

“For Us, *Bühne* is Everything that has an Audience.”¹

Masses and Mass Arts in the Viennese Lifestyle Magazine *Die Bühne* in the 1920s and 1930s

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Received 29 February 2024 | Accepted 30 August 2024 | Published online 16 September 2024

Abstract. In the 1920s in particular, the illustrated *Die Bühne* magazine claimed to appeal to “everyone” and to be a stage (= *Bühne*) for the widest possible readership. With an eye on international developments, it offered a mix of topics—from modern theatre, revue and mass media, to sport, the new body culture and leisure activities—and propagated a modern lifestyle overall. The article explores how the slogan “For us, *Bühne* is everything that has an audience”, proclaimed in the first issue in 1924, manifested itself and its attitude towards mass arts over the years. The editors are examined as well as the intended and actual readers, with a focus on the various strategies used to attract and involve readers and to keep them loyal to the *Die Bühne* as a product. The provided role models were largely middle class. However, the content indicated that the magazine wanted to appeal to a cross-milieu and thus to a more diverse readership than the promoted lifestyle, consumer products and trendy places may suggest at first glance. At the same time, “everyone” refers to mass or the masses, which is most frequently expressed in articles on leisure culture and in relation to (theatre) audiences. I analyse the contexts and times when this *topos* is used positively—e.g., in the sense of active, idiosyncratic audiences—and when mass stands for the superficial or the ordinary. The question of the masses is explored in two ways: firstly, as the popular approach of addressing everyone and promoting mass arts, and secondly, as the depiction and representation of various aspects of the masses.

Keywords: Vienna, illustrated magazines, lifestyle journalism, mass culture, mass audiences, 1920s and 1930s

Intro

A black and white photograph of a young woman with a dark, wavy bob in three-quarter profile, looking past the viewer/camera (Figure 1). She is wearing makeup and,

1 “Bühne ist für uns alles, was Zuschauer hat.” *Die Bühne* 1, no. 1 (1924): 2.

with her right hand, she is touching a pearl necklace; her upper body is half wrapped in a light-coloured satin cloth, her right shoulder, arm and back are naked. Bracelets and a feather boa complete the portrait, which focuses on the woman's softly drawn, almost dreamy, classically beautiful face and the naked parts of her body. The studio photograph, whose aesthetics is reminiscent of the 1920s, is part of the biographical material that Kurt Gutfreund donated to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: letters, postcards, a certificate of descent documenting Nazi persecution and imprisonment as a child in Theresienstadt with his mother Hilde(gard) (Gutfreund-)Grasl from 1943 until the liberation in 1945. Eight photographs—seven family photos and the picture described here—as well as two magazine pages are the only documents from the time before National Socialism.² Hildegard's portrait and the magazine article thus seem to have a significance that corresponds to that of the family photos.



Figure 1

On one of the magazine's pages are portraits of young women with their names, employers, and often also the photographers given under the title *We Are Looking for the Most Beautiful Saleswoman in Vienna* (Figure 2).³ Printed in the centre of the first page, Hilde Grasl's picture, numbered 135, is the largest. Starting in January 1930, the photos appeared in consecutive issues of the Viennese illustrated magazine *Die Bühne* and were part of a prize beauty contest, in which two one-month-long stays "in a fashionable spa hotel" in popular Austrian tourist destinations such as Kitzbühel could be won; several companies donated sixty to eighty additional

2 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Kurt Gutfreund papers, photographs circa 1920–1940, 2002.212.2. <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn711079?rsc=172599&cv=0&x=1057&y=1456&z=2.7e-4>

3 "Wir suchen die schönste Verkäuferin von Wien." *Die Bühne* 6, no. 276 (1930): 45. The title was designed by Lisl Weil, who regularly worked as an illustrator for the magazine. Secklehner, *The ABC of Women by Lisl Weil* (1933).



Figure 2

issue, taking the magazine's title literally. The editors thus not only formulated a programme to focus on everything that generated interest because it was popular and trendy, but also placed the readers at the centre. Particularly in the early years, *Die Bühne* declared that it addressed everybody and that it was a platform for the widest possible readership. Accordingly, it offered a largely non-hierarchical juxtaposition of high and popular culture, a potpourri of content, as the frequently used term *revue*⁶ indicates. The subtitle *Theatre, Art, Fashion, Film, Society, Sport*⁷ printed on the front page in the early years underlines the claim to diversity. With an eye on international developments, it presented a modern urban lifestyle—ranging

prizes, from fur capes, shoes, and perfumes to a practical sewing box, almost certainly for PR purposes. The award ceremony took place in spring at the thermal baths spa of Bad Vöslau, a popular, sophisticated leisure site near Vienna and the winners were determined in two ways: two champions were chosen by the readers by sending in the name of their favourite, for which they could also win prizes; two further winners were elected by a jury at the competition event in Bad Vöslau where the contestants paraded about.⁴ This contest is distinctive of the lifestyle magazine *Die Bühne*, founded in 1924, and its agenda in several respects: “For us *Bühne* [= stage] is everything that has an audience”⁵ the editorial team postulated as a motto in the very first

4 For an explanation of the contest, see: “Wir suchen die schönste Verkäuferin von Wien.” *Die Bühne* 6, no. 267 (1929): 22.

5 “Bühne ist für uns alles, was Zuschauer hat.” *Die Bühne* 1, no. 1 (1924): 2.

6 “Hundert Hefte ‘Bühne’ [Hundred Issues of ‘Bühne’].” *Die Bühne* 3, no. 100 (1926): 5; see also the editorial [Arnold Bachwitz, Ludwig Hirschfeld], “An unsere Leser [To Our Readers].” *Moderne Welt* 1, nos 1–2 (1918): 1.

7 Printed on the inside cover until 1931; the subtitle was then reduced to *Theatre and Society. Anno* (Austrian Newspaper Online); <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno-plus?aid=bue&size=45>. For an overview of subtitles, publishers, and editors-in-chief, see: Dietzel and Hügel, *Deutsche literarische Zeitschriften 1880–1945*, 226–27.

from theatre performances to new or emerging forms of the mass arts,⁸ such as film, revue, sports, travel, or new body images—and propagated a modern leisure and consumer culture. *Die Bühne* thus shared the “secular vision” of many other illustrated magazines of the time, such as the German-published *UHU*,⁹ “of an inclusive global modernity, built on universal values of tolerance and sociability, and the material prosperity of the machine-age future.”¹⁰

This article examines whether and how the slogan proclaimed in the first issue of *Die Bühne* was reflected in its content and also looks at the magazine’s attitude towards mass arts. What role did the owners, the editors, the various content creators play? What was the meaning of the calls to readers to contribute, such as the competition for the “most beautiful saleswoman”? How did these calls take shape? In addition to the producers, I focus on the audience: in the magazine’s understanding, “everybody” actually meant consumer-oriented, urban citizens who desired (or were supposed to desire) the propagated modern lifestyle. Much of the content and the role models presented were aimed more at women—with articles ranging from fashion for working women and stories about new gender roles to essays by well-known bourgeois feminists. Tendentially, a middle-class lifestyle was presented as desirable. But the magazine intended to appeal to a more diverse readership than the consumer products and places—in short, the lifestyle advertised—may suggest at first glance.¹¹

At the same time, “everybody” refers to the masses, a recurring theme in *Die Bühne*, most frequently in features about leisure culture and in relation to (theatre) audiences. In the second part of the article, I analyse through examples when this topos was used positively—e.g., in terms of active, idiosyncratic audiences—and

8 I am referring to Kaspar Maase, *Populärkultur*, esp. 39, 76 and Maase, *Grenzenloses Vergnügen*, 30–1, 60–1. Maase uses “mass arts” instead of popular or mass culture: aesthetic experience and mass appeal are fundamental characteristics of these arts of modern industrial society. With mass arts Maase wants to draw attention to the intertwining of high and mass culture. See also: Hecken, “Populärkultur, Massenkultur, hohe Kultur, Popkultur,” 256–65; Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 1–16.

