

‘We Have Become Niggers!’: Josephine Baker as a Threat to Viennese Culture

By Roman Horak

Abstract

Early 1928 Josephine Baker, by that time a famous dancer and singer, came to Vienna to be part of a vaudeville show. Even before her arrival the waves went high – her possible presence in Vienna caused a major uproar there. Various commentators constructed an image of Baker that was based on the assumption that she was seriously attacked on the values of traditional European culture and, furthermore, true Viennese culture.

In my essay, where I address the Viennese *Negerskandal* more directly, I explore the various discourses that produced this ‘event’ along the interface of mass culture/avant-garde and high/low culture. It is evident that these events centre on a construction of ‘blackness’ and of ‘black cultural expression’; it goes without saying that racism and sexism play a central role.

I will, however, try to contextualize the ‘nigger scandal’ in a broader setting: against the background of Vienna in the late 1920s the perceived threat of ‘Americanisation’ will be discussed.

Keywords: Blackness, Viennese culture, racism, Josephine Baker, Americanisation.

Introduction

On Thursday 9 February 1928, Karl Kraus held one of his famous lectures in the Architektenvereinsaal, the hall of the architects' association in Vienna. Kraus, whose favourite target in those days was still the Chief of Police, Schober, couldn't resist addressing recent events that had been reported by the National Socialist *Deutsch-österreichische Tages-Zeitung* under the heading *Negerskandal* ('nigger scandal') (*Deutsch-Österreichische Tages-Zeitung* 1928).

The 'scandal' itself was unleashed by the first Viennese stage appearance of the young singer and dancer Josephine Baker, who had been catapulted to stardom in Paris. Hot on the heels of Baker's performance came further causes of outrage: the successful premiere of Ernst Krenek's opera *Jonny spielt auf*, and the perceived threat to (German) Viennese culture represented by jazz – 'nigger music'.

It is in fact the case that Josephine Baker was presented over and over again as the Other of urban European modernity. 'As the embodiment of "life", "nature", "wantonness", the primitive took the guise of the repressed Other of civilisation', writes Nancy Nenno (1997: 150), adding with reference to Marianna Torgovnick that the 'primitive' does not constitute a singular, monolithic quantity but is rather a creation of modernity that takes various forms in response to specific needs (Torgovnick 1990). This 'primitive' has many aspects, ranging from 'threatening' through 'fascinating' to 'amusing', as Nenno has shown with reference to the culture of inter-war Berlin. 'The evaluation of each depends on the degree to which it could be assimilated into modern culture, as well as its potential threat to that order.' (Nenno 1997: 150) I will bear these considerations in mind in the discussion of the production and encoding of Josephine Baker in Vienna, although my concerns are admittedly not as broad.

In the following paper, where I address some distinctive moments of the Viennese *Negerskandal* more directly, I explore some of the discourses that produced this 'event' along the interface of mass culture/avant-garde and high/low culture. It is evident that these events centre on a construction of 'blackness' and of 'black cultural expression'; it goes without saying that racism and sexism play a central role. It remains to discuss these issues in the specific context of Vienna in the nineteen-twenties, Vienna as metropolis, ex-metropolis, almost-metropolis, Vienna a mere six months after the Palace of Justice Fire and six years before the Austro-Fascist putsch.

Following the overwhelming success of the 'Revue Nègre' in Paris – it ran from October until the end of November at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and completed its run in a smaller theatre at the end of December – Caroline Dudley planned an extended European tour, to include Moscow. But Baker had already accepted a contract with the 'Folies Bergère', whose rehearsal schedule would not allow for an extended tour, and so the winter of 1926 saw only isolated performances in Brussels and Berlin.

The first trip to Berlin was not only a huge success, reaping great acclaim for the 'Revue Nègre', but signified a change of track for Josephine Baker's future European career. Max Reinhardt, who had already seen her perform in New York in 1925, offered to train her as a 'proper actress' and wanted to keep her in Berlin. As she recalled a half-century later, she decided after some hesitation to stay with the 'Folies Bergère' and so to return to Paris, primarily because parts of the music for her new variety show were to be composed by none other than Irving Berlin (Baker et al. 1997: 49). Simplifying matters somewhat, one could say that in this confrontation between entertainment and high culture, music, jazz and spontaneous rhythmic dancing won out over the art of acting. This did nothing to dispel the sense that high culture was somehow under threat, as we shall see.

Baker's reputation as a singer and dancer had by this time reached Vienna. In a supplement to the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, entitled simply 'Josephine', Moriz Scheyer (1927) sought to account for the Baker phenomenon. This feature sparked off a discussion that was to reach a climax over a year later.

Scheyer was reporting from Paris, as is clear from the way in which his first-hand account does not just narrate the events but actually pinpoints their location. Josephine Baker is a ruler, an empress; Scheyer cannot resist relating this image to that of another Empress Josephine, namely Napoleon's wife.

Baker rules supreme, but only by the grace of snobbery: she holds court and all of Paris pays homage to her, and her residence, besides the Folies Bergère, the most venerable of all the Parisian music-halls, is 'Josephine Baker's Imperial', a 'boîte de nuit', a night-spot in the Rue Pigalle, that street that's so sober and depressing by day and that serves as an unholy route for all the pilgrims of Montmartre.

