



# Wittgenstein, Musil, and the Austrian Modernism

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## Part Two

# Wittgenstein and Aesthetics



# Wittgenstein, Musil and the Austrian Modernism

Pierre Fasula

In this chapter, I connect Wittgenstein's attitude towards modernism and modernity to Musil's description of modernism in his great novel *The Man Without Qualities*. Wittgenstein's and Musil's respective positions are actually similar as regards not only modernism, but also its connection to modernity, and to the possible solution of the problem raised by this connection. Therefore, my aim is not to consider Wittgenstein and Musil themselves as representatives of modernism, but, rather, to explore their attitudes towards the modernism they were confronted with. In the first two sections, I present their respective relations to modernism. I then go on to point at what they have in common and examine their attitude towards modernism within a more general reaction to modernity.

## 1 Wittgenstein and Austrian modernism

Ludwig Wittgenstein was obviously in an ideal position to be acquainted with modernism. He grew up in a family that not only attached importance to fine arts and literature but was also characterized by its nonconformist attitudes towards these domains. His father, Karl Wittgenstein, had adopted 'in the most distinctive and spectacular way this role of protector and promoter of arts,' and showed a 'fanaticism for art,' as Zweig called it, and 'a passion for aesthetic innovations'.<sup>1</sup> His sister too expressed such nonconformism; she attended avant-gardist events and met Klimt, who painted her portrait.



<sup>1</sup> Jacques Bouveresse, 'Les derniers jours de l'humanité, *Essais I* (Marseille: Agone, 2000), 19.

At the same time, as it is well known, Wittgenstein's own attitude towards Austrian modernism was ambivalent. On the one hand, he seems to be part of it, not only with the *Philosophical Investigations* but already with the *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, if one puts it into context, bringing it back to Karl Kraus's influence. Janik and Toulmin defend such a thesis in *Wittgenstein's Vienna*:

This factor needs to be borne in mind when we discover that a whole range of intellectual and artistic creations, ranging from the music of Arnold Schönberg to the architecture of Adolf Loos – and including even, in its own way, Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* – were intimately and consciously related to, and even extensions of, the critique of language and society conducted by Karl Kraus. Each of these men acknowledged the inspiration of Kraus and could be said to be a Krausian; but the integrity of a Krausian demanded in each case that the struggle against moral and aesthetic corruption be carried on by a critique of that particular area of human experience in which the individual artist or writer was himself most at home. For Loos, this was architecture and design; for Schönberg, it was music; for Wittgenstein, philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

Presented in this way, Wittgenstein, Schönberg and Loos all belong to modernism, especially as regards two aspects. According to Bouveresse, quoting Janik and Toulmin, what these three have in common is, first, the idea of a 'compulsion of an inexorable but unconscious logic in the harmonic construction' – as Schoenberg called it in his *Theory of Harmony*,<sup>3</sup> and, second, the idea of the separation between a superior and an inferior sphere.

On the other hand, one has to point out the fact that they were all, each in his own way, critical of modernism. Schönberg did not consider himself a representative of the so-called 'modern music'<sup>4</sup> and Loos distanced himself from both art nouveau and Bauhaus as forms of 'false modernism'. Wittgenstein not only shared this attitude but distanced himself also from Loos and, above all, Schönberg. The house he built reflects his own style and is perhaps less a modernist gesture than a reaction against both historicism *and* a certain kind of modernism, a reaction that could be qualified as 'classical',<sup>5</sup> and he claimed not to understand the kind of music Schönberg invented. Moreover, if Loos and Schönberg were critical modernists, Wittgenstein was much more detached

<sup>2</sup> Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 93.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Bouveresse, 'derniers jours', 29.

<sup>4</sup> See Antonia Soulez's chapter in this book.

