

INTRODUCTION



In February 2000, the far-right Freedom Party of Austria was sworn into government in coalition with the Austrian People's Party. This single event is at the heart of the cultural phenomena discussed in the present volume. The electoral success of the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) a few months earlier prompted shocked reactions around the world and spawned immediate protest in the streets of Vienna. The primary reason for the international anxiety was the increasing reputation of the FPÖ as an extreme-right organization whose charismatic leader Jörg Haider was well known for making statements that appeared to endorse Nazi era policies. The United Kingdom's left-liberal *Guardian* newspaper pinpointed Haider's ambitions on the morning after the election: 'Hitler admirer scents power after election blow for ruling coalition'.¹ The millennial *Wende* (or turn), as this endorsement of the right was dubbed, marked only the second time in the history of postwar Austria that the FPÖ had played a role in government. In 1983, it had been as a very minor party (5 per cent of the vote) and for a period of only three years in partnership with the socialist party, the Sozialistische Partei Österreichs. For most of the political history of postwar Austria there have been grand coalitions between the 'black' ÖVP and the 'red', Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (Social Democrat party, to which the SPÖ changed its name in 1991).

The Art of Resistance illuminates the cultural responses to the politics of turn-of-the-millennium Austria and provides contextual background to help take stock of a seismic wave of artistic and everyday protest. The questions that inform my analysis include establishing how widespread cultural protest was, what themes recurred and which aesthetic strategies are deployed. The corpus of materials I consider here cannot lay claim to comprehensiveness but I have been able to identify and discuss a wide variety of genres and styles. In addition to the performance of everyday protest and the cultural enactment of resistance on the street through demonstrations, speeches, dances, graffiti and so on, I analyse examples of music, novels and short stories, films and dramas. The works are concentrated around the early years of the coalition government of the FPÖ and the ÖVP, that is to say 2000 to 2002, but the timespan includes at the earliest point

Elfriede Jelinek's *Ein Sportstück* (1998) and Walter Wippersberg's *Die Irren und die Mörder* (1998). These instances represent the way in which artists have been sensitive to social and political trends and have functioned as cultural warning signals in flagging up extreme-right thinking in society. Robert Menasse's *Das Paradies der Ungeliebten* (2006) and Marlene Streeruwitz's election novels *So ist das Leben* (2006) and *Das Leben geht weiter* (2008) are the latest works that feature. The start and end points to the analysis here are primarily delineated by the elections of 1999 and 2006 but with some licence to look at relevant works in the immediate run-up to the *Wende*. This terminology is widely used in scholarship about the period, even if the concept of a turn in Austrian politics is itself disputed (see Chapter 1).

The term 'resistance' is not unproblematic either (see Chapter 2), but it was used extensively by demonstrators and artists alike, and this study aligns itself with the near synonymous deployment of the word for protest. It does not seek to establish resistance as a more active, more 'committed' manifestation of protest.² There was a very real sense that artists, thinkers and public protesters were indeed trying to offer resistance to the encroaching normalization of far-right thinking and protective, nationalist politics. Some effected their protest overtly and actively whilst others voiced their ideological resistance in the words of their songs, the plots of their novels, or in the scenarios of their films. One further terminological knot must be acknowledged here since it is not one that is unpicked in this study. Artists and protestors do not often differentiate between the vocabulary of 'far right', 'extreme right', 'populist', 'nationalist' and so on. I have used the terminology in an equally catholic manner. There is recent, prize-winning scholarship investigating which tenets of FPÖ thinking and which guiding principles of the far-right *Burschenschaften* – or fraternities, to which most male FPÖ politicians belong – can even be described as 'neo-Nazi' and not just 'far right'.³

Periods of history continue to feature in artistic works for many decades or even centuries afterwards and the present work does not seek to interpret those that have been published or released in the mere dozen years that have followed the catalyst era of 2000 to 2006. *The Art of Resistance* captures and analyses the art of those coalition years.⁴ Equally, political fiction or political art is a frequent topic of study in many countries and of many eras. The texts considered here might very well have found themselves discussed in a general volume on political art in Austria or in a study without the specific focus of resistance I have established here. This would have been to lose the distinct thread that connects them and to render the body of materials collected and critiqued here simply a sizeable body of novels, dramas, films, songs and art events that have a political theme or setting. I argue that what gives the works here their *raison d'être* and their artistic power is indeed their status as art that promotes or bears the traces of reaction and resistance to the politics of the FPÖ or to the political direction presented by the combined forces of the conservative right and the populist far right. I have not

aimed to provide a balance by profiling and interpreting literature and art that is pro-far right, even if I had been able to find many such examples. Sometimes the links between the artistic product and real-life politics are obvious, as in the satirical graphic novel *Jörgi, der Drachentöter* (2000) by Gerhard Haderer and Leo Lukas. In other cases, I demonstrate that the works can be read as voicing protest and exposing far-right politics or mercenary, pro-nationalist politicians of all political colours. Wippersberg's trilogy of novels *Die Irren und die Mörder* (1998), *Ein nützlicher Idiot* (1999) and *Die Geschichte eines lächerlichen Mannes* (2000) spans both of these approaches.