It is evident from the start of the text that the author takes no real pleasure in the Baker phenomenon. In the second column, the grounds for his displeasure are made more explicit:

Josephine Baker has so far had great success in exploiting the nigger-boom of our jazz age: she set her sights on conquering Paris, and her skin colour alone has guaranteed that she'll pot the black.

The cheap racist wordplay – more offensive instances of which we'll encounter further on – almost distracts the reader's attention from Scheyer's actual objections. The author's anxiety and displeasure is occasioned by the 'nigger-boom of our jazz age'. He nevertheless treats the reader to a full account of the impression made on him by Josephine Baker's performance, and confesses freely that 'the tropical Venus' has greatly disappointed him. Given Scheyer's obviously racist sentiments, this comes as no surprise.

To be sure, she has a barbaric appeal that's immediately striking. She exudes a cannibalistic, voracious sensuality as she tumbles about the stage under blaring lights, dressed in nothing but her own hair, combed down and shining with oil. To be sure, she is reminiscent all at once of an untouched Amazon of the jungle and a grotesque, unruly clown, like one of the Graces but more supple and bestial, exuberant as a young ragamuffin (...) But that is all there is to it. For what Josephine Baker offers

to the public by way of an 'artistic performance' is scant at best. Her greatest art seems to reside in turning her lower parts uppermost in a way that's agile as an ape and monstrously lewd (...) This all happens to the deafening din of an uninhibited jazz band, and to top it all Josephine makes onomatopoeic noises that are so deceptively convincing that one is tempted to hold one's nose as well as stop one's ears. Art? 'Art' that's paid for to the tune of thousands of francs....

Moriz Scheyer may end the paragraph with four ellipsis points, but he leaves us in no doubt as to what he means. He is concerned with art, and he can't recognise art in the performance of an 'Amazon of the jungle'. And because that which isn't intended as 'art' cannot be recognised as 'art', it poses a threat to 'art'. What the author senses here is the threat to the clear, neat boundary drawn between high culture and entertainment. His only consolation is to refer to the 'fools' who are repeatedly duped by this kind of thing.

An anonymous contributor to the same newspaper a few days later feels moved to draw different conclusions. 'Negroes', runs the heading of this two-column piece, which seeks to go further than Scheyer's feature. To begin with, the unnamed writer refers to the Josephine Baker feature, and goes on to formulate the following point of view: 'The case of Josephine Baker is no exception, but rather an example and symbol of the taste of our times, of an age that has lost its way and that flees from itself into raw exteriority' (*Neger* 1927).

The 'seemingly global understanding' reached after the war has 'extended our mental horizons beyond the world of European concepts and sensibilities', but to the author this represents a serious impoverishment:

Literature and music, dancing and entertainment have become black arts, and this en-niggerment (*Vernegerung*) is the last gasp in the development or rather decadence of the European. The cacophonies of the jazz band strike up the death dance of European culture, a death dance that unfolds with the speed of a film in the unrhythmical contortions of the Charleston and the Black Bottom.

What remains implicit in these pieces is to be formulated with increasing clarity, as we shall see. Europe's declining significance in the wake of the First World War has led to a westward shift in international power relations towards a new power-centre: the United States. This political development is expressed by these writers in terms of a philosophy of culture. The 'sacrifice of Europe in the World War and through the Peace Treaties' has led, so the argument goes, to the eclipse of the idea of Europe, an idea that has functioned 'since the battle of Marathon' as a 'cultural and moral concept, an idea and ideal that the best of all generations have upheld consciously and the nameless millions have served unknowingly yet with instinctive pride'.

Stripped of 'her ideal standard', the community of Europe faces an era of 'unprecedented selfishness', resulting in 'unbridled materialism. [...] The generation of 1918 did not know itself, did not live as itself, lived only for its labour, which was no true work but merely business.'

The phenomenon so vehemently decried by this unnamed writer was already known at the turn of the century as ‘Americanism’, a term later to be gradually replaced by ‘Americanisation’. The ‘Americanisation’ of culture manifested itself in the ‘jazz bands’, it expressed itself in the ‘unrhythmical contortions of the Charleston and the Black Bottom’, acted out ‘with the speed of a film’. This new kind of spectacle gave Europe something to worry about, and it originated in the USA.

The reference to ‘the speed of a film’ is no coincidence. During the twenties, the European film industry came under increasing pressure. Mass products from Hollywood met with growing popularity, and the European ‘art of film’ began to experience difficulties, especially in terms of its market value.¹

The ‘Americanisation’ of culture stood for the loss of the sublime, the true, the beautiful, the good, in favour of the wild and vulgar, in short: the popular. The term used by the unnamed writer clearly indicates his viewpoint. After the demise of Europe as a true standard or idea, the continent was ‘ripe for – *Vernegerung* (en-niggerment).’

Using repetitive structures to drive the point home, the author continues:

And so it came about that men worshipped the shameless nakedness of a negress; so it came about that the classical ideal of beauty embodied in the Apollo of Belvedere succumbed to the bullish neck and bestial chin of the fistfighter; (...) boxing matches are the spiritual and aesthetic climax of sensation in our era, the riot of a jazz band is its melody, the jerks of the Black Bottom its rhythm. (*Neger* 1927)

Sport may not have been an import from America, but it nonetheless sat well with the image of the new mass culture. There is a double emphasis on sport here, consolidating the popular culture argument, which is further backed up with a reference to the ‘Tarzan’ craze. By the end of his text, the author, who chose to remain unnamed, throws out a last despairing word, more a verdict than a conclusion: ‘We have become niggers.’

