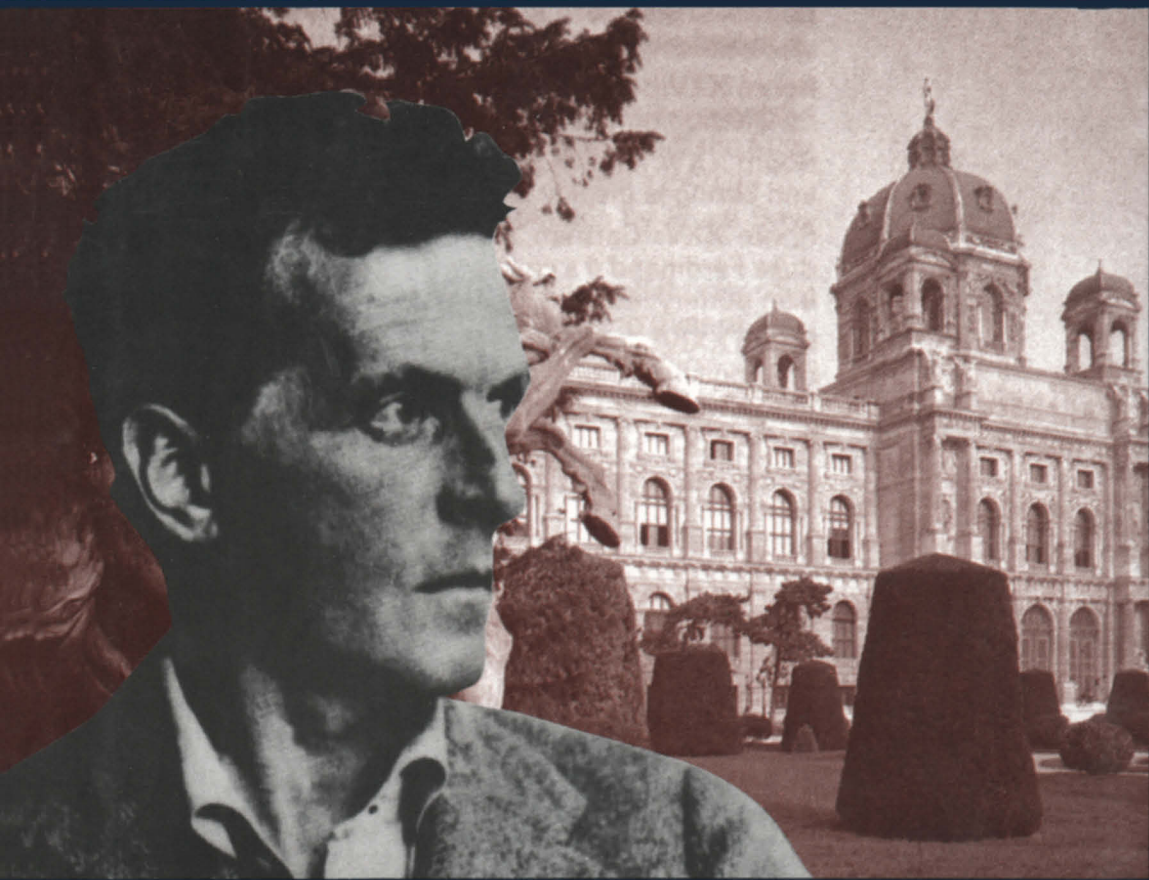


Wittgenstein's Vienna Revisited



Allan Janik

Wittgenstein's Vienna Revisited



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Wittgenstein's Vienna Revisited

Allan Janik

 Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2001 by Transaction Publishers

Published 2017 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright © 2001 by Taylor & Francis.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 00-054383

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Janik, Allan.

Wittgenstein's Vienna revisited / Allan Janik.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7658-0050

1. Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 1889-1951. 2. Vienna (Austria)—
Intellectual life—20th century . 3. Logical positivism—History.

I. Title.

B3376. W564 J364 2001

943.6' 13044—dc21

00-054383

ISBN 13: 978-0-7658-0050-3 (hbk)

For three friends in philosophy:
Dick, Dominique, Rudolf



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Contents

Foreword	ix
Introduction: How Not to View Vienna 1900	1
1. The Critical Modernism of a Viennese Composer	15
2. Weininger's Critique of a Narcissistic Culture	37
3. Weininger, Ibsen, and the Origins of Viennese Critical Modernism	59
4. Ebner Contra Wagner: Epistemology, Aesthetics, and Salvation in Vienna, 1900	85
5. Offenbach: Art between Monologue and Dialogue	105
6. Saint Offenbach's Postmodernism	119
7. Saying and Showing: Hertz and Wittgenstein	147
8. Wittgenstein's "Religious Point of View"	171
9. Kraus, Wittgenstein, and the Philosophy of Language	185
10. Wittgenstein, the Vienna Circle, and European Culture	197
11. Wittgenstein on Madness, Mistakes, Metaphysics, and Method	213
12. "Ethik und Ästhetik Sind Eins": Wittgenstein and Trakl	225
Notes	247
Index	281



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Foreword

Although the essays below were mostly written as lectures for specific occasions, and thus can be read independently of one another, they in fact expand upon and complement *Wittgenstein's Vienna*. In that book two philosophers set out to expand the horizons of their discipline by posing problems in three principal areas: the *history of philosophy*, inasmuch as it bears upon the early Wittgenstein's philosophical development, the *history of ideas*, inasmuch as Wittgenstein can be seen as emerging from the Central European background of cultural criticism in Vienna circa 1900 and finally the *critique of the technocratic tendencies of modern culture generally*. The essays below continue those investigations by amplifying a number of very specific, especially significant points concerning the genesis of Wittgenstein's thought, the nature of fin de siècle Viennese culture, and the criticism of our own culture raised in the earlier book. It is by no means comprehensive and makes no pretensions of being so.

