

Introduction

New Austrian Film: The Non-exceptional Exception



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In an article in 2006, the *New York Times* introduced a series of screenings of Austrian productions with the following statement: “In recent years this tiny country with a population the size of New York City’s has become something like the world capital of feel-bad cinema” (Lim 2006). As the critic portrays the major directors, a picture emerges that probably sums up a common sentiment regarding New Austrian Film: not unlike other cinematic new waves, Austria’s artists are engaged in a bitter fight against the prevailing petit-bourgeois mindset of their fellow citizens. From this perspective, however, it must appear that New Austrian Film is caught in a deadlock, a fight against its nation’s very image, be it the postwar self-stylization as neutral Austria, Nazi Germany’s first victim, or even the ironic self-perception as a leftover of *Kakania*, Robert Musil’s famous satirical moniker for the *k.und k.* (imperial and royal) Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy. In an effort to break the illusions of the “official” Austria and its long avoidance of dealing with its fascist past, New Austrian Film is not only highly critical and counter-traditionalist (albeit using traditional genres) but it takes on the very mechanisms of spectatorial trust in cinema. And with a strong female participation that is significantly prominent, we can see how gender affects cinematic style and mood in dealing with contemporary dystopias. Despite the challenges to the audience, the reductionist “feel-bad cinema” label is itself only another totalizing concept that current Austrian filmmakers would smash.

The problem with seeing the struggle against the petit bourgeoisie as the common denominator of New Austrian Film, even as its main creative force, is that any work debunking the former image as counter-factual and the latter as a disguise for xenophobia and parochialism would already and inevitably be a reaction against

those powerful, prior discourses. Indeed, a director's wildest imagination seems to be trumped by the sordid details of what appears to be a uniquely Austrian trauma that is constantly emerging before the eyes of the fascinated spectator. Nothing that is done to the mentally challenged hitchhiker in *Hundstage/Dog Days* (2001) by Ulrich Seidl, a film we would credit with an uncanny foresight, can match the ordeal of Natascha Kampusch, who escaped in the summer of 2006 after more than eight years in captivity. Any portrayal of the bourgeois as a pervert with a double life, clichéd or not, must fail in the light of the monstrous Josef Fritzl who held his daughter, Elisabeth, for twenty-four years as a sex slave in an underground prison. The case of Fritzl is especially telling, not because of the apathy on the part of his neighbors and the authorities (a point that has been stated ad nauseam), and not because it prompted Austria's then Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer to announce on television that he would launch an image campaign to counter the "international slander" of Austria that ensued,¹ but because the sadistic jailer himself was more than willing to produce images, thereby psychologizing and thus excusing himself, portraying himself as unloved and abused by his mother, as controlled by forces beyond his control—in short, as a victim himself.

It is exactly here, in this discourse of victimhood, that we have to locate what was described above as a deadlock: images on television, in the newspaper, and on the web are clearly already on the side of power, insofar as they allow the perpetrator to redefine himself as a victim. Any attempt to counter these images could not rise above the level of former Chancellor Gusenbauer's campaign, a reactionary mode that inevitably leads to *ressentiment*. The problem for New Austrian Film could thus be summed up as finding a way to save the perspective of the victim, this impossible position that is always already occupied by power. At this point, we can also see a first indication that this problem is directly linked to fascism, not for historical reasons but for what could be called structural reasons. As Walter Benjamin argued in 1935, in his lucid essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," fascism aestheticizes political life. Indeed, Benjamin pinpoints the novelty of German fascism in this fusion: politics and art are no longer different realms. The danger in this development, however, does not concern the loss of a somehow "auratic" status of the work of art, which could now be used for any form of propaganda, but a conflation of momentous consequences—it is now the experience of art that constitutes the community: "The violation of the masses, whom Fascism, with its *Führer* cult, forces to their knees, has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values" (Benjamin 1969: 241). This apparatus, of course, does not stop working just because Nazi Germany surrendered and Austria was allowed to reposition itself in the political landscape of the Cold War. As Benjamin points out, "the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence" (*ibid.*: 222). In other words, this mode of perception prevails and, if we can trust the diagnostic power of New Austrian Film, finds its expression above all in television. We can thus state that the attacks of New Austrian Film are not aimed at a specific Austrian petit-bourgeois milieu, but at the general mode of existence that carries this ideological apparatus and that lingers on not only in Austria.

At this point, an affinity with another conflation becomes clearer, which Michel Foucault calls “biopolitics,” and which, again, is not specific to Austria or even Germany, but whose emergence is linked to modernity: “For the first time in history ... biological existence was reflected in political existence; the fact of living was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time, amid the randomness of death and its fatality; part of it passed into knowledge’s field of control and power’s sphere of intervention” (Foucault 1978: 142). The fascist state, to stay with the most obvious example, regulates not just everyday life, but the biological life of its citizens.

In postwar Austria, as in the rest of the Western world, biopolitics already transformed society into what Gilles Deleuze, in an extrapolation of Foucault’s thesis, calls a “society of control”: “We are in a generalized crisis in relation to all the environments of enclosure—prison, hospital, factory, school, family. The family is an ‘interior,’ in crisis like all other interiors—scholarly, professional, etc. where there is no longer an outside to the system” (Deleuze 1986: n.p.). As Michael Hardt (1993: 141) explains in his reading of Deleuze, the dialectics between inside and outside still regulate the system of the modern nation-state. Here, the public space of politics has only an indirect influence on the clearly separated, private space of the family. With the gradual erosion of this distinction, the difference between “us” and “them,” nature and culture, public and private collapses into a system where the outside is basically abolished, where everything is interiorized. The consequences are far reaching: the others now “only” have a different culture, nature needs our protection, and what used to be public space is privately owned and operated, thus the frequent appearance in New Austrian Film of shopping-malls, fast-food chains and video stores as kinds of cultural wasteland, a perfect illustration of the concept of a society of control.

