

Peter Weibel

Foreword (2005)

1.4-6

1. Gertjan Dijkink, *National Identity and Geopolitical Visions* (London: Routledge, 1996).

Nations only have their great men against their will. (Charles Baudelaire)

Even today, conventional national exhibitions generally adhere to the geopolitical visions of the nineteenth century. In keeping with G. Dijkink,¹ we understand geopolitical visions as concepts of national identity translated into geographical terms and symbols. In extreme cases, such geopolitical identities tend to justify nationalist aggression and expansion based on assertions of spatial or even biological necessity. Although relating national identity to a place, a demarcated space, or a geographical location — that is, transforming place into politics and politics into place — is a cruel universal practice, it has at least fallen into disrepute since Nazi geopolitics. Only the cultural world is oblivious to this fact and still goes about defining national culture as an experience of place and space.

We, too, understand the appeal of the idea that people within a national territory produce (national) culture. But as agreeable as the idea may be that an Austrian grows up in Austria, absorbs Austrian art, literature, and philosophy and then produces Austrian art, literature, and philosophy in Austria, in reality, this proves to be a naïve, wishful notion. However, by virtue of its simplicity and lack of empirical substantiation, the notion is very suitable for sustaining illusions that are reassuring. Reality is more complex and crueler.

Is Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, who had a formative influence on the identity of the German Bauhaus, who founded the New Bauhaus in Chicago in 1937 and the School of Design in 1939 (renamed the Institute of Design in 1944), a representative of Hungarian culture? Is Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (1897-2000), who resisted the Austrian Fascism and whose most famous product is called the Frankfurt Kitchen, a representative of Austrian culture? Is Lily Greenham, born in Vienna in 1928, who has lived for decades in Paris and of whom nobody in Austria takes any notice, an Austrian artist? Sándor (Alexandre) Trauner, whose film sets had an essential formative influence on French poetic realist films of the pre-war period (e.g., Marcel Carné's *Quai des brumes* 1938), also produced *The Apartment* (1960) in Hollywood with Billy Wilder (another Austrian exile). Is Trauner a Hungarian artist? Is Nikola Tesla, born in Smiljan, Croatia, in 1856 — who studied in Graz and Prague and who gave birth to the idea of the induction motor in Budapest, but lived in New York until 1943 — an Austrian physicist just because Smiljan was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire at the time Tesla was born? Of course, there are artists who were born and raised in Hungary or Austria and who, for the most part, worked in Hungary or Austria, apart from a few years abroad. Is it the passport, is it territorialism, which determines national identity? Most of the artists represented at the exhibition "Beyond Art" and in this publication cannot be linked to any one territory and, more often than not, they have no ethnic identity, either. Culture evolves beyond the constraints of geopolitical codes, particularly in Europe, which was torn asunder and remapped by two World Wars, and suffered mass forced emigration and extermination of its intelligentsia under Fascism, Communism, and National Socialism.

Hence, a national exhibition today can no longer be based upon historical concepts of state, nation, country, people, and culture. In view of the fact that many artists and scientists were compelled to leave their home countries for religious, ethnic, or political reasons, and found themselves living, working, and realizing their ideas abroad — in exile, in Diaspora — we must naturally ask to what extent nationality, state, and culture are constructed, fictitious identities. Too often and too thoroughly, politics has destroyed its own (and foreign) culture in the name of its own (or a foreign) nation and in the name of some tribe of people. At the same time, individuals and groups have defied political upheavals, ravages, and crimes, and continued to produce world-renowned artistic and scientific achievements in or outside their own countries, even though they have long been (and still are) expelled, driven out of their homes as a result of decades of totalitarian rule. Culture, it would seem, is a network that is constantly being reconstructed and rewritten beyond geopolitical, state, national, and ethnic identities. Folklore is the only thing that can evolve within such confines. Although culture is indeed influenced by national traditions, it is not confined to national territories. It is possible for national traditions to live on elsewhere, in a third place, in other places. Culture is a heterogenous project — a "third space."