These essays move from analysis of the cultural factors militating against self-knowledge at the dawn of the millennium to a consideration of the origins of a critical attitude to modernity in Vienna and ending with a consideration of the genesis of Wittgenstein's concept of philosophy and its significance both in Vienna 1900 and for European culture today. The little-known Austrian precursor of Martin Buber, Ferdinand Ebner, penetratingly identified the source of the obstacles to self-knowledge in the modern world as a typically modern tendency to encapsulate ourselves in our dreams of the world as we would have it rather than encounter it as it actually is. In short, our aspirations, then and now, have tended to take on the character of intellectual fantasies, that ultimately prevent us from seeing and experiencing the world as it is, i.e., as populated by individuals of flesh and blood who suffer in the absence of a concerned Other. The central theme of this book develops various aspects of the thesis

that *both* this typically modern tendency to intellectual fantasizing and a highly powerful critique of it emerged from Vienna 1900. If we have failed to appreciate the true character of Viennese modernism as well as Viennese "critical modernism," it is because we are too accustomed (1) to seeing Vienna in terms of a *fin de siècle* mal-aise full of waltzes and whipped cream and (2) we have not looked closely enough at the fabric of the debates about ethical and aesthetic values in that culture. These essays, then, are, *inter alia*, a reminder of the importance of a sense for history strong enough to take us beyond the level of cliché. Wittgenstein's philosophical efforts to show us things so evident that we cannot perceive them has a special significance in this context, for it challenges philosophical modernism in its most radical form—Viennese logical positivism—head on and attempts to dismantle it from within. The story of how he got to that concept of philosophy is absolutely central to understanding his view that the most important things simply do not permit themselves to be said. In leaving things as they are, Wittgenstein in fact reminds us that we find ourselves in the middle of the world and not outside of it. We are "encompassed" by reality as Karl Jaspers was wont to put it; we do not encompass it.

In the last quarter century hundreds, if not thousands of books have been written about Wittgenstein, Vienna, and modernity. Many of them are superb, others, less so. Be that as it may, there is something to be said for the thesis that we still have not penetrated the full depths of our original subjects of study. The problem with both Viennese rationalism and Viennese aestheticism, not to mention their contemporary counterparts, is that both fail to recognize that there are limits to what we can know in the formal sense but that those limits by their very nature can only be shown and not said (i.e., in the sense of being put into a "modern" theory—or a "postmodern" counter-theory). Wittgenstein's efforts to get straight about the *limits* of thought and language in all of the stages of his development and thus to be fair to science, religion, and art account for his place of honor among *critical* modernists. These essays thus aim at elucidating that perspective on our culture and Wittgenstein's way to it.

Allan Janik
Innsbruck 2000

Acknowledgments

The individual essays below contain copious references to people who have made valuable suggestions to me concerning various aspects of the themes discussed here at various points. However, a special word of thanks is necessary in the case of a number of especially important figures. Kjell S. Johannessen gave me the idea of producing such an anthology in the first place. His profound knowledge of Wittgenstein's later philosophy and its implications for the humanities has helped me in clarifying my own philosophical thinking as no one else has. Steven Beller has been a thorough critic of everything I have written about Vienna in the last fifteen years. I have avoided many a pitfall due to his canny eye and his comprehensive knowledge of Austrian culture. In all matters bearing upon philosophy and literature Walter Methlagl's knowledge of Austrian letters has been a source of enormous stimulation and support. The same holds true for Rudolf Haller's knowledge of Austrian philosophy. Bo Göranson's commitment to the importance of the humanities in a technological culture as well as Rob Riemen's deep commitments to the importance of the Judeo-Christian tradition for the twenty-first century have been extraordinarily important to me in the matter of setting intellectual priorities. Most of all the innumerable conversations with all of the above-mentioned as well as knowledgeable Viennese friends such as Marcel Faust, Herbert Czermak, Raoul Kneucker, Emil Brix, and Hans Veigl have made this easier and more pleasant than it otherwise might have been. I am very grateful to all of them for their intellectual generosity and tolerance. They bear no responsibility for the shortcomings of this book, for which I alone am responsible.

The essays below originally appeared in journals or anthologies. All have been revised for publication here, some considerably. They are reprinted here with the permission of the respective editors or publishers.