The culture discussed here is predicated on political history, and it is for this reason that the background to the increase in popularity of the Austrian Freedom Party is the subject of my first chapter. Chapter 1 ranges over the last decades of the twentieth century, with particular emphasis on a number of key moments and concepts in postwar Austrian history (the victimization myth, the Waldheim affair and the ascendancy of the FPÖ under Jörg Haider are major themes here). If the politics of the millennium have generated so much cultural protest, then it is not simply due to the symbolism of the election itself, but to strategies or policies that have been espoused by the coalition and that spark indignation or protest. One of the guiding questions in my research has been to identify the cause for protest. This might include reactions to cuts in welfare provision (see El Awadalla's short story '18. bezirk: gretl', for example) or objections to the insistence on 'traditional' family values and the desire to see a higher birth rate for 'native' Austrians (whether in a song by Conny Chaos und die Retortenkinder entitled 'Lisi Gehrer' or as implied in Jelinek's short drama *Das Lebewohl* (*Les Adieux*)). The protests most certainly provide responses to the Austrian government's policies on immigration and to public antipathy towards migrants and the place they occupy in Austrian society. Examples of art that fights back against xenophobia are to be found in all the cultural forms discussed here and range from the high-profile installation event of the Vienna Festival of 2000 'Bitte liebt Österreich' ('Please Love Austria') initiated by German performance artist Christoph Schlingensiefel to countless other examples where racist attitudes or policies are protested or pilloried. Racist characters are held up for derision in plays such as Franzobel's *Olympia* (2000) and Marlene Streeruwitz's *Sapporo*. (première in 2000). Racist attitudes expose themselves with great irony in the documentary portmanteau film *Zur Lage* (Barbara Albert, Michael Glawogger, Ulrich Seidl and Michael Sturminger, 2002) and were a target of demonstrators' anger throughout the anti-coalition demonstrations and rallies. When the theme of racism comes to the fore, the topic of historical racism, of coming to terms with the Nazi past or, indeed, of the persistence of anti-Semitism and xenophobia into the present day are never far away. Wippersberg's *Die Wahrheit über Österreich: oder Wie man uns belogen hat* (2000) takes the mockumentary approach to Austrian history, whereas Ruth Beckermann's *Homemad(e)* documentary of

2001 is both a geographical portrait of the present and a sensitive journey into the remembered past for the residents (some of whom are Jews) of a particular Viennese district.

I do not claim here any special entitlement or capacity for the Austrian people as civic protesters or indeed for Austrian artists as generators of cultural protest. In the context of cultural expressions against far-right politics and politicians, there are contemporaneous examples from other countries that adopt similar aesthetic strategies to those in my findings here. The films *Il caimano* (dir. Nanni Moretti, 2006) and *Bye Bye Berlusconi* (a German-Italian production by Jan Henrik Stahlberg, 2006) approach the subject of populist political leader Silvio Berlusconi with black humour, but also with ambiguous, thought-provoking endings. They play self-referentially with the problems of media representation and are in essence films about making films about Berlusconi and his financial and personal malpractices. In France, the former leader of the ultra-nationalist, right-wing Front National, Jean-Marie Le Pen, was clearly the subject of pillory in Mathieu Lindon's current affairs-based novel of 1998, *Le Procès de Jean-Marie le Pen*, featuring the trial of a Front National supporter for the violent, unprovoked murder of a French-Algerian immigrant. Found guilty in France on several counts of libel, the author was subsequently taken to the European Court of Human Rights, where most counts against him were indeed upheld. Many high-profile French writers backed Lindon's case in the media, including Marie Darrieussecq, whose hugely popular but highly disturbing first novel, *Truismes*, of 1996 can be read amongst other things as a bizarre satire of the rise of proto-fascist politics in contemporary France. Perhaps Lindon's *à clef* characterization was more obvious than some of the Austrian writing I look at (for example, Erika Pluhar's novel *Die Wahl* (2003)). Allegorical techniques have been used in France, too, to depict society's degeneration, for example in Darrieussecq's political allegory on the increasing bestiality of contemporary 'civilization'. The slim publication of a dozen or so pages entitled *Matin brun* by Franck Pavloff is another example of French literary reactions to the extreme right. Pavloff's 1998 children's story became an international bestseller in 2002 after Jean-Marie Le Pen beat Lionel Jospin in the first round of the presidential elections. It is a simple tale of two young men's acceptance of the regime's increasingly invasive discrimination, as first of all only brown dogs are allowed in society and all others are exterminated, then subsequently nonbrown cats are eliminated too. Pavloff writes a punchy, highly convincing short story that invites its readers to question just how far tacit acceptance of xenophobia can progress before people take action. Allegory and dystopia feature in the novel by Ernst Molden, *Doktor Paranoiski* (2001), in many of the short stories, and in Peter Kern's film *1. April 2021 – Haider lebt* (2002).

