



INTERWAR VIENNA

CULTURE BETWEEN TRADITION
AND MODERNITY

EDITED BY DEBORAH HOLMES
AND LISA SILVERMAN

Interwar Vienna

Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture

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Deborah Holmes and Lisa Silverman



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Contents

| | |
|-----------------|-----|
| Acknowledgments | vii |
|-----------------|-----|

| | |
|---|---|
| Introduction: Beyond the Coffeehouse. Vienna as a Cultural Center between the World Wars <i>Deborah Holmes and Lisa Silverman</i> | 1 |
|---|---|

Part I: Cultural and Political Parameters

| | |
|---|----|
| 1: Cultural Parameters between the Wars: A Reassessment of the Vienna Circles <i>Edward Timms</i> | 21 |
| 2: “weiße Strümpfe oder neue Kutten”: Cultural Decline in Vienna in the 1930s <i>John Warren</i> | 32 |

Part II: Jewishness, Race, and Politics

| | |
|---|----|
| 3: “Wiener Kreise”: Jewishness, Politics, and Culture in Interwar Vienna <i>Wolfgang Maderthaner and Lisa Silverman</i> | 59 |
| 4: A City Regenerated: Eugenics, Race, and Welfare in Interwar Vienna <i>Paul Weindling</i> | 81 |

Part III: Cultural Forms

| | |
|--|-----|
| 5: Free Dance in Interwar Vienna <i>Andrea Amort</i> | 117 |
| 6: Hollywood on the Danube? Vienna and Austrian Silent Film of the 1920s <i>Alys X. George</i> | 143 |

- 7: Between Tradition and a Longing for the Modern:
Theater in Interwar Vienna 161
Birgit Peter
- 8: The Hegemony of German Music: Schoenberg's Vienna
as the Musical Center of the German-Speaking World 175
Therese Muxeneder

Part IV: Literary Case Studies

- 9: Anticipating Freud's Pleasure Principle? A Reading
of Ernst Weiss's War Story "Franta Zlin" (1919) 193
Andrew Barker
- 10: Facts and Fiction: Rudolf Brunngraber, Otto Neurath,
and Viennese *Neue Sachlichkeit* 206
Jon Hughes
- 11: The Viennese Legacy of Casanova: The Late
Erotic Writings of Arthur Schnitzler and Franz Blei 224
Birgit Lang
- 12: An Englishman Abroad: Literature, Politics, and Sex
in John Lehmann's Writings on Vienna in the 1930s 246
Robert Vilain
- Notes on the Contributors 267
- Index 271

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Introduction: Beyond the Coffeehouse. Vienna as a Cultural Center between the World Wars

Deborah Holmes and Lisa Silverman

Urban Myths

ANYONE WHO WALKS ALONG Vienna's Ringstrasse today cannot help but admire the grandiose architecture of the neo-Gothic Rathaus, the neo-classical Parliament, and the neo-Renaissance Opera House and immediately understand the city's reputation as a locus of former imperial glory. However, both the historicist buildings of the Ringstrasse and the memories of the empire that they were built to evoke belie another aspect of the city's history better represented by the four hundred equally imposing yet less centrally located blocks of council housing — the Wiener Gemeindebauten — found in districts beyond the Ring. The Karl-Marx-Hof and similar residential projects initiated by the city's Social Democrat administration during the years 1919–34 aimed to provide new, comprehensive living environments for the city's working class. Today they continue to stand as reminders of the fact that, during the years between the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Hitler's *Anschluss*, Vienna was the site of lasting cultural changes in areas such as housing, education, and the arts — all designed to rethink, reshape, and revitalize the urban population and to create a city offering the promise of a better life for as many of its inhabitants as possible.

Yet many of those who concern themselves with Vienna continue to overlook these and other changes during the interwar period. Our view of the city is colored by a barrage of clichés that often conceal its complex history as an urban center: its legendary charm and *Gemütlichkeit*, the coffeehouses and cakes, the notorious *Schmäh* (ironic wit) and *Schlamperei* (laissez-faire) of its population, not to mention their fascination with the aesthetics of death (as in the Viennese phrase “a schene Leich,” an attractive corpse). Alongside and not entirely unrelated to these popular city myths, another influential mythology has grown up among cultural historians of the Ringstrasse period and Vienna's glamorous fin de siècle. This is almost invariably presented as a golden age of cosmopolitanism, when subcultures be-

came mainstream and the effects of Viennese innovations reverberated around the world. Most often evoked by the names and achievements of a series of great men (Sigmund Freud, Gustav Mahler, Arnold Schoenberg, Gustav Klimt, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Arthur Schnitzler), this view of Vienna is not only an idealized version of the *fin de siècle* itself but has become so overdetermined that it is fixed in our imaginations as the example par excellence of modern cultural intersections in Austria's capital, eclipsing all others.¹

As a testament to the enduring, widespread appeal of this image of the city, the architectural historian Peter Hall opened his seminal 1998 study of the world's most noteworthy urban buildings with a quotation from Stefan Zweig's nostalgic reflection on the Vienna of his *fin-de-siècle* childhood:

The old palaces of the court and the nobility spoke history in stone. Here Beethoven had played at the Lichnowskys', at the Estherhazys' Haydn had been a guest, there in the old University Haydn's *Creation* had resounded for the first time, the Hofburg had seen generations of emperors, and Schönbrunn had seen Napoleon. In the *Stefansdom* the united lords of Christianity had knelt in prayers of thanksgiving for the salvation of Europe from the Turks; countless great lights of science had been within the walls of the University. In the midst of all this, the new architecture reared itself proudly and grandly with glittering avenues and sparkling shops.²

Notably both Zweig and Hall chose to stress the role of tradition in the impression given by *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, which is made to epitomize the way in which a city's past can feed into its innovative present. More notable still, Hall insisted that Zweig's *Die Welt von Gestern* (The World of Yesterday, 1943), written in exile in Brazil, is the most moving and perceptive description of a "golden urban age" that resulted when the city's population allowed the participation of Jews in its modern cultural achievements: "For the Viennese golden age in its ultimate florescence was peculiarly a creation of that Jewish society: a society of outsiders who, for all too brief a time, had become insiders."³ That a contemporary history of world architecture opens with a reference to Jewish creativity in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna points to the unique resonance of this city myth. Its power is such that it either precludes interest in later, seemingly less glorious and more problematic periods or else they are somehow subsumed into the *fin-de-siècle* myth, according to which, from the 1880s right up to the *Anschluss* in 1938, Vienna is portrayed as a hotbed of avant-garde culture where everybody mixed regardless of background, resulting in the creation of world-class music, art, science, and literature. How else could Ronald Lauder — creator of the prestigious Neue Galerie Museum in New York City and the purchaser of Klimt's portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer for a record sum of \$135 million in 2006 on its behalf⁴ — describe Vienna as a "fabulous place" before the Nazis came to power and ruined everything?⁵