The introduction "How Not to View Vienna 1900" was originally a lecture at the Swedish Center for Working Life in 1984 entitled "Creative Milieux: The Case of Vienna," which I have often delivered over the years due to the great interest in the topic. It has appeared in Swedish and German translations but in English only in the anthology from my writings on Vienna 1900 that I published for my students in my course on "Foundations of the Humanities" in the Philosophy Department stencil series of the University of Bergen under the title *How Not to Interpret a Culture* (Bergen, 1986).

"The Critical Modernism of a Viennese Composer" was a lecture at the Nexus Institute-Royal Dutch Opera Schoenberg Symposium in Amsterdam in September 1995. It later appeared in Dutch translation in *Nexus* 12 (1995).

"Weininger's Critique of a Narcissistic Culture" appeared originally in the anthology *Vienna: The World of Yesterday*, eds. Stephen Eric Bronner and F. Peter Wagner (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997).

"Weininger, Ibsen, and Viennese Critical Modernism" was originally prepared for the 8th International Ibsen Congress, Gossensaß, Tyrol 1997.

"Ebner Contra Wagner" was published in an earlier (German) version in *Kreatives Milieu: Wien um 1900*, eds. Emil Brix and Allan Janik (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1993).

"Offenbach, or Art between Monologue and Dialogue" originally was a lecture before the Stockholm Dialogue Seminar in 1986. It was published in Swedish in *Dialoger* IV (1986).

"Saint Offenbach's Postmodernism" is a revised version of an article with the same title in *Der Fall Wagner*, ed. Thomas Steiert published by the Bayreuth Institut für Musiktheaterforschung (Laaber: Laaber Verlag, 1991).

"Saying and Showing: Hertz and Wittgenstein" began as a lecture to the Department of Mechanics at Stockholm's Royal Institute of Technology in 1993. It later appeared in the *Grazer Philosophische Studien* (1994/5).

"Weininger and Wittgenstein's 'Religious Point of View'" was originally presented at the Bulgarian Cultural Institute's 1997 Symposium on Wittgenstein, Ethics and Religion and later printed with the proceedings in *Miscellanea Bulgarica* 13 (1999).

“Kraus, Wittgenstein, and the Philosophy of Language” was originally presented at the University of London Karl Kraus Symposium in September 1999.

“Wittgenstein, the Vienna Circle and European Culture” was originally a lecture before the Belgian Academy of Science Symposium on Austria and Europe in December 1995. It was printed in the proceedings of that conference.

“Wittgenstein on Madness, Mistakes, Metaphysics, and Method” originally appeared in an earlier version in *Turn-of-the-Century Vienna and Its Legacy: Essays in Honor of Donald G. Daviau* (Vienna: Atelier, 1995) in English.

“Wittgenstein and Trakl” was published in an earlier version in *Modern Austrian Literature* Vol. XXXIII, no. 2 (1990).



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Wittgenstein's Works

I refer to Wittgenstein's works parenthetically in the text as follows. Ludwig Wittgenstein,

PI with paragraph number = *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958).

BBB with page number = *The Blue and Brown Books*, ed. Rush Rhees (New York: Harper's, 1956).

C&V with page number = *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

E with letter number = Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein with a Memoir*, trans. L. Furtmüller (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967).

F with letter number = *Briefe an Ludwig von Ficker*, ed. G.H. von Wright ("Brenner Studien," vol. 1; Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1969).

GT with date = *Geheime Tagebücher*, ed. W. Baum (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 1992).

K with page number = *Denkbewegungen* [the Koder Notebook] ed. Ilse Somavilla (Innsbruck: Haymon, 1996).

L+C with page number = *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. C. Barrett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966).

N with page number = *Notebooks 1914-16*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961).

O with letter number = *Letters to C.K. Ogden*, ed. G.H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973).

OC with paragraph number = *On Certainty*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe and Denis Paul (New York: Harper's, 1969).

OCL with section and paragraph number = *Remarks on Color*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1978).

R, K, M with letter number = respectively to *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore*, ed. G.H. von Wright (2nd ed. rev.; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974).

TL-P with proposition number = *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961).

WV with page number = *Wörterbuch für Volksschulen* (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1977).

WWK with page number = *Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis shorthand notes by F. Waismann*, ed. B.F. McGuinness (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967).



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Introduction:

How Not to View Vienna 1900

When Elias Canetti was informed that he had been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature he accepted the honor in the name of four Austrians who had not been so honored: Franz Kafka,¹ Karl Kraus, Robert Musil, and Hermann Broch.² There can be little doubt that Canetti's remark was highly ironic. It was not simply that one great Austrian writer had been neglected in his eyes, but a whole series of them—Canetti's very heroes and exemplars—had been passed over. On the surface, then, Canetti was reminding those who would honor him of the remarkable richness and critical potential in Austrian letters and at the same time emphasizing the lack of recognition that these writers had suffered. He thus chose to underscore that in honoring him, an Austrian, born in Bulgaria, living in London, and writing in German, the Swedish Academy would be honoring his heroes too.

