.\(^1\)

Schiele's figures conform to the canonical male nude in their deliberate self-presentation as performing self-defining acts, their symbolic gestures, their assertive or intense comportment, and their frequent verticality. Yet they do not come across as modelled on the figures of Apollo or Christ.\(^2\) Instead, Schiele's figures assert a forceful presence in these images through their dramatic performativity for the viewer. The issue is not the performance of masculinity, but the performance of the self as an object of visual interest for another.

Schiele's gaunt, ugly male nudes are presented in the come-hither poses of sexually charged female nudes like those in Titian's *Diana and Actaeon*, 1559, Rubens' struggling heroines, Manet's *Olympia*, 1863, Hollywood advertising, and much twentieth-century pornography. They address the viewer, demanding that the viewer look at their presented bodies. In images like *Self-Portrait in*

\(^1\) See Nead's analysis of the female nude on the conceptual implications of feminine materiality and masculine order. For an account of the cultural effects of the genre of the nude, see Dawkins (2002).

\(^2\) Comini, Schroeder, and Wilson (1980) explicitly take the view that Schiele's acts are significant acts that express the truth of his epoch and himself. Nead and Clark (1956), despite otherwise divergent interpretations, hold that the male nude is always understood as somehow representing divinity or nobility.
Lavender Shirt and Dark Suit, Standing, 1914, Reclining Male Nude with Yellow Pillow, 1910, Grimacing Man (Self-Portrait), 1910 [Fig. 18], Standing Male Nude, Back View, 1910, and the coy standing Self-Portrait, 1911, where he flirtatiously turns from the viewer, Schiele appears less like the heavy and wretched “man of sorrows” than a gay camp icon (Schroeder, 53). His posing is much like the camp manner of Hollywood’s vampish sirens of the nineteen-thirties, forties, and fifties. Frequently, Schiele’s male nudes are alluringly haughty, with elongated necks, heaving chests, thin waists, large dramatic hands, and theatrical facial gestures. Moreover, many of Schiele’s figures not only have rounded breasts, erotically hard red nipples, and vaginal imagery, but overtly present themselves by rubbing and touching their transgendered bodies. Their gaunt angularity does not conform to the male nude’s canonical substantiality. They pose in femme-fatale type, rigid-backed grimaces or in wide-eyed, vulnerable, and imploring gazes. Schiele’s subversion of the genre of the male nude makes the presentation of his figures extraordinary.

Comparing Schiele’s self-portrait figures with his repertoire of female nudes supports this interpretation of his male nudes. Schiele’s oeuvre conforms to the canonical stereotypes. His male figures are assertively masculine in comparison with his female figures. Schiele’s female figures are usually horizontal, docile and beguiling, and locked in protective, self-encasing positions. Their sex

19 Tinckom’s analysis of camp glamour in Warhol’s oeuvre provides an account of the camp appropriation and re-interpretation of Hollywood iconography that is strikingly similar to Schiele’s appropriation of features of the female nude in order to re-interpret the male nude.
is on display as they recline even in orgasmic pleasure [Fig. 19]. By contrast, the male nude's sex is presented to the viewer as a feature of what he is. Schiele’s male nudes are vertical, active, assertive, dramatic, and aggressively addressing the viewer. The masculine and the feminine are at odds in Schiele's oeuvre: while Schiele exploits whatever imagery serves the self-presentation of the male figures, the female figures are relegated to passive display. The female figures lack the individuality and significant presence of the male figures and are presented only as the feminine objects of masculine desire.

This indicates that in Schiele's series of self-portraits it is the presentation of his figures that matters. There is no doubt that, when compared with his female nude figures, Schiele's self-portraits are masculinist. Yet comparison reveals that performative display is key. What Schiele’s male figures in fact borrow from the female nude is his devaluation of the meaning of the female figure's acts and the prioritization of her performative for-the-other presentation. Schiele's subversion of the genre of the male nude is precisely its emulation of the structure of the female nude: it focuses on how the figure is presented rather than what it presents. In this way, however, Schiele subverts the gender opposition he enforces on his own male and female nudes. For in his self-presentations, Schiele prioritizes the fundamental features of the traditional compositional structure of the female nude, such as openness and performative display, insubstantiality, immateriality, and mundane or insignificant acts. Thus, the male body is itself presented as the viewer's object of looking. Schiele succeeds in eroticizing the male body as an object made to be seen, just like the canonical female
nude. This has implications for the viewer, for it literally implicates her in the Schiele’s images.