Again, we have to come to the conclusion that there is neither a mourning for nor a destruction of the Austrian *Heimat* or “homeland” in New Austrian Film, but an astute analysis of these postmodern spaces which clearly appear as “non-places,” to borrow a famous concept of Marc Augé. A non-place, as Augé defines it, is “a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity” (Augé 1995: 78–79). The people we see drifting through Austria in these films could also be traveling through any other landscape. As we can clearly see, just to give some examples, in Barbara Albert’s *Nordrand/Northern Skirts* (1999) and in Michael Haneke’s *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls/71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* (1994), no relations, historic roots or regional identities can help the protagonists with positioning themselves, and any references to Austria appear as secondary, as they also do in Ruth Beckermann’s filmic travelogues.

As was pointed out above, defining the impossible position of the victim as a point in the societal *dispositif*, to stay in the Foucauldian framework, is important for an understanding of New Austrian Film. The films under discussion in the present volume do not deal with fascism because of Austria’s arguably problematic relationship to its fascist past, but because they recognize that unfortunately nothing about this *dispositif* is truly exceptional: the filmmakers from “this tiny [sic] country” are fully aware that Austria is not an exception but the rule.

In his book *Homo Sacer*, Giorgio Agamben (1998) expands Foucault's notion of biopower, concentrating on the fact that the modern state not only controls the life of its own citizens but also excludes certain people from the body of its citizenry, and in turn regulates their biological life. According to Agamben, biopolitics is always inscribed in the founding act of sovereignty. Here, he follows the often-quoted statement by Carl Schmitt that the sovereign is the one who can declare a state of exception. This founding act, initially a performative utterance—"We declare ourselves sovereign!"—paradoxically creates two related "zones of indistinction," as the one who utters the declaration is at the same time part of the group and equally above the law, because the sovereign can always suspend the law and declare martial law. Implicit in the declaration is also a primary exclusion from the group, the automatic ban on all who do not belong. These *personae non gratae* are not protected by any law and can be incarcerated or killed with impunity; indeed, stripped of all political rights, inmates have nothing but their "bare life," as Agamben explains.² Hence his provocative notion that the site of biopolitics is the camp and not the prison—a prisoner, though separated from society, is at least protected by the penal code. Agamben clearly sees the same mechanism at work in modern politics as well as in fascist Germany: the dangerous precedent set by the Nazis, one still perpetrated today, is the creation of in-between spaces where de facto people can be kept in legal limbo.

Looking at New Austrian Film, we can quickly see that the common denominator here is the temporary creation of a zone of exception. The most obvious example is, of course, Stefan Ruzowitzky's Academy Award-winning film, *Die Fälscher/The Counterfeiters* (2007),³ where, inside the concentration camp, another forbidden zone is erected that, in turn, simulates normalcy—people do their job, eat, party, and so on. Inside this bubble, however, the law is an absolute dictate of usefulness, as the life of the inmates depends entirely on one specific skill; indeed, as the film strongly suggests, this secret zone inside the camp is the repressed truth of capitalism, because the simulation of value is reality and absolutely no surplus hinders efficiency. Here, *The Counterfeiters* offers a far more critical insight into the workings of a camp and the questions of morality than Steven Spielberg's epic *Schindler's List* (1993).

From this perspective, zones of exception appear everywhere in New Austrian Film. Michael Haneke constantly reminds us in his films that the central institutions of modernity—family, school, and the military—are in crisis and are themselves subject to a state of exception. His first three feature films, the so-called "glaciation of feelings" trilogy, address the failure of these institutions directly: the husband and wife in *Der siebente Kontinent/The Seventh Continent* (1989) destroy all their belongings, including the "bare life" of their daughter and the fish. The two white-gloved killers in the two versions of *Funny Games* (1997, 2007) turn the gated community into a camp with astonishing ease and their rigged bets and wagers represent the law of the moment for the unfortunate victims; while *Le Temps du loup/Time of the Wolf* (2003) takes place in a post-apocalyptic, lawless landscape, where the zone of exception is omnipresent.

We can state that the Austrian exception is best understood as a paradoxical exception; what makes these films exceptional is the astuteness with which they analyze and represent an unexceptional and generalized postmodern condition. Yet it is the history, the very development of New Austrian Film—the *nouvelle vague viennoise*, the Austrian New Cinema, Vienna's Po-mo Neo-realism, what ever it may be called—that is truly exceptional in the development of contemporary Western and specifically European cinema. Despite the slow lifting of popular amnesia (in and outside the country) regarding Vienna's film tradition and that of its old cinematic relationships—with Budapest, Prague, Berlin, Paris, London, and most of all Hollywood—Austria's recent international filmic presence since the 1990s is neither the proverbial "overnight success" nor is it a national film emergence in the truest sense of the phrase. Austria has been at this point before, but the deep fractures in the nation's identity since the trauma of its (re)birth in 1918, with five political incarnations in the twentieth century alone (sharing some of that with its neighbor and historical partner Germany) has taken a toll on continuity in its cinema. Each new cinema generation has had difficulty in reconnecting with the one before it, until all that seemed to remain were counterproductive clichés and a frustrated desire to reinvent. But without a strong auteurial tradition, and the need to export, even beyond the German-speaking world, such retrenchments tended to move with market demands rather than with risk. Each time creative risk became a factor in Austrian filmmaking, it had something to do with the disruption of the very concept of the nation. Perhaps this makes its cinema all the more demonstrative of what Austria is: as a multicultural melting-pot that attempted cultural homogeneity, and not without lingering debate, it is embracing its difference from the linguistically based nation-states and collected regions that surround it, a difference it already represented as a polyglot dynastic empire that colonized itself, ever eastward and southeastward, much like the United States in its move westward to expand a nation based around an ideal, rather than an ethnicity. Austrian film, when it arrived, was naturally multicultural, as was its post-1918 national industry—even at times transnational—and as were its larger mirrors, Canadian film and, most importantly, Hollywood.