<sup>5</sup> Lothar Rentschler, 'Das Wittgensteinhaus. Eine Morphologische Interpretation', in *Wien-Kundmannsgasse 19*, eds. G. Gebauer, Gunter Grünenwald, Alexander Ohme, Rüdiger Rentschler, Lothar Sperling, Thomas Uhl and Ottokar (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1982), 138f.

from modernism, behaving sometimes in a reactionary way. According to McGuiness, his relation to literature is an example of this attitude:

Ludwig gave little sign at any period of interest in contemporary literature. Hofmannsthal was a distant family connexion and his idea of a return to the Baroque as a refuge from the decline of culture in his own day had some attraction. At any rate Ludwig liked to quote his saying

One has to behave decently

Some day, somehow, somewhere, it will pay off

But on the whole he was a stranger to Young Vienna and he hardly knew the names of the writers Ficker selected for his benefaction in 1914: Musil, with whom he has often been compared, he probably never read: there could have been no question of that before 1906 in any case. The chief exception to this disregard for contemporary literature – an exception providing the rule – was his respect for Karl Kraus, one of the chief influences on his thought, he said in the 1930s, listing those influences in the order Boltzmann, Hertz, Russell, Kraus, Loos, Weininger, Spengler, Sraffa.<sup>6</sup>

Wittgenstein not only appreciated classical references such as Lessing, Goethe or Schiller, but also alluded to figures who were considered reactionary: Gottfried Keller and, above all, Franz Grillparzer, ‘a writer who personifies the refusal of modernism and the faith in the moral virtues of the most traditional Austria.’<sup>7</sup>

To conclude this point, there were several ways of being a modernist in the beginning of the twentieth century in Austria. One of them was to fully belong to the modernist movement, another consisted in a critical attitude towards it, as in the case of Loos and Wittgenstein. In this latter case, as we will see, something else is expressed: the feeling of alienation from the new forms of arts and literature, and more generally from this new world.

## 2 Historicism and avant-garde in Musil's novel

Let us now encounter the position towards modernism Musil describes in the *Man without Qualities* through the main character whose name is Ulrich.

<sup>6</sup> Brian McGuiness, *Wittgenstein: a Life. Young Wittgenstein 1889-1921* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: The University of California Press, 1988), 37. McGuiness leaves out the names of Schopenhauer and Frege, also included in Wittgenstein's famous list. (Cf. CV, 19)

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Bouveresse, ‘Ludwig Wittgenstein: un moderniste résigné?’ in *Essais I* (Marseille: Agone, 2000), 98.

According to Walter H. Sokel, there is a tension in Musil's novel between historicism and avant-garde.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Vienna's architecture was characterized by its historicism, which found its inspiration in older styles (for instance, Greek and Roman classicism or baroque architecture),<sup>9</sup> and sometimes combined them in an eclectic way. In the novel, this aspect of Vienna is mentioned from time to time, but is also symbolized in the house Ulrich chooses, at the beginning of the story, when he comes back to the capital, after being abroad:

An old garden, still retaining some of its eighteenth- or even seventeenth-century character, with wrought-iron railings through which one could glimpse, in passing, through the trees on a well-clipped lawn, a sort of little château with short wings, a hunting lodge or rococo love nest of times past. More specifically, it was basically seventeenth century, while the park and the upper story showed an eighteenth century influence and the façade had been restored and somewhat spoiled in the nineteenth century, so that the whole had something blurred about it, like a double-exposed photograph. But the general effect was such that people invariably stopped and said: 'Oh!'<sup>10</sup>

This little castle is not exactly an instance of historicism, for its building really began in the seventeenth century, and is not a reconstruction of old styles. Yet, two facts in the description link the castle to historicism: the nineteenth-century restoration of the façade had spoiled it and a blurred aspect characterizes the whole. According to Walter H. Sokel, it symbolizes what the *Ringstrasse* in Vienna looks like with its neo-gothic town hall, the theatre's Renaissance façade, etc.

But the most important occurrence of historicism lies elsewhere in Musil's novel:

In *The Man without Qualities*, historicism has two contradictory consequences. On the one hand it leads to modernism, *i.e.* to the focusing on the modern as a unique historical turning point, a new beginning in human history, an entirely new language, which has not yet been spoken in the past millennia. On the other hand *The Man Without Qualities'* historicism leads to an idea close to Nietzsche's, the return of the same.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Walter H. Sokel, 'Historismus und Avantgarde. Zur zwiespältigen Bewertung der Moderne', in *Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, in *Hommage à Musil* eds. Bernard Böschstein and Marie-Louise Roth (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995), 145–57.

<sup>9</sup> On this point, see Carl Schorske's classical study, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna* (New York: Knopf, 1979).

<sup>10</sup> Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, vol. I [here MWQ I] (New York: Knopf, 1995), 6.

<sup>11</sup> Sokel, 'Historismus und Avantgarde', 148. My translation.

