

# Masterminded Choreographies

## Stadium Mass Performances in Interwar Austria

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**Abstract.** Austrian political culture is rooted in counter-reformation, in a specific Catholic-baroque theatricality. With its marches, parades, pageants, Dionysian art and populist politics, a very distinctive form of showmanship or staging already characterised the last decades of the Habsburg Monarchy. After 1918, the new republic picked up this thread—with less of the ‘Dionysian’ at the fore than the more sublime and solemn. From the mid-1920s onwards, all political camps focused on involving masses in their political manifestations, thus the structured amorphous crowds involved participants marching in rank and file and in military attire and unified mass bodies engaged in choreographed movement, forming images (and messages). However, the authors and organisers of such events often seemed to be more impressed by these performances than the audience or even the participants themselves. Although the ‘mass’ in contemporary phrasing was a ‘feeling’, an ‘experience’, or an ‘emotion’, it still had to be controlled: stadiums and arenas became architectural means of social control, accompanied by a plethora of security and policing measures. But with the advent of new media, the crowd organised itself differently and anew. As a result, both the social democratic, pan-German and Christian-conservative mass festivals in the late 1920s and early 1930s and the staged Austrofascist ‘Tributes to the Youth’ after 1934 quickly lost their appeal, while their audiovisual reproduction in radio or newsreels had no effect either. Even enormous logistical efforts and bureaucratic pressure could not prevent the mass stagings from becoming outdated.

**Keywords:** Austria, mass culture, crowd, social control, stadium, Austrofascism, social democracy, Red Vienna

Austrian political culture has always had a penchant for theatricality, for a distinctive form of showmanship or staging. This is usually attributed to the country’s dominant Catholicity and to the tradition of the Baroque *Theatrum mundi*, the *Barockes Welttheater*, a mentality that decades ago was so aptly characterised by an American academic as a composition of ‘*Dionysian Art and Populist Politics*’.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, modern Austrian political cults and rituals have their roots in this

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1 McGrath, *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics*.

Catholic-Baroque tradition—regardless of the political camps or orientations that evolved later and whether these rites were legitimising, affirmative or rebellious.

Marches, parades, pageants, and ritualised mass demonstrations for more civic rights already characterised the last decades of the Habsburg monarchy. Major events of this kind, which “appealed to all segments of the population”<sup>2</sup> in the nineteenth century, mostly took place in the meadows of the Viennese *Prater*: in October 1814, 18,000 soldiers gathered along the *Hauptallee*, the immense green outdoor area’s main avenue, to mark the anniversary of the Battle of Leipzig; in April 1854, 200,000 Viennese came together here to celebrate the marriage of Emperor Franz Joseph I to Elisabeth, and at his birthday festivities, in August 1863, more than 250,000 took part. The infamous “»bewegliche« Feste”<sup>3</sup> (‘moveable feasts’), such as the *Makart-Festzug*, the ‘Makart Pageant’ in 1879, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Emperor’s marriage, and the *Kaiserhuldigungsfestzug*, held in 1908<sup>4</sup> to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of Franz Joseph’s accession to the throne, also started here. But the meadows of the *Prater* were also the site of rebellious mass actions such as the so-called *Praterschlacht*, the ‘Prater Battle’, in August 1848, when public workers protested against drastic wage cuts,<sup>5</sup> and on 1 May 1890, when more than 60,000 workers gathered here rebelliously and defiantly demanding more political rights but at the same time in a joyous and festive mood.<sup>6</sup>

After 1918, the young republic, its political parties and organisations picked up this thread—referring less to the *Dionysian* and more to the sublime, sacred and solemn aspects of this tradition, reminiscent of similar tendencies, scenes and events performed in the early Soviet Union or 1920s Germany.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, aesthetic-political propaganda mass performances were by no means new for Austria.<sup>8</sup> From the mid-1920s onwards, all political camps focused on including a multitude of actors or performers in their political manifestations, whose structured amorphous crowds included participants marching in rank and file and military attire, while the unified mass bodies, through choreographed movement, formed images (thereby evidently transmitting political messages). This “aestheticising of political life,”<sup>9</sup> as Walter Benjamin so precisely characterised the phenomenon, which was and is so specific to Austria, was further emphasised in processions, marches and large-scale

2 Storch, “1766–1872, »Gehn wir im Prater«,” 12.

3 Muhr, *Praterbuch*, 71.

4 Großegger, “Der Kaiserhuldigungsfestzug 1908.”

5 Maderthaler, “Die »Praterschlacht«.”

6 Troch, *Rebellensonntag*.

7 Eichberg, “Thing-, Fest- und Weihepiel,” 73–76.

8 Janke, *Manifeste kollektiver Identität*, 35.

9 Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,” 269.

cultic-ritual stagings. As recent studies have shown, a festival culture of strikingly “similar aesthetic construction, but different idealistic goals”<sup>10</sup> subsequently emerged in all political camps. By the end of the decade, this was further developed under new, technically modernised media conditions in the form of parades, mass meetings and performances, as well as large-scale cultic-ritual productions. The monumental stadium performances in the early 1930s had similar ideological roots. All the more, their aim—according to the approach of the initiators—was to overcome the distance between the audience and the performers by theatricalising reality, de-fictionalising events, and thus captivating the audience, involving them in what was happening in the arena and on stage. ‘Emotion’ was the turgid magic word for the reaction that the organisers expected. But ultimately, this also meant, as we shall see, discipline and control of the performing masses in the sense of their perfect direction.

