Vienna Meets Berlin
Cultural Interaction 1918–1933

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Introduction

Cultural Interdependence: a Tale of Two Cities

Karl Kraus once suggested that Berlin would adapt to tradition before Vienna would accept the machine, and this certainly sets the tone for generalised conceptions of these two capitals. Of far greater significance than clichés about differences, however, is the interaction and even interdependence between the metropolises. The exhibition 'Paris–Berlin 1900–1933', mounted at the Pompidou Centre in Paris in 1978, showed the potential of such a comparison, and no two cities have been more closely linked than Berlin and Vienna.[1] Their cultural heritage was first explored by Julius Bab and Willi Handl in a popular volume published in 1918 and then updated with an additional chapter by Hans Kienzl after Handl's death in 1926.[2] Here the focus is on differences between attitudes and approaches, some of which are closely linked to the history of the two cities. By 1918 Berlin had grown in size, wealth and in cultural enterprise, attracting those keen to succeed both from Germany's provincial capitals and from Vienna, where the richness and depth of *fin-de-siècle* culture had produced a superfluity of artistic talent – much of which, particularly that of *avant-garde* inclination, found its way northwards. In November 1918, as the fate of the rump state of 'Deutsch-Österreich' became a vital issue to German-speaking Austrians, Stefan

1 Publications exploring aspects of the close ties between Berlin and Vienna in the twentieth century include: *Wien–Berlin: deux sites de la modernité*, ed. by Maurice Godé, Ingrid Haag and Jacques Le Rider (Montpellier, 1993); *Berliner und Wiener Moderne. Vermittlungen und Abgrenzungen in Literatur, Theater, Publizistik*, ed. by Peter Sprengel and Gregor Streim (Vienna, 1998); *Berlin–Wien–Prag*, ed. by Susanne Marten-Finnis and Matthias Uecker (Berne, 2001); *Wien–Berlin*, ed. by Bernhard Fetz and Hermann Schlösser (Vienna, 2001).

2 Julius Bab and Willi Handl, *Wien und Berlin. Vergleichende Kulturgeschichte der beiden deutschen Hauptstädte mit einem Schlußkapitel von H. Kienzl* (Berlin, 1926).

Großmann, whose work as a journalist is discussed in this volume by Bernhard Fetz, called a meeting of all Austrians working in Berlin to form a 'Deutsch-Österreichischer Arbeitsausschuß'. He discovered to his amazement that about a third of those working in the performing arts in Berlin were in fact Austrians, most of them from Vienna.[3] Many more were to follow, working in the arts and journalism and contributing to 'Weimar culture'[4] until political conditions forced them to retrace their steps – in many cases into exile, as is reflected in the majority of the contributions in *Vienna meets Berlin*.

A comparison of the situation in Berlin and Vienna at the start of the Twenties shows marked similarities in so far as both cities had major problems to contend with – housing, health, transport, general infrastructure, economy and politics. However, as Frank Trommler's comparative article on architecture and social policies shows, the two cities dealt with the challenge in different ways. After 'Greater Berlin' had been created in 1920 it became the third largest city in the world after London and New York, while in January 1922 Vienna became a 'Land' and the first city of over a million inhabitants to have a socialist administration. The efforts to create a socialist utopia earned Vienna the sobriquet 'das rote Wien', and its achievements in the fields of public housing, welfare and education in particular were internationally recognised. Both cities faced political unrest right from the beginning with the revolutionary situation of 1918/19, more severe initially in Berlin. In July 1927, Vienna experienced a major confrontation between the workers and the executive in the aftermath of the Schattendorf trial. As a result of a 'not guilty' verdict on right-wing paramilitary murderers the Viennese workers downed tools and gathered outside the Justizpalast, which radicals set on fire. This was followed by police chief Johannes Schober's instructions to fire on the demonstrators, resulting in 89 deaths and with consequences for political stability hard to assess. In 1929 in Berlin, on the orders of the socialist chief of police, Karl Zörgiebel, police opened fire on workers during a May Day demonstration. Later,

3 Stefan Großmann, *Ich war begeistert* (Berlin, 1930), p. 286.

4 This term normally applies to cultural developments in Germany between the wars. Classic assessments have been written by Peter Gay (*Weimar Culture*, London, 1968) and Walter Laqueur (*Weimar. A Cultural History 1918–33*, London, 1974).

when the political situation polarised between left and right, Austria and Germany both resorted to government by emergency decrees. Vienna as it happened had no significant communist party. Friedrich Adler's rejection of the leadership of the putative party on his release from jail in November 1918 had ensured there would be no major fragmentation between the Social Democratic (what was termed 'Austro-Marxist') party and other left-wing groups, although this fragmentation was to occur later within the party itself.