The desire to develop a new wave in Austrian cinema has been active since the postwar era. In the midst of the great commercial boom of the late 1940s and 1950s, attempts were made to cultivate an Austrian neo-realism that would be analogous to that of Italy, and thus reflect on Austria's sociocultural problems. The ten year Allied occupation of Austria ultimately scarred Austrian self-esteem. The myth of sovereignty, the search for a future role in Cold War Europe, and the de-Germanization of its immediate past in favor of the "good" history of the imperial era and Vienna's artistic heyday, merely shut down the audience's desire for critical approaches in favor of escapism, unproblematized national allegory, and visual pleasure. The Second Republic, which officially began in 1955, and the wearisome move towards it since 1945, marked a return to traditional film genres in comedy and drama, in the *Heimatfilm*, and the historical biopic. Many important filmmakers, performers, and crews that had made Austrian film internationally popular in the era

of silent and early sound film, and those that had remained or survived the Nazi annexation, were still at work. Although tarnished by the immediate past, the old star system (Paul and Attila Hörbiger, Paula Wessely, Hans Moser, Hans Holt, Hans Thimig, Theo Lingen, Curd Jürgens, the Marischka family) mixed well with the new discoveries (Oskar Werner, Romy Schneider, Josef Meinrad, Maria Schell, Nadja Tiller, Peter Alexander, Senta Berger, Gunther Philipp, Johanna Matz) and held the nation's loyalty, even when many of the newer generation soon left for Munich, London, Paris, or Hollywood in search of more adventurous material, only to be regarded there as an even more limited "type." The public and the critics also continued to trust in the traditional creativity of veteran directors such as Willi Forst, Hubert and Ernst Marischka, Eduard von Borsody, Karl Hartl, and Géza von Cziffra; these recalled Austria's silent era, its socially critical melodramas, its female film pioneer, Louise Kolm-Fleck, and the monumental epics of producer Sascha Kolowrat and Austro-Hungarian directors Michael Kertesz (Michael Curtiz) and Sandor Korda (Alexander Korda), which rivaled D.W. Griffith and C.B. DeMille for world popularity. These veterans were active in the creation of Austria's most recognizable genre in early sound, the Viennese film. Created by writer Walter Reisch and star performer/director Willi Forst, it was not only exported internationally but remade in Berlin and then Hollywood studios, where Austrian film talent that sought wider possibilities, rejected the clerico-authoritarian regime (1934–1938) known as Austrofascism, or fearing Nazi revolution or annexation, joined many of their German counterparts from Berlin. Austria essentially hosted two film industries after 1933: that of mainstream production approved for German import (Nazis in and outside of the country had infiltrated Austrian production to the point of forcing "Aryanization" in the sovereign state), and that of the *Emigrantenfilm*, which consisted of German immigrant and anti-Nazi or Jewish Austrian talent coproducing in an internationalist style with studios in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, even the Netherlands and Sweden. While these latter attempts found critical and popular favor at home and, indeed, around the globe, annexation by Nazi Germany in 1938 (the *Anschluss*) halted this Central European film experiment and shifted much of its talent to Hollywood.⁴ The "entertainment" role of Vienna in the Reich consisted of more of what it always had done best, the Forst-led Viennese film, operetta, and comedies, along with a few overtly propagandist narratives. Nevertheless, many of these lavish period films suggested the forbidden fantasy of a lost imperial Austria and its unique culture, rather than the country's integration into a multifaceted concept of a greater Germany.

The imperial film epics of the 1950s which emerged from the Viennese film genre and lost themselves in the opulent melodrama of Habsburg royalty and the music-laden fantasies of old Vienna in the nineteenth century, along with biopics on composers such as Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert (from veterans and new purveyors of the style, such as Hubert Marischka and Franz Antel), were the exact opposite of their antecedents during the Reich—nation building rather than national deconstruction. Given the long Allied occupation, the imperial fantasy and *Heimatfilm* context seemed to define Austria with a false sense of continuity and a

world popularity that at once distanced Austria from its Nazi past and its definition as a German province, while it brought it ever closer to West Germany in film production needs. These Agfacolor films, like the postwar Hollywood Technicolor celebration of American cultural superiority, conveyed through opulent studio backlot musicals, wide-screen trivial comedies, and Biblical epics, were reassuring. They battled the onset of television and brought Austria to the world entertainment market again, if not to the critical world of cinema, which found its important impulses in Italy, France, Sweden, Britain, and even in the Eastern Bloc (East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia).