Can we derive an expressly Austrian typology of the materials covered in this study? In light of these brief international comparisons, there is no doubt that this

is not possible. It is not my intention to pursue here a scholarly competition with other nations whose artists and populations are seeking to process sociopolitical change in their own countries and perhaps also produce aesthetic resistance to political developments. Scholars of Austrian Studies are often asked how Austria's art or artistic approaches and themes differ with regard, most predominantly, to those of Germany. Enquiries centre on whether Austria's art, literature, drama or filmmaking is a replica of Germany's or what the differences might be beyond merely lexical or dialectal differences reflecting Austrian linguistic specificities. (There are, indeed, plenty of works studied here that avail themselves of dialect in their writings, song texts or screenplays.) But this is not a defensive study that is bent on arguing for Austrian aesthetic particularities. It does not ask, for example, whether the protest art charted here is somehow a reflection or extension of the much-vaunted linguistically sceptical experimentalism of twentieth-century Austrian writing, in particular. The research for this volume is not carried by a quest to confirm that culture from Austria is more humorous in style and less serious – or political – in intent than its German counterpart. Such enquiries are relics of debates on the cultural politics of postwar Austria with regard to the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s in particular.⁵

There is equally no wish to make the works studied here become markers of Austrian art and literature *tout court* and have them stand as the only emblems of a 'period' in Austrian art.⁶ Indeed, the strategies that have been adopted in the art discussed here are common to critical and political art of different language communities, countries and eras. In addition to the common adoption of satirical or other humour-based approaches and of dystopian scenarios, many artists use the popularity of their medium to make their criticism heard or to underline it through the genre of its execution. The music I consider in Chapter 2 is a prime example of how popular dissemination seeks to reach mass audiences with, in most if not all cases, a younger audience target in mind. Kern's mockumentary film aesthetic in *I. April 2021* is an instance where the playful undermining of the TV documentary produces a sometimes subtle and sometimes jarringly obvious mismatch of deadpan delivery and comically fictive content. Other artists essay a more reflective analysis, based on documentary techniques or authentic, personal stories, as does Ruth Beckermann, for instance, in *Homemad(e)* or Frederick Baker with his demonstration recording and projectionist experiments in *Erosion und Wi(e)derstand* (2003). Feminist and gender-related readings of Austrian politics represent another critical approach that recurs across the genres of our study. They feature in the novels of Marlene Streeruwitz, for example, in short stories by various authors and in activism and cultural interventions. Feminist organizations as well as lesbian and gay rights groups were well represented at the demonstrations.

The symbolism, political targets and personalities are, of course, specific to Austria, and the study is sensitive to the need to explain these at relevant points

without impeding the textual or cultural readings. In Chapter 1, I introduce some of the precursors to turn-of-the-millennium protest, particularly in the form of resistance in the Waldheim era when the election campaign and subsequent success of Kurt Waldheim's presidential bid polarized Austrian society and gave rise to a rich vein of cultural protest and to mass demonstrations on the streets. The study does not seek to use the 1980s as a benchmark for evaluating the millennial protests even whilst recognizing that the Waldheim affair and its aftermath represent a turning point in the Second Republic's political and cultural history. It has been suggested that the cultural exchanges between writers and politicians (or the allusions by each to the other) of the 1980s and 1990s (Jelinek and Haider are the most cited pairing) may be seen as 'one inevitable but in the end unproductive aspect of the postwar scene', but further that 'this did not prevent . . . writers from exposing what they saw as the malaise of Austrian society'. Anthony Bushell notes correctly that this is part of a long tradition in German-speaking literature for creative writers to pursue a 'didactic, even moral role'.⁷ The impetus to the cultural analysis here is not to try to detect a causal impact of the critical art on the political developments in Austria after the Wende or even to suggest that this is possible or measurable. The millennial protests and manifestations of resistance stand in their own right and are copious and wide-ranging. If the works, publications, performances and actions have had an impact on society, then it has been in resisting far-right thinking on their pages and stages, in their songs, on the film screens and in public places. Their impact must surely also have been in providing a voice for many and a means for protesting that was creative, visible or audible and that could help to educate, to resist or just to bring people together in solidarity.