In many respects it is no surprise that research on the fin de siècle tends to eclipse the interwar period. Vienna between the wars has been an unpopular object of study for the same reasons that fin-de-siècle Vienna is popular: the fin de siècle, transfigured by nostalgia, represents Austria's swan song under the monarchy, a prosperous, seemingly peaceful age characterized by a globally acclaimed boom in the arts, a time of cultural success and productivity.⁶ During the First Republic, by contrast, Vienna was rocked by financial crises; unemployment doubled between 1929 and 1933, and the suicide rate increased.⁷ Modernism became more and more problematic both politically and otherwise, and antisemitism took on a new and more threatening dynamic. The city maintained its picturesque exterior in many respects, but it was no longer possible to overlook the hardship and enmities beneath the surface. Nevertheless, interwar Vienna occupied such an unforgettable place in the memories of those who lived there that author and eyewitness Gregor von Rezzori (1914–98) questioned whether anyone who had not experienced it would be able to fathom its unique and contradictory tensions:

Wer nicht gelebt hat im damaligen Paradoxon des Neben-, Mit- und Ineinanders von tiefer Skepsis und irrationalster Verheißung, von schwärzestem Pessimismus und stürmischem Willen zur Welterneuerung, konservativstem Schönheitssinn und brutalem Ikonoklasmus, von Eleganz und Verlotterung, unbefangenenstem Luxus und demütig hingenommener Armut — wer nicht die Spannung dieser Widersprüche in sein Innenleben eingeatmet hat, der sollte imstande sein, es nachzuempfinden?⁸

[Anyone who has not lived through the paradoxes of that time, the coexistence, interaction and merging of deep skepticism and the most irrational hopes for the future, of the blackest pessimism and passionate commitment to world renewal, of the most conservative aesthetics and brutal iconoclasm, of elegance and impoverishment, of ostentatious luxury and humbly accepted destitution — how can anyone who has not absorbed the tension of these contradictions in their innermost being understand what they were like?]

For von Rezzori, who lived in Vienna from 1927 to 1938, understanding the city's cultural climate requires sensitivity not only toward the violent social and political events of that time and place but also with respect to its peculiar and pervasive intellectual and aesthetic atmosphere.

It is undeniable that in the volatile years from 1918 to 1938 issues such as politics and labor often overshadowed the concerns of art, literature, and culture that had occupied such a dominant position in the period immediately preceding the First World War. However, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the ensuing turmoil in no way resulted in an abandonment of art and culture, as has sometimes been assumed. Rather, it

led to new forms of expression and reflection in literature, theater, music, dance, scholarship, and many other areas. In other words, much that was culturally significant occurred in Vienna in the 1920s and 1930s. A closer examination of the city at this time presents us with a unique combination of persisting urban and artistic myths alongside intense social change. Post-1918 Vienna may not have been able to compete with its own Habsburg past either strategically or in terms of social glamour, but it nevertheless remained a major — if ultimately doomed — center of cultural innovation.

The perception of these years in Vienna's history has been dogged by another recurring Viennese stereotype, namely, that the city never changes — or at least is peculiarly resistant to modernization. In *Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit*, for example, Hermann Broch portrayed Vienna as inherently moribund, incapable of facing the challenges of a new century. He made a very unfavorable comparison between the British Empire under Queen Victoria and Emperor Franz Josef's Austria:

Doch während England kraft seiner politisch-ökonomisch und kulturellen Resistenzkraft die viktorianische Tradition weiter aufrecht hielt und offenbar imstande ist, sie evolutionistisch in die neue Zeit überzuführen, fehlte in Österreich und besonders in Wien eine solche Resistenz: die Abschiedsstimmung, von der die Habsburgermonarchie seit Dezennien umfungen war, hatte sie den Tod vergessen lassen, und all die Menetekel, mit denen der Geist des 20. Jahrhunderts sich angekündigt hatte, waren unbeachtet geblieben; nirgendwo war man nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg dem Neuen weniger gewachsen als in Wien.⁹

[But whereas England, thanks to the political, economic, and cultural powers of resistance it had built up, was able to maintain the Victorian tradition and is now obviously capable of carrying it forward into a new period/era and evolving it further, this strength was lacking in Austria and particularly in Vienna. The valedictory mood that had enveloped the Habsburg monarchy for decades made it oblivious to death, and to all the writing on the wall that had proclaimed the spirit of the twentieth century; following the First World War there was nowhere less prepared for the new than Vienna.]

Broch's insistence on Vienna's inflexibility led him to reject as inherently "un-Viennese" the signs of artistic and cultural innovation that already were undeniably present in the city, such as the modernist buildings of Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos: "In einer schier mystischen Weise war diese Stadt [. . .] nicht mehr erneuerbar; was in ihr an Neuem errichtet wurde, gehörte nicht mehr zu ihr" (The way in which the city resisted renewal was positively mystical; anything new that was erected didn't belong there anymore).¹⁰ Broch's presentation of the city was, of course, tailored to his idiosyncratic analysis of Hofmannsthal and pessimistic view of the culture that had failed to protect him and his contemporaries from National Socialism. However,

an unwillingness to look for or even recognize cultural modernity in Vienna between the wars still persists up to the present day. This is particularly striking when, as is so often the case, Vienna is compared to Berlin, German-speaking culture's other major capital. Vienna, so the stereotype goes, is content to "be," to maintain and strengthen its traditional characteristics, whereas dynamic Berlin is in a constant state of "becoming."¹¹

In order to prove itself worthy of study, then, interwar Vienna not only has to face down the notion that anything of cultural significance occurred in the years preceding the First World War, but also that during the interwar years everything of cultural significance happened in Berlin. According to historian Marcus Gräser, the contrast of "old" and "new" became an indispensable mechanism in debating urban identity from the mid nineteenth century onward, soon followed by comparisons between individual cities along the same axis of past versus present. He presents these comparisons as a constitutive element of modern urban discourse.¹² There can be no doubt, however, that their polarizing nature has cemented the stereotype of Vienna as a backwater, overshadowed after the catastrophe of the First World War by culturally innovative Berlin. There are, of course, many factors that seem to substantiate this view. Berlin in the 1920s was experiencing its heyday, with global cultural implications — as had Vienna twenty years earlier — and there was a huge creative exodus from the Austrian to the German capital.¹³ Vienna was reeling from the collapse of the monarchy, which marked the end of centuries of continuous court tradition. The loss of many Habsburg crown lands — Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Galicia, the Bukovina and so on — cut the city off from the creative and economic potential of its historical hinterland. Conversely, out of the ashes of imperial Vienna the Social Democratic "Red Vienna" rose with amazing speed and efficiency from 1919 onward — a city of modern welfare and administrative reform, new housing projects, and exemplary sports, library, and adult education services.¹⁴ While it is true that in some respects Berlin did overshadow the Austrian capital, the fact that seminal periodicals such as Karl Kraus's satirical periodical *Die Fackel* were published in Vienna between 1899 and 1936 proves that it continued to influence cultural life beyond the borders of the new Austrian republic. Kraus's cultural critique and his lecture circuit remained centered on Vienna, although they both increasingly encompassed Berlin, Prague, and other European cities.¹⁵

The major exhibition *Modernism, 1914–1939* held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London during the summer of 2006 contained additional proofs of Vienna's contribution to the European modernist movement as a whole.¹⁶ Photographs of the Geroge-Washington-Hof and the Karl-Marx-Hof — with their communal laundry facilities, crèches, and kindergartens — demonstrated the positive achievements of Red Vienna, a model that was copied by local authorities all over Europe. From Austrians already working abroad there was Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's famous "Frankfurter Küche"