Ironically, as significant as cinema had been in defining and redefining postimperial and republican Austria, and in sending its creative messages abroad, it was never seen as a national art with the pride and support given to literature, theater, opera, or the concert hall. The lack of national film funding in Austria, which was only sparsely begun in 1980, the exhaustion of the mainstream film genres, and the retirement or demise of many of Austria's veteran film talents by the 1960s, brought no government support for the growth or even teaching of film. Instead of the national pride that greeted French, British, or Italian New Wave cinema and cultivated global attention, Austrian commercial film was co-opted by West German, then ever wider, international multi-productions (generic spy films, broad comedies aimed at dubbing distribution, period extravaganzas that flopped) and television, and ceased to exist by 1968. The avant-garde turned against narrative structure rather than trying to change it with new techniques and subject matter, and Viennese Actionism—a mix of shock and protest performance art about and utilizing film—attacked the complacency and traditionalism of Austrian art, society, and politics, alienating audiences (if not critics).⁵ This supported the growing impression abroad and eventually at home that Austria was not a “film nation.”⁶

The exception that is the current new wave in Austria is that it grew uniquely from a slow return to narrative and documentary film forms, and attempted to please no one except its makers and communicate with a local audience. From its scattered beginnings in the late 1970s, its artists rejected commercial filmmaking not only because this was a dead concept following the collapse of the industry and its Austrian-German remnant in the sex comedy, and with the impact of the Actionists, but because it was poverty cinema that made the auteur a necessity rather than an artistic conceit. The very modest means and the need to experience a different Austrian reality (even “history”) engendered a new film generation that looked at styles abroad but found their vision and voice in critical topics set in recognizable circumstances. Austrian film history was distant, unloved, and served only as a measure of what was being made differently.

By the time the ‘new wave’ label began to identify the second decade of this youthful cinema, limited international coproduction (usually Austrian-German) was common again, and several narrative films had garnered noteworthy attention in and outside Austria. Among these was the groundbreaking television film, *Der Fall Jägerstätter/The Jaegerstaetter Case* (1972) from Axel Corti, a rare attempt at exploring dissident life in Austria during the Third Reich; the psychological study of

contemporary urban-underclass xenophobia, Peter Patzak's *Kassbach* (1979); the starkly neo-realist *Schwitzkasten/Clinch* (1978) by Canadian-turned-Austrian filmmaker, John Cook; actor/director Maximilian Schell's *Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald/Tales From the Vienna Woods* (1979), a critical look at impoverished life under Austrofascism from the play by Ödön von Horváth; and Wolfgang Glück's *Der Schüler Gerber/The Student Gerber* (1980), a period allegory about fascism and self-destruction. Axel Corti's television trilogy, *Wohin und Zurück/Somewhere and Back* (1986), which followed Gabriel Barylli's Jewish refugee character Freddy Wolf through the war, made Barylli a near star in the US for a brief time when the wrenching final segment, *Welcome in Vienna*, about Wolf's return to Austria as part of the American occupation force in 1945, aired on public television networks. *Die Praxis der Liebe/The Practice of Love* (1985), written and directed by one of Austria's leading avant-garde experimentalists of the 1960s, VALIE EXPORT (who insists her name be written in capital letters as a brand), was a successful foray into traditional narrative form and helped her find wider reception for her feminism and political criticism. Finally, Niki List's national box-office smash, the neo-noir comedy *Müllers Büro/Mueller's Office* (1986), and Josef Hader and Alfred Dorfer in Paul Harather's now classic adaptation of their tragicomic odd-couple play *Indien/India* (1993), proved that popular entertainment could be critical and did not have to return to outmoded production forms and themes. Even the social comedies of television director Reinhard Schwabenitzky, the most mainstream Austrian filmmaker at the present time, have grown within this cinematic new thought and look.

The Vienna Film Fund and a nascent national film subsidy helped solidify the new growth to some extent, but it was and still remains among the weakest financial support structures in Europe. With few traditional venues for distribution available, new companies and concepts such as the artist-run Sixpack Film (or sixpackfilm), which promotes short and experimental work, brought together a very disparate creative scene. The term New Austrian Film is thus one of convenience. This new wave did not replace or integrate itself into entertainment film as elsewhere in Europe. It did not have to battle dominant entertainment film (and lose) as in the US. Although politically critical it was not brought about by sweeping national political change, nor does it emerge from cinematic colonialism. It is not based on a manifesto as was the early Oberhausen-led New German Film of the 1960s and the second generation New German Cinema in the 1970s and 1980s, or like the followers of the Danish Dogme 95 approach (although there are a few Austrian Dogme-inspired films). It is the exception, one that grew organically from the uniqueness of the destruction of its cinematic parent, from its resistance to official history and national image, and from the multicultural shadow that has always been a natural part of the internationality of this national cinema. Its categorization can only be found in its self-starting and casual collaboration, rather than in some overriding doctrine, in its ability to exist against all economic and market-driven odds, and in emerging critical sympathy to a multi-segmented and detached national film history/culture that has only recently been represented as significant by archives, retrospectives, and

research.⁷ The exception is also the fact that New Austrian Film can be defined by what it is not—as Austria itself has always been.