One final point needs to be clarified. When we speak of Baker as a ‘product of mass culture’, then this does not assume that the *phenomenon* Josephine Baker is essentially and merely a result of the external forces that define her. Josephine Baker herself played with her roles along the axes of ‘race’ and ‘gender’. By over-emphasising and simultaneously retracting them through irony and clownishness, she played with these roles in a distinctive way that can be seen in the context of ‘expressive black cultures’ as a manifestation of the ‘counter culture of modernity’ (Baumann). Following Paul Gilroy, I seek a perspective on these cultures that goes beyond their reduction to an expression of an ‘essential, unchanging, sovereign racial self’ or an endless, purely textual play of ‘racial signification’ (Gilroy 1993: 132).

Baker Appears in the Revue *Black on White*: The Event Itself

We have already seen how the role of the press has been mentioned several times as regards Baker, accused of spreading publicity for her, or even worse, of exercising opinion terror and leading the masses astray. These are familiar accusations, which today are generally levelled at the television. The press in Vienna in the 1920s really had developed into a modern medium, and the ‘case’ of Josephine Baker can give us a couple of indications of this.

On one hand, most magazines and newspapers carried out a heated debate for or against Josephine Baker, which in the final instance was conducted as a classical political debate – here the party newspapers, but also the *Neue Freie Presse* are particularly relevant. On the other hand, Baker also featured in forms of a new, modern entertainment press that was no less present in Vienna at that time. Star reports on the arrival of Baker in Vienna, on her various pets, her likes and dislikes etc are offered to the reader. The *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung* featured a ‘Josephine Baker-Bulletin’, which reported on the star’s sleepless nights as much as on her ten suitcases of clothes, which contained amongst other things 137 outfits, 196 pairs of shoes, and 64 kilos of powder (*Josephine Baker-Bulletin* 1928). The report is illustrated with two caricatures, one showing Baker and one showing her maid. The *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, which as we have seen was still writing about ‘en-niggerment’ a year before, published an interview including a photograph of Baker in private (*Josephine Baker in Wien* 1928).

Der Montag mit dem Sportmontag landed a special scoop. The newspaper managed to get the ‘sole printing rights in Vienna’ for Baker’s memoirs, which had just appeared in German, and published passages from these in several installments beginning on 6 February (*Der Montag mit dem Sportmontag* 1928).

To cut a long story short, these examples show that the media production of popular cultural heroes (and heroines) existed in Vienna in the 1920s as a modern phenomenon. It is however not just the content of these reports which constitute their modernity, it is also the way in which they are presented – the witty interview, the caricature, the photograph, the layout, the outsized blocked headlines etc. These modes of presentation are all clearly very different from the traditional modes of newspaper reporting.

Whatever the case, Baker’s actual performance had been prepared for in the best possible way. The revue *Black on White* was premiered in the Johann Strauß Theatre on 1 March. As practically all the important newspapers reported on it, they can be used to gain an impression of the spectacle. The revue consisted of a total of 42 scenes or ‘pictures’, put in order by Messrs Beda, Florian and Bekessy. Baker performed in only five of these. It must have been a pretty colourful affair, as the *Arbeiterzeitung* states: ‘The succession of scenes confused the eyes and ears and had no order at all; the last vestige of intellectual content, a linking plot, was dispensed with entirely’ (*Arbeiterzeitung* 1928). The *Kleines Blatt* was also

rather sceptical. Baker's performance was described as a very interesting variety turn, the turn of the 'eccentricity dancer' Nina Payne is praised, as she managed always to preserve 'ladylike grace despite her unbelievable flexibility. Otherwise the revue *Black on White* has been created by a production company with a speed that exceeds the usual measure of tastelessness and pretension. Girls, glittering gold on naked female flesh, noise, false sentimentality, ineffective humour, borrowed scenes, all just mixed up together. (...) (*Die Josephine-Baker Revue* 1928).

On the other hand, the *Neue Freie Presse* reviewer Emil Kläger was in raptures over the revue and particularly smitten by Baker: 'Such a surprise: this women is negro kraal and the latest in Parisian fashion at one and the same time, Africa and boulevard by night' (*Die Baker tanzt* 1928).

We do not need to go into his description in any further detail as it largely repeats what had been so lavishly celebrated about Baker in Paris a few years earlier. Alongside the foreign stars, Viennese celebrities such as Fritz Imhoff and Armin Berg performed in the revue; thus Baker was combined with a 'spring scene in the woods, during which Easter Bunny Girls dance the Charleston and the bells of spring ring' (*Arbeiterzeitung* 1928). In the end then, it was in fact Viennese.

After the exotics came the Europeans, 'Return to Schubert', a revue in a revue, to which no lesser man than Hugo Thimig speaks the prologue, introducing played, danced and acted Schubert songs (...) Thus the primal instincts of Baker were dissolved in Viennese 'Drei-Mäderl-Haus' mood. On the waves of the Swanee river followed 'I heard a stream rushing ... (*Die Josephine Baker Revue* 1928) [or better for a foreign audience: Thus the primal instincts of Baker were dissolved in a mood of Viennese Schubert nostalgia and the waves of the Swanee river were followed by the burbling of a Viennese brook].