(Frankfurt kitchen), designed to offer maximum utility in a limited space, and a photograph of Richard Neutra's Nesbitt House in Los Angeles. In the section "Technology and the Machine and Its Reflection in Art" scenes from Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* were shown, but it might equally have included Max Brandt's opera *Machinist Hopkins* and Gertrud Bodenwieser's dance "Dämon Maschine." Excerpts from *Berlin: Sinfonie einer Großstadt* were shown, a film based on an idea of the Austrian Carl Mayer, hailed in Germany as the foremost writer for the silent screen. Modernism in the theater was represented by Friedrich Kiesler's "Raumbühne" (space stage), a key construct of the Vienna Music and Theater Festival of 1924, as well as by a photograph from the *Ausstellung internationaler Theatertechnik* (Exhibition of Modern Theater Technology) that had also been part of the festival.¹⁷ The section "Health and Body Culture" could also have included many examples from Vienna in the 1920s and early 1930s, including swimming pools, the Prater stadium (built in 1931), and the mass gatherings devoted to physical exercise — all of which were captured for posterity by Vienna's brilliant photographers.¹⁸ Vienna in the 1920s was clearly not just the backward-looking, traumatized, conservative "Wasserkopf Wien" (city with water on the brain) of right-wing memory.

The present volume does not seek to prove that Vienna was either more or less innovative than Berlin — or, indeed, than any other European city during the interwar period. Vienna did not, of course, exist in isolation after the fall of the monarchy, and there are strong arguments for considering its cultural development within a Central European paradigm for the period in question.¹⁹ Nevertheless, in order to analyze and refute, to some extent, the various myths and stereotypes, the essays that follow concentrate on Vienna itself and consider its interwar development on its own merits.

Between the Wars: Problems of Periodization

Hermann Broch's pessimism toward Vienna in the twentieth century was also a result of his chosen periodization, which divided European culture according to a grand timeline. Seen as the tail end of a millennium of history, the interwar period was bound to appear insignificant and enervated.²⁰ Although our chosen time span is minute by comparison, it is fraught with its own difficulties and implications. By drawing attention to the years 1918 to 1938, we are following a tradition of dividing fields of inquiry into the past along major turning points that shaped the course of history in Central Europe and beyond. We do so with an awareness of the inherent limitations of such a traditional historiographical approach, which risks downplaying important continuities in the political, intellectual, and artistic culture that characterized European life both before and after the wars. Recently some innovative historians of Central Europe have begun to refocus their studies in favor of transcending traditional chronological boundaries. For example, in her re-

cent book *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968*,²¹ Marci Shore examines shifts in the political and artistic allegiances of a generation of Polish intellectuals in Warsaw from the 1920s all the way up to 1968. In doing so she attempts to avoid viewing the Second World War as a period of “absolute discontinuity,” instead focusing on how the entire period combined ruptures in narrative histories with the maturation of intellectual and artistic ideas and trends. This is particularly relevant in her study of Central European refugees and emigrants, for whom shifts in Marxist ideology represented much more than patterns of political loyalty.

While we also view the effects of the world wars as crucial, yet not absolute, the specific political events that affected Vienna between the wars were not only closely linked to shifts in art, culture, and philosophy but formed much of the basis for their reshaping. Not only the end of the First World War and the onset of fascist ideology leading up to the *Anschluss* in 1938 but also Austria's “failed revolution” in November 1918, the elections of 1919, the collapse of the Viennese stock market in 1924, the burning of the Palace of Justice in 1927, and the banning of the Social Democrats in 1934 are all vital for a proper understanding of why Vienna's culture developed as it did in the 1920s and 1930s. As even this brief outline of events shows, the smallest of period divisions still contains within itself a plethora of other possible cutoff points that themselves can be misleading. For example, the Austro-fascist putsch of February 1934 may appear to represent a clear break in Vienna's history, and it certainly precipitated a general cultural decline, as John Warren argues in the second essay of this volume. However, the putsch itself was merely the culmination of the ongoing conflict between the Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei (Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria, or SDAPÖ), which reigned supreme in Vienna, and the conservative Christlich-Soziale Partei (Christian Social Party), which remained dominant in the provinces. The final crisis is prefigured in a strikingly visual manner in the pages of the Social Democrats' official press organ, the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, which for most of the interwar period contrived not only to be a party publication but also Vienna's most important intellectual daily, alongside the *Neue Freie Presse*.²² On 8 March 1933 the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* first reported on restrictions of the press and right of assembly. On 19 March 1933 the newspaper's entire front page was already empty, wiped cleaned by the censors. From 26 March 1933 onward the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* was placed under *Vorzensur* (pre-emptive censorship) and invariably appeared with large expanses of blank space. Thus, long before the events of February 1934 the Christian Social regime had already made serious inroads on the basic freedoms of Red Vienna.

Vienna between the wars offers a test case of how the intellectual and cultural life of a city responded to threatened and actual political destabilization. Although neither of the world wars represented events of absolute discontinuity in terms of culture, politics, or art, their effects lent a special character to the intervening two decades, between a time of perceived social

stability and burgeoning democracy, on the one hand, and growing political violence and imminent dictatorship, on the other. As the essays in this volume reveal, an intense consciousness of being “in between,” of representing a provisional state of affairs, informed many of the creative and social products of the interwar period. Initially this sense of being in a state of transition could be positive, as it was for the Social Democrats, who believed they were moving one step closer to an ideal socialist society, or indeed for German nationalists, who felt Austria should now work toward becoming or joining a solely German nation. In some cases the uncertainty of the times triggered nostalgia for the predictability of the old Empire.²³ It often also took the form of growing apprehension regarding the future of European society and politics. None of these possible responses remained mutually exclusive; it was perfectly possible to find optimism, nostalgia, and apprehension in any single reaction from practically any political viewpoint.²⁴ The entire First Austrian Republic itself was seen by representatives of various political camps as a rootless provisorium, artificially divorced from its true cultural context by the Entente’s refusal to permit *Anschluss* with Germany in 1919.²⁵ Vienna was suddenly out of all proportion as a capital, a city of almost two million inhabitants oddly placed at the far eastern edge of a new alpine republic whose total population numbered six million. The Viennese had become strangers in a strange land. Their new instability is indicated by the mixed metaphors they used to describe the feeling of, on the one hand, being restricted, tied down to a reduced geographical hinterland, and, on the other, of floundering, of being cut loose from the polyglot context that had shaped them. Although the Social Democrats stood to gain most from the new developments in several important respects, reactions in the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* nevertheless encapsulate this general anxiety quite clearly, as in the following anonymous commentary published on 25 October 1918 and entitled “Inland und Ausland,” in which the psychological and physical problems of the time are inextricably linked:

Die Grenzpflocke der Staaten knicken im Sturme des Weltkrieges und schwimmen hin und her in seiner Flut. Das Stück Polen scheint von Österreich schon weggeschwemmt zu sein, denn niemand bei uns wird mehr zweifeln, daß Krakau bereits Ausland ist; Und vorgestern ist’s Agram gewesen und auch Preßburg ist wirkliches Ausland. [. . .] Krakauer Würste [. . .] und Prager Schinken sind jetzt Auslandsware geworden und uns noch unzugänglicher als Südtiroler Aepfel und Weine, die auch schon ins Ausland wandern. Ueberhaupt schwimmt immer mehr Ware ins Ausland, denn ganz abgesehen vom Schleichhandel rücken uns ja die Auslandsgrenzen immer näher. Viele unserer lieben Wiener, die gute Inländer waren ihr Leben lang, sind über Nacht Ausländer geworden und haben unsere Staatsbürgerschaft verloren; wohin man sieht, gibt es lauter “fremde” Gesichter. Hohe Staatsbeamte und selbst Minister sind nun überwiegend Auslandsmenschen geworden, ja

sogar in der Armee sind nun überwiegend Ausländer eingereiht. Es ist ein förmliches Wettrennen ins Ausland einzutreten, womit nicht etwa die hohen Persönlichkeiten gemeint sind und unterschiedliche Leute, die zum Beispiel in der Schweiz Zuflucht suchen in ihrer übereiligen Angst, sondern die Selbstbestimmer, die nun die Ausländer in Österreich vermehren. Das Ausländertum nimmt derzeit eine solche Ausdehnung an, daß man bald nicht weiß, ob man daheim Ausländer oder Inländer ist.²⁶

[The storm of the world war has snapped state border posts and tosses them to and fro in its floods. The bit of Poland seems already to have been washed away from Austria, for none of us doubts anymore that Cracow is now part of another country; and yesterday it was Agram [Zagreb] and even Preßburg [Bratislava] has become truly foreign. [. . .] Cracow sausages [. . .] and Prague hams have now become foreign produce and even less accessible to us than apples and wine from the South Tyrol [Alto Adige], which have also taken themselves off to foreign climes. More and more wares are being washed away to other countries, for, quite apart from the smuggling, the borders of other countries are moving closer and closer to us. Many of our dear Viennese, who had been worthy natives of this country their whole lives, have become foreigners overnight and have lost our citizenship; “foreign” faces wherever you look. The majority of high-up state officials and even ministers have become foreigners; indeed, even the ranks of the army are mostly full of foreigners. There is a positive race to get abroad, by which we don’t mean the high and mighty and various people who, for example, have sought refuge in Switzerland with unseemly haste and fear, but rather the self-determiners who increase the number of foreigners in Austria. At the moment, there is such an expansion of foreignness that soon we won’t know if we are foreigners at home or not].

In their study of Viennese feuilletonists working in Berlin, Christian Jäger and Erhard Schütz conclude that — at least from the outside — Vienna continued to be perceived as a “Stadt der Fremden” (city of strangers or foreigners) throughout the 1920s, full of both rich tourists and poor migrants.²⁷ The tourists came and went according to the vagaries of the currency market, whereas the migrants remained a permanent feature. They quote from Emil Faktor’s article of 18 April 1924 entitled “Drei Tage Wien,” which was published in the *Berliner Börsen Courier*:

Die Physiognomie der Straße [. . .] ist von schleichenden und friedlos umherschweifenden Zufallsgestalten beherrscht, die der Osten oder Süden auf die Hinterlassenschaft glorreicher Vorkriegszeiten losließ. Der ewige Jude Ahasver oder Revenants aus dem Reich der Untoten?

[The physiognomy of the city [. . .] is dominated by random, creeping figures who restlessly wander around, come from the East or the South to prey on the legacy of glorious prewar times. The eternal Jew Ahasver or revenants from the realm of the undead?]

For better or worse, Vienna was the only place where elements of the former empire could continue to exist as such, a possible anchor for a multicultural Austrian identity cast adrift, with a marked identification of foreigners as Jews.

One final important factor of our chosen periodization remains to be mentioned, relevant both to its geographical limitation and to its potentially awkward brevity. The “in-between” nature of interwar Vienna is intensified by our retrospective knowledge of the National Socialist catastrophe: so many of the city’s protagonists were soon to flee or to be murdered. This knowledge should not be allowed to predetermine our analysis of their aspirations, achievements, and failures with the sense of an inescapable negative teleology. Nevertheless, the effects are undeniable at all levels, from the dispersal of archival material to the annihilation of eyewitnesses. This constitutes another major difference between research on fin-de-siècle Vienna and research on the interwar period, both in terms of the available sources and the psychological resonance of the periods in question. Although many of the gaps in Vienna’s cultural history left by National Socialism have gradually been filled in over the past two to three decades,²⁸ almost every essay in this volume shows that many more still remain to be investigated, from Birgit Peter’s analysis of Vienna’s theater world during the interwar period to Paul Weindling’s consideration of eugenics and welfare. Scores of Vienna’s cultural figures died a double death during the interwar period, first in 1934 and then again in 1938–39; their legacies were destroyed and their possessions scattered. Our aim is to revisit the vibrancy and diversity of the culture they worked in, without succumbing to a primarily memorializing approach.

By examining in detail a number of overlapping and contingent cultural products of the era, this volume brings to light important concerns in Austrian cultural history that have been underrepresented in existing studies. Research on the era has benefited greatly from the work of individual scholars, who have addressed the interwar period from a political (Anson Rabinbach and Helmut Gruber), architectural (Eve Blau), and literary (Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler) perspective, to name only a few major areas of research.²⁹ Rather than focusing on any single aspect, the contributors to this volume explore the interconnectedness of public events and personal lives — including the related political and social influences that shaped the cultural products of these years — in order to shed new light on the Viennese interwar period as a distinct chronological and geographical entity.

City of Jews — City without Jews?

Interwar Vienna saw a major shake-up of national, political, cultural, and religious identities. This activity formed a crucial backdrop not only for new cultural forms³⁰ but also for new forms of older social problems, such as xenophobia, religious intolerance, and antisemitism. For Austria’s Jews, most

of whom lived in Vienna, the collapse of the Empire meant losing a secure system of identification. Before the First World War, historian Marsha Rozenblit claims, Jews were able to lead a tripartite existence as proud members of the German *Kulturnation*, loyal citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and also as Jews.³¹ After the war, however, they were confronted with a theoretically homogeneous nation-state that demanded a new kind of loyalty, a more exclusive identity as “Austrians,” to which Jews could not reconcile themselves so easily. While the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the ensuing political and social changes profoundly affected all Austrians, Jews in Vienna were affected more than most as incidents of anti-semitism increased and Jews were treated as scapegoats for the loss of the war.³² Forced to renegotiate their previous identities, they responded in several different ways, including the previously mentioned nostalgic turn to the past and a longing for the Habsburg Empire. Their confusion also accounted for increased Zionist participation after the First World War, coupled with a new sense of ethnic pride that led many Jews to support Yiddish culture.³³ Still others, however, officially left the Jewish faith. Vienna’s Jewish conversion rate, which rose in the decades immediately before the First World War, was higher than in any other city in Europe.³⁴