We have endeavored to give this collected volume the type of methodologically and stylistically variant quality found in the films examined. From close readings to psychological study; from sociopolitical to semiotic analysis; from formalistic examination to impressionistic reportage and interview—the volume as a whole reflects the aspects that unite and separate these films and their makers. Balancing the general and the exceptional might be the only way to do justice to these recent films from Austria. Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger explores the very roots of the new film era in her discussion of *VALIE EXPORT*, as she looks at the artist's questioning of cinema as theory and practice in the 1960s and 1970s, her feminism, and her current stance on the relationship between performance and the screen. New Austrian Film's origins in the dominant film style and unlikely camera of the versatile entertainment showman of the Second Republic, Franz Antel, is the subject of Joseph Moser's examination of Antel's series of commercial films (1981–2003) dealing with a curmudgeonly Vienna butcher by the name of Bockerer that move towards an early attempt to “come to terms” with the previously cinematically taboo subject of the *Anschluss*, Nazism, Allied occupation, and Cold War consequences. Similarly, Wolfgang Glück's film *38* (1987), about a Jewish journalist and a gentile actress caught between the final days of Austrofascism and the approaching Nazi *Anschluss* is dissected by Felix Tweraser as a mixed attempt to reinvent the historical drama for a generation that rejects the totalizing force of that genre and to open the topic of historical fascism in Austrian cinema. Glück gave Austria its first international success in decades and garnered an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language film but lack of critical enthusiasm at home articulated the new generation's desire for new cinematic structures informed by the deep caesura of the 1960s and 1970s and a concentration on the fascistic residue in contemporary Austria. Christina Guenther provides a close-up from this landscape and considers Ruth Beckermann's representation of Jewishness and women in the construction of Austrian historical memory and contemporary cultural identity through her experimental documentaries and transgenre works as one of the very few Jewish filmmakers at work in Austria today.

Barbara Albert's *Nordrand/Northern Skirts* (1999) provided the international breakthrough for the more established phase of New Austrian Film in the late 1990s. It approaches the marginalization of the new multicultural population in Vienna played against the transitory nature of the postmodern urban environment and the xenophobia encouraged by Jörg Haider and the so-called Freedom Party. The dominance of female characters and her specifically female approach make it the exception in New Austrian Film. As film critic Ed Halter writes, these “quiet, cool, and subjective [films] achieve a detached, contemplative air so rarely attempted by overcompensating American cinema, communicating a bittersweet beauty through the simple evocation of interior life” (Halter 2003). Dagmar Lorenz approaches this postfeminism inside and outside of Albert's landmark film, and finds the lingering sexism and gender-related abuse that makes female independence difficult.

Meanwhile, Imke Meyer looks behind the scrim of a post-9/11 globalist, consumerist society at the leveling mechanisms that at once antagonize individualism and cause isolation in a nation still at odds with its national identity in Albert's follow-up film, *Böse Zellen/Free Radicals* (2003). The dystopian mosaics of Albert's oeuvre are mapped out according to her use of space and spatial distinctiveness by Mary Wauchope, who finds the filmmaker's subversion of the mythical Vienna and tourist Austria to be illusory points of identity and non-security, particularly for women. Yet, Albert's desire and need for a "new community of women," as Lorenz calls it, shaped by these dystopian aspects is most perceptible in the working interrelationship of women filmmakers in Austria today. The collaborative quality of New Austrian Film has manifested itself as a creative network that has replaced the historical male dominance of Austrian cinema with a female direction that is unique among the "new" cinemas in Europe. Seemingly at the center of this shared creativity, and also representative of its auteurism, is Kathrin Resetarits, in whose work and near iconic (self-)representation Verena Mund finds complex messages of perception regarding "image"—be it gender, socioculturally, or culturally defined—and its ambiguous reflection in popular media. Catherine Wheatley asks if there is a postfeminist, feminine, or female aesthetic arising from this cinematic imprint, using Valeska Grisebach's *Sehnsucht/Longing* (2006) as her case study along with films by Jessica Hausner and Ruth Mader. Her analysis of a specific reflexivity defined by time, space, and spectatorial gaze which opposes the "meta-textual ruptures" in continuity by male New Austrian filmmakers does not lead to a conscious male-subversive counter-cinema (Mulvey, et al.) for her, but ultimately forms a cinematic *écriture féminine* constructively coexisting with male presence in these films.

One can look to Michael Haneke, who has risen to the kind of critical international attention not given to an Austrian director since Willi Forst, as heading up the "other half" of New Austrian Film—that of a possible male aesthetic, but one that does not oppose or position itself against female filmmaking, instead sharing equally in the talents available and the networking that has brought this new wave to the fore. If Haneke is a pan-European filmmaker—German born, Austrian citizen, Austrian, French, and German creative loci, and multicultural ethnic concerns—whose internationalism contributes to his universality, then Ulrich Seidl provides the opposite approach to locating similar universally identifiable dystopias: a sharply localized camera aimed at the anomie and brutality of everyday life in faceless suburbs and among "average" working and middle-class Austrians—the heart of the non-exceptional exception. Eva Kuttenberg approaches Haneke's earliest filmic success, *Der siebente Kontinent/The Seventh Continent* (1989), which influenced the breakthrough films of Albert and Hausner, by examining the "glaciation" that concerns the filmmaker in the contemporary industrialized world, and specifically in the Austrian vernacular. The implosion of the consumerist dream, its deception and dehumanization, results in an allegorical reduction of the Second Republic and its value system to rubble. Haneke's baiting of the audience's desire for (Hollywood and Hollywood-style) horror and human torture refashions this film into the notorious *Funny Games* (1997), in which the middle-class family unit and its safety in