After the first chapter explaining the rise of 'blue' Freedom Party politics in Austria, each of the subsequent chapters covers a different genre or locus of protest. In Chapter 2, 'Performing Politics: On the Sounds, Symbols and Sites of Resistance', I first consider how protest activities interacted with the public space of protest and explain some of the insignia and symbolism of protest. I cover the enacting of everyday cultural resistance in Austria's capital city, Vienna, during and accompanying the demonstrations, reading the acts, accessories and symbols of protest as well as the widely known, organized performance of Schlingensiefel's *Big Brother*-style event, 'Bitte liebt Österreich'. The chapter characterizes the sites and spaces of popular resistance and cultural protest activities. It also addresses the soundscape of the city and of protest music. Some of the musical items were performed during the protests, while some were broadcast in anti-coalition radio programmes. The chapter deconstructs the protest marches or 'hikes' to show how the act of walking was performed in a resistant manner. Here, as in all subsequent chapters, I have included artistic responses by domestically well-known and internationally acclaimed artists as well as by lesser-known performers, writers and filmmakers. Background information is provided for most of

the artists who feature here, but ultimately the texts and artefacts must speak for themselves. Some of the examples of resistance are by lay members of the public, illustrating the fact that political resistance can be a creative force for all and that nonprofessionals also have important and interesting things to say. Nearly all of the artists featured in this volume are Austrian, although international support is also highlighted.

I felt it was important to select materials that had something distinct and stimulating to offer rather than seeking to expand the scholarly literature on a select few, even whilst recognizing that there are flagship authors (filmmakers, artists and playwrights) who must feature in the study. The ‘Novel Responses’ of Chapter 3 include examples of prose writings of very different lengths. There are novels by Ernst Molden, Erika Pluhar, Marlene Streeruwitz and Walter Wippersberg. Numerous short stories are also explored here for their resistance against the black-and-blue regime. There are illustrative examples by Paulus Hochgatterer, Eva Jancak, Dieter Schrage, El Awadalla, Luca Kilian Kräuter, Hoppelmann Karottng, protest artists ‘United Aliens’, Richard Weihs, Brigitte Tauer, Ludwig Roman Fleischer, Sylvia Treudl and Monika Vasik. The chapter concludes by discussing the graphic novel *Jörgi, der Drachentöter* (2000) by cartoonist and writer Gerhard Haderer and writer and cabarettist Leo Lukas. The literary text is the basis for my readings. I explore the themes at play and the techniques employed by the authors. The styles include dystopian adventure, feminist analysis, the topos of tourism, autobiographical moments of personal politicization and the perspectives of childhood, of older age and of fantasy.

Chapter 4, ‘Projecting Protest: Resistance on Screen’, also draws on examples of widely different lengths. Shorter films from the series ‘Die Kunst der Stunde ist Widerstand’ (‘Resistance is the Art of the Moment’) are scrutinized for their various styles and approaches. For example, films by the Schnittpunkt production team and by a collective made up of the Volxtheater Favoriten/Videogruppe, Rosa Antifa Wien and Martin Gössler capture demonstration activities and cultural interventions. Dieter Auracher edits news footage to undermine Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel’s anti-demonstration philosophy, while Ewa Einhorn and Misha Stroj also use interview footage to allow political rhetoric to expose its own falsehoods. Thomas Horvath and Niki Griedl deploy the perspectives of childhood to suggest racist attitudes in Austria and to support Austria’s repudiation by the European Union. Martin Reinhart’s *Pinocchio* plays on the well-known children’s story and uses graffitied posters of Jörg Haider to deconstruct an FPÖ campaign slogan. Bernadette Huber’s is a more provocative, experimental style, forcing the viewer to think about whether far-right thinking might be innate in Austrians. Hubsli Kramar, the cabarettist and Hitler impersonator, features in a film by Franz Novotny, and humorous films by Studio West and the now highly famous Maschek cabaret duo complete the analysis of the very short form.

The work of Austro-British filmmaker Frederick Baker captures demonstration footage and uses the techniques of projectionism in a style that suggests a reverse archaeology – adding memory layers and symbolism back on rather than removing them. At 20 minutes in length, Baker’s film is still in short-length format, as are the various contributions by Albert, Glawogger, Seidl and Sturminger that combine to make up the film *Zur Lage*. Feature-length documentary is represented by the film-essay style of Beckermann, and Wipperberg plays with the conventions of television histories and with documentary tropes. Kern’s style is that of outright satire and metareferential playfulness as a fictive investigative journalist sets out on a quest to locate missing, ousted politicians Jörg Haider and Wolfgang Schüssel. The plethora of different styles evinces a great richness in the filmic protest examples.