The traditional model of the cultural nation, which beguiles with its simple way of constructing identity, could be characterized as a cylinder of concentric discs. The first disc is the country, the geographical unit. The tribal disc (ethnic unit) arises out of it, for a people ought to inhabit an enclosed space. From this disc arise the discs of language and religion (everyone should speak the same language and belong to a common religion). All of these distinct discs, which should be congruent, then form a nation or state. The Greeks based their civilization on such a monistic model, and called everyone lacking the purity of the Greek people barbarians. And yet this monistic, purist model of the nation is itself barbaric in a modern sense. For in reality, there is no unity of geography, people, language, religion, and culture in a state. The concentric circles disintegrate, overlap, and exceed the respective borders of the other discs. The border of the geography disc

Peter Weibel

is not the border of language or religion. The religion border is not the border of culture. Being a member of a people does not rule out the possibility of living in another country and writing in another language. Nations are not cylinders made up of vertical discs of pure entities. Different "peoples" in a particular country speak different languages and have different cultures. The culture (of the country, of the nation) evolves in various languages, beyond the national borders, through members of different peoples and nations. Nations and states should not be treated as entities of any fixed identity. National identity is continuously being written and rewritten on the basis of outside events, but also as a result of self-analysis and self-renewal. Culture is a rewriting program. Culture is a community that goes beyond geographic and national borders. Culture is produced by members of a community who are not made identical to one another through territorial, ethnic, linguistic, political, religious, or governmental connections.

Experience conditioned by culture can construct identity better than ethnic or territorial experience. Anyone who geopolitically identifies culture with national or geographical borders misconstrues the very essence of culture. The identity-constructing function of culture is an informational function. Culture has a memory function. It produces knowledge. Yet unlike the nation-state, which links historical events with certain "peoples" and territories, culture is an information system that links events with certain people and ideas. "The history of the sciences is a large gap in which the voices of nations gradually emerge," wrote J. W. v. Goethe in his *Maxims and Reflections* in 1822. Culture could not teach the state not to equate national borders with geographical borders. Culture and the nation-state are structural opponents, for while the nation-state demands borders, culture seeks to transgress them. As a system that produces knowledge, the nation-state will always resort to space, place, territory, and geographical borders. As a different knowledge-producing system, on the other hand, culture refers back to history and time, transgresses the borders of a territory, a language, a state, a people, a nation, a religion. Culture is evidently a work of translation and rewriting, passing from generation to generation, beyond the realm of the geographical, state, and ethnic entity. Emigrants thus protect the culture of a particular country from itself by taking it abroad with them, and immigrants do more to foster cultural memory than native inhabitants do. In this way, despite the fact that many participants have been exiled, it is possible for common intellectual movements to lose their geographical unity, but nevertheless to be continued and further developed — re-imported into Austria and Hungary.

In view of their common "Kakanian" history,² the cultural landscapes of today's Austria and Hungary seem fated to serve as the backdrop for much-loved illusions, interchangeable clichés, and outdated historical concepts benefiting ideologies that range from being reactionary to obscure.³ Hungary is still seen from the colonial or anti-Communist perspective. Austria has no identity anyway, no distinctive features; to extrapolate from Robert Musil's *Man without Qualities*, it is a "country without qualities." The kitsch notion of Austria is also the result of the colonial view from the outside. Generally speaking, inhabitants and foreign visitors alike know precious little about the culture of these countries. The ahistorical consciousness industry of post-Fascism, which has endured to this day, has indeed cheated Austria of its history. The main focus of this analysis is the period following the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which is regarded as a key point for a new beginning in culture and politics. Secessionism, Art Nouveau, and Expressionism are therefore not dealt with in detail in this book, since they were art movements linked to the monarchy. Quite the contrary, we feel it to be a typical mistake of conservative ahistoricity to write about art history in Austria and Hungary without mentioning this turning point or these political changes. It was not just an empire that died in 1918: art movements did, as well.

Thus, in an attempt to counter the distorting anecdotes, misrepresented appropriations, and occult curios, the main goal of this book is to present, for the first time, the unknown reality of cultural history since 1918, by using selected examples. The notion of culture applied here is that of a "third culture," which reasons that the culture of the humanities and the arts is connected to that of the natural and formal sciences. It is therefore a complex model, full of mutual influences and common disciplines. Therefore, this is not a traditional exhibition catalogue but rather a portrait of a kind of cultural production and the cultural connections that were suppressed to the point of invisibility by official cultural policy. In comparing the two countries of Austria and Hungary, we focus on making readers aware of particular, mostly unknown cultural achievements as a result of the oppressive political circumstances (from the collapse of the monarchy to the Cold War).