Indeed, one finds in the novel a description of the birth of modernism in reaction to historicism, which is considered as a period of ‘stagnation’:

The just-buried century in Austria could not be said to have covered itself with glory during its second half. It had been clever in technology, business, and science, but beyond these focal points of its energy it was stagnant and treacherous as a swamp. It had painted like the Old Masters, written like Goethe and Schiller, and built its houses in the style of the Gothic and the Renaissance. (MWQ I, §15, 52)

What is described here is the difference between the domain of art and literature and the domains of economy, technology and the sciences. Before modernism, the former domain was characterized by the reference to old masters or old styles, in opposition to invention and originality, and historicism has to be linked with this more general trend in art and literature. To build in a gothic or Renaissance style, at least in Austria, was just a part of a more general tendency in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is in this context that modernism appeared as a reaction to historicism:

And each time it is like a miracle when after such a shallow, fading period all at once there comes a small upward surge. Suddenly, out of the becalmed mentality of the nineteenth century’s last two decades, an invigorating fever rose all over Europe (53).

Musil describes here not only a particular phenomenon in the domain of art and literature, but a general movement that includes society, morality and politics as well, and which takes the form of a reaction to the period of stagnation. More precisely, what is described in the novel is a variety of reactions. The consequence is that in a way ‘no one knew exactly what was in the making; nobody could have said whether it was to be a new art, a new humanity, a new morality, or perhaps a reshuffling of society’ (53). But at the same time, all these various reactions shared the same origin: ‘These were certainly opposing and widely varying battle cries, but uttered in the same breath’ (53). This is an essential feature of modernism. It consists, indeed, in an abundance of inventions, sometimes moving in contradictory directions; what links all these war cries and what makes them modernist is this agonistic dimension.<sup>12</sup>

But on the other hand, the historicist point of view seems to affect every attempt to create something new, including modernism itself. In Musil’s novel,

AQ: Please provide the page number for reference Fried (1969)” in note 12.

<sup>12</sup> See Michael Fried, ‘Shape as Form: Franck Stella’s New Paintings’, in *New York Painting and Sculpture 1940-1970*, ed. H. Geldzahler (New York: Dutton, 1969).



the idea and the feeling of the perpetual transformation in culture and history, which are characteristic of historicism, are presented as dominant in society.<sup>13</sup> In other words, transformation is a permanent phenomenon. According to Sokel, it affects not only past centuries but also modernism. Sokel insists particularly on the fact that, as in every new movement, in modernism as well, the moment of creation was followed by a moment of trivialization. Thus, if before the First World War modernism went on expressing itself in a variety of forms, something changed after it: the impulse decreased. This is how Musil puts it:

Could one not say, in fact, that things have got better since then? Men who once merely headed minor sects have become aged celebrities; publishers and art dealers have become rich; new movements are constantly being started; everybody attends both the academic and the avant-garde shows, and even the avant-garde of the avant-garde; the family magazines have bobbed their hair; politicians like to sound off on the cultural arts, and newspapers make literary history. So what has been lost?

Something imponderable. An omen. An illusion. As when a magnet releases iron filings and they fall in confusion again. As when a ball of string comes undone. As when a tension slackens. As when an orchestra begins to play out of tune. (MWQ, §16, 56)

From Ulrich's point of view, in a way nothing had changed and perhaps things got even better, because artists went on creating and the spirit of modernism became dominant (for instance in painting, with the role of the exhibitions). But in another way, modernism institutionalized itself: the leaders became old glories, visiting modernist exhibitions became a habit and it was felt that something had been lost. According to Ulrich, this feeling may have originated in the predicament of the eternal return. Modernism, and all the sub-movements that belonged to it, do not escape the recurrence of that known phenomenon: everything new eventually gets back to normalcy.

This is the reason why Ulrich and his old friend Walter, an artist, distance themselves from this modernist movement of perpetual creation, each in his own different way. Walter becomes a bitter opponent of modernism; he prefers, for example, Richard Wagner over modern music, adopting a very conservative and pessimistic position. Ulrich, on the other hand, is not conservative but, rather, much more alienated from the alternative conservatism-modernism altogether.

<sup>13</sup> This implies that historicism could be defined in two ways: as a return to previous times and values in the domain of arts and literature, and as a peculiar point of view on history, which sees in it a perpetual transformation.