Like many other aspects of the first Austrian republic from 1918 until 1934, this demonstrates—in contrast to the basically competitive or even hostile mutual relationship—one of the numerous points of unintentional contact and formal overlap between the country’s political camps. Drilled formations marching in military guise, choreographed movement sequences of unified mass bodies, the staging of the masses themselves: all of this—regardless of the ideological orientation—was a means of mobilising followers as well as the in-group in order to achieve (supposed but hardly verifiable) effects on an out-group: in the end, to impress both. But at the same time, in all camps, the relation to the crowd itself remained ambivalent: mass rallies were only intended to evoke a feeling, an emotion or experience—for no other means. The terminologies for and the distinction between an open, spontaneous, and uncontrolled—therefore undesirable—and a closed, orderly, and disciplined—therefore desirable and tolerable—crowd were clearly defined in all political camps, linguistically as well as regarding their factual organisation. The events of 15 July 1927, the mass demonstration and the following massacre associated with Vienna’s *Justizpalast*, the ‘Palace of Justice’, frightened everyone and led to the initiation of numerous measures to control any crowd or mass gathering—on the part of the executive, these steps involved policing; on the part of the organisers of such events, they were administrative.

### “An Unmanageable Crowd of German Men”:<sup>11</sup> The Schubert Celebrations of 1928

In this respect, the *Deutsche Sängerbundfest*—since well researched and described<sup>12</sup>—commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the death of Franz

10 Müller, “Vaterländische und nazistische Fest- und Weihespiele,” 151.

11 Festblätter für das Deutsche Sängerbundfest (June 1928) Folge 5, 12.

12 Stachel, “» ...seine österreichische Heimat, sein deutsches Volk... «.”

Schubert in July 1928 substantiates many of the arguments above. It marks the above-mentioned link or overlap between the political camps of the first Austrian Republic. On the occasion of this event, all political parties were able to convene in memory of the composer while apparently placing different emphases at the fore: for the Social Democrats, the *Sängerbundfest* was primarily a celebration of ‘their’ republic, for the Pan-Germans, it was the propagation of the idea of a common German-Austrian statehood, and for the conservative Christian-Socials it was a platform for ventilating—although hesitantly and cautiously—an idea of a distinct Austrian people, a specific ‘Austrianness’, albeit within the German nation. Politically, the *Sängerbundfest*, with its 120,000 participants, showed this ambivalence between competition and cooperation but also reciprocal ignoring.<sup>13</sup>

In a way, the Schubert Celebrations, mainly organised in the *Prater* and opened with a huge parade along the Inner City’s *Ringstraße*, can be regarded as a missing link between the two forms of mass festivities of the era: on one hand, exuberance, pleasure, carnival, circus and uncontrolled entertainment, on other, order, discipline, the sublime, theatrical and artificial. With regard to public spaces, this meant here the *Wurstelprater*, the popular name for Vienna’s amusement park, there the *Hauptallee*, and later the stadium, the *Trabrennplatz*, the horse racing track with its solemn political rallies. While people were entertaining themselves at the amusement park, there was a dignified seriousness in the neighbouring stadium at mass political events. While the *Wurstelprater* “was home to an almost uncontrollable audience as regular guests” and had “a carnivalesque touch”,<sup>14</sup> the stadium became a “Catholic cathedral”,<sup>15</sup> and was a “powerful architectural means of controlling and staging crowds”,<sup>16</sup> as a most recent study on the history of the Vienna stadium has suggested. But, at least at the *Sängerbundfest* in the late 1920s, these two could—in contrast to later years—still cohabit, as a contemporary cheerful report on the festivity put it: “Vienna was transformed. Overcrowded streets, hundreds of thousands of blue-plate caps, waving flags. Cheerfulness everywhere, carelessness, merit everywhere. When the events in the Singers’ Hall were over, the masses of festival guests streamed into the *Wurstelprater*.”<sup>17</sup>

Last but not least, the *Sängerbundfest* was an experimental field for disciplining a crowd. Planned with military precision, the Schubert celebrations offered the authorities, above all, the police, the opportunity to professionalise the handling of such mass events and to test the re-structuring of its governance and its procedures