This anecdote serves as a reminder at once of the magnitude of the Dual Monarchy's contribution to modern culture as well as its penchant for ignoring, if not actually abusing, the geniuses it bred. If Swedes could ignore brilliant Austrians, it was only because Austrians had already set the fashion and no Austrians were better at that than the Viennese. Indeed, the Viennese treatment of home-grown talent only serves to remind us of the city's amazing capacity to ignore creative individuals at best and persecute them at worst while they lived, only to adulate them once dead. If we need examples we need only look to her treatment of her composers: Mozart, always happier and better received in Prague, Schubert (for most of his life), Bruckner, Mahler, and Hugo Wolf. The failure of the Vienna Circle, which revolutionized philosophy in the English-speaking world, to have any impact upon philosophy in its native city till after World War II is no less depressing, as are the cases of Sigmund Freud, Robert Musil, and Karl Kraus. If we are to understand Vienna

as a creative milieu, it is of paramount importance that we recognize the role that Vienna's almost incredible hostility to her *most* illustrious sons played in forming that milieu. So it should not be surprising that Vienna should breed critical spirits like the late Thomas Bernhard who have rewarded her hostility in kind. In short, here, as in everything else, to understand Vienna is to understand her as a city of *paradoxes*.³

Three of Canetti's heroes, Kraus, Musil, and Broch, were Viennese. Kraus in fact spent his life as a sort of professional anti-Viennese. Indeed, so vehement was his opposition to the powers that be that he is all but incomprehensible apart from the cultural context of *Alt Wien*.⁴ His satires and polemics were directed at the shallowness and hypocrisy which permitted the Viennese to ridicule the gifted and heap praise on the mediocre. His campaign against superficially dazzling shoddiness was rewarded, as in the case of his enemy Sigmund Freud, with a conspiracy of silence (*Totschweigen*) on the part of the Viennese press, his archenemy. Thus only the Socialist *Arbeiterzeitung* among Viennese papers reported the obituary of Kraus's friend and colleague, Adolf Loos, because Kraus gave the graveside eulogy. Musil was never at home in Vienna. It is not for nothing that the Habsburg imperial capital is depicted as a pathological phenomenon fit only for phenomenological dissection in his *chef d'oeuvre*, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (*The Man Without Qualities*). If Freud, Mach, and Loos were in some sense spiritually and culturally Englishmen, Musil was a Berliner.⁵ Broch may have matured in Vienna but it was in New York and at Yale that he did much of his best work and finally attained the recognition he so well deserved. Canetti, like Kraus (i.e., in Germany, France and Czechoslovakia during his lifetime at least), has fared much better abroad than at home.

It is the merit of Fredrick Morton's lively—and aptly named—survey of the events of 1889 in Vienna, *A Nervous Splendor*, to have pointed out that but a single figure of note in the city's cultural life that year was entirely free of tormenting self-doubts: Johannes Brahms.⁶ Not even the immensely successful Johann Strauss was entirely free from insecurity—not to mention the cases of Bruckner, Freud, Schnitzler, Hugo Wolf and the Crown Prince, who would take his own life along with that of his mistress at Mayerling in the romantic Vienna Woods before that fateful year was out. It is precisely this insecurity incidentally which helps to explain why gifted

individuals often chose *not* to know each other when it was easily possible to do so, if there was a danger that their originality might be compromised—witness the case of Freud and Schnitzler.⁷ This should be emphasized because people often get the false impression that everybody was on intimate terms with everyone else in Old Vienna, which was hardly the case. The point is, then, that Vienna was indeed a cultural “hothouse,”⁸ as Carl Schorske insists, but the tendency of the gardeners was to let what blossomed wilt. With the paradoxical truth captured in Franz Theodor Csokor’s description of Vienna 1900 as a “flashy collapse” (*farbenvolle Untergang*) or Broch’s “cheerful apocalypse” (*fröhliche Apokalypse*) in mind we are ready to examine the factors which fertilized that garden.

The first factor which must be emphasized is sheer size. *Alt Wien* was a huge metropolis with two million residents, the capital of an empire of fifty million. With such a large population it is simply statistically more probable that creative individuals would emerge there than in a little town, i.e., it would be mightily surprising if they did not. Between the mid-nineteenth century and 1914 Vienna grew by leaps and bounds. In 1857 there were 476, 220 Viennese, by 1910 there were 2, 031,420.⁹ One noteworthy feature of the city’s growth is that to this very day Vienna seems *smaller* than it actually is. In Vienna you never have the feeling of being in a large city that you do, say, in London, Paris, or New York (which are all, of course, bigger cities than Vienna, but similar to Vienna as metropolises). Indeed, in Vienna one could almost say that perception of the size of the city varies inversely with the social class of the residents—the higher their class, the smaller the city would seem due to the concentration of the upper classes in the city’s center with its small scale.