Mirroring the Viewing Subject
While Schiele’s figures’s acts are erotic because they are dramatically enacted and present the body to be seen, they still perform mundane acts with which anyone can identify. This is emphasized by the fact that Schiele’s figures look as though they are performing before a mirror. The relationship between the active figure and the active viewer is participatory and specular. The figures look intensely out at the viewer with the familiarly penetrating gaze one has before a mirror, soliciting the look that the figure expects to be reciprocated. Schiele’s figures thus appear to objectify themselves: they dramatize their activity in their self-enacting presentation as the object of the viewer’s gaze. But the viewers do not see themselves. Schiele’s images are not mirror images of the viewer, because the viewer is not made to look at Schiele’s bodies as if they were the viewer’s own mirrored reflections. Rather, the figure visually addresses the viewer as the reflection of Schiele himself. The viewer’s implication in the image puts the viewer in the place of Schiele. The viewer is made to study Schiele’s reflection as he would. This renders the mundane acts performed by Schiele’s self-portrait figures so extraordinary. They are performative acts directed at the viewer which objectify the viewer as an active body of physical sensations. The specularity of Schiele’s self-portrait images implicates the viewer in the
most familiar self-other relationship, namely the form-
bestowing relationship of specular subjectivity.\textsuperscript{20}

This is not surprising considering that Schiele used
a large, full sized mirror that could reflect the image of his
entire body when he made his self-portraits. The use of a
mirror makes explicit the fundamental visual relationship
between the viewer and the self-portrait image, where
visuality implicates physicality. Schiele's self-portraits
adhere to the absolute mimesis of mirroring: the self-
portraits reflect the viewer's act of looking. There are two
reasons for this. First, the viewer is hailed by the figure to
look at it and is led to look with a visual and tactile gaze.
But, secondly, the figure is shown to return the viewer's
gaze, returning to the viewer the viewer's visual and tactile
look, for the activity which constitutes the figure's body is
the same as the activity which constitutes the viewer's
gaze. The relationship between figure and viewer is visual
and tactile. The viewer is addressed by the figure and
challenged to look closely. This positions the viewer in the
place of Schiele himself so that the viewer is looking at
Schiele's self-image from the point of view of Schiele
himself. The tactile, visual and active structure of the
figure's body is reflected back to viewers and shown to be
theirs too. Participating in the structure of the images
allows the viewer to participate in the structure of Schiele.
The viewer is emphatically embodied.

Situated in a classically specular relation with the
viewer, Schiele's self-portraits act as mirror images of the
viewer transformed into Schiele. It is the notion of "acting
as" that is crucial to their performance. The figures act in

\textsuperscript{20} This solicits what Kaja Silverman calls "heteropathic
identification" (1996).
the sense of performing a play: they performatively enact the mirroring effect by visually confronting and obliging viewers to find in them a reflection of themselves. Moreover, the figures act in the sense of being active: they are dynamic images which involve the viewer in the acts performed in, on, and by each figure. Further, the figures act in the sense of pretending: they dissimulate the viewer’s looking activity, representing the viewer as the self-portrayed in the self-portrait image. Viewers are enticed by the specular effect of the mirror images which offer the promise of a form-bestowing relationship by presenting the viewers with images that function as portraits of themselves. However, Schiele’s self-portraits are serial self-portraits. Taken as a series, the repeated presentation of the self continually presents the self anew and this throws a loop in the form-bestowing relationship conventionally understood to emerge through specularity. Thus the form-bestowing relationship promised by the specularity is re-interpreted in Schiele’s series of self-portraits. The mimetic and participatory specular interaction is constructive in wholly unexpected ways, on account of both the serially iterative and intrinsically active, physical, and visual presentation of the figure in Schiele’s self-portraits.

The absolute mimesis of the mirroring effect happens in the very visual way the viewer becomes implicated in the images. The specularity of the self-portraits opens up a visual relationship between viewer and self-portrait wherein, traditionally, viewers are led to

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21 This deployment of performativity to solicit the viewer’s performance is analyzed by Bal in her discussion of James Coleman’s 1999 slide installation Photograph (2002).
find reflections of themselves. This is where the applicability of the Lacanian theory of the mirror stage can be employed to elucidate the viewer-image relationship.\(^{22}\) As I have shown, the viewer is addressed by the self-portrait figure and encouraged to identify her embodied, viewing self with that of the pure surface, the visual image before her. Lacanian theory claims that the visual relation between the viewing subject and her visual image is formative because it is representational. That is, the viewing body of differentiating and interior sensational responses is given an external image that is whole, complete, and stable with which it can identify itself. In Lacanian theory, the self becomes a subject by accepting the external image as her own, the form of her physical body.