9 *UHU* (1924–1934), published monthly by Ullstein in Berlin, was one of the most innovative and internationally influential lifestyle magazines of the Weimar Republic.

10 Satterthwaite, *Modernist Magazines and the Social Ideal*, 2.

11 On female writers as well as readers in *Die Bühne* focusing on Jewish women and Jewish difference see Silverman, “A Delicate Balancing Act”. On gender roles with a focus on leisure culture see Yazdanpanah, “»Das Wochenende ohne Männer?«.” The readership can be pinned down to a certain extent, through participants in competitions, published letters to the editor and enquiries to the graphologist. However, one has to keep in mind that certain milieus are more likely than others to write letters to the editor. Attempts to reconstruct the actual readership are presented in my dissertation about “Visual Culture and Consumer Culture in the Viennese Lifestyle magazine *Die Bühne*”.

when it signified the ordinary or a lack of culture. How and in what contexts are the masses usually presented? I thus explore the question of the masses in two ways: firstly, as the popular mass cultural approach in the magazine's program, and secondly as the depiction and representation of various aspects of the masses.

Emmerich Békessy—agent of a “new journalism”¹² or sensationalist hack?

“At first glance, the impressive magazine, with its brightly coloured cover presents itself as an urban product of the best kind. Indeed, it is unique because it is the first modern illustrated magazine in Vienna. [...] The constant development of the graphic arts in England and America made it possible to meet the growing demand for illustration at the highest level and to launch magazines onto the media market which, with their colourful pictures and photographic reproductions, are a true mirror of life in all its diversity. [...] »Die Bühne« is the good, amusing magazine of the city, which, thanks to its rich content and technically perfect design, represents Vienna worthily in the series of metropolitan magazines.”¹³

The announcement in November 1924 of the first *Die Bühne* in the *Die Stunde* daily from the same publishing house claims that the new magazine is poised to catch up with international developments. Illustrated magazines are presented as a reaction to the increasing visualisation of everyday urban life and as its adequate medium of expression, the United States and the United Kingdom, which indeed played a pioneering media-historical role, are used as models and reference points. A bright cover and photography are also significant: only they will make the medium a “true mirror” of the diversity of modern city life but, above all, they will generate attention. The PR article thus addresses the central features of illustrated magazines, which boomed internationally in the mid-1920s, and characterises *Die Bühne* as a pioneer among them. It ignores the fact that the *Moderne Welt* [Modern World] magazine had existed in Vienna from 1918. Then illustrated magazines had become one of the most influential media, conveying urban consumer culture globally. Both shaping and reflecting the zeitgeist, they were part and product of the modern, increasingly visual culture; therefore, photography and graphic elements were essential.¹⁴ Technical innovations from around 1900 made it possible to produce

12 With “new journalism” I am referring to contemporary discourses, especially Békessy's self-stylization.

13 “»Die Bühne«. Ein neues illustriertes Wiener Blatt” [»The Bühne«. A New Illustrated Viennese Paper], *Die Stunde*, November 7, 1924, 3.

14 Zimmermann, “Publikumszeitschriften,” 21–7; Faulstich, *Mediengeschichte*, 106–8.

newspapers and (illustrated) magazines faster, in higher quality and with more illustrations, especially photographs. As a consequence, print media became cheaper, circulation increased, and more target group differentiation followed.¹⁵

The announcement was not just PR for the publisher's plan to modernise the Viennese media market and—at least in terms of design—align it with international standards. In fact, Vernay AG, where *Die Bühne* was printed, was the printing company that, together with the Steyrermühl media concern, employed the most modern equipment in Austria.¹⁶ *Die Bühne* was the lifestyle journal in Austria that promoted modern photography most intensively and offered it an important platform.¹⁷ The ad includes a photo showing that the new magazine was promoted by street advertising. Thus, the publisher used methods that in 1924 had been permitted for no more than around two years in Austria: the Press Act of 1922 had lifted the ban on colportage, and newspapers were no longer available by subscription or at newsstands only but also on the street; furthermore, they were now allowed to be advertised in a variety of ways, resulting in wider distribution and greater diversity.¹⁸

Die Bühne was founded by journalist Imre Békessy (1887–1951), who had emigrated to Vienna from Horthy's Hungary in 1920. Before his sensational forced departure in 1926, he was one of the busiest newspaper publishers in Vienna: he launched the business paper *Die Börse* ([The Stock Exchange], 1920), the daily newspaper *Die Stunde* ([The Hour], 1923), and a year later *Die Bühne*, as well as the puzzle paper *Die Sphinx* [The Sphynx]. All were issued by Békessy's Kronos publishing house, printed by Vernay,¹⁹ and co-funded by controversial financier and investor Camillo Castiglioni. Today, Békessy is best known as the opponent of Viennese journalist and writer Karl Kraus (*Die Fackel* [The Torch]), who blamed Békessy for embodying an immoral post-war society and representing the most notorious example of unscrupulous journalism and press corruption.²⁰ Békessy had already worked as a journalist in Hungary, founded the weekly *Tőzsdei Kurír* [Stock Exchange Courier], and had come into conflict with the law because of his dubious journalistic and business practices.²¹ In Vienna, he was again involved in press scandals and court

15 Fröhlich, *Viewing Illustrated Magazines with Wittgenstein*, 59–60.

16 Venus, "Aufstieg und Blüte der VernayAG," 57–65; Eigner and Resch, "Steyrermühl und Vernay," 162–67.

17 Holzer, *Rasende Reporter*, 175–57.

18 Bundesgesetz vom 7. April 1922 über die Presse, BGBl. Nr. 218/1922.

19 *Compass. Finanzielles Jahrbuch 1927, Band 1: Österreich*, 1300.