13 Kerekes and Teller, “»Die Masse besitzt nicht nur Phantasie«,” 46.

14 Kerekes and Teller, “»Die Masse besitzt nicht nur Phantasie«,” 53.

15 Müller, “Vaterländische und nazistische Fest- und Weihespiele,” 156.

16 Hachleitner, “Der Superblock des Sports,” 368.

17 Pemmer and Lackner, *Der Wiener Prater*, 93.

after the July 1927 tragedy—the complete disaster of the police force’s handling of the manifestation.<sup>18</sup> Traffic and visitor flows were simulated and tested, an animated short film was produced to help manage and regulate the expected rush, and special telephone lines were laid for internal communication on-site. The security authorities and the municipal *Verkehrsamt*, the ‘Municipal Traffic Department’, issued an abundance of announcements, posters, notes and brochures to inform the population of these measures.<sup>19</sup> A detailed operational plan for 6,000 specially deployed security guards was worked out with military precision. Six thousand stewards supervised the events surrounding the festival, between 300 and 500 security officers were on duty at the sites, and police dogs monitored the spaces under the podium of the huge *Sängerhalle*, the ‘Singers’ Hall’, which was temporarily erected just for the festival on a meadow of the *Prater* that could hold 60,000 people. This was because the “collective intoxication and the reversal of the existing order at the festival were not conceivable without social control,”<sup>20</sup>—states a recent study on different forms of collective representation in Vienna between the late 19th and the early 20th century.

### **“A Great Experience of Collective Beauty!”:<sup>21</sup> Social Democratic Stagings of the Crowd**

The manifestations of the social democrats, with their liturgical elements, were always related to Catholic Austria and thus an important element in binding the lower classes, which—especially outside Austria’s industrial zones—had been brought up in religious surroundings and faithful traditions. Around 1930, a group led by the educator Otto Felix Kanitz and, for completely different reasons, left-wing deviant groups (in which later communist and writer-politician Ernst Fischer was active) increasingly demanded a new conception of these rituals, an intensification of the aesthetic effects at the expense of political content, a “para-religious atmosphere of messianism.”<sup>22</sup> May parades, celebrations of the founding of the republic, political demonstrations and manifestations now revealed a new choreography of propaganda and agitation, including fanfares, choirs, as well as individual speakers, musical interventions, flag rituals and collective formation exercises. The flag and mass cult of approaching fascism were to be confronted with an even

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18 *Ausschreitungen in Wien am 15. und 16. Juli 1927.*

19 ÖStA, AdR, BKA-Inneres 22/NÖ, 5076, Gz. 144.269-8/28; 10. Dt. Sängerbundfest in Wien, Sicherheitsvorkehrungen d. Pol.Dion [10. Sängerbundfest in Vienna. Safety Precautions of the Vienna Police Department].

20 Mattes, *Festrede und Festspiel*, 31.

21 Schrage, “Die Schönheit der Massen,” 70.

22 Cazzola, “Die proletarischen Feste,” 19.

more massive aestheticising under the motto “Repulse the Swastika! Light the Way for the Victory of Socialism!”—a strategy, however, which was not undisputed.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, this formal modernisation or adaptation to new media and political conditions paradoxically also meant stronger recourse to the named historical traditions. In the campaign for the municipal elections in 1932 in Vienna, for instance, the *Festzug des Neuen Wien*, the ‘Parade of the New Vienna’, with its thirty floats, celebrated the achievements of the city’s social democratic government by citing elements of similar pageants and processions in the early modern period and the Habsburg monarchy, a production about which Karl Kraus remarked sardonically: “That must have been a beautiful piece of kitsch!”<sup>24</sup>

The proletarian mass play also dates back to the past, namely to the historical form of the medieval mystery play, as well as to Hugo Hofmannsthal’s *Großes Welttheater*. In addition to mass events in the young Soviet Union, immediate precursors of the Viennese stadium productions were also smaller events and productions, like Paul A. Pisk’s musical score for the play *Die neue Stadt* (The New City) by Josef Luitpold Stern<sup>25</sup>—due to its solemn, highly dramatic, and overdone poetic lyrics satirised by Karl Kraus as *Stadtbauamtpsalme*<sup>26</sup> (Psalm for the Municipal Building Department),—Fritz Rosenfeld’s *Tag der Republik* (Day of the Republic), and Emmy Freundlich’s *Pyramidenbauer* (Constructors of Pyramids), a historical revue staged by the *Sozialistische Veranstaltungsgruppe* (Socialist Group for Events), near Vienna in 1926/27. Texts and stage directions were published in the group’s magazine, the *Politische Bühne*.<sup>27</sup> The merging of these theatrical strands with gymnastic mass performances, as arranged for the first time in July 1926 at the *Arbeiterturn- und Sportfest*—the Workers’ Festival for Gymnastics and Sports—in Vienna, finally produced the type of future mass performances in the new stadium.

