



Fig. 1 – 3 Pictures from the dance-movie *EGON*. Fotos © Dutch Mountain Movies

A parade of not so silent images

A commentary on a set of films on Vienna 1900

The fin-de-siècle Vienna keeps awakening the interest of many. It is remarkable how diverse its public is. However, if one recalls Karl Kraus's statement that Vienna was a research laboratory for world destruction, it makes sense. The Vienna of those days was in the frontlines of the most fundamental battles that had to do with the flesh and the spirit. And those issues continue being in full force. One could say that they are timeless, probably because they are human, all too human, to put it in Nietzschean terms.

In the last few years, the interest in Vienna 1900 has given birth to films that have generated stimulating discussions and have pleased the palate of many cinema enthusiasts. For instance, think of David Cronenberg's *A Dangerous Method* or Raoul Ruiz's *Klimt*. Both films have been applauded by amateur film watchers. They are exquisitely finished and their screenplays are full of intellectual pretensions. However, both movies use unfairly the depths of the prevailing issues in Vienna 1900 and deceive the public with reductionist and sensually sweetened interpretations of serious matters and the complex personalities of artists and intellectuals.

This kind of abuse is not exclusively cinematographic. It can also be observed in literature (even in pseudo scientific literature). In any case, it always shows that one of the Cartesian axes that gave shape to the work of the Viennese critical modernists is being ignored, that is to say, the concern for representation, form, the way of organizing the material, whatever it was, paint, architecture or philosophy.

Let us remember what Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote about the relationship between the content of the *Tractatus logico philosophicus* and the form he had given to it. In the prologue, he affirmed that the content of the book and the way in which it had been expressed were equally important.¹ He understood them as two sides of the same coin. He cared deeply about the shape of his writings throughout his life. One could say that behind his literary practice there is an intuition that brings philosophy and art close to each other. Around 1933, he wrote that philosophy ought to be written as a poetic composition.² Although this statement cannot be taken literally, it indicates that Wittgenstein thought that philosophy had much to learn from art, that philosophical methods could strengthen with the close observation of artistic processes. For instance, Wittgenstein compared his philosophical task to that of a draftsman. He believed that a philosopher ought to tackle a philosophical tangle like a draftsman deals with a landscape, that is, changing one's perspective once and again. He also compared his philosophical method to that of an architect interested in laying the foundations for all possible buildings, but not in building any particular one. Furthermore, his involvement in the house he built for one of his sisters left a considerable impact on his middle and mature philosophy.

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico philosophicus*, *Schriften* 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), 13.

2 *Vermischte Bemerkungen. Eine Auswahl aus dem Nachlass/ Culture and Value. A Selection from the Posthumous Remains*, 2nd revised edition with English translation. Edited by Georg Henrik von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman. Revised by Alois Pichler. Translated by Peter Winch (1998, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2006), 28 (MS 146 25v: 1933-1934).