Let's just have a closer look at these diverting images for a moment, later we will examine the revue *Black on white* in more detail. First of all, let us establish where the discourse strands are that I attempted to present in detail in the history of the Negerkandal in Vienna. In the introduction I said I wanted to tell this story in such a way that the different ways of dealing with the 'Other' became visible. Most of the strands of discourse which were formulated around Baker's case have already been sketched out.

One ran along the interface high culture/mass culture (Baker, that's not art, it's just wild jumping around, at best – slightly – erotic); then there was a second strand, the racist one, which as we have seen was not only to be found in the extreme nationalist camp. The variation on this strand to be found amongst the Christian Socials was combined with a clearly defined anti-modernism.² I claimed that they tended to have recourse to a 'timelessly popular' variation of what is considered typically Viennese, which was not the case for racists on the offensive. Aggressive racists were not concerned with 'good old Vienna' but with a modern – if we take the term to mean modern terror – ethnically pure Germany. (Modern dance is not the evil, the real evil are the Jews who dance it.) Finally we looked at the strand which could be described as the mass media encoding of Baker as a

product, and discovered impulses of modernism in the Viennese press. This in turn gives insight into the perceptions and forms of discourse of a political and cultural instance of modernisation, which so vitally influenced Vienna between the wars. We have arrived at the Social Democrats. In an article formulated along anti-capitalist lines published the day after the premiere, they sum up their attitude to Josephine Baker:

She was physically well developed (...), there was no doubt about it, she was also not really wearing very much: a loin cloth – bananas of all things, – a little jewellery and nothing besides. But her childlike high spirits, her scallywag freshness, her completely un-erotic gaiety meant that anything immoral or inflammatory was completely missing, (...) instead of a black she-devil, an unproblematic negro lassie jumped around on the stage (*Die nackte Frau und das nackte Geld* 1928).

Ernst Fischer found similar words to describe Baker in the article from the *Arbeiterwillen* that I have already quoted. For him the ‘beautiful negro was too natural, too uncomplicated, too un-erotic for the Viennese’ (*Arbeiterwille* 1928).

One is tempted to ask which show these reviewers had actually seen. A woman comes to Vienna who inspires freethinkers to go into raptures of ecstasy and Christians to organise a spate of penitential masses by openly presenting her sexuality on the stage, and the Social Democrats report on ‘an un-erotic, rascally, fresh negro lassie’. The nature of this strand of the discussion is clear enough and need only be named, it is one of de-erotising and de-sexualising. If sexuality or rather eroticism has to be equated with bourgeois decadence, the only non-racist encoding of the phenomenon of the black woman Josephine Baker is recourse to puritan squeaky-cleanliness. Fresh, a scallyway – a sexually neutral image is created to combat the conservatives’ discourse of over-sexualisation.

But there were also examples of more laid-back approaches. Already at the beginning of February, as the affair was really taking off, a short, two column commentary can be found in the *Wiener Allgemeinen Zeitung*, which – carried by the spirit of the liberal Jewish Viennese feuilleton – tries to offer a corrective. Against de-erotising on the one hand, and over-sexualisation on the other, but also against the discourse of art versus non-art, this article situates the Baker revue where it should have been all along.

Vienna wants to stay a cosmopolitan city, begs everywhere to be seen as such. In a cosmopolitan city however, high, pure art has the same right to exist as entertainment. And this – and nothing else – is what Josephine Baker is all about (*Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung* 1928).

Baker as Code, or: Don’t let Vienna Become Paris

The *Revue Nègre*, which had been causing an uproar in Paris since 2 October 1925, but also *Black on White* belong to the same genre. The revue was different from variety, although it was a related form of entertainment,³ and it had been growing in importance as variety declined in Europe’s cities (See also – classic-

contemporary – Möller-Bruck 1902), initially during the first decade of the century, but above all in the 1920s. In the form of what was known as the ‘Ausstattungsrevue’ (a show in which the sets and costumes were more important than the actual content), the revue was to all accounts also popular in Vienna after World War One. It had one major feature in common with variety: it was organised into ‘numbers’ or ‘turns’. Whilst the usual variety programme didn’t require a director, however, the revue couldn’t do without one. ‘He had to be capable of matching the quality of the individual scenes, making sure each performance had verve and charm, and balancing the relationship between sets, ensemble scenes and individual appearances’ (Jansen 1990: 200). For a successful revue it was particularly important to grab the audience’s attention and fire their enthusiasm with suitably impressive sets. The optical side of the whole production was mostly much more important than the individual scenes and numbers themselves. Whilst in variety the basic elements music, dance, comedy and acrobatics were indispensable, ‘producers staging a revue tended to engage dance and song numbers above all, which they combined with scenes played by cabaret artists and actors’ (Jansen 1990: 201) It should be noted here that song and dance took up more of the American variety shows than was usual in their European equivalents. This was to play a crucial role in the development of popular music in the United States (Tilgner 1993: 102).