I have been trying to collect, archive, and reconstruct this destroyed, dispelled, foiled, and forgotten culture for more than twenty years. Both the exhibition and its book are the results of these decades of research. Yet every reconstruction is also construction. Thus I would like to indicate the parameters of this reconstruction. First, I selected art movements and intellectual trends in which both, Austria and Hungary, have brought forth achievements. The contributions might not be of equal weight: in some cases, there would be more from Austria, in other cases, more from Hungary, but an imperative criterion for selection was that the only

2. "Kakanian" was the ironic name Robert Musil gave to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. cf. Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities* (Vintage Books USA, 1996) (*Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 1930-1952).
3. See the two official state-organized millennium exhibitions of 1996, "Kunst aus Österreich 1896-1996" at the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle in the FRG, Bonn, and "Austria im Rosennetz" at the Museum for Applied Arts in Vienna.

4. Felix Kreissler, *Kultur als subversiver Widerstand* (Munich/Salzburg: Edition Kappa, 1996); John Czaplicka, ed., *Emigrants and Exiles: A Lost Generation of Austrian Artists in America 1920-1950* (Vienna: Österreichische Galerie, 1996); Matthias Boeckl, ed., *Visionäre und Vertriebene. Österreichische Spuren in der modernen amerikanischen Architektur* (Vienna: Kunsthalle, 1995); Christoph Bertsch, Markus Neuwirth, eds., *Die ungewisse Hoffnung. Österreichische Malerei und Graphik zwischen 1918 und 1938* (Salzburg/Vienna: Residenz Verlag, 1993), especially the article "Zur österreichischen Kulturgeschichte der Zwischenkriegszeit" by Manfred Wagner, pp. 7-15; Felix Kreissler, ed., *Fünfzig Jahre danach - Der 'Anschluss' von innen und außen gesehen* (Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1989); Oswald Oberhuber, *Zeitgeist wider den Zeitgeist. Eine Sequenz aus Österreichs Verirrung* (Vienna: Academy for Applied Arts, 1988); Gabrielle Koller, Gloria Withalm, *Die Vertriebung des Geistigen aus Österreich. Zur Kulturpolitik des Nationalsozialismus* (Vienna: Academy for Applied Arts, 1985); Oswald Oberhuber, Manfred Wagner, Erika Patka, *Die verlorenen Österreicher 1918-1938. Expression. Österreichs Beitrag zur Moderne* (Vienna: Löcker Verlag, 1982); Hans Bisanz, Almut Krapi-Weiler, Efriede Baum, *Die uns verließen. Österreichische Maler und Bildhauer der Emigration und Verfolgung* (Vienna: Österreichische Galerie, 1980).



P. Weibel, F. Stadler (eds.), *Vertriebung der Vernunft / The Cultural Exodus from Austria*, Löcker, Vienna 1993. Reprint: Springer, Vienna/New York 1995.

disciplines considered were those in which people from both countries had been active. The aim was to discover how their cultural achievements intersected: For example, the foundation of game theory by John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern in 1944 or Kurt Kren's film *Szondi-Test* (1964), named after the test of the same name devised by Lippot Szondi (1947) in Switzerland. Second, we selected intellectual and art movements founded or substantially promoted in Austria and Hungary, which also represent autonomous specific contributions to world culture. This does not imply that they were perceived as such in their countries of origin.

Focus was placed on analytical and abstract ways of looking at the world (from formal sciences to formal arts). First of all, the formal sciences have long been a central, albeit invisible, part of our culture. Second, Austria and Hungary have achieved outstanding things precisely in the area of the formal sciences, quite in contrast to the repressive and reactionary image of a baroque, expressive Austria and Hungary, as drafted by other countries. So we had to go beyond the classical disciplines of art in order to be able to draw an adequate picture of culture beyond all clichés. The book presents achievements in the formal arts and sciences, mathematics, logic, and in the social and natural sciences that operate on the basis of formal methods. It is not possible to offer a complete presentation. Rather, the aim is to select individual persons and groups who have helped Austria and Hungary give a specific impetus to the world of international science and art, and who have contributed to the development of a third culture.