As so many of the essays in this volume show, Jewish reactions to the political and social crises in the years following the First World War encompassed a wide spectrum, from a wholehearted embrace to total abnegation of Jewishness. Ironically, those with the least concern for overt Jewish identification often led the way in constructing a new, inclusive cultural and political identity, thus reinforcing their affiliation to a secular, acculturated Jewish subculture. This was true, for example, of many of the Social Democrats who were instrumental in the creation of Red Vienna. To return to our architectural tour of the city, Eve Blau describes the Socialist housing blocks of the interwar period as embodiments of the spirit of the age, incorporating workers’ dwellings “with kindergartens, libraries, medical and dental clinics, laundries, workshops, theaters, cooperative stores, public gardens, sports facilities and a wide range of other public facilities.”³⁵ They demonstrate in bricks and mortar the blending of culture and politics, public and private life, that characterized Red Vienna. Anson Rabinbach likewise emphasizes how attractive the cultural “public sphere” became for Social Democratic Party leaders in lieu of political power, as shown by the many party publications and hundreds of *Vereine* (clubs) for leisure activities, which strongly appealed to those shut out of the national government. As Rabinbach writes, “in lieu of political power in the Republic, the prospect of directing political and organizational vigor into the construction of a model city in Vienna was extremely attractive for the Socialist leadership.”³⁶

Given the city’s location between eastern and western Europe, plus the transitory nature of the interwar period, the role of Jews as a cultural force in interwar Vienna provides a unique perspective on Jewish historical studies in

general and Jewish cultural history in Vienna in particular. As Wolfgang Maderthaner and Lisa Silverman's essay shows, there is a need for more detailed study of some of the basic assumptions underlying previous research in this area. For example, why did so many Viennese Jews not only join but also lead the Social Democratic Party during the interwar period? Previous studies have emphasized the lack of alternative political affiliations open to Jews as the prime motivating factor.³⁷ However, more recent studies indicate that their drive and passion for the party was also linked to their identities as secular Jews during the interwar period.³⁸ How were new creative niches for Jews — and those perceived as Jews — opened and maintained during the interwar period? Jews were at the forefront of many new cultural developments of the time, whether aimed at the conservation of tradition (for example, Max Reinhardt and Hugo von Hofmannsthal's contribution to the founding of the Salzburg Festival), or at innovation (Schoenberg's creation of twelve-tone music). Moreover, there was an increase in the presence of Jewish women in cultural and artistic professions. For example, photography became a surprisingly viable career option for numerous Viennese Jewish women during the interwar period, as Trude Fleischmann's development of new visual and technological opportunities shows. Free dance, as described in the essay by Andrea Amort, also offered a forum where women — and, in particular, Jewish women — were able to fulfill their creative potential in Vienna's public sphere.

Nevertheless, antisemitism also increased and must be considered alongside the development of innovative culture by Jews and non-Jews alike. The interwar period saw the publication of Hugo Bettauer's novel *Stadt ohne Juden* (City without Jews, 1922), the film version of which is discussed in the essay by Alys George. Bettauer envisioned a fictional Vienna minus its Jewish population. When Jews are forced to leave the city and non-Jews take over the shops, restaurants, banks, and all other aspects of urban life, everything grinds to a halt and the city becomes a ghost of its former self, its population reduced to dressing in outmoded garb rather than the fashionable clothing once provided by Jewish businesses. Bettauer's work may have been intended as satire, but its narrative counters the giddy assumption that all "outsiders" were "insiders" in pre-*Anschluss* Vienna. His assassination in 1925 by a man supported by the National Socialists renders the persistence of antisemitism undeniable and foreshadows the violent forms it would take a little over a decade later.

Antisemitism, however, had been institutionalized under the First Republic long before Hitler marched into Austria. Though later downplayed by his biographers, the antisemitic views of Jesuit priest Ignaz Seipel, leader of the conservative Christian Social Party for most of the interwar period and Austrian chancellor from 1926 to 1929, greatly influenced party politics.³⁹ The rhetoric of his party frequently misused Austria's majority religion of Catholicism for political purposes, pitting Catholic Christians against Jews.⁴⁰ Jewish intellectuals from the capital were regularly forced to register aggres-

sion toward them often more evident in the conservative provinces than in the Social Democrat-run city.⁴¹ Unsurprisingly, this was most apparent when city people left home for the holidays. As early as 1921 an “Arierparagraph” (clause restricting membership to non-Jews) was inserted into the bylaws of the alpine hiking club Austria. The journalist Alice Schalek, a club member who came from an assimilated, bourgeois Jewish family of avid hikers, wrote an article defending the right of Jews to belong to such groups, claiming they were among the most loyal to the state — to no avail.⁴² As Therese Muxeneder writes in her essay on Arnold Schoenberg, a holiday incident involving antisemitism in Mattsee in 1921 led the composer to question his conversion and reconsider his role as a Jewish innovator of German music.

An increasingly brutal form of antisemitism in the Austrian system is also illustrated by a case that became known as the Austrian Dreyfus affair. Philipp Halsmann, a young Jew from Lithuania, was unjustly incarcerated for over two years for the murder of his father following overtly antisemitic accusations and insults during two trials. The events began in September 1928, when Halsmann and his father, Max, went on a hiking vacation in the Tyrolean Alps near Innsbruck. After Max Halsmann suddenly collapsed, Philipp ran to a nearby inn for help. While he was gone, his father was murdered and robbed. After the burial — which, in keeping with Jewish tradition, took place as soon as possible — an innkeeper accused Halsmann of patricide, claiming he had disposed of the body quickly to avoid detection. As a result of these antisemitic accusations, as well as the media frenzy that developed soon thereafter, on 16 December 1928 Halsmann was found guilty of the crime by order of an Innsbruck court.⁴³ Following a subsequent trial in 1929, Halsmann, who had been imprisoned since September, 1928, was sentenced to four years in jail. Although it occurred in the provinces, his trial mobilized such prominent Jewish intellectuals in Vienna as Jakob Wasserman, whose open letter to the president of Austria on Halsmann’s behalf appeared on the front page of the *Neue Freie Presse* on 27 October 1929, and Sigmund Freud, who publicly refuted the prosecution’s attempt to implicate Halsmann in his father’s murder based on his theory of the Oedipus complex.⁴⁴ It was only after their and others’ intervention that he was finally pardoned in 1930.⁴⁵ According to Martin Ross, whose father’s articles on the case appeared regularly in the *Neue Freie Presse*, the Halsmann affair polarized the residents of Vienna, with Jews congregating at coffeehouses to discuss the topic among themselves until a Gentile approached their table.⁴⁶ These incidents attest not only to rising tide of antisemitism in the interwar period but also to the ongoing distinctions made in Vienna, where, despite their full participation in Austrian culture, Jews were still considered different from non-Jewish Austrians.

As this brief overview has shown, the events and debates that shaped Viennese culture between 1918 and 1938 were pervaded by paradoxes and

extremes, from neopositivism to cultural pessimism, reactionary Catholicism to Austro-Marxism, and late Enlightenment liberalism to rabid antisemitism. Despite Gregor von Rezzori's doubts that interwar Vienna could only be adequately understood by those who had experienced the tensions inherent in these contradictions, this volume nevertheless aims to address them from the standpoint of tradition versus modernity. These terms, which can be understood in many different ways, underlie the cultural and political debates of the period.