So far so good: this is the outline of a model revue. In Vienna in the 1920s however they were presented to audiences in many different variations. Alongside the ‘Ausstattungsrevue’ there was also the satirical ‘Kleinkunst’ revue (shows played to audiences of less than 50, often in cellar theatres), the revue operetta and the variety revue. Revues were performed in many venues, but also in places which had actually been intended for variety performances, the Apollo and the Ronacher.

A particularly successful example of the genre was the ‘Ausstattungsrevue’ *Wien, gib acht*, written by Bruno Hart and the young Karl Farkas and directed by Emil Schwarz. It was performed several hundred times between 1922 and 1924 (see also Eberstaller 1974: 88; Eberstaller 1990: 102ff). Amongst other artists, this revue featured Hans Moser – here he performed the ‘Dienstmann’ [porter] sketch that was to make him famous – and Lilian Harvey, at that time not yet a film star. The particularly Viennese nature of this revue has been described by Eberstaller:

According to its nature, the revue was not actually a theatre play, but in Vienna it was often made into such to a certain extent by adding a plot which ran all the way through; it incorporated at least the skeleton of an operetta plot with conflict and finale (Eberstaller 1974: 93).

As typical examples Gerhard Eberstaller refers to the revue operetta *Journal der Liebe* by Karl Farkas and Fritz Grünbaum, for which Egon Neumann had composed the music, performed in 1925 in the ‘Bürgertheater’, and *Wien lacht wieder*, also by the duo Farkas/Grünberg, which ran from 1925 to 1927 in the ‘Stadtthea-

ter' (ibid.). In his guide to Vienna written at this time – which was published in a series with the title *What isn't in Baedeker* – Ludwig Hirschfeld airs the secret of the huge success of this revue, in a witty description.

It features, he writes, 'the right mix of decorative and costume luxury, young women, old jokes. Lack of toilets and superfluity of bosoms. Add to this girls, dances, hits, everything which today's sensibility desires' (Hirschfeld 1927: 98).

Operetta and revue, either in a hybrid mixed form, or taken separately, had a considerable influence on (popular) entertainment on offer in Vienna, alongside cinema, which was becoming ever more dominant. Operetta stars and producers of course complained about their waning importance, warning that the special nature of Vienna's golden operetta' would be lost. Even the periodical *Anbruch* which otherwise dedicated itself to serious Modernism,⁴ could not resist intervening in the debate. An editorial statement at the beginning of a new year in 1929 declares that in future the periodical will extend its field of activity and will 'energetically address the problem of easy listening music' (*Anbruch* 1929a: 3). And in actual fact, *Anbruch* published in number three of that very same year – a number dedicated to 'easy listening music' – three articles on operetta. Amongst these was an article by Ernst Krenek, entitled 'Operette und Revue. Diagnose ihres Zustandes' [Operetta and revue. A diagnosis of their current state], in which Krenek predicts the end of the operetta and interprets the revue as a sign of the 'complete lack of imagination of today's average person', because it 'even saves him the effort of erotic fantasising, which until now had been seen as something enjoyable, by showing him women as he would like to see them without having to invest any imaginative energy' (*Anbruch* 1929b: 105). But Krenek would not have had the great success he enjoyed with his opera *Jonny spielt auf* had he not been willing and able to significantly relativise this cultural pessimism (stemming from Adorno?) towards the end of his text. There he refers to American hit music, where occasionally 'excellent things are achieved', and he goes so far as to venture a declaration:

In any case, I believe it is an excellent exercise for every composer of serious music to try and write a hit melody every now and then. The feeling for precision, for a line which 'sits' well, for clear, comprehensible, undiluted and catchy formulations of an idea are better sharpened in this genre than anywhere else. (*Anbruch* 1929b: 107ff)

Let's just take a look at where we have arrived, nearly at the end of this paper, bearing in mind the background I have sketched to the Viennese Baker revue – and also bearing in mind the differences to the successful Paris production *Revue Nègre*. Girls (half naked) and golden glitter are reminiscent of operetta in Vienna, rather than being presented in all too lascivious a light, and Hofrat (Privy Councillor) Hugo Thimig declaims the prologue to a series of Schubert scenes. Immoderately erotic, expressive dance in Paris, in Vienna Easter bunny girls dancing Charleston and 'Drei-Mäderl-Haus' Schubert nostalgia. There the *Revue Nègre*, here *Black on White*, the differences are easily discerned already at the level of

how the performance presents itself. The only similarity is the star, Josephine Baker.

What can we conclude from this? First of all, that the Viennese production, contrary to first impressions, was a Baker revue after all, but a Baker revue which had been designed in and for Vienna. One could argue that the 'Schubert section' was a result of the Schubert year and was therefore merely a parenthesis informed by opportunistic considerations. I would like to put forward an alternative explanation.

In a Viennese context, even a Negerrevue, which had been planned around the international Parisian star Josephine Baker still remained a Viennese revue, or rather, it was made into such. It was made into such because even a modern medium like the revue, which owed so much to film, had to position itself as 'Viennese'. References to a general Viennese 'backwardness' are not enough to explain the situation, long-term urban encoding comes to bear on the differences here.