It was the completion of the arena that provided the structural form for the coming events and secured adequate scenery.<sup>28</sup> The edifice, erected by the social-democratic-governed ‘Red Vienna’, was opened at the Second Workers’ Olympiad in July 1931 with a historical revue, the *Festspiel der Viertausend* (the Festival of the Four Thousand). Audio-visual impressions and dramatic intensifications were intended to create the effects of the mass play. But in the end, it was the movements/motions of the crowd itself that comprised its basic artistic element. “The heroes of the games

23 Rásky, *Arbeiterfesttage*, 130–65.

24 Kraus, Karl. “Feste der Jugend” [Festivals of the Youth]. *Die Fackel* 34, no. 876 (1932). 34.

25 Pisk, *Gebet aus dem XX. Jahrhundert*.

26 Kraus, Karl. “Die Wohnbaukantate” [Cantata for Residential Constructions]. *Die Fackel* 31, no. 820 (1929), 57–64, 63.

27 *Die Politische Bühne*. Vienna: Sozialistische Veranstaltungsgruppe, 1932–1933.

28 Hachleitner, *Das Wiener Praterstadion*.

are therefore not individuals, but the masses themselves.”<sup>29</sup> A large contingent of young people from the organisational hinterland of the Social Democratic Workers’ Party (SDAP) – *Viertausend*, after all, referred to the number of actors actively involved—combined sport and theatre into a collective event: “The present must enliven the game with its glowing breath, the masses on the tribunes must feel one with the masses on the field”<sup>30</sup>—went a euphoric and somewhat pompous contemporary description of the play. Parade rituals, choreographies and whole movement sequences were laid out using pictographs, plans, pictures and instructions in specially produced accompanying brochures, right down to details such as the exact position of flags, lines of sight, and collective gestures.<sup>31</sup> But the actual work and effort lay less in the dramaturgical or gymnastic planning of the mass performances than in the preparatory organisational tasks and logistics, illustrated by the protocols and documents about the meticulous preparation of the events, the construction of the scenery, and the extensively documented approval by different authorities, as well as the planning of the security measures.<sup>32</sup> Although the *Festspiel der Viertausend* was able to mobilise a total of 260,000 spectators in four performances, it is precisely this immense effort that may have laid the path to the end or the failure of similar mass spectacles.

The play itself recounted a historical-materialistic universal history, ending with the overthrow of capitalism and the salvation of mankind. Even the conservative *Reichspost* was impressed by the performance, albeit outraged by the references to Catholic traditions. The daily’s review stated that some scenes were “really brilliantly copied from the ingenious director of the Metropolis film” but criticised the idea of an irreconcilable class struggle, which permeated the whole play (in contrast to Fritz Lang’s movie): “You feel like you are in this film again, except that everything, absolutely everything, is missing from its redemptive basic idea that the »heart shall be mediator between brain and hands«!”<sup>33</sup> The 1931 play was followed a year later in May by another mass event in the Vienna stadium, organised by the ASKÖ, the Socialist Workers’ Association for Sports and Gymnastics. Again, almost all social democratic associations were represented, with more than 6,000 performers. At this *Maifestspiele* again, everything was precisely specified—a printed manual summarised all instructions, from how to hold the flag up to the

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29 Rásky, *Arbeiterfesttage*, 107.

30 Ehrenzweig, Robert. “Das Theater der Masse” [Theatre of the Masses]. *Die Politische Bühne*, (June 1932), [no pagination].

31 Rásky, *Arbeiterfesttage*, 109.

32 WStLA, M.Abt.104, A 8: Mapped Arbeiterolympiade and WStLA, M.Abt.471, A 4: Mapped Arbeiterolympiade and Mapped Stadion.

33 Dr. Birk. “Das Spiel der Viertausend” [The Play of the Four Thousand]. *Reichspost*, 4.8.1931, 7.



viewing direction.<sup>34</sup> This illustrates how nothing was left to chance by the director Stephan Hock: “Hock’s directorial work was reproduced in military vocabulary”,<sup>35</sup> claims a recent study on the performance—while a contemporary report on the rehearsals makes it clear that “the course of events depended on the will of a single person, who choreographed the masses from an elevated position. [...] The aim was, therefore, to have a mass body that was brought into line; every individual expression was eliminated.”<sup>36</sup> In the play itself, however—unlike in the mass performances of the authoritarian Austrofascist corporate state later—a central leader only rarely appeared. To a certain extent, the collective acted of its own accord, even if this required a sophisticated and hierarchically defined choreography: The dramaturgical parts of the ‘Führer’ and followers were reserved for the Austrofascist performances after 1934.