20 Langkabel and Prager, "Karl Kraus' polemische Praktiken," 227–42; Timms, "Haifische in der Donau."

21 Habe, *Ich stelle mich*, 34–6, 57–65; "Békessys Vorvergangenheit" [Békessy's Past], *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, August 25, 1926, 4; Sz. P., "Békessy Imre összeomlása" [Imre Békessy's Collapse]. *Aradi Közlöny*, July 24, 1926, 3.

cases with journalists, such as Kraus, Ernst Stolper, and Walter Federn, editors of the business magazine *Der Österreichische Volkswirt* [The Austrian Economist], and Friedrich Austerlitz, editor-in-chief of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* [Workers Newspaper]. They accused him of plagiarism, extortion of advertisements, libel, and close ties to controversial financiers.²² In the mid-1920s, numerous media reports appeared, most of them against Békessy, mainly in Vienna, but also in Budapest. Békessy, Kraus, Austerlitz, Stolper, Federn, *The Stunde* employee and Kraus opponent Anton Kuh, Camillo Castiglioni and many others of the people involved were of Jewish heritage. Antisemitic rhetoric was levelled from both sides for different purposes, signifying different things: Jewish acculturation (or difference), power struggles between the diverse groups with Jewish heritage (Vienna, Bohemia, Hungary, Galicia), sometimes blunt antisemitism. But Békessy's opponents also made statements that devalued him as a Hungarian outsider, hence employing another form of Othering, that of Hungary being a less civilised culture.²³

The accusations against him and several of his employees were anything but unfounded. Békessy often acted unscrupulously, was politically opportunistic, did not adhere to ethical concerns, and invented or distorted facts. To acquire money, he did not refrain from blackmail and promised positive reporting in return for paid advertisements. In a lawsuit in 1924 he described himself first and foremost as an entrepreneur and journalism as a business that followed the pattern of supply and demand, rather than as a profession with ethical legal requirements laid down in the Press Act.²⁴

Békessy and his employees declared that, based on the American/British model, they were introducing modern journalism to the Viennese media landscape, which

22 “Der Prozess Bekessy. Stenographisches Protokoll der Schwurgerichtsverhandlung über die Privatklage der Herausgeber des ‘Österreichischen Volkswirt’ Walther Federn u. Dr. Gustav Stolper gegen Emmerich Bekessy Herausgeber der ‘Börse’ und ‘Stunde’ am 18. und 19. Jänner 1924, [The Bekessy Trial. Stenographic protocol of the jury trial on the lawsuit of the publishers of the ‘The Austrian Economist’ Walther Federn and Dr. Gustav Stolper against Emmerich Bekessy publisher of the ‘The Stock Exchange’ and ‘The Hour’ on January 18 and 19, 1924].” *Der Österreichische Volkswirt*, September 27, 1924. An important contemporary source of the Békessy criticism is that of former *Stunde* employee Ernst Spitz: *Békessys Revolver*. Karl Kraus, who published around 500 pages on Békessy and his “new journalism” in *Die Fackel* between 1924 and 1926, drew heavily on Spitz. For Békessy's side, including many Hungarian publicists and Kraus opponents, see: Emmerich Békessy, ed., *Békessy's Panoptikum*. For documents and brief descriptions of the controversy, see the research project *Rechtsakten der Kanzlei Oskar Samek*.

23 “Die Staatsbürgerschaft Békessys” [Békessy's Citizenship], *Neues Wiener Journal*, December 1, 1927, 3–4. Timms, “The Kraus Bekessy–Controversy in Interwar Vienna,” 191–7; Silverman, *Becoming Austrians*, 3–27.

24 “Der Prozess Bekessy,” 48–9.

they criticised as elitist, old-fashioned and subservient. It is especially important for my argument that Békessy declared he would appeal to and do journalism for the masses. In this vein, his approach was popular and oriented towards (potential) readers, producing comprehensible, sometimes simplistic journalism.²⁵ Thereby, he antagonised established publishers and journalists, often deliberately. Békessy wanted to feature what was popular or was made popular by his media. Therefore, he used marketing devices, including gifts, contests, such as the one for the “most beautiful saleswoman”, and other forms of engaging readers. This was often done using a style based on Anglo-American tabloids, full of superlatives and promises. The advertisement for the first *Die Bühne* is a pertinent example of this approach: it announces “the most beautiful pictures from all over the world” and promises readers participation, gratification, and fame in an almost mantra-like manner.²⁶

A later example is an ad printed in *Die Bühne* in 1929 which visually suggests the hegemony of the former Békessy media (Figure 3). In a photomontage, issues of *Die Bühne*, *Die Stunde*, *Die Börse*, and *Die Sphinx* are placed over St. Stephen's Cathedral, almost covering the city's landmark and thus “conquering” Vienna. The text asserts their leading position and unique selling point (“unrivalled”) on the “continent” or even “world-wide”.²⁷ Not only does the self-promotion illustrate the assertion of internationalism and the sensationalist gesture of exaggeration, but it is also an expression of a concept aimed at maximising sales, which was maintained in the first years after Békessy's departure. *Die Börse* represents the type of popular special-interest newspaper that was aimed at everyone by communicating complicated economic relationships in an understandable and personalised way. For the daily *Die Stunde*, the ad claims to have won over the “great mass of the intelligentsia” as readers. This



Figure 3

25 Conboy, “The Press and Popular Culture,” 5–15.

26 “Wollen Sie” [Do You Want?]. *Die Stunde*, October 26, 1924, 7.

27 [Advertisement], *Die Bühne* 3, no. 99 (1926), s.p.

constitutes PR through differentiation and elevation: “mass” does not refer to everyone, but to the intelligent people; and in *Die Bühne* to those who knew about the latest trends. At the same time, potentially all people were addressed, and no one was excluded from the outset. Above all, the ad demonstrates Békessy’s sense for trends, as his portfolio included the most important emerging types of print media of the time: *Die Stunde* was the best known and most notorious of his papers and is considered the archetype of the modern tabloid press in Austria; *Die Sphinx* is an example of the new type of puzzle magazine that was highly sought after from the mid-1920s and with *Die Bühne*, Békessy started a media type that became the central mediator of an increasingly visualised urban everyday life.²⁸

Fifteen minutes of fame for everyone

Roughly 250 saleswomen participated in the contest described above. To those who did not have up-to-date portraits of themselves, *Die Bühne* offered the opportunity to be photographed free of charge at Blumberger&Schulz, the studio of Anni Schulz and Marianne Blumberger(-Bergler), whose pictures appeared regularly in the magazine and who were among the successful and innovative photographers in interwar Vienna.²⁹ Hildegard (Gutfreund-)Grasl did not have to take up the offer—on her obviously professional studio portrait the credit “Pollak” is printed; presumably the Willi Pollak studio, whose work was also reproduced in *Die Bühne*.³⁰ It is not clear whether the magazine compensated Blumberger/Schulz, whether they made a separate agreement, or the two wrote off the commission as an unpaid PR measure. However, this cooperation as well as the naming of the companies employing the saleswomen, testifies to the practice of the often-fluid boundary between editorial content and advertising, between journalism and PR in *Die Bühne* and other Békessy-managed media. Taking note of the employers, but even more so of the companies that provided the prizes, also indicates that consumer products, be it fashion brands or trendy locations, constituted an important part of the propagated modern life. They could be bought and consumed, but participation could also be acquired through reading about and looking at them in magazines or shop windows. The mediation of consumer knowledge, which symbolised connoisseurship and belonging and enabled readers to participate in the discourse on popular culture and modern lifestyle, was every bit as relevant. In the interwar period, advertising and product communication was increasingly aimed at the

28 Podewski, “Zwischen Sichtbarem und Sagbarem,” 39–46; Scheiding and Fazli, “Einleitung,” 11–27.

29 Holzer, *Rasende Reporter*, 209–10, 331–4.

30 E.G. Bac., “Der interessante Mann” [The Interesting Man]. *Die Bühne* 6, no. 259 (1929): 35.

masses. It was less about ensuring that everyone could afford the consumer goods, and more about opening up “product horizons”. Democratisation therefore related to “product perception”,³¹ with the promise of future participation and consumer knowledge taking centre stage—and magazines played an important role here.