Let's take a look back at a short feuilleton piece [by Henri Robert Vigny] that appeared in the years before the First World War. Vigny attempted to draw conclusions from a comparison of the different nightlife in the urban centres of Paris, London, Berlin and Vienna. Alongside the repeated emphasis on how safe one is in Vienna at night above all as compared to Paris, it also contains attributions which can be described as classical. In London there is no public nightlife, everything is 'absorbed by members only clubs'. 'In Paris it is above all Montmartre which has experienced a real boom over the last couple of years. Under the Second Empire it was still a infamous district, inhabited at most by the bohème, today it has become a meeting place for all of Parisian high society and foreigners looking for a good time in Paris' (Vigny 1911).⁵

According to this article however, Berlin was the city where the nightlife had taken on dimensions that were incomprehensible for the inhabitants of other urban centres. Nevertheless, Berlin's nightlife lacked light-heartedness and serenity and this could be explained as follows:

In Berlin, where work has to be so dreadfully exact, people are forced to amuse themselves to ease the paralysing effects of the drive to earn. This can be seen from the fact that, in the places where Berlin's jet set meets socially, strong spirits are the preferred alcoholic beverages. Cabarets and more or less American bars are filled to bursting with men in evening dress, but it is immediately apparent that their jollity is unnatural, that their nerves are strained in the continual struggle for survival. (*Kunst und Sport* 1911)

Just to round off this picture: in Vienna, according to this journalist, jollity, waltz, operetta and – the coffee house rule.

Back to the 1920s. If Lionel Richard discerns an Americanisation of the entertainment industry in Europe's cities during this period, although he is thinking first and foremost of Paris and Berlin, one can still apply this to Vienna, even if its

application must be somewhat limited (Richard 1993: 216ff).⁶ The key word here is jazz.⁷

‘The Americanisation which took over Europe’s theatres consists of nudity set to the passionately convulsive rhythms of jazz. Legs were everything, voices didn’t matter anymore’, Richard writes looking back (1993: 219). His historical judgement sounds strangely contemporary. Even in Paris the new forms of entertainment had their critics – I have already mentioned the mixed reviews which greeted the *Revue Nègre* – I am especially interested here however in the particular logic and structure of Vienna’s way of dealing with them. The following two examples, completely different, but from the same period, should serve to help outline how a ‘landscape of taste’ was formed, against the backdrop of which and as symptoms of the same Josephine Baker’s performance – as a scandal – was able to become effective and visible.

Firstly, the guide to Vienna that we have already looked at, by Ludwig Hirschfeld (1927), published in 1927. A liberal, feuilletonistic tone underlies the text, it was aimed at foreign (probably mostly German!) visitors to Vienna, and presents a familiar picture of the city. Even in new contexts (shopping, the football pitch) the ‘Viennese temperament’ is noticeable, even the night clubs and bars would seem to be populated by it, if it weren’t for ‘jazz’. Hirschfeld sees this ‘mechanical noise’ (1927: 153) as a clear sign of modernisation, and writes:

Jazz is music of the night, of the late afternoon, it provides a rhythm for high society, it makes noise for legs which have been enlisted to work in the crazy service of the Charleston, its melody is disquiet, haste, nervousness, big city, it drives people forward, whereas the old Viennese waltz melody put them back into gently reflective moods. (Hirschfeld 1927: 111)

Hirschfeld finds space for both, for waltz and for jazz. After all, as the author himself informs us, a metropolis needs ‘the Other’ if it is to be understood as such (and sold as such to tourists). In the end, tradition dominates anyway. After the nightclubs and bars, the reader (female as well as male; Hirschfeld addresses himself alternately to the ‘dear lady’ and – with a wink – to her ‘esteemed husband’, presenting the various amusements on offer as gender specific) is introduced to the ‘real Heuriger’. [the genuine Viennese wine watering hole].

The tone which characterises Felix Dörmann’s melodramatic colportage novel *Jazz* published in 1925 is quite different (Dörmann 1925). The title, *Jazz. Wiener Roman*, is programmatic, the story is one of love, passion, cocaine, war profiteers, gamblers, black marketeers and high-minded (but weak) aristocratic losers, the style is rhythmic, quick, even hectic in parts.

Vienna’s (and Austria’s) economic crisis at its most critical point forms the backdrop of the novel, and Dörmann makes its effects culturally visible.

The shrieking of women could be heard from bars hung with heavy curtains with bars on the doors and windows, accompanied by the jerky melodies of the alien music which dictates the rhythm of Vienna, to which Vienna staggers and babbles – the lost city (Dörmann 1925: 210).

Hirschfeld and Dörmann's tone may be very different, but they are singing the same song.

'The mechanical noise of jazz', the 'jerky melodies of the alien music', both of these threaten Viennese sensibilities. The city's encoding since Henri Robert Vigny's [who??] feuilleton (and surely also for a long time before this as well) had remained more or less the same in its essentials, all that had happened was that it is being insisted on with seemingly increased vehemence. The threat had also increased of course, in the 1920s the 'cartography of taste' was changing (not least because of increased technologisation and the spread of the emerging entertainment industry associated with this – the gramophone, radio, cinema, etc). Josephine Baker's performance in Vienna makes this visible. In a paradoxical turn, she is taken to represent 'jazz' and 'Americanisation', and is rejected on the one hand as alien whilst being appropriated in a Viennese fashion on the other. The latter is addressed explicitly by the author of a short gloss in the *Österreichischen Reklame*, who stresses the calming effect of the posters advertising both revue and film. These are not in the least 'nigger-like', can by no means be described as 'indecent' and thus, he writes, summing up the matter: 'Baker has, as it were, been re-modelled as Viennese' (*A,a,a – die Baker, die ist da!* 1928: 32).