A second factor in explaining why Vienna became a great cultural center is its multiple role in the Dual Monarchy as imperial capital, economic hub, and provincial capital as well as being the largest city in the realm. As imperial capital it was the focus of imperial patronage of the arts as well as seat of the empire’s administration—and we should not forget the old saying according to which Austria is not ruled but administered—so great was the challenge of unifying an empire of fifty million speaking eleven official languages, not to mention dialects, on the one hand, so Byzantine, the practices of the imperial bureaucracy, on the other, that to this day it has proven difficult to form an accurate estimate of the achievement involved. From the administrative point of view the judicial system, say, was a

highly efficient *Zweckrational* institution; yet, it is not wholly accidental that Franz Kafka's *The Trial* was written under the Dual Monarchy. Part of the explanation for this paradox lies in the schizoid origins of the Habsburg bureaucracy.¹⁰ Founded as an instrument of radical social reform by the "revolutionary" Emperor Joseph II, the bureaucracy was re-oriented by the ultra reactionary Emperor Francis I in the direction of maintaining the status quo without ever being transformed into a genuine vehicle for reaction. Francis was so reactionary that he would not go so far as to abolish an existing *revolutionary* institution. The schizoid character of the bureaucracy, then, lay in its Josephine concept as it came into conflict with its Franciscan *modus operandi*. If Vienna's role as the business and financial center of the monarchy was for the requisite concentration of wealth for the support of cultural activities on a large scale, bourgeois imitation of aristocratic traditions of patronage of the arts—at least as far as the "baroque arts" of painting, architecture and music were concerned—insured that the bourgeois so employed their riches. From 1860 onwards as Carl Schorske has graphically and grippingly delineated in his essay on Ringstrasse architecture, the newly dominant bourgeoisie sought to emulate Habsburg practices by stamping new public buildings: the university, the opera, the theater, parliament, the city hall, etc., as symbols of its civic aspirations.¹¹ As provincial capital of Lower Austria Vienna housed its own bureaucracy in addition to the imperial administration. As the empire's largest city, Vienna required newspapers, theaters, cafés, and all that appertains to the elegance of modern municipal life. Naturally enough, the requirements of such an administrative and financial center included the demand for solid educational institutions. To that end, secondary education was completely overhauled already under the absolutist regime in the 1850s. The success of this reform, which produced the superb Viennese classical *Gymnasium*, was highly distressing to absolutism's liberal foes, whose ideal of *Bildung* it pre-empted. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the classical gymnasium: years spent translating Latin and Greek classics sensitized the Viennese pupil both to rhetorical structure and architectonics as well as to the nuances of style which make elegant self-expression possible.¹² However tedious this may have been for the pupils, this rigorous regimentation produced minds of a caliber seldom seen today outside of an English public school or a French *lycée*. Indeed, it was and remains one of the great ironies of

modern culture that the very classical learning which produced so many brilliant thinkers and stylists was so widely condemned by its own products. Be that as it may, rigorous classical education was absolutely crucial in making *Alt Wien* into the creative milieu that it was.

This consideration of Vienna's multiple role in the Dual Monarchy leads us to the third factor in explaining how Vienna became a cultural center and a creative milieu. All of the functions we have mentioned stimulated movement to and fro between the capital and the provinces, a movement which already accounted for Vienna's polyglot character in the eighteenth century. But the provinces of the Habsburg Empire were unique in that the Empire was studded with metropolitan cultural centers, some of which, like Prague, were older than Vienna itself but were nevertheless oriented to that city for the reasons already mentioned. Prague, Budapest, Trieste, Cracow, Laibach, Lemberg, Czernowitz, and a host of yet smaller urban centers continually fed Vienna with talent¹³ (only the role of Edinburgh in the development of London seems comparable to the relationship of Vienna and, say, Prague). Moreover, unlike Berlin, Paris, or New York, there was a reciprocal character to the movement between the capital and these towns. An aspiring Viennese musician or scientist might begin his career in, say, Czernowitz and then, once having established himself, return to Vienna. He would, however, bring something with him as he moved in each direction. The importance of this interplay has only begun to be rediscovered since the opening of the former Communist bloc and has hardly really begun to be explored in depth. Be that as it may, this to and fro movement of peoples speaking so many different languages accustomed the Viennese (in comparison, say, with the Berliner) to an extraordinary variety in diet, idiom, and cultural expression. However much the native Viennese might resent the Czech, the Dalmatian, the Magyar, or the Galician Jew, he was familiar with all of them. That familiarity bred a cosmopolitan wit—even if it were to have scurrilous, racist, and sardonic overtones. However, this was not the only sort of migration to the Habsburg capital. For all of the reasons we have mentioned Vienna attracted foreigners such as Metternich, Leibniz, Brücke, Meynert, Krafft-Ebing, Beethoven, H.S. Chamberlain to her as well as providing temporary residence for figures like Wagner, Lenin, Trotsky, and Mussolini—and the list could be extended indefinitely. Vienna would hardly have had such a magnetic effect

were it not for her relative economic prosperity after 1860 and especially after 1867, which certainly cannot be omitted from any account of its emergence as a cultural center. Huge fortunes were made overnight when the economy was liberalized in the wake of the Compromise with Hungary in 1867.

The next set of features we must discuss in aid of explaining how Vienna became such a matrix for creativity is perhaps the most important: her talent-fostering *traditions*. It has rightly been pointed out that creativity depends upon excellence; however, excellence, in turn, depends upon the existence of practices and customs which further that excellence.