The jury that elected “the most beautiful saleswoman” consisted of *Die Bühne* editor Grete Müller, presumably responsible for organisation and media coverage, and five men of different generations working in the cultural sphere.³² A longtime employee, Grete Müller wrote about new women and changing gender roles and was in charge of the *Die Bühne*’s fashion section. She also edited the fashion page of *Die Stunde* and before that was responsible for fashion coverage in the *Wiener Mode* magazine. Müller is not only an example of the practice of multiple employment in the Békessy media but was also one of the influential fashion journalists in Austria after 1918. She established new topics and forms of writing about women as well as fashion. The male jury members were all featured in the magazine, some for many years, and reflect its range of content and the media-typical combination of high and popular culture: representing the established bourgeois arts were painter Quincy Adams, who painted portraits of the Viennese bourgeoisie from around 1900, and Art Nouveau sculptor Gustav Gurschner; demonstrating the importance of modern photography was the successful, aesthetically modern but politically conservative photographer Rudolf Koppitz while the young generation was represented by actor Ulrich von Bettac and cabaret star, actor, and revue author Karl Farkas, who also stood for contemporary mass arts and sometimes published in *Die Bühne*. That it was more or less exclusively men who decided on female beauty was common practice; the readers’ involvement, however, indicates a modern, democratic-egalitarian aspect. According to the announcement, the competition aimed to give the “modern everyday Cinderella a little satisfaction, a little chance: we are looking for the most beautiful saleswoman—and the public should help us.”³³ Not only were all of the readers invited to become active, but their taste was presented as a category to consider and as equal to the seemingly professional knowledge of the jury. Together, the readers could help an average urban type become visible and rise socially (at least that was the promise).

Hilde Grasl’s portrait in *Die Bühne* represents a moment when she steps out of her everyday life as a saleswoman. Depicted just a few pages away from celebrities and famous actors, their glamour and desirability are transferred to the potentially most beautiful saleswoman—at least for “fifteen minutes”. In times of economic crisis, the awarding of consumer goods must have encouraged participation as well.

31 Gries and Morawetz, “Kauft österreichische Waren!,” 218–20.

32 “Die schönsten Verkäuferinnen Wiens im Strandbad Bad Vöslau” [Vienna’s Most Beautiful Saleswomen at the Bad Vöslau Lido]. *Die Bühne* 7, no. 281 (1930): 48.

33 “Wir suchen die schönste Verkäuferin von Wien.” *Die Bühne* 6, no. 267 (1929): 22.

That the choice for a contest fell on the group of saleswomen is relevant in several ways: they were the ones with daily contact to the consumer culture propagated in *Die Bühne* and were agents of its distribution. In addition, together with the secretary, the saleswoman most strongly represented the new working woman, who (even more than urban white-collar male workers) became the ideal consumer of mass media entertainment.³⁴

Modes of attracting and engaging readers

The effort of *Die Bühne* to incite devotion in their readers to the product also meant that in addition to participating in contests, quizzes and the like, they should actively contribute with their texts, songs, or photographs. This is evidenced by feedback given on submitted plays, novellas and jokes in editorials and the letterbox section, where the editor-in-chief addressed readers or reflected on the contributions. The insert *What the 'Bühne' Should Feature*³⁵ combined the claim of broad impact and diversity with immediacy and direct interaction with readers. In return for submitting suggestions and pitches, readers would both receive a magazine according to their expectations and would increase its success. Their participation was meant to strengthen identification and—to a lesser extent—generate free content. Yet, the majority of the printed reader contributions seem to consist of jokes and similar short texts. The editorial team was also provided with information on the impact of their medium on consumers—a free and early form of media usage analysis.

The first issue especially offered varied participation opportunities: besides competitions for a theatre play and rhymes, there was a photo puzzle, a radio contest, and the contest *Would you Like to Film?*, which ran over several numbers. In the 1920s, the star system of the major Hollywood studios and Ufa evolved, cinema palaces were built, cinema chains and numerous film magazines emerged. The first *Die Bühne* featured stars and the production of the monumental film *The Young Medardus* by Michael Kertesz, who invited the “most talented” participants to test shootings. Like Békessy, he was of Jewish descent and emigrated from Hungary where he became part of a network of (exiled, often Jewish) Hungarians who contributed to the magazine during the Békessy years. According to historian Corey Ross, the “glamour [of film] and the sheer novelty of the radio [...] most captivated

34 Kracauer, “Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehen ins Kino,” 279–94. Another beauty contest addressing the new woman was for the “Lady with the most Beautiful Bob,” *Die Bühne* 3, no. 77 (1926): 16. For research on modernity, gender (esp. new women) and consumption see de Grazia and Furlogh, *Sex of Things*; Weinbaum, *The Modern Girl around the World*.

35 Redaktion, “Was die »Bühne« bringen soll” [What the ‘Bühne’ Should Feature]. *Die Bühne* 1, no. 5 (1924): 63.

contemporaries and [...] most significantly reshaped the cultural landscape of the interwar period.”³⁶ Thus, *Would you Like to Film?* appealed to the readers’ desires to participate in the most glamorous medium of the time.³⁷

With radio, *Die Bühne* promoted a brand-new medium, as RAVAG (Radio-Verkehrs AG [Radio Broadcasting Inc.]) had started daily broadcasting only in October 1924,³⁸ about a month before the first issue. In the *Radio-Bühne* section, readers were invited to help shape the medium: “[...] this task does not await specialists, because there are no such specialists yet. It awaits a large audience. Radio is for everyone; it expects support from everyone!”³⁹ This appeal revealed an inclusive, democratic approach that suggests opportunities for participation and active involvement by potentially everyone in a new, yet open medium. Radio, a medium that enabled participation in a novel way due to the mechanical reproduction of (mass) arts, was the focus of an essay on machine-recorded music: radio’s detachment from space created equality, as it could overcome geographical distances and would allow the masses living in the countryside to consume forms of music (whether “elite” or popular) that had hitherto been inaccessible to them.⁴⁰

The photographic puzzle *Whose Legs are These?*⁴¹ plays with expectations, because the photos do not show legs of women, for example chorus girls, but of five prominent male Austrian football stars (Figure 4). Created in the 1920s, and quickly gaining in popularity in magazines across Europe, photographic puzzles functioned as part of a broader program of participation and playful pedagogy, designed to teach readers to gain knowledge and experience about visual media in the context of a star system that was just fully emerging.⁴² The readers who identified the players could win one-year box subscriptions for the most prestigious Viennese theatres. Hence, the prize puzzle is evidence of the practice of the (early) *Die Bühne* of not separating high and popular culture; moreover, it illustrated the popularity of football even outside the obvious milieu of male working class and nods at female spectators. It is also an example of the significance of the (athletic) body in the visual media of the time. Overall, it is an expression of the magazine’s popular culture approach.