The persistent presence of Vienna's particular version of the 'popular' is the key element of this two-prong impulse. Its forms and modes of representation change, but it itself is seen as 'timeless' Around this impulse the various discourses which I have tried to illustrate in this paper flow, from de-sexualisation to worries about the decline of Western culture, from (an early version of) the staging of popular culture to openly racist rejection.

Another aspect of the larger picture comes from the debates of 19th century natural science, the (supposedly biological) view according to which 'Jews... were black' (Gilmann 1992: 244), a view that was widely held in Freud's Vienna and which I have already mentioned. The 'Other' does not come from distant continents, it comes from Vienna's second district, where Jews traditionally lived. The threat does not come from overseas, rather it is a threat from within. It is not surprising that psychoanalysis was first developed in Vienna. Baker can also be decoded as 'Jewish' as a representative of that 'Other' which threatened a timelessly valid representation of what it meant to be Viennese.

The dilemmas presented by this debate were not essentially any different for those involved in what is commonly termed 'Viennese Modernism' with all the traditional and aesthetic limits which that implies. Their attitude to Vienna (as a city and as a particular sensibility) and to the threat of Americanisation is in no way uniform. On the one hand, Adolf Loos, who had spent some time in the USA, always – despite his customary severity – showed a barely disguised interest in phenomena of popular culture, in 1928 he planned a house for Josephine Baker in the 16th district of Paris (See Gronendijk et al. 1985).⁸ On the other hand, Stefan Zweig lamented Europe's loss of power and the dictatorship of American uni-

formity (Zweig 1988). In 1925 he claimed that a ‘wave of sameness’ was washing over from America to Europe.

This strand of discourse was silenced soon afterwards, as so many of those who participated in it became victims of another, genuinely deadly uniformity, which caused the exile Zweig to take his own life.

After the War and the period of fascist terror, the debates on mass culture, the cultural industry, Americanisation – on both sides of the Atlantic – were revived with new strength. Although contextualised anew, the perceived threats remained more or less the same. Stefan Zweig cited as examples of Americanisation radio, dance, fashion and the cinema (Zweig 1988: 8), the first slowly receded into the background and was replaced by television, the others remained. Around Rock ‘n Roll (understood as a cultural formation) (Grossberg 1997) worries about the future of ‘European culture’ crystallised once again from the fifties onwards, and once again, specific targets can be divined. ‘Youth’ is the first victim of Americanisation.

Vienna was different even then though. In two key films – *Ober, zahlen* and *Hallo Taxi* – Coffee house fights (against juke box and espresso) as does fiaker (Vienna’s horse-drawn taxis – against motorisation) for the survival of ‘Vienna’. The moderniser (Paul Hörbiger) and the traditionalist (Hans Moser) basically are concerned to do the same thing in the process however, to preserve ‘Viennese sensibility’ as timeless and they are both successful in this. Towards the end of the first film, espresso becomes coffee house and at the end of the second the taxi becomes fiaker. The ‘new’ is merely the ‘old’ in a different form. Vienna remains Vienna.

Roman Horak is professor and Head of the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. From October 1988 to March 1989 he was Honorary Visiting Fellow at the Department of Sociology, University of Leicester. He is currently on the editorial committee of ‘Culture Unbound’ and the ‘European Journal for Cultural Studies’ and a board member of the ‘Association for Cultural Studies’(ACS). His research focuses on the politics of the popular. He has published 16 books and over 100 articles in academic journals and books. His latest international publication is *About Raymond Williams* (ed. with L. Grossberg & M. Seidl), Routledge 2010. E-mail: roman.horak@uni-ak.ac.at

Notes

- ¹ See (Gregor 1973: 46); in Germany, for example, American products held 40 % of the market in the mid-twenties. See (Korte 1980: 85).
- ² The Christian Socials employed their most characteristic weapon. In the middle of the month a penitential mass was held in the Paulanerkerche, not far from the Johann Strauß Theatre,

- which at least resulted in the revue having better audiences at this time than on other days. (See *Arbeiterzeitung* 1928; *Neues Wiener Journal* 1928)
- 3 Ernst Günther (1978: 10) writes of the ‘mass audience’ which variety had attracted and which it targeted.
- 4 At the beginning of the periodical’s new year 1929, Theodor W. Adorno had joined the editorial staff, on Adorno’s plans for *Anbruch* and their realisation, see (Steinert 1989: 133ff).
- 5 Arnold Hauser describes Paris under the Second Empire as ‘entertainment metropolis’ (Hauser 1983: 759), see also (Karcauer 1980).
- 6 In the subtitle of the French original, *Origines et décadence*, the author’s disapproval of ‘Americanisation’ is apparent.
- 7 It is unfortunately not possible here to go further into the debate on the production and reception mechanisms of ‘jazz’. Light is shed on the relationship of jazz and revue in Ochaim & Balk 1998: 106ff. Jazz as modern, American, urban phenomenon is discussed by Collier 1993. E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Jazz Scene*, London 1959/1989, interprets (early) jazz – politically – as ‘common people’s music’.
- 8 The house was never built, sketches and plans have survived. Writing of the plans, Beatriz Colomina points out that: ‘The inhabitant, Josephine Baker, is now the primary object, and the visitor, the guest, is the looking subject’. (Colomina 1994: 260).