But differences between the two cities were already manifest in the course of the nineteenth century. The growth and establishment of a major industrial base in Berlin is probably the first and most significant factor to note, whereas in the first half of the nineteenth century industry was kept away from Vienna. It was this industrialisation that accounted for the rapid growth of Berlin, and by 1870 it had outgrown Vienna – Berlin increasing its population twenty-fold during the nineteenth century against Vienna's eightfold. The exercise of the Protestant work ethic in the city on the Spree has been remarked on by many, including Siegfried Jacobsohn who commented on the Viennese critic Alfred Polgar, 'freilich arbeitet er nicht, wenigstens in unserm Sinne, sondern spielt am liebsten Schach. Aber das ist eben Wien.'[5] *Bon mots* of this kind are numerous and speak for themselves: Vienna was seen by many as the baroque, almost Italianate city of pleasure and culture while the founding of the second German Empire in 1871 had made Berlin an imperial capital, and this, aided by the money brought in by reparations after the Franco-Prussian war, had revolutionised its cultural role.

The progress of modernism in Berlin and, indeed, in a somewhat different form in Vienna up until the outbreak of World War One had been astounding. It meant that in 1918/19 with the proclamations of the new republics, a new era in the cultural as well as the political sphere was to be expected. Censorship was abolished (in theory if not in practice)[6] and the old court institutions were taken over by the state. More than anything else the mood in the two cities had changed after the war. Ernst Křenek's memories are representative:

5 Sigurd Paul Scheichl, 'Alfred Polgar als Wiener Theaterberichterstatter in der Schaubühne und der Weltbühne', in: *Wien–Berlin: deux sites de la modernité*, p. 150.

6 Modris Eckstein, *The Limits of Reason* (Oxford, 1975), p. 70.

> Während Österreich vollkommen gebrochen aus dem Krieg hervorging und von dem schrecklichen Schlag, den es erhalten hatte, betäubt war, verwandelte Deutschland die Wirkung der Katastrophe sofort in einen neuen Impuls und zeigte ein erstaunliches Maß an Vitalität und Spannkraft. Die Tatsache, daß Deutschland den Krieg verloren hatte, wurde im Bewußtsein der Öffentlichkeit absichtlich und unabsichtlich von dem vorherrschenden Willen verdrängt, alles noch größer und besser zu machen als es je gewesen war.[7]

Berlin's development in the nineteenth century into Europe's leading industrial city, together with the sheer size of 'Greater Berlin', meant that it faced the Twenties with an immense potential. Vienna by contrast, it might be argued, had become effete and spoilt, a city where, as Victor Adler had expressed it, 'Absolutismus' was tempered by 'Schlamperei'. Formerly the imperial capital of a multi-national Empire, now impoverished and traumatised by its loss, Vienna found itself the capital of a state of a mere six million, the 'Wasserkopf' of Austria. It seemed, initially at least, incapable of positive reaction to the new situation. Furthermore it had lost the feeder cities such as Prague and Budapest on which it had drawn. Berlin on the other hand, still the capital of a state of fifty million, had to compete with cities with their own cultural tradition – Hamburg, Munich, Leipzig, Dresden, Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Cologne to name only the most important. If Berlin, a relative newcomer amongst the cultural elite of European cities, had by contrast with Vienna produced relatively few local writers and artists, it was all the more welcoming both to 'outsiders' and to stimuli from many sources.

Those who came to Berlin were quick to recognise the nascent possibilities. Bert Brecht wrote to Caspar Neher in February 1920, 'Berlin ist eine wundervolle Angelegenheit […] alles ist schrecklich überfüllt von Geschmacklosigkeit, aber in was für einem Format!'[8] 'Wir müssen', he wrote a few years later, 'nach Berlin. Nur dort wird die Theaterschlacht geschlagen'. Elias Canetti, who came to Berlin from Vienna, commented in *Die Fackel im Ohr*: 'Man mochte aus einer alten Hauptstadt wie Wien kommen, hier fühlte man sich als Provinzler und riß die Augen weit auf, bis sie sich daran gewöhnten, offen zu bleiben. Es war etwas Scharfes, Ätzendes in der Atmosphäre, das einen reizte und

7 Ernst Křenek, *Im Atem der Zeit* (Hamburg, 1998), p. 229.

8 Bertolt Brecht, *Briefe 1913–1956*, ed. by Günter Glaeser (Berlin,Weimar, 1983), p. 58.

belebte.'[9] Canetti also referred to the number of Berlin businessmen who were happy to become 'patrons' of young talent, a function additionally exercised by the publishing houses who were prepared to support young writers.