With Schiele’s self-portraits, the viewer is enticed to do precisely that. Presented in terms of mirror images, the figures address the viewer and indicate that it is the body which is at issue. Thus the viewer is encouraged to identify her self with the figural form provided by the image. Further, the viewer is encouraged to identify her experience of viewing with that portrayed in the image, for the figures not only indicate that the viewer should look, but they indicate how to look. They bestow on the viewer both a form and a form of looking that is explicitly visually tactile. The figure is still a pure surface image understood as an externalized pure form without a body, but a form that is active, that differentiates through its serial iterations, that can be seen, and that can be felt. Caught by the figure’s visual address, the viewer is brought into a

specular relation with the self-portrait that is presented in terms of light: it is a body constituted by the active forces of light and heat. It presents itself to be seen and to be felt, which means it must be felt as it is seen. However, Schiele’s figure is a sensational and active body which is always shifting and changing, is never completely realized, and is entangled in opposing perspectival structures that delineate its formative boundaries in impossible ways.

Lacanian theory posits that specular subjectivity is grounded in fictionality because the viewing body is presented with an image of the self that it wants to be, but can never be. The suggestion is that the body is a process of continual becoming: a maelstrom of interior sensations that are structured by continual differentiation and are subject to the ongoing structure of time. In this Lacanian theory, the body can never be the ideal, completely realized form presented in the mirror because it is subject to a becoming process which perpetually differentiates it. Yet this is exactly what Schiele’s figures as mirror images present: as a series of mirrored reflections, the figures are not forms but processes defined by the activity and physicality of their virtual substantiation by the forces of light and heat. The series shows that the body cannot be stabilized in a fixed representation. The viewer is presented with bodies of dynamical physicality that actually, rather than ideally, represent the viewer in terms of the viewer’s self-experience as a body of chaotic interior sensations. The viewer experiences the external image not as a form but as a processional, structure-bestowing series of images. Schiele’s series of self-portrait figures presents the viewer with absolutely mimetic structures with which the viewer can identify. They reflect the viewer’s activity of looking back as the viewer’s own structure.
The Lacanian theory of the structure of subjectivity and desire develops out of the frustration of the mirror stage: the impossibility of actually connecting the ideal form with the chaotic body generates the desiring subjects of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Schiele's images provide the viewer with unidealized self-images of the activity and physicality of the body. Because they are mirrored self-portraits, Schiele's serial images lead the viewer to believe that the relationship between viewer and figure will be form-giving. But instead the series provides the viewer with a series of images that enact an active, physical, and differentiating structure of the body. Identifying with Schiele's self-portraits merely identifies the viewer's active, physical, and differentiating self-experience with a projection of the same thing in the image. The viewer who reaches out and visually touches the figure finds herself reflected back in the structure of the figure that reaches out and reciprocates the viewer's visual touch. In this way, Schiele's images are radically mimetic for they make the viewer feel the image, understood as the viewer's mirror image, in terms of the visually tactile structure of her own experience. Because the process of looking is visually tactile, and because the viewer is put into the position of Schiele before the mirror, the viewer is led to an erotic experience of herself. That is, Schiele's viewers are made to act like the object of looking reflected back in the self-portrait. The viewer is shown to be performative in the same way that the structure of the figure is performative.

The difference between the relationship of viewer and image in the Lacanian theory and in Schiele's images shows that Schiele's series of self-portraits does not allow for a form-bestowing representational model of subjectivity. Unlike in the Lacanian model, Schiele's self-portraits do
not present ideal images of how a body is shaped into subjectivity. They present images of the body as how the body really is. The relationship enacted in Schiele’s self-portrait images is based on participation and visually tactile erotic exchange. The specularity of Schiele’s self-portraits draws the viewer to expect a representational model of subjectivity in order to reflect back to the viewer a model of subjectivity that is actually participatory and interactive. The figures and the viewer participate in the activity and physicality that makes them each what they are. They share a structure of open, performative, and participatory activity that continually differentiates them. This is how Schiele’s specular mimesis works. The figure and the viewer reach out to each other as different enactments of the same performative structure.