To this day, the charge persists that these mass spectacles of the social democrats, with their ritualisation, suspended revolutionary energies in cultic experiences, were a form of compensation for the increasing political powerlessness of the party.<sup>37</sup> But it has also been argued that too much importance is granted to these stagings and that their effect is overestimated, as they lost their importance and explosiveness even before 1933, the crucial year that witnessed the slow retreat of the party in the face of the right-wing attacks on democratic institutions.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, the productions are usually interpreted as a kind of response to the rapidly advancing process of secularisation.<sup>39</sup> According to that interpretation, the plays promised a fixed place and meaning, sacralised the collective, provided untroubled frameworks and formulas, and secured rituals in an insecure environment. However, this fails to explain their relatively short heyday and abrupt end even under democratic conditions—as was the case at the stadium festival of the social democrats—and their wasting away under bureaucratic-political constraints under Austrofascism.

One of the reasons for the decline of the genre may have been that the public at the beginning of the 1930s was already under the spell of new media, novel forms of communication, and the restructuring of the public sphere by film and radio—which primarily affected the main target group of the mass spectacles, namely the proletarian youth. The social democrats’ stadium plays had lost their significance even before the *coup d’état* of 1933/1934. A lack of interest had already led to a

34 See: *Anweisungen für das Maifestspiel*.

35 Janke, *Manifeste kollektiver Identität*, 135.

36 Janke, *Manifeste kollektiver Identität*, 135.

37 Pfoser, “Massenästhetik, Massenromantik, Massenspiel,” 73–74.

38 Dvořák, “Geschichte der österreichischen Sozialdemokratie,” 17–23.

39 Janke, *Politische Massenfestspiele in Österreich*, 322–24; Hachleitner, *Das Wiener Praterstadion*, 102.



collapse in ticket sales for the ASKÖ Festival in May 1932 and thus to a discussion about its meaningfulness: “Nothing should be said against this type of revue, to whose powerful effect we have all been happily subjected. Now only one thing should be said against them: that there were already enough of them. It is time to think of a new form of festival”,<sup>40</sup> suggested an article in the magazine of the radical left-wing agitprop performance group even in 1932. Schiller Marmorek’s “Festspiel des Proletariats” sensed the basic problem, which until today has remained open to debate: Did the new media take over the function of these mass spectacles or did the mass itself—until then considered homogeneous, be they proletariat or the Christian rank and file—become so differentiated as a result of the diversity of the new media that it could no longer be perceived as a uniform mass, and no longer wanted to be regarded as such?

But in the end, it did not come to this redefinition of the crowd, its involvement in cultural-political productions, and mass culture in general on the part of the social democratic cultural theorists. The May Day celebrations of 1933 in the stadium, overcrowded with 70,000 people, even then needed to be arranged according to the restrictions specified by the emergency decrees of Dollfuß’s government: “Once again everyone rose and sang the Internationale. The masses ran out of the stadium like minced meat from a meat machine.”<sup>41</sup>

### “St. Michael, führe uns!”:<sup>42</sup> The Mass Performances of the Conservatives

As late as the 1920s, conservative Catholic authors such as Max Mell, Friedrich Schreyvogel, and Enrica Handel-Mazzetti tried to update the traditional Catholic plays around the holidays of Corpus Christi and Easter. However, these unsuccessful new interpretations of Baroque plays were not mass productions in a narrower sense: small amateur groups such as the *Spielleute Gottes*, the Minstrels of God, experimented with new forms of religious drama on church squares in towns and villages. The passion play *Golgotha* by the canon of the Augustinian order, Vinzenz Oskar Ludwig, on Easter Sunday 1933 with the “brilliantly simple”<sup>43</sup> scene designed by architect Clemens Holzmeister and actor Peter Lorre as Judas in the building of the *Zirkus Renz* marked a further point in development. Here, “no soul-restoring and mass-mobilising attraction elements were spared in order to finally decide the

40 Marmorek Schiller, “Das Festspiel des Proletariats” [Festival of the Proletariat]. *Die politische Bühne*, (November 1932), 44.

41 Graf, *Die gezählten Jahre*, 326.

42 Henz, “1. Mai 1934, Huldigung der Stände,” 53.

43 “Passionsspiel im Zirkus Renz. »Golgotha« von V. O. Ludwig” [Passion Play in Circus Renz. “Golgotha” by V. O. Ludwig]. In *Reichspost*, 18.4.1933, 5.