Kurt Weill came to Berlin in 1925. Writing apropos the introduction of radio, he noted that while other major cities could look back on a thousand years of cultural history, Berlin benefited from the lack of it since 'Mangel an Tradition kann doch für eine Einrichtung von so umwälzender Wirkung wie der Rundfunk nur ein Vorteil sein. Man muß am Anfang stehen, um Schöpfer zu sein.'[10] And Berlin certainly made major contributions to all three of the new genres that appeared on the scene from the turn of the century – cabaret, film and radio. Even before the First World War, Egon Friedell had already commented on this position, heralding a new age and a new genre (the cinema) in the performing arts:

> Berlin zum Beispiel verdient gerade darum die höchste Anerkennung, weil es seine Aufgabe als deutsche Reichshauptstadt so richtig erfaßt hat: die Aufgabe, ein Zentrum der modernen Zivilisation zu sein. Berlin ist eine wundervolle moderne Maschinenhalle, ein riesiger Elektromotor, der mit unglaublicher Präzision, Energie und Geschwindigkeit eine Fülle von mechanischen Arbeitsleistungen vollbringt.[11]

Particularly prescient was his awareness that Berlin's hour of cultural maturity was about to arrive: the city became the powerhouse of 'Weimar culture'.

There are two reasons, however, why Vienna must not be dismissed from the equation. First, Vienna was not as intellectually denuded as it seemed.[12] Secondly, if we look at Berlin from this special perspective of

9 Elias Canetti, *Die Fackel im Ohr* (Munich, 1980), p. 332.

10 Kurt Weill, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. by David Drews (Frankfurt a.M., 1975), p. 95.

11 See: 'Prolog vor dem Film', in *Blätter des Deutschen Theaters* 2 (1912), pp. 509–511.

12 Compared to the plethora of books on Berlin less has been written about Viennese cultural life between the wars. See, for example: Gertrud Pott, *Verkannte Größe. Eine Kulturgeschichte der ersten Republik 1918–1938* (Vienna, 1990). A good account of popular culture is to be found in Hans Veigl, *Die wilden 20er Jahre. Alltagskultur zwischen zwei Kriegen* (Vienna, 1999), and there are also several useful articles in the catalogue to the 1985 Viennese exhibition *Traum und Wirklichkeit. Wien 1870–1930* (Vienna, 1985).

its interaction with Vienna, it is obvious that of the many outstanding achievements which mark out Berlin's position, the Viennese contributions were strong in almost all fields of artistic endeavour.

It is hardly surprising that a theatrical migration took place, for Berlin had over fifty theatres as against Vienna's tenth of that number – the articles by Alan Bance, Edward Timms, Alexander Weigel, John Warren and Friedbert Aspetsberger illustrate the interaction. In Berlin Expressionism in art and literature presaged a second modernist revolution and even music, for so long seen as the prerogative of Vienna, was now recognised as being strong in Berlin – as the article by Christian Glanz shows. Richard Strauss, who was to move to Vienna in the aftermath of the First World War, had established an artistic co-operation with the Viennese Hugo von Hofmannsthal which resulted in six operas and the Strauss/Hofmannsthal correspondence, a unique document of artistic interaction. This co-operation between Vienna and Berlin was to be followed not only by the likes of Bert Brecht and Hanns Eisler but also at a more popular level.