For this reason the mundane acts Schiele performs are crucial to the meaning of his images. They are not unique acts, but they are presented as unique enactments of mundane acts. Schiele’s figures perform their acts in extraordinary ways. For instance, the figure does not just raise its elbow but drives its elbow into the air, it does not simply present its back but thrusts its backside out towards the viewer. In the context of specular self-portraiture, the self-dramatization of Schiele’s figures is meaningful: it pushes performativity as a feature of the self to the forefront of any analysis of his images. The performance of the acts is what is unique to the acts his figures perform. Given the significance of their performance, the mundane acts are not unique to Schiele’s self-portrait figures, for they are acts anybody can perform. The mundane acts are fundamental to the participatory structure of his images because they allow virtually anybody to identify with them, while maintaining the specificity of the figure’s own unique
performance of the act. Brought to identify with figures constituted by their activity and physicality, the viewer is brought into an interactive and participatory relationship with Schiele’s figures. The initially promised form-bestowing relationship is replaced by the interactive and participatory relationship. Participation in and interaction with the active and physical figures identifies the viewer with them, revealing the viewer to be constituted by her activity and physicality as well.

The mundane acts performed by the figures throughout Schiele’s series of self-portraits reveals that activity is not just what the figure does, but what it is. Within each individual image, Schiele’s figures are shown to be constituted by activity and physicality and as such they are intrinsically active. Moreover, the activity that constitutes each figure also individuates the figure as uniquely what it is. However, Schiele’s oeuvre of self-portraits is understood to be a series, not solely by titular references. It is a series because throughout Schiele’s more than 250 self-portraits, recognizably the same figure is differentiated. Dividing, reordering, or fragmenting the series into different sets of images only differentiates the presentation of the same figure that continues throughout each presentation. The figure of each self-portrait is thus differentiated not only by the activity that constitutes it, but also by the activity it emphatically performs. Understood as the same across the series, Schiele’s figure is differentiated in each image by the different performances of its acts. Shown without any explanatory context or narrative, each performance must be taken as exactly what it is: the enactment of the activity which, by making the figure different, makes the figure unique. Across the
series, the figure is constituted as uniquely what it is by the
difference of the acts it performs.

As serial, each performance of the figure
differentiates it from other performances of the figure.
There is neither a determinate order nor a pre-given telos
to the series. There is no aging, destruction, or evolution of
the figure. The figure is presented and differentiated only
in terms of its acts, and is only seen to be differentiated by
its acts when it is shown in the context of other
presentations of its acts. Each enactment constitutes the
presentation of the figure. The uniqueness of each
enactment is determined by another act from which the
figure is differentiated. The series of different enactments
performed by the figure is therefore an iterative series of
differentiations. The figure is constituted by its iterative
activity of differentiation, the performance of the mundane
acts that make it what it is. The figure endures throughout
the series, but it is always different in virtue of its serially
iterative activity of differentiation.

Serial Activity and the Specular Subject
The seriality of this differential activity in the end
foregrounds difference on all levels. Schiele’s series of
self-portraits presents the figure to be intrinsically active
and physical; it is constituted by its structure of serially
iterative acts of differentiation. The viewer is led to identify
with this structure because she is brought into a specular
relationship with the figure which reflects the structure of
serially iterative differentiation activity back onto the
viewer. This specular relationship is the basis of the
viewer’s visual engagement with the figure, a relationship
that is not form-bestowing but interactive and participatory.
Drawn to participate in the structure of Schiele's figure, the viewer is made a subject of the interactive and participatory relationship the figure offers. The figure enduring throughout Schiele's series of self-portraits can be understood on the same terms. Participating in the structure of the figure involves interacting with the figure as a unique enactment of the activity that constitutes it. Figure and viewer are brought together and shown to share a similar structure, but are nevertheless independent serially iterative enactments of their own activities of differentiation.

The independence of the figure is established in two ways. First, the figure's independence is structurally accomplished by the dual schemes of linear perspective and the use of colour to create spatial volume. My explanations of the images has shown that Schiele's use of linear perspective is a way both of generating the perspectival depth of his figures as bodies and of drawing the viewer into the space of the image. In terms of linear perspective, the foregrounded areas of Schiele's figures offer a visual route into the space of the image, like the elbow in the Leopold Self-Portrait, from which point the viewer is led back into the image by the receding diminution of the size of various parts of the figures body and by their overlapping. Thus the viewer is drawn into the space of the picture plane, towards the body of Schiele's figures, and is moved around them according to a perspectival scheme which purports to structure the figures

23 Bal provides a rigorous and stimulating account of "colour-based" perspective as a non-linear perspectival scheme which opens up alternative interpretations of visual imagery. See Bal, Chapters Two and Five, partly based on Marin.
as viable representations. Schiele's use of linear perspective mobilizes the viewer's looking activity, but it ultimately does not lead to the illusion of realism. The perspectival route always undermines itself by promising a semblance of real space in the figure and then thwarting it: body parts that should diminish in size are suddenly found to be overlarge, elbows bend backwards, or legs extend well beyond the plausible. Schiele's use of linear perspective always and inevitably leads the viewer back to the surface of his images. It exposes the sheer two dimensionality of his figure. His series of self-portraits does not allow for realism, but it does insist on the viewer's participatory interaction with them.