»huge intellectual battle of the century« [...], in the spirit of the people as a whole or the new Christian-corporate-authoritarian Reich, established in the name of God Almighty.”<sup>44</sup>

It was not until the early 1930s that the conservative milieu—led by the *Christlich-Deutscher Turnerbund* (the Christian-German Gymnasts’ Association)—began to develop its own mass aesthetics that went beyond traditional religious forms. From 1931 onwards, a specialised publication<sup>45</sup> issued texts for such performances, giving precise instructions for gymnastic mass exercises and body ornament—comparable to similar publications of the social democrats. In June 1932, the Vienna branch of the Association performed the mass play *An der Esse der deutschen Schmiede*,<sup>46</sup> ‘At the Furnace of the German Blacksmith Shop’, with 8,000 participants and an audience of 40,000, also in the Vienna stadium. Performed with huge collective formation exercises in a similar way to the stadium festivals of the social democrats, here, too, the focus was on synchronised bodies, drills and unity. While the collective may have been the credo at social democratic festivals, here it was following and leadership. In a geometric formation, the Christian-German gymnasts, dressed in uniform, formed a Christian cross filling the arena at the end.

The celebrations at the *Katholikentag* in September 1933 finally led to a comprehensive adaptation of mass aesthetic elements on the conservative side. Obviously influenced by the socialist performances, Rudolf Henz, writer and a leading figure in the state-controlled Austrian Broadcasting Corporation RAVAG, wrote the ‘Weihespiel’ *St. Michael, führe uns!*—“a major rally that has been brought into shape and designed down to the last stage directive”,<sup>47</sup> as the director of the play claimed later in his autobiography, connecting “Catholic cult with elements of anti-Marxist Agitprop of the corporate state”,<sup>48</sup> as analysed in a study on the cultural politics of the corporate state. Its historical allusions to the liberation of Vienna from the Ottomans three hundred years earlier, in 1683, contained a clear thrust against the ‘red bulwark’ of social-democratic-governed Vienna (although by then already severely threatened by the regime).

In its narrative, the play established an explicitly hierarchical relationship between the crowd and the leader. At the end of the conflict between ‘good and evil’, between Christianity and paganism, after Saint Michael had banished the mutineers “with this sword”, and the “godless” workers with their “yelling” and the *Internationale* had been defeated by those “God-believing, gathering around the

44 Müller, “Vaterländische und nazistische Fest- und Weihespiele,” 152.

45 *Blätter für neues Festefeiern*.

46 Reimitz, *An der Esse der deutschen Schmiede*.

47 Henz, *Fügung und Widerstand*, 162.

48 Jarka, “Zur Literatur- und Theaterpolitik im »Ständestaat«,” 518.

symbol of their faith, the Holy Cross”,<sup>49</sup> “a procession enters the playing field and slowly moves through the trellis. The archangel has stepped aside and kneeled down, indicating that the game is over and the consecrated, sacramental reality begins.” At the end, bishops and abbots, led by the cardinal and followed by 900 priests and monks, moved within the stadium: “Voice, earth, sink into this sphere of sound, let the people sink into dust and song of praise”,<sup>50</sup> turning the stadium into “a symbolically charged sacred space”.<sup>51</sup> The *Katholikentag*—like the plays of the social democrats—were also accompanied by a multitude of security measures: the arrival and departure at the mass rallies of the “participants, whose orderly movement or insertion into the meeting place”<sup>52</sup>—Vienna’s stadium—were precisely specified. In general, all these events were framed by historical mythologies, be they of a historical-materialistic nature—as with the social democrats—, imbued by the idea of a German empire, as in the case of the plays performed by pan-German organisations, or dominated by the corporatist ideology of fascist Austria—as later with the children’s homage on 1 May 1934.<sup>53</sup> Shame and humiliation can be eliminated, the social democratic festival conveyed, while conflicts can be resolved, as the Austrofascist and Catholic festivals implied.

After the establishment of the dictatorship in 1934, such militant interpretations of the *Mysterienspiel*, the ‘mystery play’ and the solemn *Weihespiel* were followed by the Austrofascist *Bekanntnissspiele* plays in which the audience and the participants had to confess their loyalty to the new state and to pledge allegiance to the regime at their end. On 1 May 1934, the pageant *Huldigung der Stände*, ‘Homage to the Guilds’, in front of Viennese City Hall—“an attempt to dress a major state-political celebration in poetic form”<sup>54</sup>—celebrated the triumph of the ‘Corporate State’ over the democratic republic and hailed the imposed corporatist constitution. What actually did not exist—the corporation, the guilds, and their respective organisations—in this way at least found a proper stage in literary or poetic form—without any support from the masses, however. In contrast to the May Day parades of the social democrats, the *Homage* only illustrates the dispassion with which the project of the ‘Corporate State’ was carried out, a project which, due to its miserableness, could not profit from its audio-visual reproduction in the media, from “manipulated video- and audioclips”.<sup>55</sup>

49 ÖNB-Musiksammlung, Fonds 110 Nowak L. 606/2; St. Michael, führe uns!

50 Henz, “»St. Michael führe uns!«,” 45.

51 Mattes, *Festrede und Festspiel*, 93.

52 *Allgemeiner Deutscher Katholikentag*, 11.