possessions and privacy is brutally deconstructed by sociopathic visitors—from the outside in (and off camera), suggesting that even if they did not do it themselves as in *The Seventh Continent*, it can be done for them. The security, class, even civilized behavior, identified with Austria's high-art culture are myths, which Gabi Wurmitzer delineates. In *La Pianiste/The Piano Teacher* (2001), based on Nobel Prize-winning author Elfriede Jelinek's allegorical novel of self-destructive sadomasochistic impulses in an Austria repressing its fascist past, as played out behind the elegant facades of Vienna's traditional music world, Haneke becomes more specific. As Catherine Wheatley argues, this film represents the sexual redux of Haneke's *Funny Games*, in which the sex acts are de-eroticized, out of frame, and contextualized by power and control. Wheatley also positions the film vis-à-vis the sexually explicit French body-genre films of Breillat and Noé. Given Haneke's penchant for allegorical tales of sociopolitical repression and its contemporary destructive legacies, he moves interestingly into that rare form for a contemporary Austrian filmmaker, the historical film, with a pre-First World War story of ritual punishment at a German school, *Das weiße Band/The White Ribbon* (2009). It revisits and re-envision the few period explorations of early twentieth-century youth, including *Der junge Törless/Young Törless* (1966), a new-wave German film by Volker Schlöndorff based on the novel by the Austrian author Robert Musil, Glück's aforementioned *Der Schüler Gerber*, but also rare historical dramas about war and identity, such as Axel Corti's *Radetzky Marsch/Radetzky March* (1995) and Stefan Ruzowitzky's *Die Fälscher/The Counterfeiters* (2007). Perhaps the continued astringency of narratives on contemporary dystopias has made the critical historical feature a renewed possibility in the next phase of New Austrian Film.

With a more direct attack on the structures of contemporary work-a-day society, Matthias Frey details Ulrich Seidl's transference of a sensibility reminiscent of Diane Arbus from his controversial documentaries to equally distancing narrative visions of deception without satisfaction, and survival without redemption. These are heightened by Seidl's "staged reality"—using non-actors to give his narrative films the aesthetic of his unyielding documentaries. And it is this painterly quality that Justin Vicari finds so compelling in the difficult tableaux of Seidl's work, which capture attempts at individualism that often breaks through the crust of social conformity with cruelty and self-debasement. He gives Seidl's films a pedigree in the Austrian art of the *fin de siècle*, particularly in connection with Gustav Klimt and his visions of "sexual angst and malevolence, where sensual arousal goes hand in hand with terror, torture, and pain." Like Haneke, Seidl refuses to offer straightforward political solutions. Martin Brady and Helen Hughes read his social criticism by examining three films spanning the filmmaker's career which have the theme of migration as their subject: *Good News* (1990), a study of migrant newspaper vendors in Vienna; *Mit Verlust ist zu rechnen/Loss is to be Expected* (1992), a postsocialist documentary written with Michael Glawogger, on a failed courtship across the Austrian-Czech border; and the feature film which created controversy regarding the exploitation of the exploited for the purpose of bringing their plight to the screen at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival, *Import Export* (2007), which tells the story of

bilateral migration between Austria and the Ukraine. Seidl's "anthropology of migration" is examined in the context of Jean Rouch's *cinéma-vérité*, and his hyperstylization is demonstrated to offer a unique way of looking both at contemporary migration and at migrants themselves. The filmmaker's unflinching camera is shown not only to "voyeurize the voyeurs" but also to gaze severely yet democratically on transnational movements in the "new Europe."

Continuing in this vein, Nikhil Sathe inspects films by Barbara Albert, Houchang Allahyari, Ruth Mader, Jörg Kalt, Ulrich Seidl, and Andreas Gruber, which confront the very concept of space, division, and identity slippage in the national and the post-Soviet Central European imaginary. Austria as border and borderland; Austria as mythic center and actual periphery.... The *huis clos* situations that Andreas Böhn analyses in his contribution on films by Christian Frosch, Florian Flicker, and on Haneke's *Caché/Hidden* (2005), are all zones of indistinction, lawless zones, where the law is suspended, albeit momentarily, and where, in turn, a temporary totalitarian law allows the role reversal of perpetrator and victim. The directors transfer this to the relationship between spectator and image, breaking down a traditional cinema of audience trust to one that forces the spectator to question convention, expectation, and the very manipulation of entertainment. Reflecting this and focusing on Florian Flicker, Gundolf Graml looks at Flicker's reimagined postmodern road movie, *Suzie Washington* (1998), in which true identity and destination is only a surface concern. Instead, the protagonist's saga exposes the stations of her journey for their imagined sociopolitical representations and their cultural frictions within the ever-expanding EU. Erika Balsom takes on the subversion of such dominant cinema structures by exploring the work of Martin Arnold, Gustav Deutsch, and Peter Tscherkassky, three of the influential post-Actionist experimentalists of "found film" who tap hidden subtexts, turn narratives against their ideologies, and realign spectator-image relationships.

Stefan Ruzowitzky is a distant second to Michael Haneke in terms of international recognition, but unlike Haneke, who disintegrates the dominant film aspects of his work, Ruzowitzky recontextualizes traditional genres and utilizes their associated "entertainment value" to break apart their totalizing nature and create narratives that also reflect on the nature of cinematic storytelling. The horror film has been almost non-existent in Austrian and German cinema since early sound, and Ruzowitzky's approach to the internationalist concept of this box-office attraction, the German-produced *Anatomie/Anatomy* (2000) and its sequel *Anatomie 2/Anatomy 2* (2003), shows why it was generally avoided after 1945. Alexandra Ludewig analyses how the director plays with general audience expectations and the inescapable shadow of a true historical horror subtext, Nazi dehumanization and scientific experimentation. Likewise, Rachel Palfreyman surveys the rebirth of the most durable genre in Austrian and German cinema, the *Heimatfilm*. While still set in provincial surroundings and displaying the natural beauty that made the genre such a visual and escapist pleasure, it has shed clichéd characterizations, banal folk wisdom, and contrived happy endings for a more realistic (and historically suggestive) depiction of social oppression and of class and gender abuse in