36 Ross, “Cinema, Radio, and »Mass Culture«,” 44.

37 “Wollen Sie Filmen?” *Die Bühne* 1, no. 1 (1924): 33.

38 Mattl, “Wiener Paradoxien,” 58–63.

39 Due to the low number of entries, the submission period was extended, the results were published a year later, with the first prize being accepted “subject to reworking for performance on the radio stage”. “Das Radiopreisausschreiben der Bühne” [The Bühne’s Radio Contest]. *Die Bühne* 2, no. 52 (1925): 47.

40 Paul Stefan, “Musik und Maschine” [Music and Machine]. *Die Bühne* 3, no. 104 (1926): 19–20.

41 “Wem gehören die Beine?,” *Die Bühne* 1, no. 1 (1924): 42.

42 Cowan, “Learning to Love the Movies,” 10.

WEM GEHÖREN DIE BEINE?
Preisausschreiben der „Bühne“

Das Erraten des Rätsels, das wir unseren Lesern hiemit vorlegen, ist nicht so schwer als es im ersten Augenblicke scheinen mag. Wir haben eine Auswahl der charakteristischsten fünf Beinpaare berühmter Fußballer getroffen und teilen zur Vermeidung allzugroßen Kopfzerbrechens noch mit, daß die Besitzer der unten zur Schau gestellten Gliedmaßen, die in verschiedenen Nuancen den „Fußballer Schwung“ aufweisen, durchwegs der ersten Nicht-amateur-Liga angehören und insgesamt bereits wiederholt repräsentativ tätig waren. Die Auflösung erfolgt in der Weise, daß die Bildeiste ausgeschnitten und der Reihenfolge nach, mit den Namen der Beinbesitzer versehen, an die Sportredaktion der „Bühne“, Wien IX., Canisiusgasse 8—10, eingesendet wird.

Wir haben für die richtige Auflösung des Rätsels drei Preise ausgesetzt, und zwar:

1. Preis: Eine Loge im Burgtheater.
2. Preis: Eine Loge im Volkstheater.
3. Preis: Eine Loge im Modernen Theater.

Auflösungen, die Berücksichtigung finden sollen, müssen bis spätestens 15. November in unseren Händen sein.



Figure 4

Another way of connecting with readers, briefly touched on here, was organised events: tennis or ski courses with professional athletes, weekend trips to popular domestic destinations, summer or beach parties at chic lidos, or the “Redoute der Bühne”, a charity ball. Staged and documented by the editors and photographers, they were presented in several numbers before and after the event, often with numerous photos.⁴³ The special-interest journal *Reklame* [Publicity] summed up the function of such events as follows:

“To make these trips particularly attractive to young people of both sexes, popular actors and actresses are brought in, the attendees are photographed, and the pictures are printed in the next issue. It is only natural that the participants in these rather entertaining trips develop a personal advertising campaign for the magazine, which is free advertising thanks to the magazine’s skilfully established personal contact with the public.”⁴⁴

Free PR, self-promotion, advertising placements by participating hotels or ski schools, easy content generation, product identification through shared experiences, the opportunity to meet celebrities and having fun were aims and outcomes of such events. Probably few could afford the sports courses or weekend trips, while the beach parties were accessible to (almost) everyone and represented a form of

43 E.g. The *Bühne* beach party of 1926 in no. 85, no. 87, no. 90.

44 “Wiener Streifzüge” [Viennese Forays]. *Seidels Reklame* 10, no. 8 (1926): 389.

cross-milieu participation. The numerous playful rubrics, events, and contests sought to give readers a sense that

“»what they said and did mattered« by allowing them to vote on their favourite films and stars, submit essays to demonstrate their film knowledge, or propose titles and slogans for future films. While this participatory dimension provides an important chapter in the history of fandom, however, it was also integral to a broader cinephilic education, which framed and encouraged the kinds of investments of knowledge and affect that played a critical role in the widespread legitimisation of a cinephilic culture.”⁴⁵

What Marsha Orgeron and Michael Cowan have established for film magazines and the dissemination of a cinephilic culture can be applied to the propagation of lifestyle in *Die Bühne*. Magazines of this type were not only reflective, but were transformative and called for action, provided role models and possibilities for self-identification. With the participatory formats and the branding of products, the magazine could “inscribe itself as a brand in the lifestyle of its readers.”⁴⁶

“In water, all people are equal”—the masses and leisure culture

In 1926, a photograph titled *Beach Party in the Naked City*⁴⁷ was printed in *Die Bühne* (Figure 5). Set in the top third of a double page, it extends across the centrefold and shows a large crowd of people from a high angle perspective. They are dressed in bathing suits or similar leisure wear and are standing close together, most of them facing a raised wooden platform. The photo does not refer to the text below but to a beach party organised by *Die Bühne* and featured in an article some pages earlier, a typical practice in magazines of the time. The article contains two more photos of the same people from the front and slightly to the side. According to the caption, they are spectators of a programme at a *Die Bühne* party at the Klosterneuburg beach, the “naked city.” If the editorial team is to be believed, the party attracted around 14,000 people to the hip Danube beach north-west of Vienna. Regardless of the veracity of this high figure, the assertion once again expresses the magazine’s appeal to display what is trendy and to help shape and popularise a modern lifestyle and leisure culture. Most people in the crowd are focused on a point outside the photo, the platform, some look directly into the camera. They are characterised by a certain order and direction; we also see the attributes of density and equality, which Elias Canetti further defined as criteria of masses (in addition to the will to

45 Cowan, “Learning to Love the Movies,” 3; Orgeron, ““You Are Invited to Participate,”” 5–7.

46 Scheiding and Fazli, “Einleitung,” 26; Lickhardt, *Pop in den 20er Jahren*, 147.

47 “Strandfest in der nackten Stadt” and “Unser Strandfest.” *Die Bühne* 3, no. 90 (1926): 32–3, s.p.



Figure 5

grow).⁴⁸ The people in the images constitute a mass; it is relevant, that this mass is located in the context of modern leisure culture, as is the case with most visual representations of masses in *Die Bühne*.