Secondly, while the linear perspective leads the viewer into the image, the volume-construction of colour leads the viewer onto the figure to participate in its constitutive activity. Unlike linear perspective, the spatial volumes constructed out of Schiele's mottling and juxtapositioning of colour make no claims to any sort of realism. Led towards the body by linear perspective, the viewer is led onto the body to feel it through Schiele's use of voluminous colour. As I have argued, the modulated tones and values of his application of luminescent gouache are understood in terms of the effects of light. Even when the figure's white halo appears to be missing, Schiele's use of colour shapes the figure's body in a tactile way. The viewer feels it as, for instance, hot or cool, hard or soft, prickly or smooth. The two schemes work together to guide the viewer onto the body of each sensuous enactment of the figure without allowing the viewer to fully grasp or completely realize the figure. It
remains immaterial, insubstantial, and pure surface. The figure is always presented for visual touch: the viewer touches the figure and the figure touches back. At the same time, however, the figure always remains infinitely beyond the viewer's grasp.

The independence of the figure from the viewer structurally achieved by Schiele's dual use of perspectival schemes underscores the other way the viewer is kept out of complete identification with the figure, namely its insistent signs of interiority. Schiele's self-portrait figures are riddled with signs of interiority: pain, discomfort, wonder, anger, malaise, and orgasmic pleasure, all of which sculpts the specular visual figure into a body of sensations like the viewer. His specular self-portraits reflect the viewer and interpellate the viewer into a participatory and performative subject of differentiation, but maintain the difference of the viewer and the figure as subjects independent of each other. The viewer cannot participate in the figure's sensational inner life beyond recognizing it.

Replete with an interiority that is

24 Joselit offers a critical analysis of surface as 'flatness' in modern and postmodern art. In modernism, Joselit claims, flatness is a way of denying the viewer's mimetic identification with the image in order to produce a depth of psychological response. Joselit's analysis is a useful account of the notion of surface in modern art and art history and its relation to postmodernism. However, his treatment of surface takes optical experience as its basis, even when he argues against opticality. Thus Joselit often forgets about the body, particularly the body as a surface and the body of the viewer as affected by what she sees.

25 This is not a new concept, but some intriguing treatments of it can be found in Bal (1999), Butler, Scarry, Silverman, Meyer (2003) and Weiss.
independent of the viewer and a physical structure of performative, serially iterative, differential activity, Schiele’s self-portrait figure is presented as a subject. Thus the viewer’s interaction with it is an interaction between subjects. Participating in the structure of Schiele’s figure involves neither visually realizing the figure nor identifying with the figure as entirely accessible. On account of its serially iterative activity of differentiation, the figure is never completely realized. Complete identification or knowledge of the other is impossible. The participatory structure of subjectivity presented in Schiele’s series of images is a matter of affective interaction with another subject, a mutual implication which neither completes the subject nor uses it but instead acts with it.

In this way, the structure of serially iterative activity of differentiation presented in Schiele’s series of self-portraits differs from that presented both in Bacon’s and in Mondrian’s images. Like Mondrian’s, Schiele’s images interpret serially iterative activity as a differentiating structure, but, unlike Mondrian’s, not as one which is freely actualized by the viewing subject. In Schiele’s images, the freedom of the subject is its independence from others. The activity which constitutes the subject is the activity which makes it different not only from itself but from others. Yet the structure of serially iterative activity is open because it is shared in interactive activity with others. Like the structure presented in Bacon’s paintings, Schiele’s presents a model of subjectivity that is participatory, affective, and emphatically not form-bestowing. Yet, unlike Bacon’s, Schiele’s subjectivity is not affectively constructive of the other. Schiele’s participatory subjects are communal because subjects are shown to share a structure of performative and serially iterative differential...
activity that is open to interaction with others. For this reason, the structure of differential activity in Schiele shares with that of Degas both identification with the other as a fundamental principle, and participation in the other as a matter of dynamical interaction. Schiele’s series of self-portraits interprets the modern subject as essentially performative, for the serially iterative, differential activity that is constitutive of the self is a matrix of shared and public activity. In Schiele’s images, the subject is always an independent centre of activity that opens itself to the other. As will be seen in the next chapter, a gap opens up between this subjectivity-oriented art and the art that all but erases the subject in favour of surface. For this contrast, we turn to Andy Warhol.