53 BR [Béla Rásky], Tag der Jugend im Wiener Prater.

54 Henz, “1. Mai 1934, Huldigung der Stände,” 53.

55 Moritz, Moser, and Leidinger, *Kampfzone Kino*, 298.

The very same day, 50,000 children were required to gather in the stadium: “On Prater-Hauptallee, under the blossoming chestnut trees, whose mighty green crowns decorated with bright red candles form a canopy, groups of boys and girls, brightly dressed, full of expectant festive joy, parade in uninterrupted succession,”<sup>56</sup> reported the daily *Neue Freie Presse* on the approach of the children to the stadium for the patriotic ceremony on 1 May 1934, when the constitution of the Austrofascist dictatorship, proclaimed in the name of God, came into force. The stadium and that particular day were of utmost importance for the regime as symbols of the occupation and humiliation of the defeated democratic republic: the stadium was a landmark of ‘Red Vienna’, and May Day was the central holiday of the hated workers’ movement.

The Austrofascist, patriotic mass aesthetic, with its images and historical reminiscences of the system’s historical ideology, presented a world of harmony and unity, having overcome social differences and conflicts with the help of corporatism. It was a retrograde imagination of pre-modern social structures. The *Jugendhuldigung*, the ‘Tribute to the Youth’, of 1 May 1934, again written by Rudolf Henz, presented an Austrian historical mythology free of any internal (class) conflicts in three scenes: the advancement of ‘Christian-German culture’ towards the East, Austria’s musical heroes, and finally, Austria as a bulwark. The narrative structure was neither linear nor closed but rather a “diffuse, erratic depiction of mass presence”<sup>57</sup> created less for the stadium itself than for—rather unsuccessful—reproduction in mass media, for the state-controlled newsreel. Every year, “Österreich in Bild und Ton” (Austria in Images and Sound) reported on the *Tribute*, making the shortcomings of the performances—primarily an “acoustic media event designed for broadcast”<sup>58</sup>—very clearly visible. The media productions were amateurish, often grotesque, and could not keep up with technical developments and opportunities. Even if “50,000 Viennese children were shown the historical superiority and strength of their homeland, [and] at the same time the event was given the greatest possible media presence, the self-portrayal of an authoritarian state,”<sup>59</sup> the celebrations remained tableau-like acts of homage and affirmation in which audience and participants had to pledge their loyalty to the state and leadership. The collective evoked in the social democratic celebrations was now replaced by the faithful community, by the will to voluntarily integrate and subordinate. Here, too, it became clear that the regime—despite the all-out media effort—could only simulate the allegiance of the masses by administrative measures.<sup>60</sup>

56 “Die Kinderhuldigung im Stadion.” *Neue Freie Presse*, 2.5.1934, 3.

57 Kovács and Tóth, “»Denn Ihr seid die Zukunft«,” 79.

58 Matzl, “Der Tag des neuen Österreich,” 190.

59 Kovács and Tóth, “»Denn Ihr seid die Zukunft«,” 72.

60 “Kinderhuldigung im Stadion am 1. Mai 1934. Eine vaterländische Weihestunde” [Children’s Homage in the Stadium on 1 May 1934. A Patriotic Hour]. *Verordnungsblatt des Stadtschulrates für Wien*, 15.4.1934, 46.

Until the ‘Anschluß’ of 1938, this *Jugendhuldigung* regularly took place in the Vienna stadium on 1 May: the worship of imagined ancestors, commitment to a ‘German Austria’, loyalty, fulfilment of duty, military combativeness, recourse to monarchical military rituals and cults, as well as loyalty to the murdered Chancellor Dollfuß were the leitmotifs of these mass productions. Similar to the social democrats’ mass productions in the final phase of the republic, these performances lost their attraction, became boring with their endlessly repeated messages, the glorification of people and community, love and loyalty towards the fatherland, overegged with the historical images of corporative Austrian ideology. The dynamic crowd, the militant collective of the festivals of the early 1930s, degenerated here into a static folk community that begged its leaders to become imbued with “the virtues of holy leadership”.<sup>61</sup> The annual repetition eventually lost its appeal, and slowly, even the newspapers loyal to the regime hardly devoted any space to the event. The 1935 event, with boys and girls in “old Viennese costume”<sup>62</sup> and gymnastic performances, was a tribute to the (imagined) ancestors—“Hail to the people from which we come, happiness to the land of our ancestors!”—and a commitment to the new state—“Old fatherland in a new guise!”<sup>63</sup> as text passages read. In the second part, students and pupils—separated by gender—formed a huge *Kruckenkreuz*, a crutch cross, the symbol of the dictatorship at the end. In 1936 and 1937, the poet-writers loyal to the regime, Hans Nüchtern and Max Stebich, respectively, wrote their plays *Rot-Weiß-Rot*<sup>64</sup> and in *hoc signo vinces*<sup>65</sup> for the tributes. Here, history was no longer the focus, but rather the landscape, tradition, crafts and folk customs, a rural, pre-industrial world. What remained was “mass aesthetics, which the masses preferred to stay away from”.<sup>66</sup> Without bureaucratic pressure, the youth celebrations would hardly have been able to fill the Vienna stadium: a decree from the Vienna City School Council not only obliged “a third to half” of all Viennese students and teaching staff to take part but also distributed tasks to be completed. “During the subsequent homage to the fatherland, the students will cheer Austria and wave red-white-red paper flags. These will be provided by the festival committee,”<sup>67</sup> as the official gazette of Vienna’s School Board prescribed.