### 3 Feeling alienated from modernism and modernity

We can now justify the comparison between Wittgenstein and Musil, or indeed, Ulrich, Musil's character, despite the differences between them. It seems to me that what they have in common is this feeling of alienation from modernism and, as I shall argue, even from modernity. As I explained above, although Wittgenstein can be considered as belonging to a kind of critical modernism, in the tradition of Karl Kraus, he also distanced himself from representatives of critical modernism, such as Loos and, above all, Schönberg. He did not see them as rivals but could not understand their work. Ulrich's early involvement in modernism is the occasion to realize that 'it is always the same story': moments of creation, and then moments of decline. This leads him to feel withdrawn from the movement and the period. Thus, Wittgenstein's and Ulrich's reasons for feeling alienated are not exactly the same (an absence of understanding of the new language versus a feeling of vanity), but the consequences are similar, the same hostility towards modernism.

Moreover, one finds both in Wittgenstein and in Ulrich the same extension of this feeling towards modernity and towards modern times. Indeed, a distinction must be made between these three phenomena: modernism, modernity and modern times. In *Proust: Philosophy of the Novel*, Vincent Descombes suggests such a distinction. First, 'modern times' has mainly a philosophical meaning: it refers to the alliance between natural sciences and human emancipation since the Enlightenment. 'Modernity' refers to a new form of life, characterized, for instance, by the way of living in huge cities, the means of transportation, the industry, the newspapers. Finally, 'modernism' refers, above all, to a radical change in the arts, which occurred at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century: 'The modernist is the artist who feels compelled to overthrow the art forms handed down by tradition.'<sup>14</sup> There is no definite modernist style but a perpetual invention in the battlefield of the arts.

We saw that Wittgenstein and Ulrich felt alienated in their meeting with modernism; however, my contention is that this feeling was not limited to modernism but also affected their attitudes towards modernity and modern times. Indeed, in the well-known draft of the foreword to the *Philosophical Remarks*, printed in *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein describes the emergence not of a new

<sup>14</sup> Vincent Descombes, 'Notes on Concepts of Modernity', in *Proust. Philosophy of the Novel* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 135.

culture but of a state of non-culture, and this description coheres with what is described in Musil's novel and helps interpreting it. According to Wittgenstein, modernism has to be seen as a particular aspect of a more general transformation:

This book is written for those who are in sympathy with the spirit in which it is written. This spirit is, I believe, different from that of the prevailing European and American Civilization. The spirit of this civilization the expression of which is the industry, architecture, music, of present day fascism and socialism, is a spirit that is alien and uncongenial to the author. This is not a value judgement. It is not as though I did not know that what today represents itself as architecture is not architecture and not as though he did not approach what is called modern music with the greatest mistrust (without understanding its language), but the disappearance of the arts does not justify a disparaging judgement on a whole segment of humanity. (CV, 8)

Wittgenstein links modernism and modernity here in order to refer to the new architecture and the new music, and to present them within a more general framework. Judgements about architecture and music are mixed with considerations about politics, society and economy, in order to embrace a whole culture or, better, a whole civilization. Criticism of what is characteristic of this civilization can be found in later sections of *Culture and Value*, namely the central role given to the idea of progress:

Our civilization is characterized by the word progress. Progress is its form, it is not one of its properties that it makes progress. Typically it constructs. Its activity is to construct a more and more complicated structure. (CV, 9)

This idea must be applied to the different expressions and aspects of our civilization, that is to say, to economy, the sciences, and to the arts as well: Wittgenstein mentions architecture and music in the section quoted above. It could, therefore, be applied to modernism, even if this application is not really intelligible *prima facie*: the notion of progress in modernism could be more easily understood as a complication or a change of structure rather than a form of progress.

Nevertheless, this civilization, characterized by progress, became 'alien and uncongenial' to Wittgenstein, just as progress became 'alien' – but not exactly 'uncongenial' – to Ulrich in *The Man Without Qualities*. Indeed, the reality of progress in our time seems to him to be paradoxical:

We're undeniably making so much progress in the several branches of human capability that we actually feel we can't keep up with it! Isn't it possible that

this can also make us feel that there is no progress? After all, progress is surely the product of all our joint efforts, so we can practically predict that any real progress is likely to be precisely what nobody wants. ... It seems to me ... that every step forward is also a step backward. Progress always exists in only one particular sense. And since there's no sense in our life as a whole, neither is there such a thing as progress as a whole. (MWQ I, §102, 527–8)

Ulrich's view of progress is based on the difference between overall progress and specific instances of progress. There can be improvements in various branches of human capabilities and spheres of knowledge, but we do not feel overall progress: perhaps there is no such thing as progress of a whole. This is the reason why modern improvements became alien to Ulrich: they do not produce a unified advance and they do not generate a sense of life.