Ten sections present the interdisciplinary experimental methods and connections between formal arts and sciences that have been of decisive importance in the cultural development of both countries. Michael Stöltzner and I wrote the introductions and abstracts for these sections. Employing a holistic view, we attempt to reintegrate the fragments towards a "third culture," on the basis of various philosophical topoi, which are predestined to form a synergy between science and art. The problem I have been pointing out for the past twenty years, which others have been dealing with in recent years,⁴ is the fact that these cultural achievements were accomplished by Austrian and Hungarian nationals but, in some cases, not in Austria or Hungary. This problem precisely describes the schisms and wounds inflicted by the political systems in Austria and Hungary, which are still capable of engendering dangerous identity crises, even today.

Hungary is a successful cultural nation because it has not made the division between formal arts and formal sciences. Artists are thus able to find their artistic practice theoretically and scientifically in manifestos and books. Moreover, Hungary also fosters close contacts with its emigrant scientists through its academies and other institutions. Unlike the corporative state and Fascism in Austria, Hungary has a homomorphic culture that even withstood Stalinism. The Catholic corporative state continued anti-progressive tradition in Austria in the form of national policy. The rational sciences were curbed; public opinion was stirred up against mathematics, physics, positivism, empiricism, the Vienna Circle, all critical and analytical philosophy as early as 1920, and abstraction in art. Vienna University became a breeding ground for National Socialist criminals in the 1920s. Expulsion and loss of rationality became part of the corporative state program after 1927. However, since it was not possible to banish rationality completely from science (at the most, formal science was separated from culture), art was compelled to forego all analytical formal elements. Austria's First Republic thus came to be the country that all avant-garde art movements passed by, with the exception of the few supranational, unofficial approaches I will be presenting. From 1920-1950 (!), the time of the corporative state and Austro-Fascism, Austrian culture was produced in exile by emigrants. This lost generation was neither brought back nor honored in the Second Republic. Quite the contrary, the division of art and science continued. Although it was not possible to ban rationality from science, it was banned all the more from philosophy and art. The formal sciences remained in exile, formal art omitted. Hence, in opposition to the corporative state perspective, we focused our selection on the analytical formal sciences and abstract arts.

This work was done for reasons of sadness and anger. Anger at the power of destructive political systems and sadness at the irrevocably lost lives of great scientists and artists. But also in the hope that the culture of the expelled, forgotten, and outcast can be restored; that the expulsion of rationality is reversible. In remembering, we oppose political systems. However, this collection of evidence is also aimed at securing a future. This is why I am presenting a new methodical approach to researching cultural developments, to depicting the historical emergence of cultural production: culture as a transnational, transterritorial, transethnic dynamic system of knowledge production. In comparing two cultures (art and science) of two countries, Austria and Hungary, as they developed throughout the twentieth century, a new, complex model of cultural history, development, and production is created: the vision of a third culture.

Scientia sine arte nihil est; ars sine scientia nihil est. (Jean Vignot, 1392)

Formal Intuition Beyond and Within Art

If one wants to acquire a sense of how to exhibit science, the natural place to go is the technology museum. Through its technical applications, the tremendous progress of twentieth-century science can be grasped, even literally touched. In most cases, the theoretical sciences also have made their way into the museum — sometimes in a very ambitious manner, sometimes in a way that is embarrassing at best. Thus, the task of a "scientific coordinator" in an arts and science exhibition seems to be no more than to devise a suitable combination of didactics of both science and museum pedagogy. To this end, she or he will build heavily upon models. For example: "The electron in a quantum-mechanical double-slit experiment feels whether one or two slits are open;" "Quantum mechanical observables are a sort of infinite-dimensional matrices;" "A non-pathological curve is defined by the continuous motion of a point."