Both essays in Part I further investigate issues already touched on in this introduction, namely, the problems of periodization and of defining the culture of complex urban networks articulated and informed by historical events. To this end, Edward Timms revisits his work on Karl Kraus's Vienna, suggesting ways in which his approach might be extended to further illustrate the interactions — financial, cultural, personal, and otherwise — which defined the city's unique dynamic. John Warren takes an interdisciplinary approach to the effects of February 1934 on Viennese culture, comparing and contrasting its development under the Social Democrats and the Austro-fascists. Part II turns more specifically to the political climate of the interwar years and its intersections with developing theories about race and difference, focusing on links between the city's socialist cultural experiments and Jewishness (Wolfgang Maderthaner and Lisa Silverman), as well as connections between welfare and race theory (Paul Weindling). Part III features essays on the implications of change and innovation in four fields of cultural production: free dance (Andrea Amort), film (Alys George), theater (Birgit Peters), and music (Therese Muxeneder). Part IV provides detailed analyses of text-based cultural creativity, examining works by the authors Ernst Weiss (Andrew Barker), Rudolf Brunngraber (Jon Hughes), Arthur Schnitzler and Franz Blei (Birgit Lang), and John Lehmann (Robert Vilain). All these case studies shed new light both on the works and individuals in question and on the general cultural framework of interwar Vienna, whether it be Brunngraber's Viennese variant of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, the stylistic eclecticism of Gertrud Bodenwieser's choreography, or the outsider view John Lehmann provides on the events of February 1934.

Although the exquisite aestheticism of the fin de siècle was a living memory for many of these individuals, it had been replaced by an interdisciplinarity that often had more to do with financial necessity or political allegiance than choice. The fall of the Habsburg Monarchy had liberated Vienna in many respects, particularly as regards civil and political rights and the opening up of possibilities for social reform. These new freedoms provided unprecedented scope for innovation — albeit for a limited time and only insofar as the economic and political pressures of the period allowed. In Karl Kraus's typically disparaging view, the Viennese character was held in permanent stasis by a combination of passivity and irresponsibility.⁴⁷ However, as this volume demonstrates, during the years 1918–38 the Viennese

responded to the opposing forces buffeting their city not with inertness but with dynamism.

Notes

¹ This is the case across a spectrum that ranges from academia to marketing the city to tourists. As Monika Sommer notes: “Wien um 1900’ ist mittlerweile alltäglich omnipresent und gilt oftmals als Qualitätsmerkmal, das eine scheinbare gelungene Verbindung zwischen Tradition und Moderne suggeriert.” “Imaging Vienna — Das Surplus von Wien: Stadterzählungen zwischen Ikonisierung und Pluralisierung,” in *Imaging Vienna: Innensichten — außersichten — stadterzählungen*, ed. Monika Sommer, Marcus Gräser, and Ursula Prutsh (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2006), 9–19; here 15. For a summary of the fin-de-siècle Vienna boom in the 1980s as initiated by Schorske et al., see also, in the same volume, Heidemaria Uhl, “Wien um 1900’ — das making of eines Gedächtnisortes,” 47–70.

² Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography* (New York: Viking, 1943), 13–14, as cited in Peter Hall, *Cities in Civilization: Culture, Innovation, and Urban Order* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), 4.

³ Hall, *Cities in Civilization*, 5.

⁴ Carol Vogel, “Lauder Pays \$135 Million, a Record, for a Klimt Portrait,” *New York Times*, 19 June 2006.

⁵ See Rebecca Mead, “An Acquiring Eye,” *The New Yorker*, 15 January 2007, 59–67; and Lisa Silverman’s letter to the editor, *The New Yorker*, 19 and 26 February 2007, 14.

⁶ *Literature in Vienna at the Turn of the Centuries: Continuities and Discontinuities around 1900 and 2000*, ed. Ernst Grabovszki and James Hardin (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), 2.

⁷ Paul Hofmann, *The Viennese: Splendor, Twilight, and Exile* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 207.

⁸ Gregor von Rezzori, introduction to Hans Schreiber, *Trude Fleischmann: Fotografin in Wien, 1918–1938* (Vienna: Wirtschafts-Trend Zeitschriften Verlagsgesellschaft, 1990), 8–12; here 12.

⁹ Hermann Broch, *Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit, 1947–48* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), 134.

¹⁰ Broch, *Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit*, 143–44. Anything new in Vienna was presented by Broch either as an anomaly or — to strengthen his argument — as an exception that proved the rule. Take, for example, Schoenberg’s innovative compositions: “Daß just in der Stadt des Rosenkavaliers der Hauptbeitrag zur Entstehung der neuen Musik erstehen sollte, war einer jener Witze des Schicksals, mit denen es manchmal so etwas wie eine ausgleichende Gerechtigkeit etabliert” (That the main contribution to the creation of the new music should arise in the city of the Rosenkavalier, of all places, was one of those jokes with which destiny sometimes establishes something like a compensatory justice).

¹¹ See Marcus Gräser, “Wienerzählungen im internationalen Kontext,” in *Imaging Vienna*, ed. Sommer, Gräser, and Prutsh, 189–201; here 191–92. As Karl Scheffler wrote in *Berlin — ein Stadtschicksal* (1910), Berlin is “dazu verdammt: immerfort zu

werden und niemals zu sein" (damned to be ever becoming and never to be). For an example of how emigration to Berlin and Berlin's dynamism is privileged over Vienna in comparative studies, see *Wien-Berlin: Mit einem Dossier zu Stefan Großmann*, ed. Bernhard Fetz and Hermann Schlösser (Vienna: Zsolnay, 2001).

¹² Gräser, "Wienerzählungen im internationalen Kontext," 190.

¹³ In a similar fashion to fin-de-siècle Vienna, this image of Berlin during the Weimar Republic is both based on fact and results from literary representations and retrospective nostalgia. See Otto Friedrich, *Before the Deluge: Portrait of Berlin in the 1920s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972). See also the English-language accounts of life in Weimar Berlin by Auden, Spender, and Isherwood.

¹⁴ Nevertheless, it is also important to note that the new administration legislated for social changes that had often been foreshadowed by would-be reformers under the old system, further complicating the debate on what was to be regarded as old or new. This is especially true of education reform, adult education, and the new press laws.

¹⁵ Hanno Biber, "In Wien, in Prag und infolgedessen in Berlin' — Ortskonstellationen in der Fackel," in *Berlin-Wien-Prag: Moderne, Minderheiten und Migration in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, ed. Susanne Marten-Finnis and Matthias Uecker (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), 15–26.

¹⁶ *Modernism, 1914–1939: Designing a New World* (exhib. cat.), ed. Christoph Wilk (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2006). Our thanks to John Warren for this information.

¹⁷ See Barbara Lesák, *Die Kulisse explodiert: Friedrich Kieslers Theaterexperimente und Architekturprojekte, 1923–25* (Vienna: Locker Verlag, 1988) and John Warren, "Friedrich Kiesler and Theatrical Modernism in Vienna," *Austrian Studies 4: Theatre and Performance in Austria* (1993): 81–92. For an account of the full extent of the festival, see John Warren, "David Josef Bach and the 'Musik- und Theaterfest' of 1924," *Austrian Studies 14: Culture and Politics in Red Vienna* (2006): 119–42.

¹⁸ See *Photographie in Wien, 1918–1938* (exhib. cat.), ed. Monika Faber (Vienna: Seemann and Lunzer, 1999).

¹⁹ See the introduction to Marten-Finnis and Uecker, *Berlin-Wien-Prag*, 9–12; here 9.

²⁰ Broch, *Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit*, 148.

²¹ Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2007).

²² Peter Pelinka and Manfred Scheuch, *Hundert Jahre Arbeiter-Zeitung* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1989).