Four years later, in *The Big City Takes a Dip*,⁴⁹ author Fred Heller created a social history of modern bathing culture in Europe with a focus on changing gender relations and a new body culture. The photographs and illustrations suggest that open-air pools, rivers, and beaches attract everybody in the summer months. The text emphasises this but goes further by stating: “In water, all people are equal.” The modern leisure activity of visiting crowded public swimming pools or beaches is presented as an equalising practice: class, race, heritage, and gender distinctions would (almost) disappear if all wore modern bathing costumes. Heller interprets this as positive and a manifestation of a democratic-liberal attitude towards modern society and leisure culture. He continues by saying “the weekend was the beginning of all beaches”, linking the then still relatively new achievement of free (half) Saturdays and Sundays for most employees and workers with the emergence of a mass bathing culture. This was made possible by labour law provisions and reductions in working hours in countries such as Austria, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States after World War I.⁵⁰ The masses in their swimsuits are symbolic of a changed world, in which, at least for the brief period of shared leisure activities, differences no longer seem to have any meaning. The promise of egalitarian democratisation through participation in the developing leisure culture becomes apparent here. Moreover, the magazine featured not only spaces that were read as bourgeois, such as the beach in Klosterneuburg, but also public pools that were built by the

48 Canetti, *Masse und Macht*, 17.

49 Heller, “Großstadt geht Baden.” *Die Bühne* 7, no. 283 (1930): 17.

50 On the emergence of the weekend and its propagation in the media, esp. *Die Bühne*, see Yazdanpanah, “»Das Wochenende ohne Männer?«,” 20–32, 41–42.

social democratic municipality of Vienna. Besides highlighting the overall appeal of the summer bathing culture, which had developed into a mass pastime, content like this also reflected that the magazine addressed a cross-milieu urban audience.

Masses and public spaces

One of the few examples where the masses are visually the central topic is a photo series consisting of five photographs, staging masses and crowds of people at various spectacles, almost all of them in the Vienna Prater (Figure 6). Under the title *Mass of Man*⁵¹ spectators of a Punch-and-Judy show, the *Praterwurstel*, and the audience of the football match Austria against Italy in April 1929 are assembled in the form of a collage superimposed over a full-page photograph, also depicting a mass of people. The next page displays two photos of traditional Prater amusements on Sundays: crowds visiting the popular *Wurstelprater*, an amusement park, or strolling in the more upscale *Hauptallee*, an avenue for promenading and concerts. Since the 1800s, the Prater has been *the* popular leisure area of Vienna, attracting people from all walks of life and a centre for all forms of popular culture. Although the picture with the football fans suggests otherwise, the match was not played in the Prater, but in another Viennese open-air stadium, which most local readers would



Figure 6

51 “Masse Mensch.” *Die Bühne* 6, no. 231 (1929): 40–41.

have known. The photograph seems to stand for the popularity of this sport and, as it was inserted into the collage, presented the Prater as an important hub for football and popular sports in Vienna. Compared to the lifestyle journals *Moderne Welt* (1918–1939) and *Wiener Magazin* ([Magazine of Vienna], 1927–1941),⁵² football generally featured quite prominently in the early *Die Bühne*, where it was declared to be the epitome of popular mass entertainment and proof of the latter's victory over high culture—which was both courted and simultaneously rejected as outdated. The aforementioned puzzle contest and articles about popular sports, such as the one about wealthy opera and theatre lovers as fans in the stands at football matches, portray football as a sport that had conquered all of society;⁵³ it was popular, produced stars, gave pleasure and attracted everybody.⁵⁴

The photos in the series show masses that are differentiated: there are men with hats, with proletarian caps, women, and children; various generations, genders, classes, and origins, many laughing, waving and in motion. The full-page photograph in the background however is an exception; it is missing a caption as well as a credit and remains somewhat unclear. Perhaps it depicts a political event, because we see a gathering of men, motionless, concentrated, sober, focused, and directed at the same point outside the frame. This is reminiscent of representations of masses in contemporary political journals. It is noticeable that the men, many of whom are older, are not wearing hats, but there are no posters or other political symbols to be seen. We might witness a minute's silence, a relatively new practice at the time. Regardless of the unexplained occasion, this motionless, silent mass functions as a background foil for the cheerful leisure crowds in the other pictures.

Crowds and masses in public space are focused on in the essay *The Street as Theatre* (1929)⁵⁵ published in *Die Bühne* about the urban street as the epitome and expression of the modern world. The author utilises oppositions, thereby drawing on contemporary concepts of the masses as the embodiment of soulless, engineered modernity. The modern street in metropolises such as New York is portrayed as crowded, crammed with vehicles, people and objects, and characterised by constant, hectic, and stressful motion. In those streets, the human individual is completely subordinated to a diffuse mass of machines and of people who use them, whereas in the “southern” streets of Italy, Spain, and in Vienna, “the mass man [...] has not yet completely displaced the individual.” The article is an example of content that took a nostalgic perspective towards pre-war Vienna. This is evident especially on the second page,⁵⁶ the photographs and captions juxtapose modern republican Austria

52 For a brief overview see Holzer, *Rasende Reporter*, 170–175.

53 R., “In der Oper auf der »Vierten«” [In the Opera in the 4th circle]. *Die Bühne* 2, no. 21 (1925): 32–3.

54 Marschik and Yazdanpanah, “Sport im Rampenlicht,” 27–8.

55 “Die Straße als Theater,” *Die Bühne* 6, no. 232 (1929): 5–7.

56 See <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno-plus?aid=bue&datum=1929&page=966&size=45>

with an idealised past, exemplified by the new republican and the old Habsburg versions of the mounting of the guards: the one represented by a rigid, uniformed group of men, the other by a spontaneous, individualistic tangle. Moreover, unlike the second group, the first lacks an audience in the chosen image section. Whereas in the past the Viennese street used to be a stage, and the crowds acted as an audience, today masses in public spaces, especially political ones, were potentially dangerous. Monarchies, on the other hand, were idealised for their supposedly more playful, performative politics, which had helped to entertain the masses: “In Monarchies, the sense for the theatricality of the street is more developed than in a republic, where people in the street usually mean nothing good.” The author is implicitly referring to the political situation in interwar Austria, during which politics was often conducted in the street. Contemporary readers probably recalled the various—“theatrical”—choreographed mass events in the last decades of the Habsburg monarchy, as well as in republican Austria. But most certainly they had in mind the demonstrations, marches, and often-violent clashes between right and left-wing paramilitary groups that defined political life in Vienna around 1930; above all, the violent reaction of policemen in the July 1927 revolt that killed several protesters.