The final genre from which I draw is the drama, and in ‘Staging Resistance’, Chapter 5 first examines short works by Antonio Fian and Elfriede Jelinek that feature politicians as characters. The second part of the chapter takes a thematic approach to measure the political temperature. Sport often plays an important role in the forging of national consciousness, and I consider here the implications of this idea for Austrian identity in the postcoalition period. Not only was there a heightened use of sporting imagery in political rhetoric, but essayists and writers also chose to use sport as a thematic lens or starting point for advancing their own cultural-political critique of contemporary Austrian politics. Jelinek’s *Ein Sportstück* (1998), Franzobel’s *Olympia* (2000), Streeruwitz’s *Sapporo*. (2002) and Robert Menasse’s *Das Paradies der Ungeliebten* (2006) all challenge the political climate of contemporary Austria in this way. The chapter concludes by enquiring about the contribution made by the theatre as an institution and investigates how drama took to the streets to make itself heard and seen.

My Conclusion returns to the political situation of the present from the standpoint of early 2018. On 18 December 2017, the Austrian President, Alexander Van der Bellen, presided over the inauguration ceremony for his country’s new government – a further coalition of the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). This time, there was no international hue and cry. The political landscape has changed immeasurably since the elections and inauguration that prompted this book (in October 1999 and February 2000 respectively). I reflect on the political situation today and ask what might be the direction and form of new political protest art. That the FPÖ would be admitted to political partnership once again was hardly foreseeable in 2006 at the end of the millennial coalitions with the far right. The fact that just a decade later this has indeed happened makes it highly timely that we take stock of the wave of cultural protest against the politics of early twenty-first-century Austria and advance a reading of these works here. Whether there will be such a body of protest and cultural resistance to the government of Chancellor Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP) and Vice-Chancellor Heinz Christian Strache (FPÖ) and to the politics of the late

2010s remains to be seen. Austria's political developments have doubtless been influenced by events beyond its borders, and with many countries of Western Europe experiencing electoral gains for far-right parties, Austria's own renewed coalition with the FPÖ has prompted little reaction internationally. Political events such as the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union ('Brexit') and the political direction of the USA under President Trump have given artists and protesters in those countries and beyond heightened grounds for civil and artistic protest. The final chapter of this book identifies some of the burgeoning protest on Austria's streets and in its works of art but stresses once again that the reasons for protesting are often multiple. Elections might form the catalyst, but it is the policy-making and enforcement that produce physical and cultural resistance. I draw attention to examples of new political writing and filmmaking in contemporary Austria and trust that the pages of this book will stand as testimony to the creativity of cultural resistance and to its potentially galvanizing effect.

Notes

1. Kate Connolly, 'Big Vote for Right in Austria', *The Guardian*, 4 October 1999, retrieved 8 April 2018 from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/oct/04/austria.kateconnolly>.
2. For a highly nuanced typology of resistance, see Jocelyn Hollander and Rachel Einwohner, 'Conceptualizing Resistance', *Sociological Forum* 19(4) (2004), 533–54.
3. See Hans-Henning Scharsach, *Stille Machtergreifung: Hofer, Strache und die Burschenschaften* (Vienna: Kreymayr and Scheriau, 2017). Scharsach's book received the Bruno Kreisky prize for the best political book of 2017.
4. Thomas Stangl's *Regeln des Tanzes* (Graz: Droschl, 2013), for example, is a novel that is partly set against the backdrop of the 2000 protests. One of the main characters experiences a new sense of meaning in her life as a result of her participation in political resistance.
5. I rehearse some of these in Allyson Fiddler, *Rewriting Reality: An Introduction to Elfriede Jelinek* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), especially 'The Austrian Literary Context', 17–26.
6. There are differentiated studies of the variety of art and literature of the first decade of the twenty-first century. See, for example, Michael Boehringer and Susanne Hochreiter (eds), *Zeitenwende: Österreichische Literatur seit dem Millennium: 2000–2010* (Vienna: Praesens, 2011); or Allyson Fiddler, Jon Hughes and Florian Krobb (eds), *The Austrian Noughties: Texts, Films, Debates*, special issue, *Austrian Studies* 19 (2011).
7. Anthony Bushell, *Polemical Austria: The Rhetorics of National Identity: From Empire to the Second Republic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), 246.