²³ Along with Stefan Zweig, a further striking example is Joseph Roth. See Ritchie Robertson's entry entitled "The year of the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire marks a crucial historical and symbolic change for Joseph Roth," in *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture, 1096–1996*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Jack Zipes (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1997), 355–62.

²⁴ On the left, see Otto Bauer's editorials in the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*; for a more conservative reaction, see Hofmannsthal, "Die österreichische Idee," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 2 December 1917, third Sunday supplement: 1.

²⁵ Those holding this view ranged from the Social Democrats on the left to the German nationalists. Others included intellectuals like Robert Musil, who can be seen as apolitical from a party point of view. See Musil's essays from 1918 to 1919, in particular "Der Anschluß an Deutschland" (March 1919), in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 8 (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978), 1033–42.

²⁶ The vagaries of Josef Roth's application for Austrian citizenship, which was not granted until 1921, are a concrete example of this. See Edward Timms, "Citizenship and 'Heimatrecht' after the Treaty of Saint-Germain," *Austrian Studies* 5: *The Habsburg Legacy* (1994): 158–68, esp. 161–62.

²⁷ Christian Jäger and Erhard Schütz, *Städtebilder zwischen Literatur und Journalismus: Wien, Berlin und das Feuilleton der Weimarer Republik* (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitätsverlag, 1999), 81–82.

²⁸ For examples of the emergence of new opportunities for previously inactive or stifled voices during the interwar period, see the recent research on such women writers as Veza Canetti, Else Feldmann, and Lili Grün.

²⁹ See Anson Rabinbach, *The Crisis of Austrian Socialism: From Red Vienna to Civil War, 1927–1934* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983); Helmut Gruber, *Red Vienna: Experiment in Working-Class Culture, 1919–1934* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991); Eve Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919–1934* (Cambridge: MIT, 1999); Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler, *Ohne Nostalgie: Zur österreichischen Literatur der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2002).

³⁰ One such venture was the establishment in 1920 of the Salzburg Festival, intended to rival Germany's Bayreuth, driven in large part by Viennese cultural figures. Another was the creation of new forms of literature both adhering to and deviating from popular forms of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

³¹ Marsha L. Rozenblit, "The Crisis of Identity in the Austrian Republic: Jewish Ethnicity in a New Nation-State," in *In Search of Jewish Community: Jewish Identities in Germany and Austria, 1918–1933*, ed. Michael Brenner and Derek Jonathan Penslar (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998), 134–53; here 135.

³² Marsha L. Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria During World War I* (New York: Oxford UP, 2001), 133.

³³ Rozenblit claims that it was the lack of Austrian national identity that facilitated Jewish ethnic identity even as it fostered economic and cultural integration. See Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity*, 177 n. 34; and Rozenblit, "The Crisis of Identity in the Austrian Republic."

³⁴ Marsha L. Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna, 1867–1914: Assimilation and Identity* (Albany: SUNY P, 1983), 132.

³⁵ Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna*, 2.

³⁶ Rabinbach, *The Crisis of Austrian Socialism*, 27.

³⁷ Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *Jewish Politics in Vienna, 1918–1938* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991), 87; and Walter B. Simon, "The Jewish Vote in Austria," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 16 (1971): 97–121. Simon and Freidenreich emphasize that Jews in interwar Austria had no alternative to voting Social Democratic since that was the only party that did not ally itself with other antisemitic political parties. See also Robert S. Wistrich, *Socialism and the Jews: The Dilemmas of Assimilation in Germany and*

Austria-Hungary (East Brunswick, NJ: Associated UP, 1982); Jack Jacobs, "Austrian Social Democracy and the Jewish Question in the First Republic," in *The Austrian Socialist Experiment: Social Democracy and Austromarxism, 1918–1934*, ed. Anson Rabinbach (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1985), 157–68; Robert Schwarz, "Antisemitism and Socialism in Austria, 1918–1962," in *The Jews of Austria: Essays on Their Life, History and Destruction*, ed. Josef Fraenkel (London: Vallentine, 1967), 445–66; A. Barkai, "The Austrian Social Democrats and the Jews," *Wiener Library Bulletin* 24, no. 1, n.s. 18 (1970): 31–40; no. 2, n.s. 19 (1970): 16–21.

³⁸ See Lisa Silverman, "The Transformation of Jewish Identity in Vienna, 1918–1938" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2004).

³⁹ Anton Staudinger, "Katholischer Antisemitismus in der Ersten Republik," in *Eine Zerstörte Kultur: Jüdisches Leben und Antisemitismus in Wien seit dem 19. Jahrhundert*, 2nd ed., ed. Gerhard Botz et al. (Vienna: Czernin, 2002), 261–82, esp. 266–68.

⁴⁰ In contrast to France, where Catholic intellectuals participated in socialist projects, according to some scholars the Austrian church was "one of the least flexible, most reactionary, and ultramontanist in Europe" and thus completely at odds with projects such as Red Vienna; Gruber, *Red Vienna*, 28 and 196. Nevertheless, Catholic culture during the interwar period should not be dismissed as merely reactionary or conservative; its pomp and pageantry was both admired and harnessed by a number of Jewish and non-Jewish cultural innovators. For example, Julius Braunthal, a Jewish socialist leader living in Vienna, recalled in vivid detail the processional of Fronleichnam (Corpus Christi), which celebrated the alliance between church and state. Julius Braunthal, *In Search of the Millennium* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1945), 50.

⁴¹ In the 1920s, antisemitism was very strong in Tyrol even though only a few hundred Jews resided there. See Bruce F. Pauley, *From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian Antisemitism* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1992), 98–99.

⁴² Alice Schalek, "Der Arierparagraph der Sektion Austria," *Neue Freie Presse*, 22 February 1921.

⁴³ Several witnesses reported that Josef Eder, innkeeper and star witness for the prosecution, made antisemitic statements directed at Halsmann even during the trial. See Martin Pollak, *Anklage Vatermord: Der Fall Philipp Halsmann* (Vienna: Zsolnay, 2002), 136.

⁴⁴ Sigmund Freud, "Das Fakultätsgutachten im Prozeß Halsmann," *Neue Freie Presse*, 14 December 1930.

⁴⁵ Bertha Zuckerandl, *Österreich Intim: Erinnerungen, 1892–1942*, ed. Reinhard Federmann (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1970), 180.

⁴⁶ Martin H. Ross, *Marrano* (Boston: Branden, 1976), 17.

⁴⁷ "Der Wiener Volkscharakter hat zwei Triebfedern des Stillstandes, die, scheinbar einander entgegenstrebend, schließlich doch eine Einheit ergeben: Der Schiebidenne-tean-Wille paart sich mit der Stehtenettafür-Skepsis und es entspringt die Lekkimoasch-Absage" (The two seemingly contradictory mainsprings of the Viennese popular character actually combine to form a single entity in the final instance: the "don't push yourself forward will" copulates with the "don't stand for anything skepticism" to create the "kiss my ass" refusal). Karl Kraus, *Die Fackel* 376 (1913): 24.