Ruzowitzky's *Die Siebtebauer/The Inheritors* (1998). It would, of course, be a film set during the Nazi period that gained New Austrian Film its greatest Hollywood attention and the country's first Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film despite the fact that Austrian filmmakers had already been a presence and an influence on the international festival circuit for more than a decade. Critics suggested the following year that "studios are guilty of mining the Holocaust for awards season gold"⁸ when Stephen Daldry's cinematic adaptation of the Bernhard Schlink novel on Nazism, guilt, and objective reception, *Der Vorleser/The Reader* (2008), was deemed a favorite along with six other Nazi-period films. Götz Spielmann's equally sexual meditation on crime, revenge, and redemption, *Revanche* (2008), gave Austria its second foreign-language Oscar nomination in a row, but it was Ruzowitzky's unique way with genre film and its vocabulary that not only gave Hollywood what it had obviously wanted all along: a fess-up; an Austrian film on Nazism.⁹ It was of course a breakthrough in Austria as well, a popular film that dealt with the painful and obscured Nazi past and the Holocaust. A pendent perhaps to the sixty-plus years it took Germany to present its own nuanced version of Hitler and his last days, Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Untergang/Downfall* (2004), as its cinema had already begun to face a new aspect of its history, East Germany. Raymond Burt shows how Ruzowitzky intentionally uses the relative safety and order of traditional narrative structure and documentary camera movement to approach the heretofore unapproachable topic of an Austrian concentration camp, where the exchange of power provides the spectator with a far more nuanced look at "unrepresentable" territory than otherwise seen in recent cinema. A far different genre revision is the Austrian comedy, which has usually been tied to Vienna's cabaret tradition with performers ranging from Jewish monologists of the 1930s, to theater actors turned golden-age comedy film stars, to the biting satire of performer Helmut Qualtinger in the 1960s and 1970s. As Regina Standún argues, the resurgence of the local Austro-comedy, which already iconizes its new-classic talents, is less pratfall and more a gritty neo-realist look at the foibles of an unremarkable life reflected in the darkest shades of humor. The least internationally marketed or exported films of the new wave, they have achieved significant box-office success at home and in the German-speaking region, occasionally achieving greater popularity than the ubiquitous and seemingly unassailable Hollywood or internationally coproduced blockbuster import.

The hypocrisy of the elite, the purveyors of high culture, and of the Catholic Church, is Wolfgang Murnberger's target, and he deflates these icons deftly in the guise of mainstream entertainment as one of the most commercial filmmakers in critical Austrian film (along with Reinhard Schwabenitzky and Harald Sicheritz). His cinematic take on the detective story, *Komm, Süßer Tod/Come Sweet Death* (2000), based on the novel by Wolf Haas, resulted in a bona fide national and regional box-office smash. Despite his more mainstream entertainment style, Murnberger, no less than Haneke, forces the viewer to question cinematic convention and spectatorial expectations in a moral context. Also subverting mainstream form and style is Michael Glawogger, whose slightly surreal features and documentaries on the often

shocking absurdities of contemporary society are discussed by Christoph Huber in an impressionistic manner that mirrors the tone of the director's form and demonstrates the style of reportage greeting film in Austria today. From his first feature film—*Die Ameisenstraße/Ant Street* (1995), in which the introverted inhabitants of an old apartment building are all but ignored during the vast renovation work undertaken by its new owner—Glawogger has concentrated on the marginal, the forgotten, and the exceptionally unexceptional. That this film has been understood as an allegory of everything from the official repression of “untidy” aspects of Austrian history to the construction of the European Union, suggests the odd universality Glawogger achieves while at the same time being arguably the most Austrian-focused filmmaker of the new wave. Even his documentaries, such as the voyages across overcrowded urban slum landscapes in *Megacities* (1998) and the look at intensive hard labor in *Workingman's Death* (2005), have something of the hallucinatory about them. The films seem conscious that image cannot be reality, and reality is but perception—an equation that exposes the constructs of Jörg Haider's absurd exclusionary politics in a country where multiculturalism is fundamental to the nation, as in the Glawogger/Barbara Albert/Ulrich Seidl/Michael Sturminger documentary, *Zur Lage – Österreich in sechs Kapiteln/State of the Nation – Austria in Six Chapters* (2003). Glawogger takes on the exploitation cinema of the 1960s and 1970s but replaces its hedonism with a tragicomic futility that speaks of the limits of self-realization, as in the anti-sex-comedy sex comedy, *Nachtschnecken/Slugs* (2004), in the episodic look at three contemporary families related by Holocaust history, *Das Vaterspiel/Kill Daddy Good Night* (2009), or in the Tarantinoesque, druggy road-movie grunge of *Contact High* (2009).

“The image is all and also nothing” might be a motto for the Austrian new-wave documentary which in its meditative manner forces the spectator to become the narrator, as in such hypnotic eco-films as Nikolaus Geyrhalter's *Unser täglich Brot/Our Daily Bread* (2005), which stares at the horrible beauty of food production; Erwin Wagenhofer's *We Feed the World* (2006), or Udo Maurer's *Über Wasser – Menschen und gelben Kanister/About Water – People and Yellow Cans* (2007). And while the image is always questioned, this approach manages to capture the elusive, and move the spectator without the overtly objective manipulation found in most post-9/11 documentaries on the condition of our social and natural world. Arno Russegger looks not only at filmmaker Hubert Sauper (like Haneke, an Austrian living and working in France) and his previous documentaries on the fight for human dignity, be it in Africa or among abused women in contemporary Paris, but also at the documentary's place in the new wave and its mistrust of the “official.” His theoretical dissection of Sauper's multi award-winning and Oscar-nominated *Darwin's Nightmare* (2004), on the widespread corruption surrounding the fishing industry in Lake Victoria, Tanzania, which has resulted in unmitigated ecological and human disaster, approaches the filmmaker as helpless witness rather than polemicist, and its resulting spectatorial effect.