Unfortunately, there is danger in any model. The examples given above, for instance, have attracted severe criticism in our century because they mislead by suggesting a flawed continuity between classical and modern science. This has produced a flood of pseudo-problems, such as the question of whether quantum particles possess a free will. Moreover, scientific theories determine our present worldview to such an extent that their basic results are often misunderstood as being a priori conditions of any scientific knowledge. This is especially the case if intuitively appealing and memorable models are found. As there were no such models to assist laymen in accessing the core tenets of relativity theory and quantum mechanics, these theories have frightened or even disturbed the common sense of two entire generations.

At the turn of the century, even mathematics ran into a severe "crisis of intuition."¹ Concepts so elementary and widely used as "dimension" or "curve" became plainly inconsistent if defined according to common-sense intuition. Rectifying the definition necessitated the introduction of new concepts that embraced objects that could only be construed algebraically, without the assistance of non-paradoxical pictures. As a matter of fact, quite a few of these alleged pathologies turned out to be useful to theoretical physics; just think of the importance of functional analysis in quantum mechanics, the singularity theorems in modern cosmology, and the non-trivial topologies in elementary particle physics.

History teaches, accordingly, that all models and pictures are only applicable within a definite domain or over a limited scale. Once a model is extended beyond these limits, it becomes scientifically meaningless and creates paradoxical questions — not to say that all paradoxes in science result from simple errors, some may have great heuristic value to the expert. Thus, if one exhibits a model to laymen, one also has to show its domain of validity. Small print in the guide or in the commentary won't do. If, however, the limitation is integrated into the model itself, at first glance it produces an apparent contradiction. If the model and its limitations or the old and the new concepts are shown side by side and almost equally, a possible unity of the scientific concept could be destroyed, because, nonetheless, a new definition is often just a suitable generalization of the old one. Well-balanced museum pedagogy will certainly mitigate these problems but cannot eliminate them entirely. Moreover, the pedagogical solution might raise new problems. Unless the curator questions the model and seeks some direct contact to the scientific fact, she or he might just exhibit the pedagogy of the model of the theory. Impressive aspects emphasized to attract interest might be completely marginal from a scientific point of view. The expressive colors of the popular fractal pictures, for instance, obscure the fact that self-similarity is the gist of all fractals. Moreover, some might even consider nature herself as the artist, although the colors simply arise from associating them to certain parameter values.

There is less danger of such false anthropomorphism if formal relations such as size, number, or direct causation are pictorially modelled. This, to my mind, is a very important advantage of the ISOTYPE method created in Red Vienna by Otto and Marie Neurath and Gerd Arntz. To Neurath, this method was part and parcel of his program of "scientific world conception" that strove for public education in the sciences and, on the philosophical level, primarily attacked the misalliance between naïve realism and classical metaphysics that might indeed result from an uncritical use of popular models.²

Even if an unambiguous presentation of a theory has been reached, there is still a major problem because any model is deeply conservative, akin to an item in a textbook. Thus, visitors will typically take the facts displayed for final truths without being able to grasp the approximations and simplifications — beyond just specifying a domain of validity — upon which the model rests within science proper. Such models contain many idealizations, like frictionless surfaces, which simply become contradictory if used in the wrong context. The gravest danger, however, arises from naïve realism: once a model has been understood as directly representing nature, all its internal limitations and discrepancies regarding other areas of physics may contribute to a general skepticism toward science that, perhaps, fails in revealing the true facts. Even worse is the possibility that future scientists will declare the model utterly wrong; postmodern critics will then quickly conclude that scientists are no more right about science than Aborigines.

1. See, for instance, Hans Hahn, "The Crisis of Intuition," in *Empiricism, Logic, and Mathematics: Philosophical Papers*, ed. Brian McGuinness (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1980), pp. 73-102.

2. See Otto Neurath, "Visual Education — Humanization Versus Popularization," in *Encyclopedia and Utopia*, ed. Elisabeth Nemeth and Friedrich Stadler (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996), pp. 245-336; for a practical application, see Roger Miles, "Otto Neurath and the Modern Public Museum: The Case of the Natural History Museum (London)," in *Encyclopedia and Utopia*, pp. 183-90; and the contributions of Friedrich Stadler and Angela Jansen in *Beyond Art*.