

Julia Secklehner

The Courtauld Institute of Art

Frontiers of Identity. The Vienna and Prague Satirical Press in Political Crossfire, 1918-1938

Tracing the popular satirical landscapes in interwar Prague and Vienna, my thesis interrogates how opposing social and political factions employed the entertainment press within the tensions leading up to WWII. Mukařovský's concept of art as a social signifier and the links between visual stereotypes and national perceptions elaborated by Suppan serve as a starting point for an assessment of satirical magazines as a popular form of art. This is paired with inquiries into art and politics by Lukács, Kris and Gombrich, and Canetti, while critical texts about the interwar period add further sociological and political dimensions to the project.

Organised chronologically, the thesis is formed of seven chapters, starting with the establishment of Austria and Czechoslovakia as republics in 1918 and finishing with their annexation to the Third Reich in 1938. Each chapter examines up to four satirical magazines, focusing on visual content, readership, layout, and their links to social and political networks. The first two chapters are comparative with a focus on the legacy of the Hapsburg Empire. The following four chapters consider the Austrian and Czechoslovak contexts separately in relation to the formation of proto-fascist and paramilitary groups in Austria, the strengthening of the Czechoslovak communist party, and competing factions in multi-ethnic Czechoslovakia. The final chapter assesses what remained of Prague and Vienna's satirical landscapes after the Nazi-takeover.

Special attention has been paid to a selection of material that underlines the varying approaches satirical magazines took in competition for a growing, and radicalising, readership. For Vienna, these include *Der Kikeriki*, whose alignment with the conservative Christian Social Party was severed in favour of the National Socialists, and *Die Leuchtrakete*, which allegedly served the education of the proletariat, but *de facto* represented an instrument of propaganda against the Christian Socials. In Prague context, the thesis considers

Humoristické Listy, which aligned itself with the progressive ideas of President Masaryk's circle in the early 1920s, but became a populist magazine with an erotic focus in the 1930s; *Trn*, whose popular success, communist politics and modernist visual language continuously challenged the government; and the bilingual *Simplicus*, which accounts for Czechoslovakia as a centre of exile after 1933.

My findings show that interwar satirical magazines were employed as carriers of propaganda and idealism by both the political left and the right, allowing greater freedom for expression than the daily press. The fact that fine artists contributed to these publications also shows that they allowed experimentation with new visual forms, and an international place of exchange. Ultimately, however, avant-garde satirical magazines held a secondary position to 'a-political' humorous publications, which pervaded after the National Socialist takeover.