Sara F. Hall's analysis of Götz Spielmann's *Antares* (2004) shows the formalistic aspect of the New Austrian Film in its early turn-of-the-century manifestation:

cyclical, episodic, and medially reflexive. In this way Spielmann's sexually attentive observation of a controlled set of people who simultaneously interact with and without the social mask is no different from the structures of Albert and Seidl. In fact, they reach back to the Viennese literary impressionist work of Arthur Schnitzler and his 1897 play *Reigen* (published first in 1903 due to censorship difficulties), which has spawned so many adaptations and modernizations, and is often known by its French title, *La Ronde*. Hall finds Spielmann's film to be one of body politics, image propaganda, and ultimately a troubled humanism that positions itself against the Hollywood constructs of sexuality and the sexual female, as well as against the romantic notions of touristy Austrian images. Perhaps it is this clinical distance that makes New Austrian Film seem difficult and a "feel-bad cinema" to some. Overtaken by the aesthetic of the ugly it searches for and captures human discord that cannot easily or ever be resolved.

More than just an unusual choice by Austria to represent the country at the 2010 Oscars, *Ein Augenblick Freiheit/For a Moment, Freedom* (2009), a film about exile and immigration shot in Farsi, Turkish, English, and German by the Austro-Iranian director Arash T. Riahi, was a volley against xenophobia and a validation that New Austrian Film is as multifaceted and polyglot as Austria's cinema history has been. The concept of national cinema has always been an elastic one here, even as Austrian filmmakers of the past have struggled to survive in a limited market and between "seeing" the nation and selling the country. In an interview with Catherine Wheatley, Götz Spielmann discusses the changing qualities, reception, and markets of New Austrian Film from a primary perspective and voices his views regarding his *Antares* follow-up, the Oscar-nominated *Revanche* (2008). Along with other recent work, it seems to mark the return of the genre film and suggests the shifting aesthetics of Austrian feature film to come.

Notes

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1. ORF [Österreichischer Rundfunk]. 2008. "Gusenbauer Plans Image Campaign to Counter Abuse Criticism," 30 April. Retrieved 11 October 2008 from: <http://www.aparchive.com/Search.aspx?kw=gusenbauer&st=k#1U563145>.
2. Agamben summarizes his arguments as follows: "1. The original political relation is the ban (the state of exception as a zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exclusion and inclusion). 2. The fundamental activity of sovereign power is the production of bare life as originary political element, and as threshold of articulation between nature and culture, *zoë* and *bios*. 3. Today it is not the city but rather the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West" (Agamben 1998: 181).
3. Prior to this Stefan Ruzowitzky had made *Anatomie/Anatomy*, a horror film that features doctors who define their patients entirely as "bare life", using them for experiments. *Das Experiment/The Experiment* (2001), by Austrian resident Oliver Hirschbiegel, could also be called a meditation on the establishment of a zone of exception. Inspired by the Stanford prison experiment, the guards in this film quickly establish a totalitarian regime, stripping the inmates of all political rights.
4. Ulrich (2004) is a hefty compendium of Austrian and Austro-Hungarian expatriate and exiled talent in the Hollywood film industry. Many of these actors, directors, and film artists were also active in Berlin, Budapest, Prague, London, and Paris prior to or following their Hollywood years.
5. Hermann Nitsch presented the first Actionist art in his showing at the Galerie Dvorak in Vienna in March 1963. The bloody carcass of a lamb was hung from the ceiling and then moved through the room in a shaking motion in order to splatter blood on the viewers. Blood was poured from buckets onto the floor, and an actor flung raw eggs against a wall. The shock value of the Actionists is to be found not only in their provocation of traditional art venues and art audiences, but also in the radicalism of their materials and the use of the human body. Blood, animal entrails, and carcasses figure strongly in their early performances in what is intended as a ritualistic or Dionysian "rapture". Later, the naked human body was directly involved in the action. A selection of Austrian actionist film (1967–1970) can be seen online at: www.ubu.com/film/vienna_actionists.html. The interview with Actionist Otto Mühl by Andrew Grossman explores this subversive and alienating creativity from the artist's perspective.
6. For a detailed examination of the decline of the Austrian film industry after the 1950s and non-narrative avant-garde experimentalism, see Dassanowsky (2006).
7. Historical studies of Walter Fritz provided the only substantial volumes on Austrian film history from the 1960s into the 1990s. With the re-emergence of Austrian film there has been a significant increase in published studies. The Filmarchiv Austria issues restored film classics and rarities on DVD and well-produced director, era, and genre book-length studies, while the Austrian Film Museum and Vienna's Synema Society for Film and Media concentrates on more recent cinema. Contemporary film is examined in Horwath, Ponger, and Schlemmer (1995), and Schlemmer (1996). Elisabeth Büttner and Christian Dewald (1997, 2002) have attempted to examine Austrian film history in a thematic/theoretical frame. In English, there is Riemer (2000), Lamb-Faffelberger (2002), Lamb-Faffelberger and Saur (2004), and Dassanowsky (2005). The Austrian Film Commission publishes annual catalogues and its online site includes summaries of current and forthcoming productions in all genres, interviews with filmmakers, and current news: <http://www.afc.at>.
8. AFP. 2009. "Filmmakers 'using Holocaust as Oscars bait'". *ABC News*, 19 February. Retrieved 14 May 2009 from: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/02/19/2495396.htm>.
9. The first nomination of an Austrian film in this category was Glück's *Anschluss* love story, 38 (1987).

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