References

- ‘A,a,a - die Baker, die ist da! ...’ (1928): *Österreichische Reklame. Organ des Verbandes österreichischer Reklamefachleute*, vol 2, Sonderheft zur Wiener Messe.
- Anbruch. Monatsschrift für moderne Musik*.(1929a): Nr. 1, (vol XI).
- Anbruch. Monatsschrift für moderne Musik* (1929b): Nr. 3, (vol XI).
- Arbeiterwille*, 8. März 1928.
- Arbeiterzeitung*. 2 March 1928.
- Arbeiterzeitung*, 11 March 1928.
- Baker, Josephine & Jo Boillon (1995): *Josephine*, Washington: Marlowe & Company.
- Collier, James Lincoln (1993): *Jazz: The American Theme Song*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Colomina, Beatriz (1994): *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. Cambridge/London.
- Deutsch-österreichische Tages-Zeitung*, 3. Feb. 1928.
- Der Montag mit dem Sportmontag*, 6. Feb. 1928.
- ‘Die Baker tanzt’ (1928): *Neue Freie Presse*, 2 March 1928.
- ‘Die Josephine-Baker Revue’ (1928): *Das Kleine Blatt*, 2 March 1928.
- ‘Die nackte Frau und das nackte Geld’ (1928): *Arbeiterzeitung*, 2. March 1928.
- Dörmann, Felix (1925): *Jazz. Wiener Roman*, Wien, Prag, Leipzig: Strache.
- Eberstaller, Gerhard (1974): *Zirkus und Variete in Wien*, Wien: Jugend & Volk.
- Eberstaller, Gerhard (1990): *Ronacher. Ein Theater in seiner Zeit*, Wien: Edition Wien.
- Gilman, Sander (1992): *Rasse, Sexualität und Seuche*, Reinbek: Rowohlt.
- Gilroy, Paul (1993): ‘It Ain’t Were You From, It’s Where You’re At: The Dialectics of Diaspora Identification’, Paul Gilroy (1993): *Small Acts*, London, New York: Serpent’s Tail.
- Gregor, Ulrich (1973): *Enno Patalas, Geschichte des Films*, München: Bertelsmann.
- Gronendijk, Paul, Piet Volland & Adolf Loos (1985): *Huis voor/ house for/ maison pour/ Haus für Josephine Baker*, Rotterdam: 010 Publishers.
- Grossberg, Lawrence (1997): *Dancing in Spite of Myself: Essays on Popular Culture*, London & Durham: Duke University Press.
- Günther, Ernst (1978): *Geschichte des Varietes*, Berlin: Henschel.

- Hauser, Arnold. (1983): *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur*, München: Beck.
- Hirschfeld, Ludwig (1927): *Das Buch von Wien*, München: Piper.
- Hobsbawm, E.J. (1959/1989): *The Jazz Scene*, London: Pantheon Books.
- Jansen, Wolfgang (1990): *Das Variete*, Berlin: Edition Hentrich.
- 'Josephine Baker-Bulletin' (1928): *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3. Feb. 1928.
- 'Josephine Baker in Wien' (1928): *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, 3 Feb. 1928.
- Karcauer, Siegfried (1980): *Jaques Offenbach und das Paris seiner Zeit*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Korte, Helmut. (1980): 'Vom Kinematographen zur Nationalen Propaganda. Zur Entwicklung des frühen deutschen Films', Helmut Korte (ed.): *Film und Realität in der Weimarer Republik*, Frankfurt: Fischer.
- Kunst und Sport*, 10. Juli 1911.
- Möller-Bruck, Arthur (1902): *Das Variete*, Berlin: Bard.
- 'Neger' (1927): *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, 9. Jan. 1927.
- Nenno, Nancy (1997): 'Feminity, the Primitive, and Modern Urban Space: Josephine Baker in Berlin', Katharina von Ankum (ed.), *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Neues Wiener Journal*, 13. March 1928.
- Ochaim, Brygida & Claudia Balk (1998): *Variete-Tänzerinnen um 1900. Vom Sinnenrausch zur Tanzmoderne*, Frankfurt, Basel: Stroemfeld.
- Richard, Lionel (1993): *Cabaret. Kabarett. Von Paris nach Europa*. Leipzig: Reclam.
- Scheyer, Moriz (1927): 'Josephine', *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, 5 January 1927.
- Steinert, Heinz (1989): *Adorno in Wien. Über die (Un-) Möglichkeit von Kunst, Kultur und Befreiung*. Wien: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik.
- Tilgner, Wolfgang (1993): *Psalmen, Pop und Punk: Populäre Musik in den USA*. Berlin: Henschel.
- Torgovnick, Marianna (1990): *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals*, Modern Lives, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Vigny, Henri Robert. (1911): 'Vienne s'amuse. Wien bei Nacht, verglichen mit Paris, Berlin und London', *Kunst und Sport*, 10 July 1911.
- Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, 5 February 1928.
- Zweig, Stefan (1988): *Die Monotonisierung der Welt*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.