This may be how the following section of Wittgenstein's foreword quoted above, which is explicitly devoted to the emergence of a non-culture, ought to be understood:

For in these times genuine and strong characters simply turn away from the field of the arts and towards other things and *somehow* the value of the individual finds expression. Not, to be sure, in the way it would at a time of Great Culture. Culture is like a great organization which assigns to each of its members his place, at which he can work in the spirit of the whole, and his strength can with a certain justice be measured by his success as understood within that whole. In a time without culture, however, forces are fragmented and the strength of the individual is wasted through the overcoming of opposing forces and frictional resistances; it is not manifest in the distance travelled but rather perhaps in the heat generated through the overcoming of frictional resistances. But energy is still energy and even if the spectacle afforded by this age is not the coming into being of a great work of culture in which the best contribute to the same great end, so much as the unimposing spectacle of a crowd whose best members pursue purely private ends, still we must not forget that the spectacle is not what matters. (CV, 8f.)

In such a state of non-culture, or civilization, as Spengler would say, the efforts devoted to progress in each domain of life (science, technology, society, etc.) do not join into one direction. This section of Wittgenstein's foreword helps us understand what is at stake in the situation of Ulrich and Walter mentioned earlier. They feel that they no longer live in a great culture, and that there is no 'great organization' indicating each and every one its own place. Such an organization would normally enable individuals to contribute to the whole.

Ulrich and Walter conceive themselves as living in a context in which the artistic forces are conflicting and lack unity, and therefore lose their power because of their reciprocal resistances in artistic conflicts. The consequence is that they no longer believe in the potential of the arts, and this is what unites them, although the former is a conservative spirit and the latter an independent or 'ahistorical' one.

## 4 The problem of culture

Let us now consider what Wittgenstein and Ulrich propose to do once faced with this state of non-culture.

Reading Wittgenstein's biography, one is not surprised that Wittgenstein finds such a civilization and the importance it gives to progress as 'uncongenial'. But it is significant that he also says that it is 'alien' to him. Wittgenstein expressed the feeling that his cultural ideal was in a way connected to Austria's past, the beginning of the nineteenth century, Schumann's period:

I often wonder whether my cultural ideal is a new one, *i.e.* contemporary, or whether it comes from the time of Schumann. At least it strikes me as a continuation of that ideal, though not the continuation that actually followed it then. That is to say, the second half of the 19th Century has been left out. This, I ought to say, has happened quite instinctively and was not the result of reflection. (CV, 4)

But nothing in Wittgenstein's words implies or recommends a return to the past: he imagines his cultural ideal as a continuation of Schumann's period, even if it didn't become real. Therefore, he adopts a very peculiar attitude: a rejection of progress and of the way things are shaped in the present, but without any desire to go back to the past.

This echoes the situation Ulrich discovers in the first part of *The Man without Qualities*. Ulrich is depicted as having retired from his course of life in order to determine the direction he would like to give it. His father worries about him and his career, and therefore asks him to take on a secretary's role in the organization of the Jubilee celebrating the seventieth year of the reign of the emperor. In this organization, Ulrich is in charge of collecting people's ideas regarding the celebration of the Empire, practical ideas for the event (a march, an exhibition?). But, at the same time, the chosen idea would have to glorify the

Empire, to reveal its power and its nature, in order to give it a new direction. This experience eventually reveals the Empire's incapacity to find such an idea that would give it a new impulsion for the future.

Ulrich formulates then the more general problem of a culture with no direction, a problem that is similar to Wittgenstein's. In a discussion with one of the organizers, Diotima, his cousin, he describes what he and the Count Leinsdorf, another organizer, found:

He has only just come up with the discovery that in the history of mankind there is no turning back voluntarily. What makes it difficult is that going forward is not much use either. Permit me to say that we're in a very peculiar situation, unable to move either forward or backward, while the present moment is felt to be unbearable too. (MWQ I, §66, 294)

Ulrich and Leinsdorf are, indeed, confronted with two kinds of ideas and desires. The one could be expressed by 'back to ...' and the other by 'forward to ...'. But the desire to 'go back to ...' previous periods of history raises a problem: 'Things can never again be what they were, the way they were' (MWQ I, §58, 294). The aim of going back into the past is necessarily modified by the particular present circumstances in which this return takes place. These circumstances give a specific shape to what has already happened, so that there is never a true return to older values, social structures, etc. As for the desire to go 'forward to ...', the problem is precisely that people in the Empire do not agree on what their future could be. Therefore, the act of collecting such ideas, directed towards the past or the future, reveals and clarifies the disorientation of the people, who experience the present situation as senseless. According to Ulrich, this is the true problem of culture.