We can begin with Vienna's excellence in medical science, which was already well established by 1848 and second to none by the turn of the century. In 1745 Maria Theresa invited a number of Dutch doctors to Vienna to teach medicine under supervision from their countryman, Gerard van Swieten.¹⁴ Her successor, Joseph II, founded the General Hospital as an institution for providing state care for the populace. It was not only that a tradition of medical excellence was 100 years old in 1848, but also a tradition of liberal humanism as well—as Arthur Schnitzler, a doctor by training and the son of a doctor, never ceases to remind us in his writings, whose conflicts often turn upon the opposition between the values of a callous army officer and those of a kindly doctor. Nor is it accidental that a Freud should have emerged in Vienna—or for that matter that he should have encountered such stiff opposition there. Vienna's eminence in medicine, which is in fact the source of American medical excellence, was, like almost everything typically Viennese, Janus-faced. However, medical excellence went hand-in-hand with (1) a certain *dogmatism*, which manifested itself variously as “therapeutic nihilism”, the refusal to prescribe cures for fear of perpetuating quack remedies and was itself not incompatible with (2) a certain *callousness* with regard to the treatment of patients. Further, it went hand-in-hand with (3) a certain *intolerance* with regard to innovation as was the case with the reception of Freud's views on the aetiology of hysteria and Semelweiss's suggestion that doctors could eliminate childbed fever by washing their hands between dissecting cadavers and assisting women in childbirth. Finally, (4) it went hand-in-hand with a certain professional *elitism* or clannishness, which manifested itself in America where Viennese-trained doctors led the campaign to abolish midwifery.¹⁵

We find a similar ambiguity in Vienna's musical heritage. Musical life has blossomed in Vienna at least since the mid-eighteenth century. Maria Theresa and her son Joseph II, were great patrons of the musical arts. Joseph was especially concerned with the development of German-language opera, with which he hoped to sway popular taste away from the crudities of Italian *commedia dell' arte* farce, which had been well-ensconced in Vienna since the Renaissance.¹⁶ Aristocratic families like the Lobkowitzes, the Kinskys, and, of course, Haydn's patrons, the Esterhazys, were also staunch patrons of music. Gottfried van Swieten, whose father, Gerard, we have already encountered, was not only a friend and patron of both Haydn and Mozart, but was largely responsible for the rediscovery of Bach and Handel. Such patrons of the arts were, as Arnold Schoenberg, never tired of pointing out, highly sophisticated connoisseurs, who were often talented performers in their own right. The Viennese musical tradition got a big boost from the French Revolution. In the reactionary realm of Emperor Francis I music, opera apart, was considered a safe art, uncontaminated by revolutionary ideology and incapable of criticizing the regime. No small part of Vienna's eminence in musical history, then, is tied to official fear of the word. Interest in music was essentially bound to censorship of the spoken and written word. This represented a blow to the Viennese, especially as it meant a fairly strict censorship of the favorite Viennese popular entertainment, theater. However, the less-than-Draconian stringency of the censorship itself became an opportunity for gifted satirists, like the very Viennese Johann Nestroy, to try to fool the censors and thus itself became a source of Viennese creativity.¹⁷

To appreciate the full significance of the Viennese obsession with theater, drama, and the like is ultimately to tell a long story about the role of spectacle, symbol and ornament in Austrian life, which could hardly even be summarized here. However, it is crucial to point out that fascination with theater is but one aspect of a certain *theatricality* which was—and still is—part and parcel of Viennese life. This is more relevant to our discussion of Vienna 1900 as a creative milieu than theater per se. Hardly anything is more important in the crucial task of understanding the uniquely Austrian and typically Viennese way of demarcating the public and the private. The story of how spectacle, symbol, and ornament became so central to Viennese cultural life takes us seemingly far afield, for it begins with the forcible re-Catholicization of what is today east and southeast Austria. These

regions, including Vienna, had gone over to Protestantism a few scant years after Luther nailed his theses to the door of Wittenberg Cathedral.¹⁸ In the religious wars of the Reformation the Habsburgs, like their Bavarian cousins, the Wittelsbachs, were wholly identified with Catholicism after 1608. Thus those distinctively Counter-Reformation styles, the Baroque and the Mannerist, became symbols of Habsburg *authority*. The imposing majesty of a Baroque cathedral or monastery, say, was a wholly political reminder of Habsburg political might to the dissenting. The same is true of the pageants on Church holidays such as Corpus Christi, which came to characterize public life, mitigating absolutism with spectacle. As the political significance faded away, the taste for spectacle did not; rather, it was transformed in an enormous variety of ways. The Baroque, then, at once established a standard of public taste and sowed the seeds of later social criticism by providing secularized dissenters with a natural target, *ornament*. At this very time the imperial theater provided Vienna with its first taste of “modern,” secular culture and the meeting place for the aristocracy and the new bourgeois class, so anxious to legitimize itself by imitating the splendors of aristocratic style. Thus the art that the small *haute bourgeoisie* of the eighteenth century cultivated was principally “baroque”: music, painting, sculpture, and architecture, in short pictorial and edifying, rather than verbal and critical (as it was in Protestant lands such as England, Sweden, or Holland).