However, the text does not present an anti-republican view per se. France, metaphor for culture and refinement, functions as a positive exception. Referring to the funeral of Marshall Foch, which is described as a mass procession through Paris, the author states: “France [...] demonstrates more sense than other nations, not only for the solemn gesture but also for the pathos of the masses.” He opposes neither the republic as a form of government, nor the street as a space for the masses to exercise democratic rights. Rather, his overall aim is to criticise what he sees as “*neusachlich*”—factual, unfeeling, and untheatrical, embodied in the modern streets of “the north”. The author alludes to nations such as the USA or England, but primarily to Germany, all of them countries associated with Protestantism. Predominantly Catholic Italy, Spain, and even France—as *the* republican, mass revolutionary state—on the other hand, are interpreted as similar to Austria and its political culture rooted in the Counter-Reformation and a Catholic-baroque theatricality and set as a positive contrast.⁵⁷ Using the example of the street as a quintessential public urban space, the main aim is to present the notion of a theatrical, soulful Austria in contrast to Germany—implicitly drawing on the idea of Austrianness, promoted, among others, by the Salzburg Festival, which gained in importance around 1930 and increasingly during Austrofascism.⁵⁸ The positive reference to Marshal Foch’s funeral in Paris underlines the article’s German-critical thrust.

57 See the article by Béla Rásky in this issue: Rásky, “Masterminded Choreographies.”

58 Steinberg, *The Meaning of the Salzburg Festival*, esp. chapters 3 and 4; Silverman, *Becoming Austrians*.

Taste and power of the mass of the audience

It is not surprising that the revue, as a highly popular mass art, was also celebrated in the *Bühne* (Figure 7). For example, when the revue *Broadway* was running in Vienna, the first December 1927 cover consisted of a collage with a revue performer and a saxophone overlapping an illustration of Broadway and a skyscraper—all iconic images for America. In *Die Bühne*, America meant stars, mass culture, high-rises, affluence, new women—and even if not always named as such: the masses. The magazine thus partook in a prevalent discourse in the 1920s and 1930s, in which America functioned as a metaphor for modernity. Conservatives, liberals, right- and left-wingers celebrated and condemned it as the land of Taylorism and Fordism, of freedom and a new matriarchy, lacking traditions and history; of mass production, mass democracy, mass people, and mass culture.⁵⁹ Writer Stefan Zweig took a critical stance, interpreting America's growing influence on Europe as a process of monotonisation and de-individualisation that would culminate in the emergence of a mass soul,⁶⁰ while, according to Miriam Hansen, journalist and theoretician Siegfried Kracauer welcomed the American revue as a “vision [...] of equality, cooperation, and solidarity”. He appreciated the end of the elite status of the so-called educated classes and the dominance of bourgeois culture and hoped that it would be replaced by an industrialised mass culture with a mass audience across all milieus sharing a penchant for the distractions (*Zerstreuung*) of mass culture:⁶¹

“A homogeneous cosmopolitan audience of one mind emerges, from the bank manager to the clerk, from the diva to the typist.”⁶²



Figure 7

59 Lüdtke, MarBolek and von Saldern, “Einleitung,” 7–26; Hansen, “»A Self-Representation of the Masses«,” 257–62.

60 Stefan Zweig, “Die Monotonisierung der Welt” [Monotonization of the World]. *Neue Freie Presse*, January 31, 1925, 1–4.

61 Hansen, “America, Paris, the Alps,” 352, 357.

62 Kracauer, “Kult der Zerstreuung,” 313.

At the time, revue girls were often seen as an ideal expression of mass culture, and women (and workers) as more susceptible to its distractions. Another notion was seeing the mass as female and, therefore, unintelligible, diffuse, and full of emotions. This goes back to the late nineteenth century, when male fears associated with modernity and the new social struggles such as the first women's movement or the workers' movement were often projected onto femininity: the fear of the masses was the fear of women, "a fear of nature out of control, a fear of the unconscious, of sexuality, of the loss of identity and stable ego boundaries in the mass."⁶³ The perception of the masses and women as intangible, ambiguous, and somewhat enigmatic was expressed by Grete Müller in a story on sports fashions for new women.⁶⁴ Yet, here the idea of women and the masses as the opposite of male logic was hardly negative; for Müller women became the equivalent of the mass audiences, both self-confident and sure of their taste:

"Just as that other immeasurable and incomprehensible mass 'audience' cannot be influenced in the long run in artistic matters and imperiously expresses its will, women today follow their own will in matters of fashion."

In her article *Theatre in Front of the Curtain* (1927), Müller outlined a positive image of mass audiences without adopting a gender perspective. She described them as "well-structured [...], differentiated and finely organised"⁶⁵—composed of distinct individuals that together constituted a mass, rather than being faceless and levelling. The mass of the audience in theatre plays, revue, or circus performances, its behaviour, power, and taste are the most frequent thematisation of the masses in *Die Bühne*. In an essay about popularity, the positive relationship between celebrities and the masses was described as the power to reach everyday people and to consider their likings and desires as fundamentally important.⁶⁶ The author assumed a position comparable to that expressed in the first *Die Bühne*—to feature what was popular. The first issue also posed the question: "What do the masses like? Plot, suspense, disposition, fun."⁶⁷ Similar to Kracauer's analysis of the mass audiences' desire for the distractions of mass culture, the author listed and commended precisely those aspects that were (and still are) often criticised as superficial and, therefore, rejectable characteristics of mass culture. Moreover, dealing with the popularity of the operetta and interpreting it as both "mass art" and "art for the masses", the writer's

63 Huysen, *After the Great Divide*, 52.

64 Grete Müller, "Der sportliche Typ" [The Sporty Type]. *Die Bühne* 5, no. 181 (1928): 35, 38.

65 Grete Müller, "Theater vor dem Vorhang." *Die Bühne* 4, no. 149 (1927): 10–1.

66 Alfred Beierle, "Popularität [Popularity]." *Die Bühne* 9, no. 336 (1932): 1–2.

67 G., "Die Berlin-Wiener Operette 'Der Tanz um die Liebe'" [The Berlin-Viennese Operetta 'Dancing for Love']. *Die Bühne* 1, no. 1 (1924): 19–20.

stance is similar to Kaspar Maase's much later interpretation.⁶⁸ Only in some cases were the audiences looked at from an elitist perspective. In this respect, mass tastes became a manifestation of mainstream, the ordinary, the opposite of the exquisite, embodying the ignorant masses without a sense of culture and knowledge, which were prerequisites for recognising and appreciating culture. For example, when theatre star Hugo Thimig summed up an unsuccessful production saying "It was not for the masses",⁶⁹ thus suggesting an apparent quality. More often, audiences were celebrated as "partners" of the artists removed from the director's grasp and thus independent and unsusceptible.⁷⁰

"The masses, who make such a great impression on us as performers in meetings, processions, parades, revues, and circuses, and who as spectators in football and boxing matches, generally in all sporting events, make an active appearance, no matter how much they hold back."⁷¹

This assessment refers to the central aspects of the various representations of the masses in *Die Bühne* examined in my contribution: not only are they comprehended as a visible and active quantity in all areas of public and political life and in popular leisure culture, but they also have a powerful and impressive seductive potential. Although a distinction is made between the masses as performers and as spectators, they are not perceived as passive and manipulable consumers of mass cultural products but are portrayed as active and powerful. The appraisal of the masses' potential includes a positive understanding of their potential obstinacy (*Eigensinn*).⁷² And finally, sports, mass arts, and modern art are juxtaposed and connected, once again illustrating the magazine's populist approach to mass arts and a modern lifestyle.