61 Henz, “»Sankt Michael, führe uns!«,” 45.

62 “Jugendhuldigung im Stadion”. *Reichspost*, 2.5.1935, 2.

63 *Wiener Jugendfeier, 1. Mai 1935. Stadion*. Vienna: Stadtschulrat für Wien, 1935, 4f.

64 Nüchtern, *Rot-weiß-rot. Ein Festspiel*.

65 Stebich, *Wiener Jugendfeier. 2. Mai 1937*.

66 Pfoser and Renner, “»Ein Toter führt uns an«,” 238.

67 “Kinderhuldigung im Stadion am 1. Mai 1934. Eine vaterländische Weihestunde” [Children’s Homage in the Stadium on 1 May 1934. A Patriotic Hour]. *Verordnungsblatt des Stadtschulrates für Wien*, 15.4.1934, 46.

The self-adornment of the corporate state led to an abundance of public appeals, parades, consecration hours, homages, tributes, and flag consecrations. The dictum of a “permanent Corpus Christi holiday”<sup>68</sup> in an academic article in the 1980s may be exaggerated, but a mixture of the mass aesthetics of the state and the staging of the Catholic Church can definitely be claimed. But everything remained within the framework of an unadventurous, limited, and staid mass mobilisation as the elite of the corporate state was committed to anti-collectivism. The modern phenomenon of depicting the masses in motion—as an element that makes social demands—did not occur in the baroque-courtly garb of Austrofascist mass festivals.

At the same time, the conservative, later Austrofascist elite of dignitaries, with their deeply rooted anti-collectivism, found themselves with the dilemma of not having a plausible political identity to offer concerning why it was worth being loyal to the regime. Torn between the resistance of social democrats, socialists, and communists, as well as the national socialist opposition, and despite all cultural-political experiments, they were unable to evoke collective passions and stronger and conscious ties to the regime. Likewise, the Austrofascist tributes in the years after 1934 turned into bloodless, controlled and self-initiated declarations of loyalty to the state and its leadership. “The emotional charges of the stadium were not provided by the mass festival, but above all by the football games.”<sup>69</sup>

Ultimately, mass performances, in their conservative as well as leftist shaping—as an all-in-all “»reactionary« genre”<sup>70</sup>—remained theatrical plays with no consequence, while another political mass event was soon to become bloody serious. In September 1933, at a mass rally of the *Vaterländische Front* (Patriotic Front)—soon to become the sole legal political organisation—on the *Trabrennplatz*, the horse racing track in the *Prater*, Federal Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß revealed his plans to destroy Austria’s democracy: “From the grand stand I watched”, reported later the correspondent of the British *Daily Telegraph* George Eric Rowe Gedye,

“[...] the outwardly picturesque but terribly depressing spectacle for everyone who had to study the successive developments in the Greek tragedy of Austria’s destruction at the hands of her glowingly patriotic but misguided Chancellor. In company columns the Heimwehr-Fascists stood drawn up on the turf in their green uniforms, flanked by Tyrolean National Guards in picturesque national costume and sugar-loaf hats with osprey plumes which quivered in the breeze like a forest of aspen leaves. Dark green or black-and-red jackets and shorts tailed off into snow-white

68 Jarka, “Zur Literatur- und Theaterpolitik im »Ständestaat«,” 518.

69 Hachleitner, “Der Superblock des Sports,” 366–67.

70 Janke, *Politische Massenfestsspiele in Österreich*, 424.

stockings. Catholic semi-Fascist peasant irregulars stood there in many varieties of picturesque Alpine costumes, in front of them blue- and yellow-shirted scout battalions. All the peasant costumes of Austria's alps [sic!] and valleys were represented, from the broad-brimmed, gold-lace hats, which so becomingly framed the faces of girls from Upper Austria, to the hideous little black-straw hats, tight-fitting black bodices and skirts reaching well down below the ankles of the women of Tyrol. The hundred thousand broke into enthusiastic cheering, shouts of 'Hail' and fluttering handkerchiefs as a little man in the grey-green uniform of the Tyrolese Kaiserjaeger, with a cape draped from his shoulders and a white falcon's feather in his cap, trotted out from the grand stand and scuttled up into the red-draped rostrum from which his speech was delivered."<sup>71</sup>

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