Growing concern for luxury evoked a critical moral (or better moralistic) response in the witty sermons of the court preacher Ulrich Megerle, alias Abraham a Santa Clara. For some forty years starting in the 1660s Abraham effectively turned the charm of secular culture, its very theatricality, against itself in hilariously devastating sermons castigating the Viennese for their worldliness.¹⁹ Abraham is a particularly important figure for our story, for he marks the beginning of a Viennese rhetorical tradition and a mode of social criticism, which is distinguished by its efforts to turn Viennese *obsession with style* against itself. Abraham's rhetoric foreshadows Vienna's populist, anti-Semitic, fin de siècle mayor, Karl Lueger, in its exploitation of local idiom, its wit and emotional appeal, but also, paradoxically, Lueger's archenemy, Karl Kraus, in its resourceful efforts to turn the tables on the corrupt comically—although it must be hastily added that Kraus's values were hardly Abraham's. Abraham is a figure, then, who helps us to draw two crucial features of the

creative milieu that was Vienna into relief. First, by considering the case of Abraham a Santa Clara we *begin* to see how Viennese moral fervor could take on unusual forms as it would later in, say, Arnold Schoenberg's theory of harmony or a book of technical aphorisms which tries to get clear about just *what you cannot put into words at all* with the young Wittgenstein. Second, it helps us get a grasp of how it could be that both Lueger and Kraus, for all their differences, both manifest a single aspect of the Viennese heritage (albeit not in the same way or in the same sense).²⁰

However, there is yet more to say about the implications of the Habsburg forcible re-Catholicization of Vienna. Reflect for a moment upon the state of mind of the recently re-Catholicized Protestant. He had only recently learned that his conscience was the sole legitimate guide in moral matters as well as that all religious symbols and ceremonies were idolatrous. Now the state, as it were, forced him to commit idolatry, i.e., to act exactly counter to his convictions.²¹ It is not difficult to see how cynicism about public life and a certain fatalistic alienation with respect to ethical matters could come to go hand in hand in Vienna. Thus we find fatalism and alienation lurking everywhere in that quintessentially Viennese art form, the *Wienerlied*: "wenn der Herrgott nicht will, nützt es gar nix" (roughly: "if the Good Lord ain't willin' fergit it"). In effect, the forcible re-Catholicization of Vienna and its environs amounted to a curious kind of semi-secularization, for religious beliefs became something ornamental and extraneous to public life. Over generations as the memory of Protestant Vienna faded, and even more so after the failure of the French Revolution as reaction set in and the possibilities for Enlightenment vanished, the temptations to cynicism grew even greater. Certainly, it was possible to capitulate and enjoy the show, or even contribute to its orchestration in the way that, say, a Makart or Strauss did, or you could go into a kind of inner "emigration" as some Biedermeier intellectuals did.²² A third possibility was to attack the very role that spectacle had come to play in society. However, to take this path you had to beat the enemy at his own game. In effect the forcible re-Catholicization policy of the Habsburgs, strongly reinforced by the triumph of the forces of reaction in the Napoleonic wars, laid down premises upon which a good part of subsequent Austrian culture and counterculture was to rest. The events of the Counter-Reformation set in motion sociocultural force which later were capable of making, say, the Loos Haus am Michaelerplatz

with its unadorned facade, which so annoyed Francis Joseph that he ceased to use the entrance to the Imperial Palace opposite it, a symbolic commentary upon and confrontation with the mores and institutions of a whole society. Thus Georg Trakl could write in its guest book: "Countenance of a building: seriousness and silence of stone full, forcefully formed: to Adolf Loos in admiration."²³ Nor in this light is it altogether accidental that the work which most epitomizes the self-delusions of fin de siècle Viennese, Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*, should prominently feature an aria which begins "Glücklich ist, wer vergißt, was doch nicht zu ändern ist" (roughly: "happiness is forgetting what cannot be changed").

The phrase "the whole society" should not pass without commentary here, for it has a special significance. It is crucial to emphasize that there was in Vienna at this time, unlike Berlin, a genuine popular culture with roots as far back as Mozart's day and even farther. Indeed, Joseph's concern to develop opera in German, which is responsible for Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* and *The Magic Flute*, is part of a response to a demand which was growing up in what was then the suburbs of Vienna. Already at this time there was a tradition of local comedy, which was itself rooted in the Italian *commedia dell' arte* and Shakespeare. Already the conventions of mocking and fondly tampering with the "high culture" of the Burgtheater were altogether well-established in such pieces as *Othellerl, Moor of Vienna*. In *Vienna: Legend and Reality* Ilse Barea suggests that the cultural conundrums surrounding the plot of *The Magic Flute*, the odd juxtaposition of Tamino and Papageno, are at least a bit less puzzling when you realize that the work belongs to a locality, the *Freihaus auf der Wieden*, which was Vienna's biggest tenement house and virtually a self-contained suburb.²⁴

The myriad contradictions in Schikaneder's plot are easier to fathom when you realize that the work was written to appeal to the simple-minded, earthy sense of humor of the suburban bourgeoisie and yet, at the same time reflect their *aspirations*. In the nineteenth century, Ferdinand Raimund and later Johann Nestroy developed these traditions in different ways. However, lest we roam too far afield of our subject, the point of introducing all of this is to emphasize that Habsburg autocracy was not incompatible with a full cultural life for the *whole* populace. There was in Vienna already in the eighteenth century a kind of democratization of culture that one did not have in, say, Berlin until considerably later. Thus the ordinary

Viennese-in-the-street was no less appreciative of a well-turned phrase than his haut-bourgeois fellow townsmen. This too was a Viennese culture-fostering tradition.