A liberal-democratic perspective on mass arts and modern lifestyle

"All classes attend the try-outs, from the minister to the common man, from the famous star to the shy or envious dilettante. Everyone wants to witness the birth of the performer."⁷³

68 See footnote 8.

69 "Dreimal Hauptmann ... Hugo Thimig erzählt" [Three Times (Gerhard) Hauptmann ... Hugo Thimig Explains]. *Die Bühne* 9, no. 337 (1932): 10.

70 Franz Horch, "Der Partner im Parkett" [The Partner in the Stalls]. *Die Bühne* 12, no. 396 (1935): 6–9.

71 Peter Scheller, "Chorische Bühne in München" [Choric Theatre in Munich]. *Die Bühne* 7, no. 283 (1930): 13, 59.

72 See conceptions of audiences, consumers in Cultural Studies, e.g. Stuart Hall or John Fiske.

73 Dr. F. L., "Die Geburt des Artisten" [Birth of the Performer]. *Die Bühne* 4, no. 149 (1927): 16–7.

In *Die Bühne*, the masses are presented as homogeneous in terms of their taste(s) and characteristics, but internally differentiated and composed of various types. Mass arts were perceived as attracting people from all genders, origins, generations, but especially from all classes, as expressed in the article about aspiring performers cited here. Whether through revue and circus performers, actors, or “the most beautiful saleswoman”, the masses would transcend milieus and embody democracy, and as a group could decide on popularity and success. As active audiences and/or participants they shaped and helped determine popular culture and thereby demonstrated the popularity of a cultural practice. This can often be detected in features about modern leisure culture, which was also presented as transcending milieus and therefore creating a certain equality. Sometimes, a cultural-critical perspective was adopted, most often when contrasting high culture with a mass culture that was to be rejected, thus viewing the masses as ignorant, levelling and the opposite of the individual. In many of the magazine’s essays, reviews, photo series, contests, and events, however, a belief in the masses and mass arts as important ingredients of the lifestyle promoted prevails—in line with the early motto “For us *Bühne* is everything that has an audience”. *Die Bühne*’s perspective—liberal, democratic, and consumerist—was evident not only in the mostly positive appraisal and presentation of modern leisure culture and mass arts, the linking of high and popular culture and the participatory content to readers. It also transpired in its explicit and implicit political references: in the commitment to democracy and the new Austrian state—even if the masses in the streets in contemporary republican Austria were perceived ambiguously.

The positive attitude to the masses and their democratising effect can be recognised especially in the 1920s, a period of temporary optimism and democratisation in Austria. Around 1930, the popular culture approach and the view of the masses as evidence of the popularity and success of mass arts and practices were reduced and the diversity of topics and contributions was cut down. Likewise, the variety and frequency of participatory formats and interaction with readers decreased over the 1920s, only to be almost completely abandoned by the mid-1930s. This was due to the differentiation and professionalisation of the illustrated magazine format. It also allows conclusions to be drawn about the programme of *Die Bühne*, the journalistic self-image, the goals of its editors-in-chief and the historical-political context. Among the few competitions around 1930, the one for the “most beautiful saleswoman” followed the logic of the earlier events, whereas prize contests, such as the one for the “best vacation spot in Austria”⁷⁴ reflected the increased presence and promotion of Austria and Austrianness in many media in the 1930s.

74 “Der beste Urlaubsort in Österreich” [Austria’s Best Tourist Destination]. *Die Bühne* 8, no. 308–310 (1931).

At the same time, the claim to show what was popular, as well as a certain openness, were maintained. *Die Bühne* retained its liberal democratic attitude in the period of increasing conservatism around 1930 and, albeit to a lesser extent, also during Austrofascism, neither distancing itself from the government nor idealising it, unlike the other two important Viennese lifestyle magazines, *Wiener Magazin* and especially *Moderne Welt*. The latter published a special issue on the *Allgemeine Deutsche Katholikentag* [German Catholics' Day] in September 1933, a PR event in which Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß presented his dictatorial program and declared the alliance between Austrofascism and the Church. *Die Bühne's* stance seems to be largely due to its producers and ownership structure: following Békessy's departure in 1926, the magazine was published by Vernay AG, its printing press. After facing serious financial difficulties from the mid-1920s, the company was increasingly controlled by the Czechoslovak state-owned publishing house Orbis. Orbis gradually became Vernay's largest silent owner, from 1930 on via the Swiss company Particité SA to conceal any involvement. Silently buying into Austrian media was part of a campaign by the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry to inconspicuously influence the Austrian public against a potential *Anschluss* and gain support for the new Czechoslovak state.⁷⁵ In the end *Die Bühne* only played a small role in this (more or less failed) strategy. In March 1938, the Czechoslovakian owners were immediately expropriated; *Die Bühne* was temporarily taken over by the *NS-Werksgemeinschaft der Arbeiter und Angestellten* [National Socialist Working Collective of Workers and Salaried Employees] and swiftly renamed *Wiener Bühne*. While the masses had previously been presented mainly in the context of urban (leisure) culture, and depictions of political crowds had largely been absent, in March and April 1938, the *Wiener Bühne* printed, far more frequently than other Viennese magazines, numerous articles on Nazi Austria and photographs of enthusiastic crowds under swastikas, rapidly excluding many of the former writers, photographers, illustrators, and readers, among them Hildegard (Gutfreund-)Grasl.⁷⁶

Both in the 1920s and 1930s, *Die Bühne's* target audience consisted of people who saw themselves as modern—as urban, liberal, interested in modern culture and lifestyle; mostly middle-class, well-off white-collar workers or representatives of the liberal professions, who could afford the lifestyle presented, with a tendency towards a greater focus on women. Considering those who took advantage of the participatory content, it is clear that the readers were more diverse. Competitions such as the one for the “most beautiful Viennese saleswoman” demonstrate that the magazine appealed to a cross-milieu readership and was apparently successful at this.

75 Lukešová, “Tschechoslowakische Propaganda,” 101–11.

76 See *Die (Wiener) Bühne* 15, esp. no. 468–470 (1938). *Die Wiener Bühne* existed until 1950 (except 1944), again as the theatre magazine *Bühne*, with interruptions from the late 1950s until today.

Modernist magazines such as *Die Bühne* traded in “idealist images of leisure, communality, and consumer plenty”⁷⁷—consequently the lifestyle promoted was tied to consumer goods, such as the prizes offered for the contests. Yet, the *promise* of (future) participation, which could happen in many ways and appealed to as many people as possible, was of central importance. Hildegard (Gutfreund-)Grasl was not voted the most beautiful saleswoman, but she did win one of the fifty-five consumer goods in the readers’ award category.⁷⁸ Yet, participating in one of the contests or events, which mirrored popular desires and wishes, fashions and practices, took centre stage—as is indicated by the two pages of *Die Bühne* in (Gutfreund-)Grasl’s legacy.

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