Film provided a much discussed threat to the viability of theatre.[13] As early as 1922 Axel Eggebrecht noted that 1.5 million people visited the cinema every day, making it one of the largest industries in Germany, and Friedrich Wolf, writing in exile in 1938, asserted that in terms of capital investment the film industry ranked directly after coal, steel and oil. The work of the Austrian directors Fritz Lang and Georg Pabst is well known. Along with Max Reinhardt's pupil Friedrich Murnau they can be considered as the 'greats' of the inter-war German film industry. Others include Karl Grune, born in Vienna, whose *Die Straße* started a popular sub-genre, while Richard Oswald, also from Vienna, having pioneered the somewhat dubious 'Aufklärungsfilme', directed the first screen version of Zuckmayer's *Der Hauptmann von Köpenick* in 1932 and is credited with the discovery of Conrad Veidt, Lya de Putti and Wilhelm Dieterle. Gustav Ucicky started his career in Vienna with the film enthusiast Sascha Kolowrat working on *Sodom*

13 Books on German film are numerous. *Deutsche Spielfilme von den Anfängen bis 1933*, ed. by Günther Dahlke and Günter Karl (Berlin, 1993) provides an excellent overview, while *Weimar Cinema and After* by Thomas Elsaesser (London, New York, 2000) is a more than useful addition to standard works by Eisner and Kracauer.

und Gomorra and *Die Sklavenkönigin*. He directed *Café Electric* in 1927 before moving to Berlin. Here he was to direct many 'talkies' including *Das Flötenkonzert von Sanssouci*, *Morgenrot* and *Der zerbrochene Krug*. Wilhelm Thiele moved to Berlin in 1926 where he was to excel in musical films, directing the popular 'film operetta' *Die Drei von der Tankstelle* in 1930. Another Viennese, Joe May, directed and produced many popular films in the Twenties, including *Asphalt* in 1929.[14] Paul Czinner made the move from Budapest to Vienna and then on to Berlin where he worked with (and married) Elisabeth Bergner, directing her in, amongst other films, *Nju*, *Fräulein Else*, *Ariane* and *Der träumende Mund*. These last two films had scenarios by Carl Mayer, accepted during the Twenties as the greatest scriptwriter for German film. His work included *Caligari*, *Die Hintertreppe, Scherben*, *Der letzte Mann* and *Tartüff*. He also gave Walter Ruttmann the idea for the feature length documentary film *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, although he and Ruttmann fell out before it was completed. Two other Viennese used Berlin as a stepping stone to careers in Hollywood: the more famous then was Josef von Sternberg, whose *Der Blaue Engel* (1930) launched Marlene Dietrich's international career, while the more famous now is Billy Wilder, who worked on Robert Siodmak's feature documentary *Menschen am Sonntag* of 1933. Thomas Elsaesser's contribution to this volume takes the interaction a step further in that he analyses the particular cinematic rhetoric of the Viennese director Walter Reisch, whose work plays on the Viennese myth.

The world of cabaret[15] provides a somewhat similar picture, albeit with much more coming and going between the two capitals and a greater predominance of Berlin-based artists. The names of the Berlin cabarets and their artists are legendary and their resonance far greater than those of Vienna; from Reinhardt's 'Schall und Rauch', recreated in 1919 with Paul Graetz, Gussy Holl and Blandine Ebinger, Rosa Valetti's 'Größenwahn' (with Kate Kühl and Valetti herself), Trude Hesterberg's 'Wilde Bühne' (led by Hesterberg with Kurt Gerron, Annemarie Hase

14 Hans Gunther Pflaum, *Deutsche Stummfilmklassiker* (Munich, 2002), pp. 147–159.

15 See for example Klaus Budzinski, *Die Muse mit der scharfen Zunge* (Munich, 1961), Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret* (Cambridge/Mass., 1993) and Rudolf Weys, *Cabaret und Kabarett in Wien* (Munich, 1970).

and Margo Lion), the 'Künstler Café', or 'Küka' (with Karl Schnog and texts from Erich Weinert), and the 'Kabarett der Komiker' or 'Kadeko' founded by Kurt Robitschek and Paul Morgan (with Claire Waldoff, Yvette Guilbert, Ilse Bois, Ernst Busch), they flourished and delighted Berliners right down to Werner Fink's 'Die Katakombe' founded in 1929, probably the most political of all cabarets.

Radio is another area where one might have looked for close co-operation, but if the development of radio (Berlin from 1923 and Vienna from 1924) helped musical developments with exchanges of concerts over the airwaves, the new genre of 'Hörspiel' proved more localised.[16] Although Arnolt Bronnen wrote an adaptation of Heinrich von Kleist's novella *Michael Kohlhaas* for Berlin radio neither this nor other key radio plays (such as Brecht's *Der Flug der Lindberghs* or Friedrich Wolf's Rockefeller chronicle, *John D. erobert die Welt*) were broadcast by Ravag.