Clearly, it would be possible to go on listing historical examples of the way Viennese traditions nurtured competence in the populace which were conducive to creativity. Our aim here has not been to be comprehensive but to explain the kind of considerations which are relevant to understanding how it was that Vienna became the creative center that it was. In doing so we have only been able to scratch the surface. For example, we have said little about the groups that migrated to Vienna. Above all, we have not mentioned the Jews, whose contributions to Vienna at the height of her creative phase is way out of proportion to their numbers. Both as creative individuals and as patrons of the arts the Jews of Vienna played a very special role in making Vienna 1900 the kind of place it was. Indeed, one must agree with Steven Beller that Vienna's Jews provided both the talent and, what is even more crucial, the element of cultural leadership which accounted for the *impact*, i.e., the recognition and dissemination of radically new achievements at the turn of the century as Jewish artists and patrons of the arts forged links between tradition and novelty. We refer here to the Jewish salons such as those of the Wertheimstein sisters.²⁵ What cannot be denied is that Vienna was never as interesting before or since as she was during the period from 1860 to 1938 when Jews largely dominated the cultural scene.²⁶

At this point, then, it is important to make explicit what is to be learned about creative milieux from the case of Vienna. The results will be surprising to many, for much of what made Vienna into a cultural center was less than desirable in itself. We forget at our peril that Vienna was also the toughest and most thorough school of his life in the mind of Adolf Hitler.²⁷ Similarly, we forget at our peril that the obverse of Vienna's soft side, café society and Strauss waltzes, was the hard side represented by wretched housing for the poor and philistinism with respect to the arts on the part of the official bureaucratic intelligentsia. Forcible re-Catholicization, Byzantine bureaucracy, semi-efficient censorship and even hostility to innovation itself all contributed to producing an environment conducive to what we today with the wisdom of hindsight can recognize as creativity but they are most unlikely candidates for cornerstones of policymaking on the part of those who would call a creative milieu into existence. Another set of factors such as size, position, wealth,

secular atmosphere, and so on cannot be left out of the story. They are necessary but they are by no stretch of the imagination sufficient for explaining how Vienna became the "hothouse" of culture that she did one hundred years ago. When we turn to factors like excellence in education and culture-fostering traditions of patronage we are getting closer to what we seek, but in the end these factors too fail to be sufficient for explaining how the quality of intellectual life became so conducive to creativity. Lest we give up in despair, two factors need to be emphasized. First, the *interplay* of all the aforementioned factors, of conscious efforts and chance effects, is clearly just as important as any important single factor. The interplay of the factors is, after all, the milieu. Secondly, the Viennese idiosyncrasies of the implementation of policies (the mode of rule-following, in Wittgenstein's terms) with regard to factors such as censorship lent a peculiar character to those institutions and, thus, helped constitute the environment.

If this is right, if there is a lesson to be learned from the case of Vienna, it has to be that creative milieux cannot be decreed into existence. They must grow, however inorganically. This is because a stimulating environment, as Arnold Toynbee recognized long ago, is a challenging one. However, what makes the environment challenging has to do with the way in which it both nourishes and fails to nourish its inhabitants, with the way in which it proportions its inhabitants to respond to it. However, this is a matter of the way it conditions us, not simply to do what we do, but how we do what we learn to do. Yet, this is precisely what is so devilishly difficult to capture. Paradoxically, it is often the outsider who can catch this when natives themselves cannot. Thus Americans have to turn to de Tocqueville when they seek to get a good glimpse of themselves. If there is anything to be learned about creativity from the case of Vienna, then, it seems to be the Hegelian truth that creativity is the product of the "cunning of reason." However, we should not be dismayed by that thought, for it is the very unpredictability connected with creativity which makes it so precious in the first place.

* * *

The conditions conducive to cultural creativity probably are always linked to ambiguity. So the case of Vienna should hardly be expected to be unique. It is more that the ambiguous character of

Viennese institutions is more pronounced than those elsewhere. The Viennese bourgeois form of what would later come to be called alienation was an alienation with society not an alienation from society as Carl Schorske has emphasized. The Viennese form of alienation was intimately tied to what was basically an uncritical fixation on culture with its extreme fondness for theatricality as well as an obsession with one's identity in a social situation where one's public persona often had precious little in common with one's private thoughts. What we have termed critical modernism was one peculiar Viennese response to this situation of being alienated with society, which seems to be the destiny of Western society. Arnold Schoenberg was a principal representative of the critical modernist attitude to culture and society. Thus it is to his cultural critique that we now turn to introduce the crucial notion of critical modernism.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>