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Frontiers of Identity:
Austrian and Czechoslovak Caricature between Tradition and Modernity 1918–1939

My research project focuses on caricature in Austrian and Czechoslovak satirical magazines between 1918 and 1939. A comparative assessment of caricature's socio-political and artistic standing in interwar Austria and Czechoslovakia has remained largely unexplored in existent art-historical frameworks. The project thus seeks to formulate how national and ideological frictions were played out in caricature, examining how opposing factions employed it to confirm and redevelop social and political identities within the tensions leading up to the Second World War. The hypothesis of this study is that the roles and functions of caricature offer an insight into its workings as a form of popular art especially 'capable of characterising and representing a given epoch.' (Mukařovský, 1988)

The recent attack on *Charlie Hebdo* has shown that caricatures have the potential even to provoke violent reactions. The medium's significance as a mobiliser of opinions has long been established with Kris and Gombrich's analysis of caricature as a weapon, and has frequently been revisited in more recent scholarship (Pachmanová 2003, Plum 1997). The main reason for this approach comes from the way caricature has been used through time to either criticize existing socio-political norms or to confirm them, for instance in the anti-Semitic caricatures of the Third Reich. In their negotiation between entertainment and aggression, caricatures have come to be seen as defenders of counter-cultures and perpetrators of stereotypes and discrimination alike. Yet, despite the charged political and social environments of interwar Austria and Czechoslovakia, the functions and significance of caricature within this context have yet to be investigated thoroughly: Publications dealing with this period largely use caricature to illustrate historical accounts without assessing the drawings themselves (Peterová 2001, Malina 1988). One reason why critical analyses of caricature often are so underdeveloped is a disregard for its links with a wider artistic context (Hoffmann, 1985).

In response to the absence of a critical assessment according to historical and art-historical parameters, my project offers a reconsideration of caricature in Central Europe that addresses the complexities inherent in the visualisation of manifold social and political identities, many of which, like the Sudeten German minority, have yet to be explored. The project asks: How did caricature in interwar Austria and Czechoslovakia mediate between a manifestation of socio-political formations and artistic developments?

Crucial to this research, caricatures are not only considered as illustrations of fragmented histories, but also as artworks. For example, Rudolf Kremlička's 'Resurrection' not only visualises how the formation of Czechoslovakia manifested a myth of Czech democracy through Christian allegory but also corresponds with the style of the Czech avant-garde group 'The Obstinate Ones.' In the case of the anonymously published 'Reconciliation,' the adherence to a more traditional graphic style underlines the defeatist attitude of the Austrian Social Democrats after the Treaty of St Germain in 1919. Thus, the purpose of examining these caricatures is to bring to light potential links between identity politics and art-historical developments as they were disseminated in the ephemeral culture of the day.

The project explores the incorporation of political and national tendencies in caricature through analyses of selected case studies, and looks at the characteristics of interwar caricature in light of sociological frameworks, theories of reproduction and the mass media and political theory. Mukařovský's theory of art as a social signifier serves as a starting point for an assessment of caricature as an art form inextricably linked with its social contexts. (Mukařovský, 1988) This will be paired with Benjamin's critical inquiry into art and politics, while Warner's assessment of different public spheres allows for an approach to caricature that considers mainstream and counter-culture. (Benjamin, 2008; Warner, 2002) Lippman's treatise on the formation of public opinion is relevant for considerations of the formation of stereotypes, strengthened by Kotzé's assessment of the role of cartoons in the political sphere. (Lippmann, 1922; Kotzé, 1988) Finally, critical texts about the interwar period like Gruber's seminal assessment of Red Vienna and its failures add further sociological and political dimensions to the project. (Gruber, 1991)

The project is structured into five chapters, each focusing on moments of upheaval in the socio-political sphere a within a period of two to four years. Caricatures responding to these events are selected to assess ideologically coloured responses from the far right to the extreme left and across national lines. A list of satirical magazines from which the caricatures are selected includes *Kikeriki, Die Leuchtrakete, Šibeničky, Humoristické listy* and the German-

Czech publication *Simplicus*, which highlights the significance of Prague as a centre of exile after 1934. Artists whose work will be assessed include Rudolf Kremlička, Josef Čapek and Fritz Schönpflug. The chapters are organised as follows:

I. **'Independent now! The Big Breakup 1918/19'** deals with the separation of Austria-Hungary and initial reactions towards this split, contrasting the largely celebratory mood in Czechoslovakia with the desperation prevalent in Austria.

II. **'Protecting the Republic'** considers governmental aims to stabilise the new nations when national and political rivalries became more and more pronounced with the example of 'Red Vienna' and the 'Slovak Problem.'

III. **'The Palace on Fire: Dividing the Nation(s)'** focuses on the escalation between Social Democrats and Christian Socials in Austria and the mining strikes in Czechoslovakia in the wake of the financial crisis.

IV. **'Fascism on the Rise: Dollfuß and the SDP'** examines caricature during the rise of Austro-Fascism, and within the upsurge of the Sudeten German Party in Czechoslovakia. The reaction to fascism in light of the First International Exhibition of Caricature in Prague (1934) forms another central component. Finally,

V. **'Munich and the Anschluss Movement'** considers the last stages of Austria and Czechoslovakia as independent nations and reflects upon the changes in visualisations of identity throughout the interwar years.

The project thus operates under the hypothesis that caricature is an indicator for the formation of rivalling identities that shows how increasingly polarised national and political factions were played out publicly through the application of a specific visual language that was intertwined with the artistic currencies of the day.