In journalism the traffic was very much one way from Vienna and Prague northwards. Stefan Großmann's magazine *Das Tage-Buch* was a journal second only to *Die Weltbühne* in influence and importance. Joseph Roth and Egon Erwin Kisch were to establish themselves among the most famous of German journalists; a host of others were editors, among them Vicki Baum, who worked for Ullstein between 1926 and the success of her novel *Menschen im Hotel* in 1931.[17] Roth managed to write novels as well as an ongoing series of 'Feuilletons' while Kisch's success is inseparably linked to the title of his most successful book, *Der rasende Reporter*.[18] Polgar too eventually moved to Berlin where he continued to write for *Die Weltbühne* and other journals and became the first theatre critic to be given a weekly radio programme. It is therefore no coincidence that the sections dealing with the press, 'Feuilletons' and novels in this volume also demonstrate this clear shift towards Berlin.

This brings us back to the question of interdependence and indeed cultural independence. It would be a mistake to suggest that the Vienna of the inter-war years, denuded of major talents, had lost all cultural

16 Heinz Schwitzke's *Das Hörspiel. Geschichte und Dramaturgie* (Cologne, Berlin, 1963) provides an introduction to the genre.

17 Vicki Baum, *Es war alles ganz anders* (Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, 1962). See chapter 12 for an account of journalistic life in Berlin.

18 Géza von Cziffra, *Kauf dir einen bunten Luftballon* (Munich, 1975), p. 38.

sparkle and that all innovation and achievement had moved north. The programme of the 'Musik- und Theaterfest' mounted by David Josef Bach in September and October 1924, to name but one example, demonstrated a wealth and depth of creativity in theatre, music and the arts in general – not only, it must be stressed, based on tradition but also, as seen by events staged on Kiesler's 'Raumbühne' in the Konzerthaus, in the area of the avant-garde.[19] Within a month over twenty operas were performed, over forty different plays put on stage in Vienna's five main theatres, and many concerts featuring – as well as the classical composers – the work of Schönberg, Schreker, Hindemith and others. Vienna was by no means 'down and out' in the Twenties, and despite financial constraints opera, operetta and musical life in general continued to flourish through to the Anschluss, as Klaus Mann was to note.[20] But, decisively, while modernism flourished in Berlin it failed to do so in Vienna; it was in Berlin that artistic progress seemed to be moving forward. Was there anything specifically 'Viennese' or Austrian in this development? Two types of Austrians moved northwards: performing artists seeking to expand their careers and those creative artists for whom there was no place in Vienna's more traditional culture. When in 1921 the critic Herbert Jhering wrote a series of articles on various producers he compared the work of Otto Brahm with that of Max Reinhardt:

> Wenn Reinhardt farbig, phantastisch ausbrach, wo Brahm grau, spartanisch sich zurückhielt, so lagen zwischen dieser Sinnlichkeit und dieser Geistigkeit nicht die Intervalle zweier Epochen, sondern die Intervalle von Persönlichkeiten, die dieselbe Epoche in ihren zwei Möglichkeiten erlebten.[21]

The impact of individual personalities aside, some may see that the Viennese brought a certain lightness and colour to the more austere atmosphere of Berlin while others will maintain that the Viennese contribution tended towards the more popular end of the artistic spectrum. When in 1928 Max Reinhardt opened his drama school in the

19 John Warren, 'Friedrich Kiesler and Theatrical Modernism in Vienna', in *Theatre and Performance in Austria*, ed. by Ritchie Robertson and Edward Timms (Edinburgh, 1993).

20 Klaus Mann, *Der Wendepunkt. Ein Lebensbericht* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1984), pp. 322f.

21 Herbert Jhering, *Der Kampf ums Theater und andere Streitschriften 1918 bis 1933* (Berlin, 1974), pp. 105f.

Palais Cumberland in Vienna, he noted that 'hier die große Vergangenheit des Theaters in gewissen unverlierbaren Traditionen noch lebendig aufzuspüren ist'.[22] But 'tradition' and the very different historical and contemporary background were not the only reasons for the differences between the cultural life of the two cities between the wars. In the end, despite interaction and conscious comparisons by many of the key-players of the period, it came down to size, energy and vitality, to the magnetic attraction of a world city. Berlin was a true metropolis, luring talent to the capital of Weimar Germany. And it was given every opportunity to flourish – until the fateful year 1933.

22 Max Reinhardt, *Ich bin nichts als Theatermann*, ed. by Hugo Fetting (Berlin, 1989), p. 428.