Part I

Cultural and Political Parameters

1: Cultural Parameters between the Wars: A Reassessment of the Vienna Circles

Edward Timms

THE AIM OF THIS ESSAY IS TO PROVIDE an overview of the field of cultural production in Vienna between the world wars based on a wide range of historical documentation and scholarly research. In a celebrated study entitled *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (1980) Carl Schorske highlighted the “cohesiveness” of the Austrian intellectual and artistic elite at the turn of the twentieth century, while at the same time demonstrating that it was “alienated from political power.”¹ Building on Schorske’s seminal insights, my own research on the Viennese satirist Karl Kraus explored the generational shift that occurred around the time of the First World War, prompting leading artists and authors to become more politically engaged. To illustrate the resulting tensions between cultural cohesion and political commitment, I created a series of diagrams reflecting the dynamics of creativity.

The great strength of the “Viennese avant-garde,” according to the first volume of my *Karl Kraus — Apocalyptic Satirist*, “lay in its internal organization.” By analogy with the Vienna Circle of logical positivists, the whole structure of avant-garde culture could be pictured as a “condensed system of micro-circuits.” This idea was illustrated by a diagram entitled “Creative Interactions in Vienna around 1910,” incorporating fifteen intersecting circles, each of them centered on a dominant personality: from Victor Adler and Rosa Mayreder, through Freud, Kraus, and Adolf Loos, to Schoenberg, Mahler, and Klimt. Each was surrounded by a group of disciples, and the crucial feature was that the circles intersected, ensuring a rapid circulation of ideas. This model of creative cross-fertilization helped to explain that “contribution to twentieth-century civilization which has made the Vienna of Freud and Herzl, Schoenberg and Wittgenstein so renowned.”²

For all its oversimplification, this model of creativity was well received since it illustrated the interaction between different disciplines that was such a feature of late Habsburg Austria. Indeed, in his introduction to *Reflexionen der Fackel* (1994) Kurt Krolop suggested that a similar model might be constructed for the polycentric culture of Prague.³ A conference at Kassel entitled “Die Wiener Jahrhundertwende” (The Viennese Turn of the Century) provided an opportunity to extend the initial diagram into further dimensions. My article “Die Wiener Kreise: Schöpferische Interaktionen in der

Wiener Moderne” (The Vienna Circles: Creative Interactions of Viennese Modernity) suggested the addition of a cash-flow diagram since the creative ferment in Vienna around 1900 could never have been sustained without generous funding. Examples cited included individual patrons like the industrialist Karl Wittgenstein, who financed the construction of the Secession building, and Fritz Wärndorfer, the Jewish businessman who enabled Josef Hoffmann to found the Vienna Workshops. On occasion these innovative spirits also received public commissions. As Carl Schorske showed in his pioneering study, Klimt’s disturbing allegories won the support of Wilhelm von Hartel, the liberal minister of culture, while Otto Wagner was commissioned to design the elegantly functional Post Office Savings Bank.⁴ More significant, however, was what I defined as “internal patronage,” the support received from figures intimately associated with the avant-garde.⁵ Many of Kokoschka’s sitters were fellow artists and authors, while it was Adolf Loos’s tailor, Leopold Goldman, who — after an inconclusive public competition — commissioned him as architect for the controversial House on the Michaelerplatz.

To define the structure of patronage more precisely, I cited observations by both Kokoschka and Loos about the ethnicity of their supporters. “Most of my sitters were Jews,” Kokoschka recalled. “They felt less secure than the rest of the Viennese Establishment, and were consequently more open to the new and more sensitive to the tensions and pressures that accompanied the decay of the old order in Austria.”⁶ The evidence suggested that it was above all members of the cultivated Jewish middle class that purchased the products of the Vienna Workshops, attended Mahler’s and Schoenberg’s concerts, and had their dreams analyzed by the best man in town.

A third dimension, less visible but even more inspirational, was the “Erotic Subculture.” Only one circle in the original diagram centered on a woman, the feminist Rosa Mayreder, despite the fact that the defining feature of the Viennese avant-garde was the unabashed celebration of eroticism associated with figures like Gustav Klimt and Arthur Schnitzler. The first part of *Karl Kraus — Apocalyptic Satirist* contained a preliminary account of this “symbolic territory.”⁷ Since its publication we have become aware of informal sources like Schnitzler’s diaries, the letters of Kraus, and the memoirs of Fritz Wittels, revealing the inspirational power of concealed erotic experiences. My article “The ‘Child-Woman’: Kraus, Freud, Wittels and Irma Kar-czewska” drew attention to one young woman who became the focus for an erotic cult. The article also illuminated the homosexual impulses underlying male bonding. “What was it,” I asked, “that held those intellectual circles together in the first place? Obviously, not ideas alone. Libidinal energies of attraction and rivalry played their part in that explosion of creativity in the coffeehouse culture of Vienna.”⁸

A full account of this phenomenon, as I concluded in “Die Wiener Kreise,” would require a three-dimensional model, with the circles of crea-

tivity sustained by the structure of patronage and embedded in the erotic subculture.⁹ A brief concluding section in that article looked ahead to the early years of the First Austrian Republic, suggesting that a diagram of Viennese cultural life during the 1920s would require a more explicit political focus to clarify the ideological polarizations. Although this second diagram remained rather tentative, it also suggested that more attention should be paid to the function of women within the cultural network, notably Eugenie Schwarzwald, Bertha Zuckermandl, and Alma Mahler.¹⁰

A more comprehensive account of the connections between artistic innovation and political impact required further research. An analysis of the early history of Zionism, which highlighted the achievements of Theodor Herzl, explored the paradoxical phenomenon of “empowered marginality.” The marginal status of ethnic minorities had frequently been discussed by social scientists, but the situation of the Jews of Vienna was exceptional. Despite high levels of educational and professional achievement, this subgroup remained outsiders in a predominantly Catholic society. This placed leading Jewish figures in a position where they could ask critical questions or develop new initiatives from a detached perspective, while at the same time developing resources that gave their innovative projects a firm institutional basis. Thus, Mahler became director of the Vienna Opera House, Freud created the Psychoanalytical Society, Kraus founded his magazine *Die Fackel*, and Schoenberg founded the Society for Private Musical Performances. Theodor Herzl provided the most compelling example of this “empowered marginality.” Representing the leading liberal newspaper, the *Neue Freie Presse*, he was able to bring diplomatic contacts into play as he transformed Zionism from a utopian vision into a dynamic political movement that was to change the world.¹¹

The view of Vienna as a locus of exceptional creativity has not gone unchallenged. In a celebrated polemic the émigré art historian Ernst Gombrich contested the extravagant claim that “most of the intellectual life of the twentieth century was invented in Vienna.” He also argued against what he saw as an overemphasis on the achievements of Jews. For Gombrich, it went against the grain to inquire whether specific artists “were Jews or of Jewish extraction.” He preferred “to leave that enquiry to the Gestapo.”¹² However, it seems perverse to downplay the role of acculturated Jews in Viennese public life. The magnitude of their achievements has been demonstrated by several generations of highly regarded historians, from Hans Tietze and Josef Fraenkel, through Robert Wistrich and Steven Beller, to Marsha Rozenblit, Jacques Le Rider, Harriet Pass Freidenreich, and Leon Botstein. Moreover, further dimensions have been illuminated by a series of fine exhibitions at the Jewish Museum in Vienna, most notably one held in 2004 and entitled *Wien, Stadt der Juden* (Vienna, City of Jews).¹³

Gombrich was able to show that in the visual arts the Jewish contribution was marginal. But by focusing on a single field in isolation he missed a