To a certain extent, Wittgenstein's remark in *Culture and Value* answers this predicament: Wittgenstein clearly refuses to choose between 'forward to ...' and 'back to ...', between progress and return to the past. What, then, does he propose, instead of these two options? The question is particularly problematic since his cultural ideal does not correspond to the situation in his present days either. On the one hand, Wittgenstein prefers leaving the world alone:

There are problems I never tackle, which do not lie in my path or belong to my world. Problems of the intellectual world of the West which Beethoven (and perhaps Goethe to a certain extent) tackled and wrestled with but which no philosopher has ever confronted (perhaps Nietzsche passed close to them). And perhaps they are lost to western philosophy, that is there will

be no one there who experiences and so can describe the development of this culture as an epic. ... But I do not get to these problems at all. When I 'have done with the world' I have created an amorphous (transparent) mass and the world in all its variety is left on one side like an uninteresting lumber room. Or perhaps more precisely: the whole outcome of the entire work is for the world to be set on one side. (A throwing-into-the-lumber-room of the whole world) (CV, 11–12)

The problems Wittgenstein is not confronted with are the problems of the West, that is to say, the problems of that European and American culture that is alien and uncongenial to him. That is the reason why he claims that he never tackles this kind of problems; that they do not lie in his path or belong to his world, etc. And his way of working in philosophy makes this world and its problems much more alien to him: it becomes an 'uninteresting lumber room' or it is thrown into a lumber-room.

But on the other hand, another position – much less radical and much closer to Ulrich – can be found in some of the paragraphs collected in *Culture and Value*. At the end of the foreword mentioned above, Wittgenstein says that he does not want to build something new, new structures or constructions as in the European and American civilization, but to have 'the foundations of possible buildings, transparently' before him (CV, 9). This does not mean leaving the world alone, but seeing in the utmost clarity the foundations of the present cultures and of other real and possible cultures, that is, to 'describe the "possibilities" of phenomena' (PI, §90).

Although there are obvious differences between him and Wittgenstein, Ulrich seems to adopt a similar attitude. He wants to achieve what he calls a 'secretary for precision and soul' that would be, in fact, an inventory of all human ideas and possibilities. This inventory is particularly crucial in his eyes, if one thinks about the difference between two general domains in human life: the domain of the sciences and the domain of feelings and thoughts, (artistic) creations, and possibilities or potentials of life. The variety of ideas in the sciences and their proliferation in life and creation do not have the same destiny:

He was on the verge of bringing up the neglected difference between the way in which various historical periods have developed the rational mind in their own fashion and the way they have kept the moral imagination static and closed off, also in their own fashion. He was on the verge of talking about this because it results in a line that rises, despite all scepticism, more or less steadily through all of history's transformations, representing the rational mind and

its patterns, and contrasting with a mound of broken shards of feelings, ideas, and potentials of life that were heaped up in layers just the way they were when they came into being, as eternal side issues, and that were always discarded. (MWQ II, §38, 1117)

The idea is that, among all the creations of the human spirit and human life, some contribute to progress, particularly in the sciences, but also in technology. But other creations, particularly artistic creations and creation of new possibilities of life, of ethics, are abandoned after they have been developed or lived. When we read the novel attentively, it seems that this problem has become more and more important since the rise of modernism and its many creations, reactions and the oppositions to it, oppositions to these oppositions, etc.

The idea of a description and an inventory of all the human creations, the new artistic and ethical possibilities, is opposed to the rejection of the world as a lumber-room: the human world with all its creations and possibilities does not have to be left aside, but is to be seen in its variety and in light of other possibilities.

To conclude, we would say that Wittgenstein and Musil's character, Ulrich, share a reaction to modernism that is particularly significant, in the sense that it expresses a common feeling of being a foreigner in this world, this culture, and in that it implies similar original answers: an attempt to describe and grasp the possibilities of this culture and other possibilities beyond it.